

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSEPH

One of the most remarkable men in all of the Bible was Jacob's favourite son, Joseph. In this article I'd like for us to have a look at the life and times of Joseph and the lessons that we can learn from his life.

Joseph was the second youngest son of Jacob. He was the firstborn son of Jacob's second and favourite wife, Rachel. His name can mean either "God has added" or "May God add" which is a fitting name for this son who would eventually receive the birthright promises. We first read about Joseph's story in Genesis 37. Let's pick up his story starting in verse 3:

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of *many* colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

"Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: "There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."

Joseph had showed a lack of tact in the way that he told his brothers about his dreams. Since his father rebuked him afterwards it indicates that he also had a youthful pride that is not uncommon for teenagers. There's an old saying that says "Learn what you can from a teenager while he still knows it all." Many teenagers overestimate how good they really are at various things and think that they know much better than people older than them. The lesson for any teenager in light of what was to happen next to Joseph is to temper your youthful zeal with humility and a willingness to learn from others.

As a youngster, Joseph was overconfident. His natural self-confidence, increased by being Jacob's favorite son and by knowing of God's designs for his life, was unbearable to his ten older brothers, who eventually conspired against him. So great was their envy of him that they were prepared to kill him. Reuben intervened to prevent him from being killed but after Reuben left them Judah persuaded the brothers to have him sold to Midianite traders on their way to Egypt.

After being sold to Potiphar, a captain of the guard of the Pharaoh, we begin to see that Joseph had an excellent work ethic which we can all learn from. He didn't grumble about the terrible turn of events which had separated him from his family but he applied himself as diligently as he could to his duties having faith that God would turn things around for him when the time was right.

In Genesis 39:2-6 we read: "The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority."

Maybe it was Joseph's example that inspired Solomon to write in Proverbs 22:29: "Do you see a man *who* excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown *men*."

Tragedy was to strike Joseph once again but only after showing us another great strength of his – his personal integrity and obedience to God under the pressure of sexual temptation.

In Genesis 39:7 we read: "And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. "There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Dr Laura Schlessinger in her book "The Ten Commandments – The Significance of God's Laws in Everyday Life" quotes a letter from a listener to her radio program. He writes: "I also wanted to comment on the way that people should handle temptation. As a christian, I have been taught to do like Jesus did when he fasted for forty days and then Satan came and tempted him. I am taught that when that happens, just do as He did and quote the appropriate scripture to the devil. The New Testament says "resist the devil and he will flee from you." That works well for almost all temptations, except one, sexual temptation. Proverbs is just full of advice about this for both Jews and Christians...condense it down to one sentence and it would say something like this: "When you are tempted sexually, run like hell, don't look back, just run!"

Joseph did just that when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife. 1 Corinthians 6:18 tells us "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

Unfortunately for Joseph Potiphar's wife then has him framed and sent to prison by lying and saying he tried to rape her but God would again turn this situation into good for Joseph. Joseph then correctly interprets some dreams for Pharaoh's baker and butler who were imprisoned with him. A long two years later the butler remembers Joseph when Pharaoh has a dream that needs interpreting.

God gives him the interpretation through Joseph telling him about seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. So impressed with Joseph is this Pharaoh that he appoints Joseph as his vizier being second in charge of Egypt after Pharaoh.

As vizier Joseph prepares the nation by storing a fifth of the nation's grain to survive the coming famine. This tells us of another lesson that we can learn from Joseph's life which can be summed up by the famous boy scout motto – Be prepared! Solomon writes in Proverbs 6:6-8: "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, *and* gathers her food in the harvest." Modern Joseph – the American and British people - have also done much to help feed the world like Joseph did in the ancient world.

During the years of famine he is re-united with his brothers who go to Egypt to buy grain followed by his tearful re-union with his father who thought that he had lost his favourite son many years earlier. What is particularly striking in the account of the reunion of Joseph with his brothers who sold him into slavery is his generosity of spirit and his willingness to completely forgive them.

In the commentary of the Life Application Bible in it's biography of Joseph it says: "As you read his story, note what Joseph did in each case. His positive response transformed each setback into a step forward. He didn't spend much time asking "Why?" His approach was "What shall I do now?" Those who met Joseph were aware that wherever he went and whatever he did, God was with him. When you're facing a setback, the beginning of a Joseph-like attitude is to acknowledge that God is with you. There is nothing like his presence to shed new light on a dark situation. What matters is not so much the events or circumstances of life, but your response to them."

If we were to look for Joseph in the history of Egypt exactly where and when can we expect to find him? On page 21 of the UCG booklet "The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy" we read that the Pharaoh called Shishak in the Bible in the days of Solomon's son Rehoboam who

plundered the Temple of God was Thutmose III. This link between the Bible and Egyptian history can be well established by a comparison between the objects in the Temple mentioned in the Bible and the record of the vast amount of booty that Thutmose III brought back from Palestine. This booty is recorded on a wall outside of the Holy of holies in the Temple of Karnak in Egypt which I've had the opportunity to visit and photograph.

Thutmose III was one of the early kings of the 18th dynasty, the wealthiest and most powerful dynasty in the history of ancient Egypt. This dynasty ruled Egypt from around 1050 to 820 BC ending with the famous king Tutankhamen. This dynasty ruled from the time of Saul, David and Solomon right through to King Jehoshaphat.

