

GENESIS

Lesson 64 Genesis 47:1-31 The Family Settles in Egypt

¹ Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in Goshen." ² He chose five of his brothers and presented them before Pharaoh.

³ Pharaoh asked the brothers, "What is your occupation?"

"Your servants are shepherds," they replied to Pharaoh, "just as our fathers were." ⁴ They also said to him, "We have come to live here for a while, because the famine is severe in Canaan and your servants' flocks have no pasture. So now, please let your servants settle in Goshen."

⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you, ⁶ and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock."

⁷ Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, ⁸ Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?"

⁹ And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." ¹⁰ Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence.

¹¹ So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses, as Pharaoh directed. ¹² Joseph also provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their children.

Joseph and the Famine

¹³ There was no food, however, in the whole region because the famine was severe; both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine. ¹⁴ Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan in payment for the grain they were buying, and he brought it to Pharaoh's palace. ¹⁵ When the money of the people of Egypt and Canaan was gone, all Egypt came to Joseph and said, "Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? Our money is all gone."

¹⁶ "Then bring your livestock," said Joseph. "I will sell you food in exchange for your livestock, since your money is gone." ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their horses, their sheep and goats, their cattle and donkeys. And he brought them through that year with food in exchange for all their livestock.

¹⁸ When that year was over, they came to him the following year and said, "We cannot hide from our lord the fact that since our money is gone and our livestock belongs to you, there is nothing left for our lord except our bodies and our land. ¹⁹ Why should we perish before your eyes—we and our land as well? Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate."

²⁰ So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians, one and all, sold their fields, because the famine was too severe for them. The land became Pharaoh's, ²¹ and Joseph reduced the people to servitude, from one end of Egypt to the other. ²² However, he did not buy the land of the priests, because they received a regular allotment from Pharaoh and had food enough from the allotment Pharaoh gave them. That is why they did not sell their land.

²³ Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh, here is seed for you so you can plant the ground. ²⁴ But when the crop comes in, give a fifth of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children."

²⁵ "You have saved our lives," they said. "May we find favor in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh."

²⁶ So Joseph established it as a law concerning land in Egypt—still in force today—that a fifth of the produce belongs to

Pharaoh. It was only the land of the priests that did not become Pharaoh's.

²⁷ Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.

²⁸ Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. ²⁹ When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, ³⁰ but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried."

"I will do as you say," he said.

³¹ "Swear to me," he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Genesis 47:1-31 [NIV]

In this lesson, we see Jacob and some of his family meet the Pharaoh in separate meetings. The first meeting with Pharaoh is comprised of a small group of five sons chosen by Joseph; this was followed by a private meeting consisting of Pharaoh, Jacob, and Joseph. Following these meetings and the blessings bestowed upon Pharaoh, Joseph goes back to his primary role of managing Egypt through the severe famine.

So Joseph and the five brothers he chose to represent the family—we're not given their names—have a private audience with the Pharaoh. The first thing we notice is that Joseph begins the meeting by telling the Pharaoh that Jacob and his family, "my father and brothers," have arrived and are in Goshen.

We remember that our last lesson ended with the verses of Genesis 45:31-34, where Joseph told Jacob and his family, "I will go up and speak to Pharaoh and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were living in the land of Canaan, have come to me. The men are shepherds; they tend livestock, and they have brought along their flocks and herds and everything they own.' When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, 'What is your occupation?' you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians."

These verses appear to contradict each other. Joseph first says that he will inform Pharaoh, "The men are shepherds," in Genesis 45:32, and then Joseph closes in Genesis 45:34 by saying, "all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians."

It turns out that no one actually knows why these verses seem so contradictory. Clearly, in today's scripture, Joseph is clear about their occupation when he introduces them to the Pharaoh. He tells him that they have arrived with "their flocks and herds," and in response to the Pharaoh's question about their occupation they respond, "your servants are shepherds."

Pharaoh apparently likes the answer, and he tells Joseph that they can settle "in the best part of the land," the "land of Goshen." He goes on to say that they can tend "his own livestock" as well. As can be seen in the map included again below, the Nile Delta region was very fertile; much of it referred to as the land of Goshen. Avaris was, at that time, the capital of the Hyksos Dynasty, and it was also located in Goshen where the land was very rich in natural resources.



Figure: Nile Delta Region

Following his audience with Joseph and some of his brothers, the Pharaoh has a private audience with Joseph and his father Jacob. Note how old Jacob is when the Pharaoh asks him about his age. He tells him that he is 130 years old. As we have studied previously, reversing the math back to when Jacob tricked his father and Esau gave up his birthright, this would mean that the twins were 77 years old at that time. This timeline synchronizes with the events that followed—from the time he served Laban, through the day Joseph was sold into slavery, and through the current meeting with Pharaoh.

Critics of the Bible raise the point that the average life span of men and women at that time was much younger, and no one lived to be 130 years old. Perhaps the original Hebrew, written by Moses, is still not completely understood when it comes to the numbering system being used in that day (when birth dates and ages were not being recorded). As we observed during our earlier study of ages and dates, the kings ages were all symbolic and related to their military victories and the prosperity of their dynasties. They were not in fact chronological ages.

Today, however, as we have done throughout our study of Genesis, we are taking the Biblical text at face value and acknowledging that Jacob, at 130 years old, is standing in the presence of the Pharaoh, and he "blessed Pharaoh."

The text states that indeed the family settled in Goshen, in "the best part of the land.

Joseph, having settled his father and his family in Goshen, returns to his official duties; and we find that the famine is now very severe. Food is extremely scarce, except for the grain stores that Joseph has been managing. You can imagine that as the famine gets more and more severe, the price people are willing to pay for the grain that Joseph is managing has gone up dramatically. In fact, we read that, "Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan in payments for the grain."

Now the challenge is: How can people continue to purchase grain from Joseph if all of their money is already in the "Pharaoh's palace?" The starving citizens of the land want Joseph to give them grain, as they no longer have any money. However, Joseph is wiser than that.

For the next year, Joseph requires them to bring all of their livestock to him. So they gave him their "horses, their sheep and goats, their cattle and donkeys." This exchange gets them through another year, but now at the end of that year, they have neither money nor livestock. You can imagine their panic and their frustration with the famine remaining severe for so long. How can they acquire more grain?

Joseph doesn't even have to come up with a method of exchange. The people voluntarily offer themselves up as slaves—as well as giving up their land—for grain, so that they will not starve. Joseph then takes the next step, knowing that the famine will end soon, by giving them seed for planting, with the stipulation that twenty percent of the harvest belongs to the Pharaoh.

As a direct result of Joseph's leadership, Egypt survives a severe famine and begins to rebuild its food supply. Amazing! God placed Joseph in Egypt to save both the Egyptian people as well as Jacob and his family—now living in Goshen and becoming very prosperous. "They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number." Little did they know that they were beginning the early stage of God's larger plan to bring His chosen people out of Egypt and into their own land, thus fulfilling His promise to Abraham.

At the end of the narrative, Jacob realizes that he will die soon and asks Joseph to promise him that he will not bury him in Egypt, "but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried." The chapter closes with Joseph making that promise to Jacob.

Above all else, this lesson should continue to show us that God has a greater plan than we think, and it shows us that God cares for us while He carries out that plan. At times, in the lives of both Joseph and Jacob, the future seemed dark, and yet both men continued to place their faith in God—just as we need to do today. While the world around us seems darker than ever, or perhaps within our lives there are times when we see little hope, we can rest assured that God is with us. Jesus himself said, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20).

Have a great week everyone, and always rely on God's divine providence!

In Christ,

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