

Genesis – Lesson 29

Joseph's Family in Egypt

Read Genesis 46.

1. (a) List the four *prophecies* God gave Jacob in vv. 1-5 and tell how each was *fulfilled*.

The four prophecies given to Jacob were 1) you will go down to Egypt (based upon the command of God and upon his nature as God), 2) you will become a great nation while in Egypt, 3) your people will be brought back from Egypt (by God's personal presence with them; see #5 below), and 4) Joseph will be at your side when you die (i.e. he will "*close your eyes*"). These were fulfilled with Jacob and his sons going to Goshen to live, and during the next 400 years, growing into a nation of people that God led out of Egypt through Moses and Aaron.

- (b) What was *different* now for Jacob that God had prohibited in the past? *Why*?

God specifically *commanded* Jacob to go to Egypt, whereas he had prohibited Abraham and Isaac from doing so in the past (even though they did so in violation of God's command). Or (to say it in reverse) God command Jacob to *leave* Canaan and take his family into Egypt. In the past, God forbade this because it put the family at risk. But now, Jacob is commanded to do so because the sovereign God has worked through the circumstances of Joseph to create an environment hospitable to these people where God could build them up into a nation.

- (c) What do you learn about God's *guidance* from Genesis 46:1-4, Proverbs 3:5-6, and James 1:5-7?

In each of these cases, the Scriptures teach that God guides his people *as they trust in him by faith and follow him without reservation*. Jacob was instructed to leave his homeland (again!) and go to Egypt, obeying God's command for another unknown future. Proverbs and James supplement this narrative by pointing to the necessity of trusting God for the path of the future. *We are not given the depth of what was revealed to Jacob; we have to trust God explicitly for our unknown future. But, this is the essence of faith; to trust in God, believe that he guides us perfectly, and walk the path that he directs us to walk in.*

2. (a) How *many* people migrated to Egypt, according to Genesis 46:8-27? Why were their names so carefully *recorded* here?

The genealogy recorded by Moses in vv. 8-25 includes 70 named people (33+16+14+7). However, v. 26 indicates that only 66 people (minus Jacob's sons wives) are to be included. This might indicate that 4 of the people listed were unable to go into Egypt, maybe because they were dead. Thus, while 70 people were descendants of Jacob (not including in-law wives), only 66 were included in the number that entered Egypt, with Jacob and his remaining 3 wives bringing the total up to 70. Or, it could mean that "70" was just a round number, indicating the completeness of the total. This is, of course, the point: the *entirety* of Jacob's family (his wives, sons, son's wives, and grandchildren) all left Canaan and settled in Egypt.

- (b) List some reasons why Goshen was a *good place* for them to stay (see also 47:11).

Goshen was a good place to settle because 1) it was fertile and capable of supporting the family well, 2) it was a place where the family could spread out, and 3) it was *separated* from the Egyptian natives who despised shepherds.

Read Genesis 47.

3. Why is the meeting of Jacob with Pharaoh (in 47:7-10) so *interesting* and *important* to this narrative?

Jacob was the *patriarch*, the chosen man that God had set aside for himself. He was old and was coming to the end of his days. His life had been hard, and while he had previously been forced to live in several places, he was (once again!) being *relocated* to a foreign land. The Pharaoh before him was great and powerful; he owned everything in sight and people from all over the world bowed before him. Even Jacob “*blesses*” him twice, in recognition of his position as a great and powerful leader. However, *behind* the story is that truth that the *greater man* is Jacob; Pharaoh was indeed powerful, but he was *temporary*. The old man standing before him was the *instrument* through which the Creator would build a people far more permanent than any people in Egypt. Ironically, we are not told the *name* of this king, only that he was a ruler (i.e. a Pharaoh). But, Jacob’s name (and his heritage) lives on. The sovereign God of the universe was working through this old man, not through the powerful king before which he came!

4. (a) What do you learn about the *character* of Pharaoh from this chapter? Why is that *significant*? What *changes* in Exodus 1:8-14?

Pharaoh appears to be quite *benevolent* to Joseph and his family. He clearly respects and trusts Joseph, and is quite generous to Jacob’s family. He gives them free-reign to choose a new homeland, allows an audience of Jacob before him, and even seeks out some of the best shepherds of Jacob’s family to take care of his own livestock. God has granted a time of *prosperity* to Jacob and his family (through Joseph) to continue his plans; all of this *must* flow down from the Pharaoh, and it is clear that God’s hand is upon the king. Unfortunately, this situation will change dramatically when a new Pharaoh takes the throne, time passes, and the benevolence of this Pharaoh is forgotten.

- (b) What were the three *stages* in Joseph’s benevolence policy? What was its *lasting* result?

First, the people came with their money to buy food, and Joseph sold it to them on a cash basis. Next, the people came with their livestock to buy food, and Joseph sold grain to them in barter for their flocks and herds. Finally, the people (with nothing left to give) sold their lands to Joseph, and Joseph gave them grain while turning them into state-sponsored sharecroppers. The lasting results were that *everything* came under the possession of Pharaoh (through Joseph), and all of the people of the land became servants of the Pharaoh.

- (c) Do you think that Joseph *drove* the people too hard throughout this process? Why or why not?

It certainly seems *harsh* that the end-result of Joseph’s policy left the people of Egypt indentured to Pharaoh. After all, couldn’t Joseph simply have *given* the food to the people as they needed it, allowing them to keep their cattle and their lands? The problem comes in recognizing that this famine was *worldwide*; more than the people of Egypt needed food, and to simply give the food away without any sort of remuneration would have quickly depleted the supply. Joseph used the program to carefully dole out the food; instead of opening the floodgates of supply, Joseph used a “rationing” system to prevent more suffering. If the supply had run out before the seven years were up, many *more* would have died than was absolutely necessary. In this scheme, the people suffered, but they were seen *through* the disaster by Joseph’s wisdom.

5. Why does Jacob insist that Joseph *bury* him in the family plot in Canaan? *When* will this occur?

The simplest answer is because the rest of the family was buried in Canaan. The more important answer, however, is because it is a statement of *faith* in the promise of God that Jacob’s descendants would not remain in Egypt forever, but would be brought out by God in accordance with his promise. Jacob insisted that his eventual descendants bring him back to Canaan, and they would be continually reminded of this promise as a hope that their time in Egypt was temporary. Obviously, this occurs at the Exodus.

Read Genesis 48.

6. (a) Why did Jacob adopt Joseph's two sons as *equal* to his other sons? What does this say about *Joseph*?

Jacob adopts Joseph's two sons as his own *out of deep respect for Joseph*. Now, instead of Joseph being given a *single* portion of his inheritance, Joseph would receive two portions, one for each of his sons, now treated equally with Jacob's other sons. This is a statement of the great *value* that Jacob places upon Joseph: it was Joseph through whom God worked to save the family, and he deserves to be rewarded. Thus, two sons (and two tribes of Israel) will flow from Joseph and be an everlasting testimony to the faithfulness of Joseph.

- (b) Why did Jacob bless *Ephraim* over Manasseh? From Numbers 13:8 & 16, what *honor* was given to the descendants of Ephraim?

Once again, the elder son is passed over for the younger. Jacob, probably remembering the number of times this has occurred in his family, purposely chooses to bless Ephraim over Manasseh as a testimony to the sovereignty of God, even in his own life. One last time, in the age of the patriarchs, a younger son is honored over an elder son, all pointing forward to the fact that Israel (as a nation) will be honored above greater nations, the younger ruling over the older. This becomes a *literal* blessing when Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim, becomes the leader of the people of Israel as they conquer the Promised Land after Moses leads them to it.