

### **Walking Through The Bible. Part 3; Jacob And Joseph**

Jacob and his twin brother Esau, were born to Rebekah and Isaac when Isaac was 60 years old, after much prayer (Genesis 25:21). The pregnancy seemed to have been a difficult one for Rebekah (verse 22) and the Lord told her she was to have twin boys (verse 23). As adults, the twins had very different personalities. Esau was a skilled hunter; a man of the outdoors and a good cook, but Jacob was a plain and quiet man, preferring to stay indoors (Genesis 25:27; 27:4). There didn't seem to be very much sibling rivalry between the twins, even though Isaac favoured Esau and Rebekah favoured Jacob (Genesis 25:28). That was until Jacob took Esau's birthright.

Jacob was a bit of a swindler and tricked Esau out of his birthright, or inheritance that was due to a firstborn (Genesis 25:29 to 34). Although Esau may not have taken very much notice of his inheritance at that time, he later sobbed about losing it and pleaded for Isaac to bless him too (Genesis 27:34 to 38). The boys' crafty mother Rebekah, helped her favourite son Jacob, to steal Esau's blessing and even prepared Isaac's meal beforehand! The birthright and the verbal blessing given to children in those days, were the same as a non-negotiable last will and testament, written by the father. It was taken for granted that the eldest son would receive the greater portion of the father's estate, so to lose it would have been a heavy blow for Esau. We can imagine his sense of loss; his frustration, his sense of feeling cheated and the anger he felt toward his younger twin, Jacob. Strange as it may be, Esau did not seem to be angry at his mother, who helped Jacob cheat him out of his inheritance. Jacob was actually doing just what his mother commanded him to do, albeit reluctantly (Genesis 27:8 to 13), yet Jacob was wholly blamed! Isaac told Esau his anger would eventually be broken (Genesis 27:40) but it lasted for about 20 years before Esau could bring himself to forgive Jacob and embrace him (Genesis 33:4).

Both Jacob and Esau married their first cousins. Esau married his Uncle Ishmael's daughter Mahalath (Genesis 28:9). Ishmael was Isaac's older brother. Jacob married his Uncle Laban's two daughters, Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29:25 & 28). Laban was Rebekah's older brother (Genesis 28:2 & 5). Jacob went to Laban's house in Haran to find a wife, in obedience to his parents (Genesis 28:6 & 7).

Jacob had his first God-given dream while travelling from his parents home in Hebron [south of Jerusalem] to his Uncle Laban's house in Haran [located in modern day Syria]. He dreamed he saw a ladder that reached from earth to heaven and the holy angels were ascending and descending on it. The Lord stood next to Jacob and promised him his descendants would be numerous and would spread all around, and promised his Offspring (Jesus) would bring blessing to the world. God promised He would watch over Jacob wherever he went and would bring him back to the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 28:12 to 15). Jacob felt that area was the gateway to heaven and he called it Bethel, which means 'God's house' (verse 17, 19 & 22). That was prophetic because Bethel is a short distance north of Jerusalem, which as we know, is the Jewish capital of Israel and it was the birthplace of Christianity – truly the gateway to heaven!

When Jacob arrived at Haran to his uncle's sheep farm, he was greeted very warmly and was invited to stay (Genesis 29:9 to 14). Abraham's family, although separated by location, was a loving and close family unit. Jacob married Leah and Rachel and took Zilpah and Bilhah as his concubines (Genesis 29:24; 30:3, 4 & 9) and began producing children; Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin. These men were the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Only one daughter was recorded: Dinah. There was ongoing tension between sisters Leah and

Rachel, who had been sold to Jacob (Genesis 31:15), over the fact they had to share one husband, as we can read in several verses between Genesis 29:18 and 30:24. The secondary wives Zilpah and Bilhah, had no choice but to have sex with their employer Jacob, and have children to him. Imagine an employer trying to get away with that in this modern age! But they were all real people, in a real land, during a real time phase, with real emotions.

