

Gen 47 - Jacob Bless Pharaoh

THEME: Joseph presents father and brothers to Pharaoh; Joseph promises Jacob burial in Canaan.

We have seen how Jacob and all his family have arrived in the land of Egypt. Joseph, as a move of strategy, brought them into the land of Goshen. This actually was the richest land in that day, but right now they are in the midst of a famine and no land is very valuable to the owner at this particular time.

We are going to find that this is the best chapter in the life of Jacob so far. Jacob doesn't appear in a good light when we first meet him in Scripture. In fact, not until he makes his trip to Egypt do we begin to see that he has become a man of faith. This chapter, more than any other, reveals that.

The famine becomes more intense as it draws to an end. Although all the people of the world are involved in this, Canaan and Egypt are the lands which are mentioned because they are the particular areas in the development of the story which is told to us here. - McGee

Jacob's Family Settles in Goshen

Gen 47:1 Then Joseph went and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they are in the land of Goshen."

Joseph is going to present his father and his brothers to the Pharaoh of Egypt. He put them in the land of Goshen before he asked for a place for them. You can see the strategy in that. If they were already there, Pharaoh would be more apt to give them that land. After all, they would already be moved in and have unpacked their goods. – McGee

Gen 47:2-3 And he took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and also our fathers."

We saw that shepherds and cattlemen didn't get along in those days. Egyptians just didn't care for shepherds, neither did they care for shepherding. So that opened up an opportunity for the children of Israel to do something that the Egyptians would not want to do. – McGee

Gen 47:4-6 And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen." Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know any competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock."

Since shepherding was not popular for the Egyptians, Pharaoh needed someone to care for his cattle.

Now Joseph presents his own father to Pharaoh, and this is really quite remarkable. I want you to notice that Jacob now stands in the best light in which we've ever seen him during our study of him. - McGee

Gen 47:7 Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

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Notice that it is Jacob who is blessing Pharaoh. He is beginning to live up to his name. He is a witness for God now. The lesser is always blessed of the greater, and Jacob blesses Pharaoh as a witness for God. - McGee

Gen 47:8-9 Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How old are you?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty 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 pilgrimage."

At this point, if Jacob were living by that old nature which controlled him at the beginning, he would have said, "Well, Pharaoh, I am 130 years old, and I want to tell you what I have accomplished in my lifetime. I would like to tell you how I outsmarted my brother when I was a young fellow and how I became rich by outsmarting my father-in-law." And he could have bragged about his family—"I've got twelve sons...." He could have gone on and on. But Jacob is a different man now. Listen to him—

First of all, notice that he was 130 years old when he came down to the land of Egypt, and he will be 147 years old when he dies. Therefore, he will spend 17 years in the land of Egypt. I imagine that he was right on the verge of death—one foot in the grave and the other foot on a banana peel—when he came down to Egypt. But the joy of finding Joseph alive and of being with him in Egypt prolonged his life 17 years.

Again, this audience with Pharaoh is an opportunity for the old man to boast, but notice how changed this man Jacob is. He says that he is 130 years old and his life is really nothing to brag about. "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." He doesn't brag about pulling a trick on his old father. Instead, he says he doesn't measure up to his fathers. I "have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." Isn't this a changed man? It doesn't sound like the old Jacob, does it? He's giving glory to God for his life, and he is making no boast that he has accomplished a great deal.

Gen 47:10-11 So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh. And Joseph situated 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.

Had Joseph been less noble he might have shrunk from introducing his lowly relatives to the mighty Pharaoh! But such thoughts were submerged in the great love which claimed that withered, aged, halting man as his father. Let us never be ashamed of our Savior, who has done more for us than even Jacob for his sons. This confession that the days of his pilgrimage had been few and evil is set to a sad minor chord; and to the superficial gaze Esau had enjoyed a much more prosperous career; but when Jacob stood before Pharaoh the mighty monarch recognized his moral supremacy, and bent beneath his benediction. Surely the less is blessed of the greater. Here was the harvest of his tears! – FB Meyer

Gen 47:12-13 Then Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, according to the number in their families. Now there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine.

Frankly, my feeling is that Jacob has arrived. What an opportunity he has to boast, but he doesn't take advantage of it. Someone else might have thought, Pharaoh is a great ruler, but I want him to know that I

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was a pretty big man up yonder in the land of Canaan! But Jacob doesn't brag—he is just a sinner, saved by the grace of God.

In our day we hear so much boasting on the part of many Christians. Sometimes in our own circles, we attempt to applaud certain men for what they have done. We talk about how great they are. Well, if we all told the truth, we would say that we are just a bunch of sinners and we haven't anything to brag about except a wonderful Savior who has been gracious and patient with us down through the years. He is all any of us have to boast about.

Neither can we say that we are superior to our fathers. A friend of mine, who is now a seminary professor, told me how ashamed he had been of his dad. When he first went off to college, his dad was coming to that college to speak because he was a preacher and a Bible teacher. My friend said he was so ashamed of his dad that he wouldn't even go to the meeting where he spoke. He pretended to be sick so he would not have to go. He said, "I was so ashamed of him that I didn't want to be known as his son!" He spent four years in college and then went into the business world for a couple of years. He said, "I had a rough time, and I changed my thinking about my dad. I had thought he was pretty stupid, but I realized that he had supported his family and had been an excellent Bible teacher. After I had experienced some rough times in the business world, I came home, and my, how my dad had improved! No one has ever learned as much as my dad had learned during those brief years I had been away from home!" He came to the conclusion that his dad was a lot smarter than he had thought him to be. Isn't that same kind of story true of many of us? But it is not true of Jacob here. He takes a humble place because he is a changed man now.

