

JANUARY 21

Genesis 47, 48, 49 & 50

Today you read Genesis 47-50. What an important day this is. You are finishing the entire book of Genesis. I want you to know how proud I am of you for doing it. Producing these recordings and the manuscripts that lie behind them is one of the biggest tasks I have ever agreed to tackle. Some days I say to myself -- why in the world are you doing this? But I know why I am doing it -- I'm doing it because you are committed enough to read and listen every day, and because having hundreds of people in God's Word each day (that's what I am praying for - in fact I am praying for thousands) is going to change our churches - it is going to change our lives. That's inevitable because God's Word does changes lives and changed lives means changed churches and renewed churches -- real Bible churches will change their communities and when whole communities begin to be impacted by the power of the Word of God, well things can really get interesting -- and God gets glory.

So Joseph and his family settle in the land of Goshen, the portion of Egypt that later in Moses' day would be called the district of Rameses. Here at last was a place where the family could become a nation in relative safety, free from famine, attack, or intermarriage. It was both fertile and isolated - a perfect place for the nation to multiply...just as God had promised.

There are three different references given to the number of people in the family of Israel at this point. Chapter 46:26 says 66 people (not counting the wives of Jacob's sons) "went down" with Jacob to Egypt. 46:27 adds Joseph and his two sons, who, with Jacob, turn the 66 into 70. Stephen in his speech in Acts 7:14, puts the number of 75 plus using the word "kindred" and probably referring to the 70 of Genesis 46:27 and the five surviving wives of Jacob's sons. 75 people in all, plus their servants, plus all their retainers, and perhaps their shirttail relations - that's a lot of progress in just three generations! But when they would come out of Egypt with Moses about 400 years later, it will be with a nation that numbers at least 2 million!

The way in which Joseph managed the affairs of Pharaoh receives a substantial amount of attention in the account. In modern day language, what Joseph did was to nationalize the assets of Egypt. Having set aside huge stores of grain during the seven years of plenty, he began to sell the grain when the famine began. In the latter years of the famine people had nothing left in the way of money with which to pay for food, so they paid with their livestock, their land on which they were allowed to stay as tenants, finally with their own selves becoming what we would today call serfs or indentured laborers. The writer of Genesis passes no judgment on this policy. He just reports it, and though it might seem somewhat harsh or cruel to us, it may have been a small price to pay by comparison to the way other nations were suffering in the famine. The fact that it is recorded in such detail for us may help us in two ways -- first, to understand why Israel had to go to Egypt -- this was no minor famine. It was a major international catastrophe. Second, it may help to explain why the Israelites fell into slavery and were so badly treated later on. If Joseph was the cause of Egyptians losing their property, their livestock, and their

freedom, and if at least a portion of that hardship was still being felt many years later, (Chapter 47:26 indicates that at the time of Moses the Egyptian people were still paying twenty percent of all they produced to Pharaoh,) then it is not hard to see how the descendants of Joseph could be hated and abused. After all, their father Joseph took away the liberty of the Egyptians -- it is only right that these Jews should be deprived of their freedom! That would have been the way they would have thought.

By the way, there is a passage in an Egyptian Papyrus dating from approximately 1200 BC, which talks about "a certain Syrian" who became commander of Egypt during a famine period and managed to make "the whole land tributary to himself." The inscription says "he plundered all the possessions" of the Egyptians. Well Joseph wasn't a Syrian, so that document wasn't a precise fit, but at the very least it tells us that the sort of things we are reading about in Genesis really did happen in Egypt. At best, that passage, though mistaken about his nationality, may actually be referring to Joseph. (G. Alders; Genesis, Vol. 1; p. 225; Zondervan; 1981)

So Israel prospers in Egypt. While the Egyptians lost their property, chapter 47 tells us that the Israelites acquired property, were fruitful and increased greatly in number. It was the Providence of God that gave them prosperity.

