

Plan and Purpose Bible Lesson #III-9—Genesis 38-47

Stories such as the story we find in Genesis 38 seem strange and out of place to be part of the Bible, until one gains an understanding of the whole story of the Bible. Keep in mind that Moses is covering about 2000 years of history in the book of Genesis, so I think that we can be assured that anything that is written, including this strange story is quite important. This story interrupts the story of Joseph that we began looking at in our last lesson. It begins, **“And it came to pass at that time,”** but I am not sure just exactly where it fits in time wise since the story itself would probably have covered more than 30 years. Let’s begin by reading Genesis 38.

The importance of this story is with the twin sons that were born to Judah by Tamar, his daughter-in-law, rather than the wickedness of Judah and his first three sons. The first two sons, Er and Onan, obviously did not have any children. Shelah, Judah’s third son, had two sons that are listed in I Chron. 4:21-23. Their descendants included makers of fine linen and pottery and some that worked among plants and hedges. Whether it was because Shelah’s mother was a Canaanite, or some other reason, this is the only thing they were known for, and we find no more about them in the Bible history.

Pharez and Zarah, the twin sons born to Judah by Tamar, his daughter-in-law, are the sons through which Judah’s lineage is known. The families of both sons were to have great significance in the history of Israel. The name Pharez has special significance. Pharez means breach, or break, like a break or breach in a wall. It indicates a need for repair, or healing. We won’t go into all of the future ramifications of this breach in this lesson, but it is a Biblical fact that one needs to keep in mind for future reference. It is from Pharez that David ultimately descended , thus did Jesus Christ.

The name Zarah means sprout and this too has considerable significance. Though this significance is not all recorded Biblically, to a student of prophecy, it is a very interesting study, and a necessary one in understanding the complete Bible story.

This story has been inserted as a break in the story of Joseph, but the fact that it is so inserted should tell us that it is an important story to keep in mind as we study.

(Read Genesis 39:1-6) It is sometimes strange how God educates a person for the job or jobs that He has planned for them. For example, Moses had first to be trained as a prince then as a sheep herder. David was a musician, a sheep herder, a soldier, and had to spend several years on the run to keep Saul from killing him. Yet the jobs that God had planned for these men used all of this training. Joseph was no different. It appears that he first had to have an attitude adjustment, which was provided by being sold as a slave. However, we see that God blessed him, even in his duties as a slave so that his master placed his entire household under Joseph, because he saw that God was blessing Joseph in all that he did. However, Joseph’s

training was not complete.

(Read Genesis 39:7-23) Joseph was obviously a very handsome man, so much so in fact that Potiphar's wife was very much attracted to him. The book of Jasher tells us that she made every effort to seduce him, but he would not even look at her, he would only look at the ground when in her presence. She was so love struck with him that she became ill when she could not even get him to look at her. Finally, after planning a meeting with him that she thought he could not back out of, we see the results in verse 12. At first the men of the house began to beat him with the intent of beating him to death. However, by a miracle of an eleven month old child speaking out and telling the men what had really happened, Potiphar then took him to the priests to judge. Their verdict was that he was not guilty, but told Potiphar to put him in prison and to cease beating him. This, of course, is what we see that Potiphar did.

Joseph's training continued in the prison as the keeper of the prison soon realized Joseph's talents and that God was blessing him, so put him in charge of the prison. Jasher says he was in prison for 12 years.

(Read Gen. 40) This chapter is likewise pretty self explanatory, but a necessary part of the story of Joseph and how he rose from the position of a slave to ultimately second only to the Pharaoh. God uses dreams quite often in the Old Testament to convey His message. We see this usually with the prophets, but it seems to get greater attention sometimes when He gives the dream to someone who is not a prophet, in fact, possibly not even a believer in God. We see this later in Scripture especially with Daniel who interpreted dreams and signs that were given to Nebuchadnezzar and also to his son, Belshazzar, who was mocking God.

