

Genesis 47
Psalm 39
Revelation 12

“Jacob Blessed Pharaoh”

January 3, 2010

Did you notice how Jacob speaks of his life?

*Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life,
and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers
in the days of their sojourning.*

Most of us would consider 130 years to be a long time!

But as Jacob reaches the end of his life,
he says that his days have been few and evil.

How should we think about our lives?

As we begin a new year, it is fitting that we come to Jacob’s comment about his days –
because we also should take heed to how we think about life.

Psalm 39 follows a similar train of thought.

*4 “O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting I am!*

*5 Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.*

Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!

*11 When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin,
you consume like a moth what is dear to him;
surely all mankind is a mere breath!*

And so the Psalmist concludes:

*12 “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry;
hold not your peace at my tears!*

For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers.

13 Look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more!”

My days are few and evil.

All mankind is a mere breath.

Is that how you think of your life?

As you begin 2010 take up the cry of David in Psalm 39:

“O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting I am!”

(Sing Psalm 39)

Read Revelation 12

We hear at the beginning of Revelation 12 the dream of Joseph come to life –
the woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet

(in other words, the sun and moon bow down to her)
and on her head is a crown of twelve stars
(in other words, she is crowned with the tribes of Israel).

And she gives birth to a male child who is pursued by the Dragon (echoes of Moses)
and is caught up to God's throne (Davidic king)
but the woman flees to the wilderness (a new Exodus/return from Exile).

In other words, Revelation 12 speaks of the fulfillment of the promises –
the fulfillment of Israel's history –
the fulfillment of the story of Joseph.

1. God Will Go Down to Egypt with Israel (46:1-7)
2. From the Twelve to the Seventy: the Sons of Israel Go to Egypt (46:8-27)
3. Joseph Settles Jacob in Goshen (46:28-34)
4. Joseph's brothers before Pharaoh (47:1-6)
- 4'. Jacob Blessed Pharaoh (47:7-10)
- 3'. Joseph settles Jacob in the land of Goshen (47:11-12)
- 2'. Egypt under Joseph, the Son of Israel (47:13-26)
- 1'. Jacob will be buried in the land (47:27-31)

Let's review:

Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, has two wives, two concubines, and twelve sons.

Joseph, his favorite son, was sold into slavery by his brothers,
who then tell Jacob that a wild animal had killed him.

Joseph wound up in prison in Egypt
but then interprets Pharaoh's dreams correctly,
and warns Pharaoh of a coming famine.

Pharaoh was so impressed that he set Joseph over all his kingdom,
and Joseph oversaw the collection and distribution of food.

But then, during the famine,

Joseph's brothers--the ones who had sold him into slavery--
come to Egypt looking for food.

Joseph discovers that they have repented of their wicked deeds,
and so encourages the whole family to come down to Egypt.

4. **Jacob Blessed Pharaoh (47:7-10)**

Our text picks up just about here:

Joseph brings his brothers before Pharaoh, and Pharaoh treats them kindly.
Then Joseph brings his father before Pharaoh.

But before Pharaoh has a chance to speak, Jacob blesses him.

*7 Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh,
and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.*

8 And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the days of the years of your life?"

9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years.

*Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life,
and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers
in the days of their sojourning."*

10 And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.

You have to wonder,
is that all that happened?
Was their encounter that short?

Perhaps Pharaoh and Jacob exchanged more conversation,
but the shortness of the dialogue calls our attention to this remarkable fact:

Jacob....blessed....Pharaoh.

His sons had bowed before Pharaoh and three times called themselves "your servants."

But Jacob does not bow.

Jacob does not refer to himself as Pharaoh's servant.

Jacob's sons did not speak until Pharaoh had spoken to them.

But Jacob walks into the throne room of the most powerful man on earth,
and claims to be his superior by blessing him!

There is so much involved in this one sentence that we should linger here a bit.

