

ISRAEL IS BLESSED IN EGYPT

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

These chapters complete the historical period of the nation of Israel known as the Patriarchal Period. Abraham's descendants through Isaac were now located in Egypt where they would become a numerous people through God's blessing (46:3). Then God would lead them out of Egypt and give them the Mosaic Law so that they might have a political status.

In Egypt, Jacob's descendants were given their own land (Goshen) where they were separated from the pagan influence of Egypt (47:1-6). During the remaining five years of famine, Joseph gained control of the money, cattle, and land for Pharaoh (47:14-26). Joseph proved his administrative ability for which his trials and tests had prepared him (Gen 39-42). Jacob demonstrated his faith in God's promises to him by making Joseph swear that he would bury him in Canaan (47:29-31).

In Jacob's last days he pronounced a blessing upon his children according to the ancient Near Eastern custom. God used these blessings to give revelation concerning the future of Jacob's sons and their descendants (Gen 48-49). In each of Jacob's sons, the particular character and actions of that son were representative of the tribe's future role in the nation's history. Following Jacob's death and burial, Jacob's sons feared that Joseph would repay them for their former treacherous deed against him and they asked for his forgiveness (50:15-17). Joseph was grieved that they should think such evil thoughts of him after he had been so kind to them. He again reminded them that God had been in control of these events and promised his continued support of each one of them (50:20, 21).

I. Jacob's Blessing Through Joseph — 47:1-31

A. Jacob Was Provided a Separated Place — 47:1-11

47:1-5 — Joseph introduced his family to Pharaoh by taking five of his brothers to meet him. As instructed by Joseph, the brothers indicated they were shepherds and requested that they might dwell in Goshen (a fertile plain in the delta region). Joseph had enough wisdom to keep his brothers **separated** from the pagan Egyptians. Jacob and his family seemed to recognize the temporary nature of their stay for they called themselves sojourners (v. 4).

47:6 — Pharaoh responded positively to their request and gave them the best of Egypt's land -- a recompense for Joseph's goodness to him in his reign. Pharaoh told Joseph to put his brothers in places of responsibility in caring for his cattle as he saw fit. Egypt was known for spending much effort and money in breeding fine cattle.

47:7 — Jacob blessed Pharaoh, not in the sense of approving of his pagan worship, but in the sense of praying to God for his welfare. Jacob realized that God was using this man to meet the needs of His people. By doing this, Jacob was a testimony for Almighty God to this man. Humanly speaking, Pharaoh was greater than Jacob; but spiritually, Jacob was greater than Pharaoh. Therefore, Jacob could bless Pharaoh. Pharaoh was blessed and used by God to take care of Jacob because Jacob and his family were the chosen seed of Abraham.

47:8-10 — Pharaoh's interest in Jacob led him to ask about his age. Jacob responded in a threefold manner. First, his life had been marked by wanderings (pilgrimages). Second, his days had been few. They were few in relation to that of his ancestors. He was only 130 years old in comparison to his father (Isaac), who had lived 180 years, and his grandfather (Abraham) who had lived 175 years. Third, his days were evil in the sense of much bitterness. This was partly caused when he thought Joseph was dead, but also by the grief caused by his erring sons.

47:11 — Joseph had Jacob and his family settle in Goshen, in the land of Ramses. The name, Ramses, has been a problem since Jacob's settlement in Egypt was around 1875 B.C., but Ramses was not a Pharaoh until about 1300 B.C. There are three explanations for this problem. First, the

famous Pharaoh Ramses may have chosen his name from the land bearing that name. Second, there may have been an earlier Pharaoh who named that land Ramses. Third, a later scribe may have "modernized" an obsolete name so that it could be understood by later readers.