After 20 years (Genesis 31:38), the Lord told Jacob to return to Canaan, to the promised land (Genesis 31:13) where Isaac still lived (Genesis 31:18). On his way to Canaan, Jacob had his second Godly encounter. He was given the amazing privilege of having his eyes supernaturally opened so he could see an army of angels (Genesis 32:1 & 2). Jacob had just seen his uncle/father-in-law Laban off (Genesis 31:55), when Jacob sent a message of peace to his brother Esau (Genesis 32:3 to 5). Whether it was to terrify Jacob, or whether Esau rode with the ancient equivalent of a gang is unclear, but he brought 400 men with him to meet Jacob (Genesis 32:6). Jacob was 'greatly afraid' and prayed and asked God for help (Genesis 32:9 to 12). Jacob separated his massive family and horde of livestock into two groups (Genesis 32:7 & 8) and set some animals aside for a gift for Esau to try to appease him (Genesis 32:13 to 23), but Esau wouldn't accept the gift (Genesis 33:9). Jacob insisted Esau take it but Esau ignored Jacob's offer and rode away without taking any of the livestock (Genesis 33:16).

Jacob's third encounter with the Lord came in Genesis 32:24 to 30, when Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, Who was Jesus before He was born on earth. See the sermon on this website titled 'Jesus, Son of God, Angel of the Lord'. The Lord told Jacob he had power with God and with men. This is the first time Jacob's name change was mentioned. He was not to be called Jacob any longer, but Israel (Genesis 32:28). After this close encounter with our Creator, Jacob had to meet his brother Esau face to face which turned out to be a loving reunion (Genesis 33:1 to 4 & 10). Unfortunately, Jacob was back to his old tricks and deceived Esau yet again by going in a different direction to the route suggested by Esau (Genesis 33:17).

There is mention of Rebekah's nurse Deborah, dying (Genesis 35:8) but there is no mention of Rebekah, so we can assume she had passed away during Jacob's time in Haran. Jacob had a fourth meeting with God and was again told his name was to be Israel (Genesis 35:10), and he was promised a nation and a company of nations would come from his offspring, and again God promised to give him the land of Canaan, which later became the land of Israel. Jacob finally met up with his father Isaac in Hebron (Genesis 35:27) and soon afterwards, Isaac died and was buried by both his sons, Esau and Jacob (Genesis 35:29).

The twins never feuded again, but agreed to part company. Because of the amount of livestock they both had, Canaan couldn't support them (Genesis 36:6 to 8). The area Esau settled in is now modern day Jordan. These were real, living people; a real life family with their up and downs, like any normal family we may see today. They lived in places that are still there, albeit, different, modernised and some have new names, but the roads, mountains, rocks, wells, rivers and oases with trees are all there for us to see, walk on, touch, climb, drink from and rest beneath. It is all so real!

Joseph's story begins in the promised land where he was happily living with his father Jacob, 11 brothers and sister Dinah. In Genesis 37:3 we read how Jacob favoured Joseph above all his other children, and made him a long-sleeved coat. That overt favouritism caused all of the older sons to hate Joseph and eventually the family was torn apart, with

Jacob and Joseph suffering terribly. He was innocent because the favouritism was his father's fault, not Joseph's, but the favouritism seemed to be a family trait. To make matters worse, Joseph had two visionary dreams in which his parents and brothers bowed down to him (Genesis 37:7 to 11), and when Joseph excitedly told the dream to his brothers, they hated him even more. The brothers were jealous of him (Genesis 37:11), they couldn't speak peaceably to him (Genesis 37:4) they tore his coat off him and threw him into a dry pit (Genesis 37:23 & 24) then they sold him to Arabs for 20 pieces of silver (Genesis 37:28). The Arabs then took Joseph by force to Egypt (Genesis 37:28). To deceive their father Jacob, they dipped Joseph's coat into the blood of a goat (Genesis 37:31) and sent the coat to Jacob, who thought Joseph had been killed by a wild animal (Genesis 37:33 to 35). Joseph was only 17 (Genesis 37:2) when his brothers sold him. We can only imagine the feelings of rejection, hurt, betrayal, fear, longing for his family and the dreadful loneliness he must have felt. For Joseph, being forced to trek through rough, unknown terrain to an unknown future must have been awfully gruelling and terrifying. The Arabs took Joseph to Egypt where they sold him to an officer of Pharaoh's named Potiphar (Genesis 37:36).

