

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 8

Genesis – Part Seven

JOSEPH

I. Genesis background.

Genesis unfolds the great introduction to the drama of human redemption. It begins with the relationship of God and man. It explores both the universality and the originality of sin. Divine judgment is set forth along with a promised redemption.

The redemption is prophesied in increasingly specific terms. Genesis then follows the history that surrounds the original and successor prophecies as the promised redemption is further elucidated.

Genesis shows God making choices in the fulfillment of the prophesied redemption. The choice goes from the offspring of woman (Eve) through Noah, Abraham/Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob.

Genesis then unfolds the story of Jacob's children with the emphasis on Joseph.

II. Joseph.

Joseph is not the firstborn of Jacob. In fact, Jacob has a total of twelve sons, and Joseph is number eleven. Still, Joseph holds a very special place in Jacob's heart. The reason is that Joseph is the long awaited first born of Rachel, Jacob's first true love. Rachel will die during childbirth of son number twelve (Rachel's second and only other son, named Benjamin).

Joseph as a young man had significant issues with his brothers. These issues included doting from Isaac (an incredible gift of a multi-colored coat) and dreams shared perhaps indiscreetly. The dreams themselves were visions of Joseph's family (both siblings and parents) bowing subserviently to Joseph.

These episodes further alienated Joseph from his brothers such that they decided to seize an opportunity to murder him one day.

Discretion being the better part of valor (or cowardice, as the case may be), the brothers changed their minds and sold Joseph into slavery rather than killing him. The coat then provided the perfect means of deceiving Jacob into believing Joseph was the victim of a wild beast. This left Jacob's heart broken, the brothers free of the Joseph factor, and Joseph working ultimately for Potiphar, a lord high-muckety-muck in Egypt (actual job title: Captain of Pharaoh's Guard).

Joseph was mega-successful working for Potiphar. "The Lord gave him success in everything he did" (Gen. 39: 3). As a result, Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything Potiphar had, including Potiphar's household. Potiphar's wife took this a little too far (while trying to take Joseph a little too far) with the result being none too good for Joseph.

Potiphar believes his wife's lies about Joseph and sends Joseph to prison. It is in prison that Joseph meets a fellow destined to change Joseph's life. Joseph has a chance to use God's insight to interpret the prophetic dreams of two fellows that happen to be servants of Pharaohs doing time. One is a cupbearer, the other a baker.

The cupbearer survives the prison and returns to serve Pharaoh. When Pharaoh is himself in need of a dream interpreter, the cupbearer introduces Joseph to Pharaoh. God gives Joseph the interpretation of Pharaoh's very important prophetic dreams. These interpretations not only save much of Egypt, but also results in the elevation of Joseph to number two status in all of Egypt. Joseph then becomes overseer of the plan for Egyptian famine survival.

After seven great farming years, the land enters famine stage. This famine ultimately results in the reuniting of Joseph and his family (a fulfillment of Joseph's old dreams). With this reunion, we see a drama of heart-break and tensions unfold.

The brothers make multiple trips to Egypt for grain but do not recognize Joseph as their brother. Finally, the brothers are forced to leave one in custody while they are also forced to bring little Benjamin (much to Jacob's distress.)

Ultimately, Joseph makes himself known and the family is reunited. The family all moves to Egypt where Jacob dies in peace after blessing his sons. (Some read more like curses!)

In the process of Jacob's blessings, Judah receives the promise as the line of redemption or prophecies. Gen. 49: 8-10 shows Judah as a lion to whom all the others will bow down. Judah is to have the scepter of authority, rulership and kingdom. History will show Jesus coming from the line (or lion) of Judah.

Genesis comes to a close with the death of Joseph.