

LESSON V

JACOB AND JOSEPH

Preparation

- Gen. 28:10-22
- Gen. 29:1-30
- Gen. 30:31-43
- Gen. 31:11-55
- Gen. 32: entire
- Gen. 33:1-10
- Gen. Chaps. 37, 39-45, 49, 50

Markers

1. Gen. 12:8
2. Gen. 28:10-22
3. Gen. 31:24
4. Gen. 32:24
5. Gen. 33:10
6. Gen. 35:11
7. Gen. 45:4-8
8. Isa. 11:1,10
9. Rom. 15:12
10. Rev. 19:7,8
11. Gen. 48:13-22
12. Gen. 49:10

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(1) After Abraham had received the promise of a blessing from God and of being the father of a great nation, he went to a mountain on the east of Bethel (Gen. 12:8) and built an altar there. Bethel was originally a Canaanite city and it was formerly called Luz. It appears, according to Gen. 12:8, to have been called Bethel even before Abraham's arrival, despite the statement of Gen. 28:19. Bethel means "House of God."

(2) Isaac sent Jacob to take a wife of the daughters of Laban, Jacob's uncle (Gen. 28:1,2). On the way he stopped to sleep and had a vision of a ladder reaching to heaven and of angels ascending and descending on it. He, in turn, received the same promise of the land as had been given to Abraham (Gen. 28:10-22). Thus Bethel became a holy place and he became a chosen vessel.

We may think of the ladder as the means by which God's angels or messengers communicate with men. In John 1:51 Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

Just as Jacob received God's messages so did Jesus. The ladder may be thought of as symbolizing the Christ, the Mediator, the means by which God communicates to man.

The career of Jacob typifies the struggle of good with evil, of the higher nature of man with the lower. His career was a series of heights and depths of experience. On the way down he cheats his brother of his birthright

(Jacob means “supplanter”), deceives his father and steals Esau’s blessing so that he has to flee. He rises out of this darkness at Bethel when he has the vision of the angels. He then goes to Haran and meets Rachel (Gen. 29:1-30) and serves seven years for her. Laban then deceives him and gives him Leah instead. He also gives him Rachel with the promise that he must serve seven years more for her. The deception of Jacob by Laban is a clear case of Jacob’s reaping what he has sown. He deceived his father; his uncle has now deceived him. Jacob is not forsaken by God, but is reaping his reward for the way he has chosen. His actions toward his brother Esau, which showed such a lack of brotherly love, now show their fruits in the jealousy or lack of love between his wives. He and Laban now practice deception on each other over the division of cattle (Gen. 30:31-43).

(3) Jacob still remains a chosen vessel of God. He starts upward again when he hears God’s call to return to the promised land to Bethel (Gen. 31:11-55). He leaves secretly with his wives and children and goods. Rachel steals Laban’s images. Laban pursues Jacob but Rachel hides the images. Laban is told by God not to speak to Jacob either good or bad (Gen. 31:24). This is significant. Both have been good at times and bad at other times. They build a heap of stones for a witness and sacrifice upon it and promise that neither will pass it for harm to the other.

Jacob went on his way and learned that Esau was on his way to meet him with four hundred men (Gen. 32:6). He arranges to send droves of cattle ahead as a present to appease his brother. The problem which he had created for himself by his treatment of Esau twenty years before demanded a solution. The cattle represented a human means of appeasement. But a true solution demanded a rise in consciousness sufficient to bring forth a high enough sense of love that no hate could stand before it. In this crisis we find that Jacob was left alone and it

- says there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day (Gen. 32:24). Being alone he was not wrestling with a person but with his false sense of God and man. In this struggle he was aided by a message from God and he was finally victorious. He attained a height here in Peniel (Face of God) not previously reached. As a result his name was changed to Israel which means "Prince of God." His problem was solved by his transformation. He then met Esau. Love had replaced hate and Esau was happy to see him. Jacob said, "I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me" (Gen. 33:10). This is a remarkable healing for both Jacob and Esau.

- (4)
- In the following years Jacob (Israel) suffers more sorrows when his daughter, Dinah, is defiled and her brothers revenge themselves on the city. Jacob returns to Bethel and they put away their strange gods. He builds an altar again and God reveals himself to Jacob as Almighty, as he did to Abraham, and it is promised that he will be father of nations and kings (Gen. 35:11).

- (6)
- His succeeding days see more problems brought on by the actions of his sons until Joseph saves all from famine and finally Jacob blesses his sons and grandsons.