Egypt is the land of the Pharaohs, the sphinx and pyramids but also one of the lands of the Bible. The journey of Joseph was a tragic one because of his jealous older brothers. Long before Rome became a major player in the area, all roads led to Egypt. In a wonderful rags to riches story, Joseph, a Hebrew slave, became an advisor to Pharaoh, and was served by the Egyptians. Even today, the story of Joseph is retold over and over by the Bedouin tribes that call that region home. At the time of Joseph, Egypt was the most powerful civilisation in the world. Joseph learned the language of the Egyptians (Genesis 42:23; 45:12). The Bible says God was with Joseph and although he was a slave, he was a successful and prosperous man, and the Lord made all that Joseph did, flourish (Genesis 39:2). Potiphar made Joseph supervisor over all that he had and put the handsome young Joseph in charge (Genesis 39:5).

After a time, Potiphar's wife tried unsuccessfully to seduce Joseph because of his good looks, but he refused and in retaliation, she accused Joseph of trying to seduce her (Genesis 39:6 to 19). Although innocent, Joseph was thrown into the Pharaoh's prison for several years (Genesis 39:20) but the Lord was with Joseph and he prospered (Genesis 39:21 to 23). A baker and a butler were in prison with Joseph (Genesis 40:1 to 4), and when they had dreams, Joseph interpreted them correctly (Genesis 40:5 to 22). Joseph asked the butler to remember him in the prison when he was released (Genesis 40:14), but the butler promptly forgot about Joseph for another two years (Genesis 40:23; 41:1; 41:12). By this time, Joseph had been in prison for about 12 years. He became extremely depressed and in Psalm 105:18 we read that the Egyptians hurt his feet with fetters and he was laid in chains of iron and his 'soul went down into the iron'. That describes really deep discouragement, despondency and depression.

In ancient Egypt, people thought dreams always had meanings and Joseph was a gifted interpreter of dreams. When Pharaoh had two dreams and wanted the interpretation, the butler finally remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him (Genesis 41:12 & 13). Pharaoh sent for Joseph, who shaved, cut his hair, changed his clothes and made himself presentable before speaking to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14). Pharaoh told Joseph his dreams (Genesis 41:17 to 24) then Joseph gave Pharaoh the correct interpretation. Joseph predicted there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of severe drought and famine, and he came up with a solution (Genesis 41:33 to 37). Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's plan, he placed Joseph in charge of the whole court. Pharaoh placed his own signet ring on Joseph's hand, placed official vestments of fine linen on him

and put a gold chain around Joseph's neck. That made Joseph, in essence, the Pharaoh's deputy. Deputy of the greatest power on earth at that time in history (Genesis 41:40 to 44). Joseph's title translates as Governor or Prime Minister. The story of Joseph, a Hebrew slave who became Governor, is actually told in hieroglyphs etched on the walls inside a tomb in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt; further proof that Joseph was a real person and this story is factual.

After marrying and having two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph felt his suffering was finally over after 13 years, and the longing he had felt for his family was eased (Genesis 41:51 & 52), but Jacob was still mourning for Joseph, whom he believed was dead. In Egypt, there was indeed seven years of plenty (Genesis 41:53) then two years into the famine predicted by Joseph, Jacob's family began to need food (Genesis 42:1 & 2). Eventually, the famine drew Joseph's whole family into Egypt. After toying with his cruel, jealous brothers for months, causing them great anguish (Genesis chapters 42 to 44) did Joseph finally reveal who he really was because they didn't recognise him (Genesis 45:1). The dreams Joseph had, and told his family about when he was just 17, came to pass 22 years later (Psalm 105:19). Only then, did Jacob find out Joseph was still alive and he collapsed (Genesis 45:26 to 28). It was only after the sons told Jacob that Joseph was alive, did the Lord speak to Jacob again and reassure him God would be with him and that Joseph would be with him when he died (Genesis 46:3 & 4). Why the Lord chose not to speak to Jacob and tell him Joseph was okay to put his mind at ease, so he could cease mourning for his beloved son years before that, can't be explained by anyone but God Himself. After Joseph had been made Governor he could have sent word to Jacob to say he was okay, but he didn't and left Jacob to grieve for 22 years.