Though Joseph correctly interpreted the dream of both the butler and the baker, somehow the butler could not remember to return the favor to do as Joseph asked him.

(Read Genesis 41) This story is pretty self explanatory, but let me add a couple of explanations. Kine are cows. The corn is grain, not corn as we think of corn today. Corn as we know it is native to this country, so wasn't known then in the land of Egypt. Most all other grains only have one head, or ear, to the stalk, so for the stalk to have seven ears would have been unusual in itself.

The fact that the Pharaoh had two dreams, yet Joseph told him that both dreams were but one dream, bears out God's law of requiring a double witness, though the law had not been codified at this point.

The book of Jasher adds a couple of elements to the story that are not recorded in Scripture. According to Jasher, the Pharaoh had ordered the wise men and magicians in Egypt to be killed before the butler finally remembered Joseph and told the king about him. They had given the king numerous interpretations, none of which satisfied the king. The thing that convinced the king that Joseph was correct in his interpretation was that Joseph also told him that his wife was delivering a baby son that day, but that his two year old first-born son would die that day as well. The birth of the new son would comfort the king over the death of his

first-born. This is what happened, and it was then that the Pharaoh made Joseph second to the Pharaoh.

The king gave Joseph a large amount of gifts, one of which was his wife, Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On.

Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were born at the beginning of the seven good years. We are not told whether they were twins or not, but as I read things, this is a definite possibility. However, we are made aware that Manasseh was born first.

The book of Jasher adds that because the famine was so wide spread, and Egypt was the only place to buy grain, Joseph knew that sooner or later, his brothers would have to come to buy grain, so he put some rules into effect so that when they did come, their coming would certainly be made known to him. These rules also prevented anyone from buying the grain and speculating on it and assured that there would be plenty of grain to go around to all who needed it.

Jasher also tells us that the Egyptian people also stored grain individually, but when the drought came and they went to their storage, they found that all of the grain that had been stored by individuals had rotted while the grain that Joseph had stored in all of the cities was still good. While no reason is given, it appears to me that this was God's way of maintaining tranquility among the people. If one person had stored more than another, when the one who had stored less ran out, would not there be great temptation to steal from the one who had stored more? By making everyone depend on the storage that Joseph had caused to be made where fair and equal distribution was made to each person, there would be no cause of one to be against his neighbor because he had more food.

(Read Gen. 42) Again, the book of Jasher provides us some details that might help us understand why Joseph had reason to appear to think the sons of Jacob were spies. Apparently, Jacob told his sons that when they entered into the city in Egypt where the grain storage was, to not all of them go in the same gate at the same time. So they decided among themselves that they would enter in at separate gates and then get back together and search the city for their brother Joseph on the chance that he might still be there. However, one of the rules that Joseph had instituted was that they were required to give their names when they entered the gates and the names were delivered to Joseph on a daily basis. So he knew, as he had planned and expected, when they arrived in the city. They spent three days looking throughout the city trying to find Joseph before they came to buy grain. Since Joseph knew they were there and what they were doing, this gave him a good excuse to accuse them of being spies, something they had a hard time denying.

Notice, however, what their reaction was. When Joseph told them they had to bring their youngest brother with them, they all had a very guilty conscience over what they had done to Joseph years before and they believed that God was punishing them for it.

Since Jacob did not know just what his sons had done with Joseph, from what they told

him, Joseph was dead, so his outlook varied from that of his sons. Thus he refused to let them take Benjamin back so that Simeon could be released.

(Read Gen. 43) Again this chapter is pretty well self explanatory. A little over a year had passed since Jacob's sons had made their first trip to Egypt for food. Remember that it was Judah that proposed selling Joseph to the Ishmeelites. It seems he might be feeling a bit of remorse now that causes him to take full responsibility of his brother Benjamin, if Jacob would allow them to take him with them.