B. Jacob Was Protected from a Severe Famine — 47:12-26

47:12-22 — Because Joseph had learned from God that a severe famine was coming, he had stored up abundant provisions to carry Egypt through it (cf. 41:38-57). Joseph was especially careful to protect, sustain, and nourish his relatives during this famine. The people fainted because of the famine in Canaan, as well as in Egypt. The Egyptians became totally dependent on Joseph to survive the famine because they had not personally prepared for this disaster (47:13). Now they began to feel the effects of the famine. In three successive stages (probably years) Joseph acquired the Egyptians' money, cattle, and land for Pharaoh. They had a choice of either starving or bartering away their money, cattle and land for sustenance. This was wise administration on Joseph's part because it maintained law and order. Government handouts only lead to rebellion and factions, but not so with orderly trade (cf. 47:25). Joseph had the people move to cities for at least two reasons. First, it greatly facilitated the dispensing of food. Second, it allowed for a strong central government type of control (feudal system). Hence, the government could control the people as well as regulate the use of water in the Nile. Note that Pharaoh did not get control of the priests' lands. This was probably for two reasons. First, the priests were highly esteemed on the social level. Second, the Pharaoh would not do anything which would bring him into disfavor with the gods.

47:23-26 — Joseph was a wise administrator because he kept the people busy in spite of the drought. He gave the people seed to plant crops with the agreement that 80% could be kept for themselves but 20% must be given to Pharaoh. The people did not despise Joseph, but instead they praised him for delivering them from the throes of death.

C. Jacob Was Promised a Special Burial — 47:27-31

47:27-31 — God began to bless Jacob's descendants so that they were greatly multiplied (27). Jacob lived for 17 years in Egypt and he realized his time of departure was at hand. He requested a special promise from Joseph that he be buried back in Canaan. Joseph agreed by putting his hand under his thigh, the customary sign of oath-taking, symbolizing a binding of the oath so that if Joseph failed, Jacob's descendants would punish him (cp. notes 24:2). Jacob's request to be buried in the land of Canaan signified his faith in God's promise (cf. 15:13-15; 46:3, 4). It was more than the sentimental aspect of being buried with his ancestors. He truly believed that God would bring them out of Egypt into the Promised Land. Contrast this with the unbelief of the Exodus people who were characterized by unbelief in spite of God's miracles (Heb. 3:12 and context). Jacob then worshipped and glorified his God (47:31; Heb. 11:21).

II. Jacob's Blessing Upon Joseph — 48:1-22

A. Jacob Adopted Joseph's Sons — 48:1-12

48:1-4 — When Jacob became more ill, Joseph took his two sons (Manasseh and Ephraim) to see Jacob. Jacob reminded Joseph of God's appearance to him at Luz (Bethel) and of His covenant promises with him. He wanted Joseph to remember his spiritual heritage lest Egypt be considered his permanent dwelling place.

48:5-12 — In order to exalt the position of Joseph (and also of Rachel), Jacob adopted Joseph's two sons as his own. Thus Joseph became the father of two tribes and Rachel, the mother of three tribes: Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. These two sons of Joseph were about 20 years old and he counted them as his own sons. Jacob, like Isaac, could not see well in his old age and had to have Joseph identify his sons (cf. 27:12ff). Although his physical sight was diminished, he had good spiritual sight when he gave the birthright to Joseph instead of Reuben (cf. 1 Chron. 5:1-2).

B. Jacob Blessed Joseph's Sons — 48:13-20

48:13ff — Joseph brought his sons to Jacob so that the firstborn, Manasseh, would be placed under Jacob's right hand, a place of special blessing. These blessings were binding and, because of God's special revelation to Jacob, they were also prophetic in nature. Jacob violated custom when he crossed his hands so that the younger son was under his right hand and received the special blessing. Joseph objected, but Jacob informed him that the younger would become the greater of the two (48:18-20). Ephraim became very prosperous, and during the divided kingdom his name was a synonym for the ten northern tribes.

C. Jacob Allotted Joseph Land — 48:21, 22

48:21, 22 — Jacob then gave a special gift to Joseph, the land he had acquired from the Amorites by physical force. This is perhaps the land mentioned in Gen 33:19. Joseph was later buried in that parcel (Josh 24:32). During New Testament times, Sychar is described as being near this parcel of ground (Jn. 4:5).