I will, however, follow the Hebrew word order--where the verb comes first,
blessed.....Jacob.....Pharaoh

What does it mean that Jacob **blessed** Pharaoh?

In the Old Testament, blessing is closely associated with life.

When God blessed mankind in Genesis 1:28,

he said to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and increase in number;
fill the earth and subdue it..."

God's blessing gave abundant life

--as is illustrated by the fact that he placed them in the garden of Eden

--a garden of delight and abundance.

Notice also that the opposite of blessing--cursing,
brings death and difficulty in Genesis 3.

The Promised Land, the land of blessing, and of life,
is always connected to having children, the Promised Seed.

Land and Seed go together.

Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden--the land,
and were commanded to be fruitful and multiply--the seed.

When they are cast out of the land of life (Eden)

and are cast into the land of dust and death,

they are told that their hope is in the seed of the woman.

When God called Abraham in Genesis 12,

he called him to go to the Promised Land (verse 1),
which he promised to give to his seed--his offspring (verse 7).

Then God blessed him, and listen to this blessing:

"I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Remember the three parts of the Abrahamic blessing:
Land, Seed, blessing to the nations.

In Jacob's own lifestory we see the meaning of blessing.

Listen to the blessing of his father, Isaac:

"May God give you of heaven's dew
and of earth's richness,
an abundance of grain and new wine. (That's LAND)
May nations serve you
and peoples bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. (That's SEED)
May those who curse you be cursed,
and those who bless you be blessed." (That's the blessing to the nations)

The blessing is more than a prayer for God's favor.

This blessing is a declaration that the blessing of Abraham has been given to Jacob.

A blessing is generally given by the superior to his inferiors.

An inferior may ask God to bless a superior,
but only one in a position of authority may actually declare blessing.

Those whom God has called to be pastors over his flock,
to whom he has given the keys of the kingdom--
may declare God's blessing on you,
and you may know that because it comes from God's messenger,
it is given by God's authority.

So at the end of his life, when Jacob blesses Pharaoh,
this 130 year old Patriarch is asserting a spiritual authority over Pharaoh--
the greatest king of his day--
and declaring God's blessing upon him.

And this is a very strange event.

Because it is *Jacob* who blesses Pharaoh.

Earlier in his life, Jacob was the one who sought blessings,
not the one who gave them away.

But in Genesis 32, at Peniel,
Jacob wrestled with God, and God told him:
"Your name will no longer be Jacob--"deceiver"--but Israel,
because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."
This was the turning point of Jacob's life:
The deceiver now becomes the overcomer
--he has wrestled with God, and overcome.
This Jacob,
who had always been seeking blessings,
has now received God's blessing,
and realizes that he needs no other.
Now, many years later,
he blesses Pharaoh.

But why does Jacob bless Pharaoh?

Remember that Isaac's blessing included the words:
"those who bless you will be blessed."

Jacob blessed *Pharaoh* because Pharaoh has blessed Jacob.
Pharaoh is the ruler of the greatest nation on earth.
He didn't need the blessing of this wandering nomad!
He was king--he bestowed blessing or cursing upon others.
Yet he received the blessing of this aged patriarch.
Why?
Because this Gentile king knew first hand that the God of Joseph and Jacob was real.
And he welcomed the blessing of Jacob,
humbling himself that he might receive life.
Remember the promise to Abraham--"those who bless you shall be blessed"
Pharaoh had blessed Jacob and his family,
and now the blessing of God was coming even to the Gentiles.
Even to Egypt!

This turns the world upside down!

Remember that Genesis itself was written after the Exodus.
This story would have been read by the Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt,
after spending **four hundred years** in slavery to the Egyptians.

And you are telling me that Pharaoh is good?

The whole Pentateuch presents Egypt as the land of death.
Remember, you have to go *down* to Egypt.
just like you go *down* into death,
just like you go *down* into the grave.