Joseph was 17 when his brothers sold him and he was in prison for 13 years. He had already been Governor for 9 years, so Joseph would have been 39 when he was reunited with his father in Egypt. They hugged each other for a very long time (Genesis 46:29). The youngest brother Benjamin, was only a few years younger than Joseph and was already the father of ten sons when he travelled to Egypt. By this time, Jacob had adopted his new name, Israel, and all his descendants would be known as the Israelites. In modern days they are called Israeli's

There were 70 male members of Joseph's immediate family named in the list in Genesis 46:5 to 27, who were to move to Egypt, but that list did not include the son's wives (Genesis 46:26). Only Jacob's sons and his grandsons were named; the male offspring. Apart from the males, only Jacob's four wives and one daughter Dinah, were named in this list. As there were polygamous marriages to unnamed women, Jacob's other unnamed daughters and unnamed granddaughters (Genesis 46:7), plus the many required unnamed servants, we do not know exactly how many more than the 70 male family members, went with them in the wagons to Egypt. There could have been dozens more people, but the Lord named only the male members of the blood-line, because it was the blood-line from Abraham, that was to bring forth our Messiah. The wives were only needed to produce the male heirs that were to continue the family tree.

Jacob's family settled in Goshen in the Nile delta at the mouth of the Nile as it leads out to sea (Genesis 47:11). It was at that time, the most fertile area in Egypt. When Jacob was very old he made Joseph promise not to bury him in Egypt, but to bury him in Canaan (Genesis 47:29 & 30). A short time before Jacob died, he prophesied over his sons and singled out Judah to carry the sceptre and bring forth the coming Messiah (Genesis 49:9 & 10). Jacob was 130 when he moved to Egypt (Genesis 47:9) and lived in Egypt 17 years. He reached the ripe old age of 147 (Genesis 47:28).

The Egyptians must have had an impact on the Hebrews, because Joseph ordered that Jacob be embalmed (Genesis 50:2). Jacob's father, grandfather, grandmother and other family members were buried in Sarah's cave in Canaan (Genesis 49:31), making the cave a family 'plot'. In Genesis 50:3 we see that 40 days were devoted to embalming then a further 30 days were set aside for mourning. The embalming process took 40 days to desiccate the body which is the period of devotion, then a further 30 days were taken up by the bandaging process, time set aside for mourning. Jacob's sons carried his body to Canaan and buried him in the cave (Genesis 50:13 & 14).

Before Joseph died, he predicted the return of his family to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He made his family promise to take his bones back to Canaan to be buried in Sarah's cave. Joseph lived until he was 110 and was also embalmed (Genesis 50:24 to 26). Joseph was more than just an interpreter of dreams, he was a prophet.

The Hebrews, who later became the Israelites, stayed in Egypt for 430 years before the Lord took them from Egypt back to Canaan (Exodus 12:40 & 41). Although they were influenced by the Egyptian culture, what is amazing, is that after all those years, they still spoke Hebrew. In the city where Goshen once was, is a huge wall inscribed with details of the famine, the Hebrews who moved there, Joseph, the Hebrew's enslavement, and the Exodus of the people called the Israelites. There is still a non-Arab clan who live beside that wall, and who still speak about what happened there. During that time period of 430 years, the Israelites went from being the family of the Governor and served by Egyptians, to lowly slaves of the Egyptians.

See part four of this series: Moses and the Israelites.

Amen and God bless you.

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