III. Jacob's Blessing Upon His Sons — 49:1-33

A. Reuben: Forfeited a Privileged Position — 49:1-4

49:1, 2 — Jacob gathered his sons together when he was still able to pronounce a blessing upon his sons. This is more or less poetic in nature. These "blessings" are indicative of the future role the descendants of these sons would realize. The activities of the various sons were representative of the tribe's future role. This, however, was not rigid to each individual for the grace of God could enable some to rise above such conduct. These blessings, then, are really visions of predictive prophecy which God revealed to Jacob.

49:3, 4 — Reuben held the distinguished position of the firstborn and hence the beginning of Jacob's strength (29:32). But he forfeited his position when he was immoral with Jacob's concubine (35:22). He was ruled by emotion and thus unstable as water -- literally a "boiling over of water" so that he had an unstable character. He was capable of great things, but his submission to passion rendered him ineligible for an honored position. The leadership position would be given to Judah, the priestly position to Levi, and the blessing and birthright to Joseph's two sons (cf. 1 Chron. 5:1, 2).

B. Simeon and Levi: Divided and Scattered — 49:5-7

49:5-7 — Simeon and Levi are considered together because of their cruel massacre of the Shechemites (cf. Gen 34). Their natures seem to have been almost identical as they demonstrated their cruel characters by their massacre of helpless men. Jacob rebuked them at that time (34:30) and indicated that they would have no possession in Canaan to call their own. Simeon was the weakest of the tribes (Num. 26:14) and they were scattered among the tribe of Judah (Josh 19:9). The Levites likewise were not given a tribal allotment but they did receive 48 Levitical cities scattered among the other tribes and they served as teachers of the Law throughout the nation (Josh 21:1-42). Levi's descendants must be commended for their right stand in the wilderness (Ex 32:26).

C. Judah: Blessed by God — 49:8-12

49:8-12 — Judah received a lengthy blessing which was fulfilled in Christ. This praise upon Judah can be accounted for in two ways. First, Judah was the eldest eligible son of Leah (Jacob's legal Biblical wife) and therefore worthy of a position. Second, he had qualified himself as a mature spiritual man (cp. 44:33 with 37:26, 27). His blessing was threefold and it will not be fulfilled completely until Christ comes to rule the earth. First, he (and his tribe) would be a victorious warrior over his enemies as a lion over his prey. Christ is identified as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5). He will conquer all His enemies. Judah also would be a respected leader among his brothers, which also is true of Christ (vs. 8, 10). He would rest in peace and security (v. 9; Num. 2:9; 10:14; Judges 1:2). Second, he would also have agricultural prosperity (vs. 11, 12). Vines would grow so profusely in his tribe's land that donkeys could be secured to them. Farmers normally would not do this because donkeys love to eat vine leaves; but in this case it was all right because vines were so plentiful. This is metaphorical language for prosperity. Furthermore, grape vines would be so abundant a man could wash his clothes in wine if he wished. His eyes would be a dark red indicating prosperity and health, not excessive drinking. In

addition, his teeth would be white with milk, again indicating God's blessing. This describes the conditions in Christ's Millennial Kingdom. Third, Shiloh would come through Judah. The word Shiloh (v. 10) seems to come from a Hebrew word (shalah) meaning "rest." Christ offered those who labored and carried heavy burdens to come to Him and find rest (Mt 11:28, 29). Most scholars believe Shiloh refers to Christ as the promised Messiah (cp. Num. 24:14-17; Heb 7:14; Mt 2:5; Ezk. 21:27). Since "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" (49:10), this definitely refers to Christ who will reign forever,

D. Zebulun: Benefited from Commerce — 49:13

49:13 — Jacob indicated that Zebulun would be at the "haven of the sea." It is not necessary to understand Jacob's statement as literally living by the sea. Zebulun lived in northern Israel between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. As a result, they were in close proximity to the Phoenicians and derived great commercial benefit from them. Joshua's allotment to them did not include any seashore (Josh 19:10-16).

E. Issachar: Blessed from Agriculture — 49:14, 15

49:14, 15 — Issachar is compared to a strongly built ass indicating their dedication to agriculture. They received the fertile Esdraelon valley and later provided many capable military victories (Judges 5:14-18). Some indicate this land became a snare since Issachar did not drive out the Canaanite inhabitants. Thus it is pictured as an ass lying down with its burden.