If we put ourselves in Jacob's place for a moment, I believe that we can feel the anguish that he felt on the possibility that the two sons whom he loved the most from the wife he loved the most were both possibly to be lost from him. It would almost be more than he could stand considering his age and all that he had been through. Yet he finally consented to let Benjamin go with his brothers as the famine had become very severe and choices had become non-existent.

Joseph keeps his brothers guessing as to what is going on. It appears that he had to be positive that his brothers did not still possess the same spirit they had when they sold him into slavery some twenty-two years previous. Yet he did some things that might have raised their suspicion. When they sat down to eat, Joseph did not eat at the same table with them or the Egyptians, but ate alone, one clue. When he had them seated at the dinner table in the order of their birth, they marveled, we're told, but apparently did not suspect anything. This may have been because they might have heard of the story of Joseph's power of divination that the Egyptians believed he had because of his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams.

(Read Gen. 44) Joseph had one more test of his brothers' spirit. It apparently was thought by many Egyptians that Joseph's silver cup was something by which he practiced his divinations and Joseph's brothers had apparently been made aware of this. Joseph used this thought when he accused them of taking the cup. As if to mock them for thinking they could get away with stealing his cup, he asks them in verse 15, **"wot (know) ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?**, i.e. did they not think that he would know what they had done through his supposed powers of divination?

Again, put yourself in the position of Judah when he found out that Joseph intended to keep Benjamin as a slave. He was the one that had caused Joseph to be sold into slavery and now he had given himself as surety to Jacob for the life of Benjamin should they not be able to bring him back home with them. This would have been a terrible burden, yet it was a necessary one for Joseph to know for sure that Judah's spirit had changed. This was no small problem. He had to make a full confession before Joseph.

(Read Gen. 45) These chapters concerning Joseph do not require a lot of explanation, but they are necessary for us to understand later what transpires concerning Joseph and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph has reached the point that he is convinced of the spirit change in his brothers and can refrain himself no longer from revealing his true identity to

his brothers. His brothers were expecting full retaliation from him for what they had done to him, but Joseph understood the sovereignty of God and thus understood that God had brought all of what happened about for the purpose of preserving, not only their lives, but many other people as well.

It was a bit hard for the brothers to accept all that Joseph told them about himself and what was yet to happen so far as the famine was concerned. When they finally did, it turned into quite a family reunion. The Bible states quite simply, after he had kissed all of his brothers and wept upon them, **“after that his brethren talked with him.”**

After he had loaded them down with gifts and silver, they returned to Canaan, and told their father what had happened and to bring him to Egypt as well. Can you imagine the relief and joy that Jacob must have felt.?

(Read Gen. 46:1-7) As Jacob and family took their journey to Egypt, the first stop was at Beersheba where Jacob offered sacrifices to God. That night God appeared to him and assured him that this move was of God, that it was part of God’s plan. But more than that, God promised that he would make of Jacob a great nation while they were in Egypt. He also promised to go into Egypt with Jacob and to surely bring him (his descendants) back out of Egypt.

This is part of the prophecy that God gave to Abraham in Gen. 15:13, 14, **“And he said unto Abram, know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their’s, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years, and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.”** As Jacob and his family prepared to go into Egypt, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had already lived in a land that was not theirs, with the exception of the cave of Machpelah that Abraham had purchased to bury Sarah in and the plot of land that Jacob had purchased at Shechem, for over 200 years. While we refer to this land as the land of Canaan and it had local rulers, at that time it was under the jurisdiction of Egypt. They will have been under the jurisdiction of Egypt a total of 430 years before coming back out of Egypt.

(Read Gen. 46:8-27) We’re told that 66 souls of Jacob’s family came with him into Egypt. Jacob would have been number 67 and Joseph and his two sons, who were already in Egypt, would have brought the total to 70. However, keep in mind that only the males who are descended from Jacob are counted, so the number of wives and daughters and sons-in-law would have brought the number up substantially. Some of those counted are great-grandsons. The two sons of Judah who died in their wickedness, though listed, are not included in those going down into Egypt. We will see that these are productive people as their numbers will have swelled to over 625,500 males in the next 200 years.