It would be fair to say,
that Egypt is HELL.
to go to Egypt is to go to Hell.
The Prophets love to bash Egypt.
Of the fifteen prophetic books,
ten specifically pronounce judgment or cursings on Egypt.
Ezekiel spends four chapters on the judgment of Egypt,
comparing Pharaoh to the great monster of the underworld,
and declaring the judgment which God will bring to Pharaoh:
This reflects the other side of the blessing of Abraham:
"those who bless you shall be blessed,
and those who curse you shall be cursed."
Egypt was the greatest source of cursing to God's people,
therefore God cursed them and poured out his wrath upon them.

But something unique happened when Joseph was in Egypt.
Pharaoh had terrible dreams,
and he listened to Joseph and believed what Joseph said.
Joseph told him that a terrible famine was only seven years away,
and if he didn't prepare for it wisely,
all of Egypt would perish.
Pharaoh believed Joseph,
and not only that,
he made Joseph the second most powerful man in Egypt.
and as if that were not enough,
when Joseph brought his family down from Canaan,
Pharaoh told them to take the very best part of the land.
and further,
put them in charge of his own flocks.

Pharaoh blessed the seed of Abraham.
and because of that, Jacob blessed Pharaoh.
Now notice what has happened:
everything is upside down.
Perhaps we miss this in a culture where land isn't important,
but this is the wrong place for blessing to happen!
this is the wrong land!
God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham.
This is Egypt.
If you read Genesis geographically,
good things happen when you are moving toward the center of the land.
God's blessing comes most when you are living in the center of the land.
Bad things happen when you leave the land.
Notice that Abraham nearly loses his wife, Sarah, twice,
both times when he leaves the promised land.
Isaac nearly loses his wife, Rebekah, once,

when he left the promised land.
Joseph got sold into slavery,
and even though he tried to obey God,
he wound up in prison,
when he left the promised land!

Notice, that in all these cases, land and seed are connected.
If Abraham loses his wife--how is he supposed to have kids?
What will happen to the Seed?
How will he inherit the land without children?

That's why in Genesis 46:2,
God has to come to Jacob and say,
"Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt...
I will go down to Egypt with you,
and I will surely bring you back again."

But although the land is very important,
there is something else that is even more important:
the seed of Abraham.

Land and Seed go together.
Those who bless Abraham's children will be blessed,
and those who curse Abraham's children will be cursed.

Up north in Canaan,
the Promised Land,
wicked men are in charge,
men who don't care about Abraham or his seed,
and the famine turns the Promised Land,
the land of life,
into a land of death.

Down south in Egypt,
the forbidden land,
the land where bad things happen,
Joseph, the seed of Abraham, is in charge,
and God's blessing turns the land of death,
into a land of life.

When Abraham's seed rules the land,
God's blessing comes.

When Abraham's seed are ignored and rejected,
God's cursing comes.

What has happened in Egypt,
is that Pharaoh has blessed the seed of Abraham--the descendent of Isaac.

So even Egypt,
the land of death,
the land where bad things happen,
becomes a land of life,

a land where blessing comes to the children of Israel.

Why?

Because Pharaoh has recognized that God is with Joseph,
and Pharaoh has seen that those who bless Joseph are blessed.

And in Pharaoh we see the first glimpse of the promise
that in Abraham, all nations will be blessed--even Egypt.

Because after the interview is over,
Jacob blesses Pharaoh *again* and then walks out.
And Pharaoh humbles himself before the Seed of Abraham
and accepts the blessing of Jacob –

because he understands that without the Seed of Abraham ruling on the throne,
Egypt would have perished!

Paul says in Galatians 3:16 that the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed,
and that that seed is Christ.

Those who bless the name of Christ will be blessed,
and those who curse the name of Christ will be cursed.

Pharaoh was one of the first Gentiles to realize this,
and so he gave authority over all his realm to the seed of Abraham.
And because of that, he lived,
and his people lived.

When another Pharaoh arose who did not realize this,
who did not acknowledge the seed of Abraham,
his firstborn son was killed,
and thousands of his people died.