F. Dan: Serpent by the Way — 49:16-18

49:16-18 — Dan was the firstborn of Bilhah and Jacob predicted he would judge the nation -- partially fulfilled by Samson the judge (Judges 13:2). He was called a serpent by the way to indicate his lack of spiritual character. Some understand this description to refer to the "quick justice" he will repay to his enemies. Jacob does not mention Dan's tribal movement to northern Israel (Judges 18:7ff).

G. Gad: Harassed, but Victorious — 49:19

49:19 — Gad was located east of the Jordan and was constantly harassed by marauding bands but was finally victorious (cf. 1 Chron. 5:18; 12:8).

H. Asher: Productive and Prosperous — 49:20

49:20 — Asher would occupy a fertile piece of ground where wheat and oil were plentiful (cp. Deut. 33:24). Their strip of land lay near the Mt. Carmel mountain range.

I. Naphtali: Military and Linguistic Expertise — 49:21

49:21 — Naphtali would demonstrate his love for freedom, like a deer let loose. The plain of Gennesaret would provide the wide open spaces for Naphtali to exercise his freedom. In addition, he was praised for his goodly words and this was demonstrated by Barak (Judges 4:6; 5:18).

J. Joseph: Fruitful in the Midst of Adversity — 49:22-26

49:22-26 — Joseph received the highest praise of any of the sons. The main thrust is that Joseph was fruitful (ref. to Ephraim — 41:52) in spite of the adversities in his life. Fruitfulness has reference to his two tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh) and their future blessings in a threefold manner. First, the blessings of heaven above speak of dew and rain for moisture (Gen 27:39; Dt. 33:13). Second, the blessings from the deep refer to the springs during dry years. Third, the blessings of the breasts and womb refer to fertility in relation to man and beast. Joseph would be held in high esteem by his brothers. This is a just reward for his faithfulness to God.

K. Benjamin: Valiant Fighters — 49:27, 28

49:27 — Benjamin was like a wolf because of the tribe's warlike character. In fact, at one time all eleven tribes stood against Benjamin and were reduced to 600 men (Judges 20, 21). They provided many able military men who were precise with their armament (Judges 20:16; 1 Chron. 8:40; 12:2). This tribe was known for its violence.

L. Family Admonition: Bury Me in Canaan — 49:29-33 (see notes on 47:27-31).

IV. Jacob's Burial by His Sons — 50:1-21

A. Their Faithfulness — 50:1-14

50:1 — Following Jacob's death, Joseph expressed his tender affection for his dear father. It would seem that all of the brothers likewise mourned their father's death.

50:2-14 — Joseph commanded the physicians to embalm his father. It is significant that Joseph did not command the embalmers to do this work. No doubt he feared they might involve his father in magical and superstitious heathen practices. The forty day process indicates that Jacob was mummified which was followed by 30 days of mourning. According to Jacob's desire, his body was buried in Canaan in Hebron. This Egyptian involvement in Jacob's death was a real testimony of their love and respect for Joseph.

B. Their Fearfulness — 50:15-21

50:15ff — Following Jacob's death, his sons feared that Joseph might take that opportunity to repay them for their sins against him. They sent a messenger to Joseph stating their father had a dying wish to ask Joseph to forgive his brothers. Then they came and fell down before him (v. 18) and begged his forgiveness. Joseph responded in a threefold manner. Emotionally, he wept because they had not considered his previous forgiveness to be genuine. Spiritually, he left it with God to right the wrongs (v. 19; Rom 12:19; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet 4:19); and he accepted it as God's providence in order to save the lives of many people (v. 20; 45:5). Practically, he promised to continue caring for them (v. 21; Lk. 6:27ff).

V. Joseph's Burial in Egypt — 50:22-26

50:22-26 — Joseph lived to be 110 years old and saw his great grandchildren. He made his brothers and their descendants promise that they would carry his bones to Canaan when they departed from Egypt (Ex 13:19; Josh 24:32). His bones were a testimony that he truly believed the promises of God (Heb. 12:22). The book of Genesis closes in stark contrast to that of its beginning. It began with life and ended with death; it began in a garden and ended in a coffin.