The land of Rameses is the land of Goshen.

The reason that only Egypt and Canaan are mentioned is because they are the two geographical locations which are involved in our story. If Jacob had remained in Canaan with his family, they would have perished. Grain had been stored in the land of Egypt, but the land is not producing grain anymore. Evidently the famine has spread all over Africa, because the Nile River is not overflowing, which is so necessary for Egypt's crop production. - McGee

Gen 47:14 And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.

We are coming now to something for which Joseph has been criticized. People say he took advantage of poverty and he bought up the land. In other words, he closed in on the mortgages and bought the land. I feel that this is an unfair criticism of Joseph. To begin with, he is the agent of Pharaoh. None of this is for himself; he is making no effort to enrich himself. He was not crooked in any sense of the word. He did not gain personally because of the famine.

An illustration of this is the scarcity of and demand for uranium during wartime in my own country. When some men found that they had uranium in their properties—especially in Arizona—they were paid handsome sums for their land. Were they taking advantage of their government? I don't think so. The law of supply and demand was in operation.

It seems to me that this same principle was in operation in the land of Egypt. Joseph bought the land for Pharaoh, and he is enabling the people to live by furnishing them food. I think that Joseph stayed within the confines of the law of supply and demand. - McGee

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Gen 47:15-20 *So when the money failed in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For the money has failed." Then Joseph said, "Give your livestock, and I will give you bread for your livestock, if the money is gone." So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the cattle of the herds, and for the donkeys. Thus he fed them with bread in exchange for all their livestock that year. When that year had ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is gone; my lord also has our herds of livestock. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants of Pharaoh; give us seed, that we may live and not die, that the land may not be desolate." Then Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. So the land became Pharaoh's.*

There is no doubt that the famine was a very terrible thing. - McGee

Gen 47:21 *And as for the people, he moved them into the cities, from one end of the borders of Egypt to the other end.*

There was a great migration into the urban areas so that they would be near the center of supply where the grain was stored. You remember that Joseph had chosen these centers throughout Egypt at the very beginning. He now brings the people where they will be close to the supply of food. – McGee

Gen 47:22-26 *Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had rations allotted to them by Pharaoh, and they ate their rations which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their lands. Then Joseph said to the people, "Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and for your food, for those of your households and as food for your little ones." So they said, "You have saved our lives; let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants." And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt to this day, that Pharaoh should have one-fifth, except for the land of the priests only, which did not become Pharaoh's.*

When the people of Egypt and Canaan had spent all their money for food, Joseph accepted their livestock in payment. Then later he bought all the land, except that belonging to the Egyptian priests, gave the people seed with which to plant crops, and charged them one-fifth of the crop for land rental, a very fair arrangement. – Believers Bible Commentary

The slender stores of the Egyptians were soon exhausted, and had it not been for Joseph the streets would have been filled with the dying and dead. His Egyptian name means "the savior of the world;" and the confession of the Egyptians proved how true it was: "Thou hast saved our lives." How closely the parallel holds! Joseph rose from the pit and the prison to save his brethren as well as the myriads of his adopted fellow-countrymen: Jesus rose from the grave to be a Prince and a Savior. Joseph's bread cost him nothing, while Jesus gave us that which cost him Calvary. Joseph sold his corn for money; our Lord gave himself without money or price. You may go to Him without reluctance, though your sack is empty and you have no money in your hand; but He will give and give again, without stint. – FB Meyer

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Gen 47:27-31 So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years. When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." Then he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.

I think there are several factors which entered into Jacob's request to be buried back in the land of Canaan. First of all, he is now 147 years old, and he becomes alarmed that he will die in the land of Egypt. I think that is clear to him now. Then, the success of Joseph in acquiring all the land for Pharaoh makes him believe that his family might become comfortable in Egypt and never want to return to Canaan. His age certainly told him that he would die shortly.

We need to recognize this request as an evidence of the faith of Jacob in the covenant which God had made with his fathers. We need to note this because it will come up several times as we go through the Bible. The hope of the Old Testament is an earthly hope. Abraham believed that he would be raised from the dead in that land, so he wanted to be buried there. Isaac believed the same. Now Jacob is expressing that same faith. You see, the hope in the Old Testament is not to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and enter the city of the New Jerusalem, which is the eternal and permanent abode of the church.

The hope of the Old Testament is in Christ's Kingdom which will be set up on this earth. When that happens, Israel's great hope will be fulfilled, and these people will be raised for that Kingdom. The first thousand years of it will be a time of testing, and after that the eternal Kingdom will continue on and on. This is why Jacob does not want to be buried in Egypt. If he had no faith or hope in God's promise to him, what difference would it make where he was buried?

For believers today it makes no difference where we are buried. At the time of the Rapture, wherever we are, we shall be raised, and our bodies will join our spirits; that is, if we have died before the Rapture takes place. If we are still living, then we shall be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air. So it won't make any difference if we are buried in Egypt or in Canaan or in Los Angeles, or in Timbuktu. The living "in Christ" and the dead "in Christ" in all of these places will be caught up. It won't make any difference where we are. We don't need to go to a launching pad in Florida and take off from there. No, our hope is a heavenly hope.

The hope of the Old Testament is an earthly hope, and the fact that Jacob wants to be buried back in the land is an evidence of his faith in the Resurrection. He hopes to be raised from the dead in the Promised Land. Jacob is now becoming a man of faith.