3. Joseph Settled His Father and Brothers in Goshen (47:11-12)

11 Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. 12 And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

Note that here Goshen is called Rameses.

Everywhere else in this passage it says that Jacob and his sons settled in Goshen.
Why does it now say Rameses?

This suggests that whoever put Genesis into its final form
(perhaps the person who arranged the chiasm for this passage)
lived after the time of Moses,
because Rameses was not Pharaoh until over 150 years after the Exodus,
and since he was the one who named the city “Rameses”
it is likely that the final editor inserted this part of the story
in order to complete the chiasm –

and used the modern name of the region
so that people would know where Goshen was.

But the main point here is that Joseph saves his family through bread—
and as we see in the following verses,
he also saves Egypt through bread.

2. Egypt Enslaved to Pharaoh under Joseph (47:13-26)

I haven't been emphasizing the macro-structure of the Joseph narrative,
but it should be pointed out that there is a chiastic structure of the whole narrative.

This section of chapter 47 fits neatly in parallel with the earlier section in chapter 39
where Joseph was enslaved in Egypt by Potiphar –
and yet ruled over Potiphar's house.

Now Joseph enslaves Egypt to Pharaoh –
and Joseph rules over Pharaoh's house!

But what do you make of Joseph's political maneuvers in verses 13-26?
After bringing all the money into Pharaoh's house,
he buys up all the livestock, land, and people of Egypt.
(read vv 20-21)

13 Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine. 14 And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought. And Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. 15 And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone." 16 And Joseph answered, "Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." 17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. He supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year. 18 And when that year was ended, they came to him the following year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent. The herds of livestock are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our land. 19 Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we with our land will be servants to Pharaoh. And give us seed that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate."

20 So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for all the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe on them. The land became Pharaoh's. 21 As for the people, he made servants of them from one end of Egypt to the other. 22 Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land.

This may seem harsh to us.

But that is not the attitude of the people of Egypt! (read verse 25)

23 Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. 24 And at the harvests you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones." 25 And they said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh." 26 So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

Now, it is worth asking,

where did Joseph's grain come from?

During the seven good years, he had commandeered 20% of the harvest.

Now he's taking *their* grain and selling it back to them!

And what is more, now the 20% tax becomes permanent!

According to the Mosaic law this sort of taxation was not to be practiced in Israel,

where the land belonged to God,

but Moses does not seem to object when its object is to save the people from death!

And as far as the Egyptian people are concerned,

they are happy to be slaves – because otherwise they would be dead.

Notice who avoids slavery:

Israelites – and priests

(and Joseph is connected to the Israelites by birth and the priests by marriage).

But also notice what is going on here:

at the end of Genesis a Hebrew enslaves Egyptians

and they give thanks!

At the beginning of Exodus an Egyptian will enslave the Hebrews –

and the Hebrews will be crying out to God for deliverance!

This shows us that Joseph's administration was wise and just.

He saves the world through bread.

When the Seed of Abraham rules over the nations,

the nations give thanks for his just judgments.

Today we tend to think that freedom is the highest good.

But when you watch your children's cheeks shrivel

and you hear their piteous cries of hunger in the night,

you will think differently!

"You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh."

In all the famines of Genesis, there is only one that tells of a wise and just ruler

who fed his people and preserved their lives.

And as the prophets speak of the coming famine of hearing the words of the LORD,
we know that there is indeed only one wise and just ruler
who feeds his people and preserves them alive forever.

1. Jacob Will Be Buried in the Promised Land (47:27-31)

27 Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen.

And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

So here at the end of Genesis we hear that the promises to Abraham are coming true!

Even as the Egyptians are enslaved to Pharaoh,
the Seed of Abraham is fruitful and multiplies –
and they gained possessions in the land!

It's just the wrong land!

28 And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years.

So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.

There is a fascinating pattern to the ages of the patriarchs.