Prior to this dynasty were dynasties 14 to 17 where Egypt was ruled by foreign rulers known as the Hyksos. Josephus states that the Hyksos took over Egypt without a battle - something that was easy to do in the situation which followed the Exodus with the Pharaoh and his army destroyed in the Red Sea and general ruin throughout Egypt. These Hyksos were the Amalekites who were on their way to Egypt when they fought with the Israelites. They ruled Egypt during the time of the Judges.

Prior to the Hyksos were Dynasties 12 and 13 and are known as the Middle Kingdom. Dynasty 13 was a rather short-lived dynasty and ruled Egypt at the time that the Middle Kingdom came to a crashing end with the plagues that fell on Egypt. By working back we can see that the logical time in Egypt's history for the time of Joseph was the early 12th dynasty.

Several things point to Joseph living in Egypt during the 12th dynasty and Sesostris I, the second king of this dynasty, being Joseph's pharaoh. The 12th dynasty ruled from a city situated in the NE outskirts of Cairo known as On. This was the only dynasty whose capital was On. It later came to be called Heliopolis by the Greeks. In Genesis 41:50 we read that Joseph married the daughter of Poti-Phera, the priest of On. There is an obelisk there today known as the pillar of On which was built by Sesostris I.

In Egypt there is also a very long canal over 200 miles long that runs parallel with the Nile that feeds into an enormous lake known as the Faiyum. This canal, which was built in the 12th dynasty, is known by the name "Bahr Yusef" which is an Egyptian name that simply means the Canal of Joseph.

There are also two famine inscriptions in the tombs of officials by the names of Ameni and Bebi which speak of a famine of many years and also speak of food being collected in advance of the famine. Donovan Courville in his book "The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications" dates these two inscriptions to the time of Sesostris I in the 12th dynasty. I have a few photos on me today of what this pharaoh looked like as well as a few related pictures.

Galatians 3:16-17 tells us that there were 430 years between Abraham receiving the promises and the Exodus when Moses received the law.

Josephus writes that the Israelites "left Egypt in the [first] month...on the fifteenth day of the lunar month; four hundred and thirty years after our forefather Abraham came into Canaan, but two hundred and fifteen years only after Jacob removed into Egypt." In other words there were 215 years between Abraham leaving for Canaan and Jacob going to Egypt and another 215 years between Jacob going to Egypt and the Exodus. It's interesting to note that Unleavened Bread also marked the time when Abraham came out of Ur of the Chaldees fitting the symbolism of coming out of sin.

Since the Exodus occurred in 1447 BC this would put the year that Jacob moved to Egypt in the year of 1662 BC when Jacob was 130 years. Joseph was 30 years old when he became vizier of Egypt when the first year of plenty began.

As Jacob moved down to Egypt in the second year of famine, Joseph was 39 years old when Jacob moved to Egypt. Joseph died around the year 1591 BC, only 154 years before the Exodus occurred since he lived another 71 years after Jacob moved to Egypt. The period of the Israelites being in slavery in Egypt therefore probably lasted around 100 years.

The ruling class of the 12th dynasty were not Hamitic but were Caucasian in appearance as can be seen by their statues. It appears that they were descendants of Shem's son Aram. Abraham's family were closely related to the descendants of Aram. Rachel and Leah came from the area called Padan-Aram. Joseph's wife, Asenath, was Caucasian in appearance, not native Egyptian, as can be seen in the physical make-up of Joseph's descendants.

Joseph and Asenath had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The name Ephraim means doubly fruitful, a very fitting name as he received the double portion of the birthright and his descendants ruled the mighty British empire when they fully received the birthright. The name of his older brother, Manasseh, means forgetfulness. He was so named because God had blessed him and made him forget the pain of his early life. Manasseh's descendants would look to forget the troubles of the Old World in Europe when they would later migrate to America in the New World.

In his book "The Lost Ten Tribes of Israel... Found!" Stephen Collins writes:

"The United States of America may be the most generous, magnanimous, and merciful nation in the history of our planet! Besides rebuilding and restoring Japan and much of Europe after World War II, the USA has poured mega-billions of dollars into nations everywhere (usually without repayment or even gratitude) in the form of the Marshall Plan, foreign aid, the Peace Corps, etc. When natural disasters strike anywhere on earth, American agencies (public and private) rush to the scene to offer aid and assistance (even to enemy nations). When American TV sets show suffering and starving people in Ethiopia, Somalia and Rwanda (to name recent examples), it isn't long before American aid rushes to those affected areas. This world would be a grim place if Americans were not such a philanthropic people. Indeed, America is generous to a fault. So many nations which owe so much to American generosity and help are frequently anti-American in their policies. Americans see this, but simply go on giving anyway. They can't help it; it's in their genes that date back to Joseph."

In the commentary of the Life Application Bible in its biography of Joseph it gives a number of very interesting parallels between Joseph and Jesus -

"Their fathers loved them dearly, Shepherds of their fathers' sheep, Sent by father to brothers, Hated by brothers, Others plotted to harm them, Tempted, Taken to Egypt, Robes taken from them, Sold for the price of a slave, Bound in chains, Falsely accused, Placed with two other prisoners, one who was saved and the other lost, Both 30 years old at the beginning of public recognition, Exalted after suffering, Forgave those who wronged them, Saved their nation, What men did to hurt them God turned to good."

In conclusion, Joseph was one of the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11. His life experience is best summed up in Romans 8:18 where we read: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose." His faith that God would work things out for him in the face of severe setbacks truly is a great inspiration and encouragement for all of us.