Joseph

The story of Joseph is one of the finest in the Bible and is worth careful study. We find that Jacob loved Joseph more than his other children. He must have foreseen that Joseph was to play some part in the salvation of the Jews. Joseph had a dream which seemed to indicate that his parents and brothers would be obedient to him. His father observed the saying, but his brothers were envious. It began to be apparent that Joseph had a place in the divine plan, but his brothers failed to see it. Their hatred led them to put him in a pit and then sell him to some merchantmen. Reuben saved him from being killed.

The brothers then gave Jacob the impression that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. Joseph was sold to Potiphar, captain of the guard and an officer of Pharaoh. Joseph became his overseer, but was eventually put in jail because of a false accusation made against him. While in the jail he correctly interpreted dreams for the chief butler and chief baker of Pharaoh. Eventually Pharaoh had a dream and the chief butler remembered Joseph and he was brought before Pharaoh. He then interpreted his dream as signifying seven good years to be followed by seven lean years. Pharaoh then made Joseph second to himself in Egypt and Joseph carried out plans which saved all from starvation. Joseph married Asenath, a Gentile, and had by her Manasseh and Ephraim.

Because of the famine and of the report that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy corn, keeping at home Benjamin, the youngest, now that Joseph was presumed dead. When they saw Joseph they didn't recognize him and he demanded they bring Benjamin to prove what they had said and that they weren't spies. Then they realized that they were guilty for their treatment of Joseph and this was their punishment. Simeon was kept in Egypt, but the others returned with corn only to find that the money was also in their sacks. The famine increased and they returned to Egypt taking Benjamin with them. Joseph then had a feast for them. Meanwhile the sacks of the men were filled with food and their corn money put in. In Benjamin's sack, a silver cup of Joseph's was also put in without the knowledge of the men. After their departure, Joseph's steward followed them and accused them of the theft, whereupon the silver cup being found, they returned to Joseph. Joseph then said that Benjamin would be his servant and the rest could depart. Benjamin and Joseph were the only sons of Rachel, and since Joseph was thought to be dead, only Benjamin was left of the sons of Rachel. Judah then asked to be bondman in place of Benjamin.

(7) Joseph then revealed himself to his brothers. He told them (Gen. 45:4-8) that they should not be grieved, nor angry with themselves, for it was God and not they who sent him to save life and to preserve them to posterity and save their lives.

Let us now analyze the story of Joseph. We know that Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, but had to take Leah first. As a consequence, Rachel's children, Benjamin and Joseph, were sons of his favorite wife. Perhaps this is part of the reason for Jacob's preference for Joseph. However, they were all Jacob's children and they had no choice of mother, so that Jacob should have loved them all equally. This would have shown that he was not influenced by personality. Jacob may have foreseen the special place Joseph had in God's plan, but if he did, he could have explained this to his other children and pointed out that they should give special attention to Joseph while at the same time loving them all equally and bringing out the proper sense of brotherhood. To Jacob his sons represented different phases of mortal thought, as will be seen when we discuss his parting predictions concerning their future. If these phases of personality had been seen as no part of the man created by God who had a God-given individuality, the sons would have been led to part with their false sense of things. Preferring Joseph brought out resentment in his brothers, whereas a revelation of Joseph's real individuality could have brought the brothers a sense of his true nature and their own higher natures.

After Joseph had his dream which signified the obedience to be made to him by his brothers, his brothers determined to do away with him. If Joseph had kept the dream to himself, it would have been wiser. He is to be excused on the basis of his youth, being only seventeen.

Reuben, Jacob's first-born, saved Joseph. Reuben's love saved Joseph from death, but did not save him from slavery. The hatred of the other brothers caused them to make Jacob believe Joseph had been killed and ex-

posed their lack of affection for Jacob. Henceforth Joseph had to make his own way by God's guidance.

Being sold into slavery to the Ishmeelites, he was in one sense saved from death by them. The Ishmeelites were descendants of Ishmael, the other son of Abraham. As Isaac and Ishmael represented the Hebrew and Gentile worlds, we find Joseph being saved, though in slavery, by the Gentiles. This foreshadows Jesus, whose teachings were rejected by the Jews, but accepted by the Gentiles.

Joseph rose to his position of authority under Potiphar by reflecting worthy qualities until finally he was falsely accused and put in jail. The false accusation as so often happens, was exactly the failing of the accuser.

Joseph interpreted the dreams of the butler and baker at their request, telling the truth even though it meant informing the baker he would die. A lie had put Joseph in jail. Truth took him out.

The success of Joseph's mission in saving the land from famine indicated remarkable qualities as a seer and as an administrator. His brothers had wanted to destroy life. God enabled Joseph to save life.