Reading chapters 49 and 50 of Genesis -- a little anticlimactic, right? I mean after the high point of the Book -- Joseph revealing his identity -- the suspense continues for a little while. We want to see how Pharaoh responds and we want to see Jacob have his reunion with his long lost son. But chapters 49 and 50 are just tying up the loose ends and well, what comes next? It is all about the blessing...

A bit of déjà vu occurs as Jacob surprises Joseph by conferring the chief blessing on the younger son, and Joseph doesn't like it much. We've no indication of why he did that, but like Jacob who was younger and more blessed than Esau the older, and like Joseph the second youngest of his brothers gets the biggest blessing, so here the younger son, Ephraim, gets the biggest blessing. Subsequent history will show that, according to the words of Jacob, the two tribes that will dominate the history of Israel will be Ephraim and Judah, who will take the most notable blessing in Chapter 49.

These blessings have deep power and play out in history.

These words, pronounced over each of the brothers, are powerful, prophetic, life shaping words. They all come true. Before we look at some specific prophecies here I need to make this application. The idea of blessings and curses, which are their opposite, for that matter, isn't limited to the Old Testament or to those with resident prophetic or apostolic gifts. It is a New Testament idea, too, and we as God's people are called upon not only to be blessings to others, but also to pronounce blessings on others – even, according to Jesus, upon our worst enemies. Our 21st century society seems to have some comprehension of the idea of cursing

but little or no knowledge of the opposite concept of blessing. I said this before but I'll say it again now, words have objective power -- not just in Bible times and languages, but also in our time and in the English language. When you pronounce a blessing on someone it really does have an effect -- even if you are not a prophet. We badly underestimate the power of our words and as a result we use too many, think them through too carelessly and do a lot of damage to ourselves and others. Can I challenge you to do something today? Can I challenge you to bless several people today? Now try not to sound too much like Jacob -- that could be intimidating, but do it. Bless someone. You may be surprised at the results.

Jacob's blessings are given in Chapter 49 to each of his sons -- some of them are backhanded blessings at best, like the one upon Reuben, who discovers that as the result of his sin (remember he had sexual relations with his father's concubine) he has lost the firstborn's role and blessing. Simeon and Levi don't fare well either and for the same reason -- their sin. Their great sin, you remember, involved that bit of nastiness at Shechem...the massacre of a whole village.

Joseph, as is to be expected, walks off with the primary blessing. Every blessing Jacob can think of is heaped upon the head of Joseph -- "the prince among his brothers." God is invoked in that blessing as "the mighty one of Jacob", "the Shepherd" (that's a new name for God), "the Rock of Israel" (another new name), "your Father's God", and "the Almighty." (Add the new ones to your list of the names of God.)

The most interesting blessing to us however, is the one for Judah, the lion's cub. The blessing contains a significant Messianic prophecy. Jacob says, "*The scepter will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his...*" That's Jesus! The Messiah, he says, will come from the tribe of Judah and Judah will retain the power and authority to rule over the nation of Israel until He comes. That prophecy is a very important link in the chain of prophecies that lead to Christ. It is interesting to note that during the lifetime of Christ, but before He had begun His public ministry, some of the Rabbinical scholars in Israel were worrying because Rome had taken so much power of self-determination away from the Jews, that it no longer seemed true to say that Judah held the scepter, and, they said, "Messiah has not yet come..." But they were wrong - He was already there.

By the time of Joseph's death, something of the political situation in Egypt has changed a bit. For whatever reason, the kind of funeral procession back to Macpelah to bury Jacob is not even entertained for Joseph. But Joseph elicits a promise -- one that will not be forgotten even if it takes 400 years to fulfill it -- "*take my bones back to the Promised Land when you go and bury me there*"; and at age 110 he dies.

Here ends the Book of Genesis -- one of the longest and most important Books in the Bible. It is my sincere prayer that your life has been so enriched in the last 4 ½ weeks that you won't even think about stopping now.

Genesis 1-11, you'll remember, talked to us about the four great events in the earliest time of our world -- creation, fall, flood, and Babel. Genesis 12 - 50 told us about four great men -- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

This is Mark Ashton reminding you of Matthew 4:4 - we do not live on bread alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of God. Peace.