The Pharaoh told Joseph to take his family to the land of Goshen to settle. Jacob and his family were primarily livestock people and this land of Goshen was delta land ideally suited to livestock operation. Being delta land it was rich soil that produced well and was well watered.

We don't know the exact boundaries today but in general, the land of Goshen was north and east of current day Cairo.

It was quite a reunion of father and son when Jacob and Joseph were able to see each other. Jacob said in verse 30, **“Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.”** We will see however, that Jacob lived another seventeen years in the land of Egypt.

(Read Gen. 47:1-10) The land of Goshen was the northeast quadrant of Egypt and apparently was well adapted to grazing, which was the type of land Jacob and his family desired for their trade was herding sheep and cattle. As the last verse of chapt. 46 told us, shepherds were considered an abomination to the Egyptians, so this separated the children of Jacob from the Egyptians. The reason that the Egyptians considered shepherds an abomination was not due to different classes but rather due to race. This goes back a few centuries. There was a shepherd king that came into Egypt several centuries before and took control of Egypt without a battle. I believe this to have been Shem, son of Noah. While there he built the Great Pyramid and then he left. But while he was there he ended the idol worship of the Egyptians. However, when he left the Egyptian priests re-instituted the practice of worshipping idols and taught that the shepherds were an abomination. The Pharaoh thought enough of Joseph that he instructed Joseph to settle his father and family in the best of the land of Egypt, which he did, placing them in the land of Goshen.

It is interesting that we're told twice that Jacob blessed the Pharaoh. It is usually considered that the greater blesses the lesser. In reading this chapter, it would appear that the Pharaoh might just have considered Jacob to be the greater.

(Read Gen. 47:11, 12) So far as I have been able to find out, Rameses may have been a treasure city that the children of Israel built in the land of Goshen. Remember that Moses is writing this at least a couple of centuries after the fact, so while Rameses might have been an Egyptian city in Moses' time, it may not have been one when Joseph placed his family in the area.

Verse 12 may have been one of the causes for the Egyptians placing the children of Israel in servitude later on. As we will see as we read further, the Egyptians ended up becoming servants of the Pharaoh, paying a 20% tax on their earnings. By the statement that Joseph nourished his family indicates to me that Joseph probably did not require this tax from his family which turned the Egyptians against them by the time the famine was over.

Also, I think it interesting that Jacob took care of Joseph the first 17 years of his life, and Joseph in turn took care of Jacob the last 17 years of his life. Jacob was 130 years old when he moved to Egypt and he died when he was 147.

(Read Gen. 47:13-26) All of the people, with the exception of the priests and possibly the Israelites, had to buy grain for food. It was not given away. Once the Pharaoh had all of their money, they traded their livestock for food and when the Pharaoh ended up owning all of the livestock, they traded their land for food. This did not apply to the children of Israel

because they were there as guests of the Pharaoh and did not own the land they lived on. With the exception of the land owned by the priests, the Pharaoh ended up with all of the land of Egypt by the time the famine was over.

As we have already mentioned, the Egyptians were allowed to live on their land, but were required to pay a 20% tax to the Pharaoh on all that they earned. The Companion Bible had a note on verse 21 saying that the phrase “**removed them to cities**” is stated in some other original manuscripts as “**made them serve as servants**” or “**made them bondmen**”.

(Read Gen. 47:27-31) Note that verse 27 tells us that Jacob’s family “**grew and multiplied exceedingly.**” We discussed in our last lesson that the males in Jacob’s family numbered 70 when they moved to Egypt. In approximately 200 years, when they left Egypt, the adult males would number 625,500.

Though Jacob lived 17 years in Egypt, he did not want to be buried there when he died. He made Joseph swear that he would take Jacob’s body back to where both Abraham and Isaac were buried, i.e. the cave of Machpelah. Joseph swore he would do so and we will see that this is what he did. JRL