Joseph's treatment of his brothers was to awaken them from their false ways. Being falsely accused of the theft of the silver cup when they were not guilty exposed their former false treatment of Joseph. The holding of Benjamin in bonds symbolized their former act of selling Joseph into slavery.

Judah then offered to be Joseph's slave in place of Benjamin. This was a remarkable act of unselfishness, bravery and love, and was a far cry from the attitude the brothers had shown toward Joseph when they were moved by hatred.

Joseph revealed himself to his brethren and showed his mercy and love toward them. He thus proved that his heart held no hatred nor resentment. He then made a remarkable statement that not they but God had sent him

to Egypt to go before them to save life. He saw them as unwitting agents in the divine plan and that God had turned their evil intent to the purposes of good. This was a marvelous sense of God and showed his ability always to see the divine hand as present and to understand God.

We may summarize the themes of Joseph's life as

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| 1. Rejection | (by the Jews) |
| 2. Sold into slavery | (for 20 pieces of silver) |
| 3. Apparent death | |
| 4. Resurrection | |
| 5. Exaltation | (among the Gentiles) |
| 6. Marriage | (to a Gentile) |

Note exactly how they typify the themes in Jesus' life.

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| | 1. Rejection | (by the Jews) |
| | 2. Betrayal | (for 30 pieces of silver) |
| | 3. Crucifixion | |
| | 4. Resurrection | |
| (8), (9) | 5. Exaltation | (among the Gentiles)
(Isa. 11:1,10; Rom. 15:2) |
| | 6. Symbolic marriage
of the bride and
the lamb | |
| (10) | Rev. 19:7,8 | |
| | Rev. 21:9-11 | |
| | Isa. 54:1,3,5 | |
| | Zech. 9:9 | |
| | Matt. 21:4-6 | |

- (11) Joseph had two sons, Manasseh the elder son and Ephraim who was the younger son. In Gen. 48:13-22 we find that Jacob blessed both sons but bestowed the greater upon Ephraim, the younger son. He made Ephraim and

Manasseh heads of tribes. Later, when the children of Israel were again found in Canaan, a part of Canaan was allotted to the tribe of Ephraim, and eventually after the revolt of Jeroboam, the territory of Ephraim became identical with the northern kingdom of Israel. Jacob promised that Manasseh also should become great (Gen. 48:19). Later in Canaan his tribe was divided and each was given territory. Jacob told Joseph that eventually he would return to the land of his fathers (Gen. 48:21), which meant Canaan. Moses later brought his body from Egypt. He also informed him that he was given one portion above his brethren (Gen. 48:22). This referred to the gates of the Holy City, in which both Joseph and his son Manasseh have a place (Rev. 7:4-8).

Jacob then revealed the various types of thought exemplified by his twelve sons (Gen. 49) and their tribes. It was a warning of the various modes of thought which needed correcting and of future events concerning the tribes.

By Leah

Reuben—Behold a son—firstborn, beginning of Israel's strength, unstable as water, incest.

Simeon—Heard—cruelty, revenge.

Levi—Joined—cruelty, revenge.

(12) Judah—Praised—to be praised and bowed to by his brothers. The passage in Gen. 49:10 referring to Shiloh indicates from whom the Messiah will come. Shiloh means peace and is here used as the designation of a person. This person is the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), or Jesus.

Issachar—Reward—to become a servant.

Zebulun—A habitation—to dwell at the haven of the sea. Their land reached from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Galilee.

By Rachel

Joseph—Increase—a fruitful bough; the Almighty blesses him, the blessings of God have prevailed above the blessings of his ancestors.

Benjamin—Son of my right hand—youngest son of Jacob, called Benoni (son of my sorrow) by Rachel when dying in childbirth—to ravin as the wolf, i.e., rob and prey upon others.

By Bilhah (Rachel's maid)

Dan—A judge—an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. It is a serpent that tries to cause truth to be reversed.

Naphtali—Wrestling—a hind (female deer) let loose, giver of goodly words.

By Zilpah (Leah's maid)

Gad—A troop—he will overcome at the last.

Asher—Blessed—his bread shall be fat.

This brings us to the end of the book of Genesis. Joseph leaves directions that when they eventually leave Egypt for the land which God promised them, his bones should be taken along with them.

Genesis, as well as the other books of the Old Testament, strongly influenced the New Testament. Genesis is quoted more than sixty times in the New Testament. It is a book of contrasts. Beginning with the true account of creation based on a spiritual concept of God, it follows with a second account describing an opposite creation based on a tribal God. The sense of God rises and falls. The account of the fortunes of the twelve tribes foretold by Jacob bespeaks a very mortal sense. Thus mortal man requires redemption, and this brings us to the book of Exodus.