Abraham died at the age of 175, which is $5 \times 5 \times 7$

Isaac died at the age of 180, which is $6 \times 6 \times 5$

Jacob dies at the age of 147 which is $7 \times 7 \times 3$

The squared number increases by one,
while the coefficient decreases by two.

And, curiously, the sum of the factors in all three cases is 17 –
which is the sum of the two numbers of completion, $10 + 7$ –
and which also happens to be the key number for Jacob and Joseph.

Because Jacob lives in Egypt with Joseph for the last 17 years of his life –
even as Joseph had lived in Canaan with Jacob for the first 17 years of his life.

As one commentator points out,

“the patriarchal chronologies constitute a rhetorical device
expressing the profound biblical conviction
that Israel's formative age was not a concatenation of haphazard incidents
but a series of events ordered according to God's grand design.” (Sarna, 324)

*29 And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him,
“If now I have found favor in your sight,*

(note that Jacob speaks to Joseph as to a superior – he “bows” to Joseph)

put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me.

The words for “deal kindly and truly” are hesed and emet.
Hesed means “covenant loyalty” and is often translated “steadfast love”
or in the KJV “lovingkindness” –
while Emet means “truth” or “faithfulness.”

Jacob is calling Joseph to put his hand under his procreative organ
and promise by the Seed that he will do this.

*Do not bury me in Egypt, 30 but let me lie with my fathers.
Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place.”*
He answered, “I will do as you have said.”
31 And he said, “Swear to me”; and he swore to him.
Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.

Jacob believes the promises to the end.
He will not be buried in Egypt –
because he hopes in the promises of God.
He wants to be buried in the land,
because he understands, by faith, the promise of the resurrection.
God’s promises – God’s purposes for his people –
are intimately connected with the Promised Land and the Promised Seed
who brings the blessing of God to the nations.

Pharaoh understood this,
and he realized that if he was going to survive this famine,
he needed the seed of Abraham to rule everything.

Do you?
Do you recognize that Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God?
that if you are going to survive this famine
--the coming judgment--
you need Jesus Christ to rule your whole life?!

You can't just say,
"thanks for the warning!"
and then go about your daily life like nothing has changed!

You must submit to the rule and authority of Jesus Christ.
There is no other way to avoid destruction.

And what is more, in Jesus you have become the Seed of the woman as well.
Remember Revelation 12?
In Revelation 12:17, the dragon--the devil--
after failing to destroy Jesus--who is the seed of the woman--
turns against the *rest* of the seed of the woman, namely,
"those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

Those who curse--
those who hate--
those who wage war against the seed of the woman,
will be destroyed.

Because the promise to Abraham was that those who bless you will be blessed,
and those who curse you will be cursed.

We are very much like Israel in Egypt in the days of Joseph!
The *promise* is that we will receive an inheritance that will never perish.
But *presently* we are living in a foreign land that is not really our home.
And we must always remember that!
No matter how nice Egypt may seem –
remember that Egypt, in the end, is the land of death.
You have no future in Egypt!
Your future is the heavenly city –
your identity is found in Christ – who is your life.

So therefore, remember who you are!
When you face a lost and dying world,
remember that you are heirs of the promise.
When you are tempted to be afraid of the world,
remember that the world will be cursed if it curses you,
but blessed if it blesses you.

In Christ, you have become the Seed of Abraham.
By faith you have received the promise of a Land which will not perish.
a hope which will not disappoint you.
Remember that the next time you have an opportunity to give a reason for the hope that is in you,
because that is simply an opportunity to bring the blessings of God to the Gentiles.

Our hymn of praise is Psalm 90,
which is titled, “a prayer of Moses, the man of God.”

It echoes a lot of the themes that we sang about in Psalm 39.
Our days are few and evil.
Teach us to number our days.
In short, bring us through suffering to glory!

*“Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
and for as many years as we have seen evil.
Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and establish the work of our hands upon us;
yes, establish the work of our hands!”*