

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY
WEEK 15: Genesis 45-50 – Joseph’s Identity is Revealed

THE JOSEPH STORY UP TILL NOW

Sibling rivalry has been a theme we’ve seen throughout Genesis and is a central theme in the Joseph story. Joseph is his father’s favorite, followed by his younger brother Benjamin, all because they are the children of Jacob’s favorite bride Rachel. Rachel’s sister, Leah, has several children of her own and Jacob has several children through their servants as well, all of whom, according to the dreams of Joseph, will bow down before him. Joseph’s brothers, except for Reuben and Judah (depending on the source), threaten to kill Joseph, but end up selling him to some Ishmaelites (or Midianites; again, depending on the source) who are on their way down to Egypt. Using his special robe as a prop covered in animal’s blood, they convince their father Jacob that Joseph has been killed. In Egypt, God blesses Joseph and Joseph thrives, first in Potiphar’s house, then in jail, and then with Pharaoh, rising in power to become second in command of all Egypt. When famine hits, Joseph’s brothers come to Egypt to buy food. Joseph recognizes them, but they don’t recognize Joseph. Joseph seemingly treats his brothers poorly, stringing them along in their desperate situation. Is he being vindictive? Or is he testing them? I think that Joseph is putting them to the test. He accuses them of being spies and inquires after their father and brother. He allows all but one to return to their father in Canaan and fetch Benjamin, but, requires Simeon to stay behind. As they return with a report of what happened in Egypt, Jacob is afraid that he has lost another child and he refuses to lose Benjamin too. But the famine remains and the family needs food, so after Judah promises Benjamin’s safety, Jacob relents, and the brothers travel back down with Benjamin and lots of money and gifts to pick up Simeon and more food. Joseph is moved emotionally when he sees his younger brother and sets a huge meal up for them and amazingly is able to seat them according to their birth order. Benjamin, the youngest, receives five times as much to eat and drink as anyone else, but the brothers don’t seem to mind. Once again, Joseph sends them on their way with all the grain that they can carry, but, he has one more trick up his sleeve. He has his servants place his cup in Benjamin’s bag and is going to accuse them of stealing it. When Joseph’s servants ride after them and catch them, the brothers plead innocence but agree that whoever stole it will be returned to Egypt as a slave. Of course, the cup is found in Benjamin’s possession and of course the brothers can’t let Benjamin remain behind as a slave in Egypt, so Judah passionately offers to take his place.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 45 – JOSEPH REVEALED

Genesis 45:1-4	The Climax – A tearful Joseph can’t hide it any longer and reveals his true identity
Genesis 45:5-8	The Consolation – Joseph tells his brothers that God has done this to save his people
Genesis 45:9-15	The Counsel – Joseph tells brothers to go, get dad, and come back to Egypt, settle in Goshen
Genesis 45:16-24	The Command – Pharaoh says the same to the brothers
Genesis 45:25-28	The Confirmation – Seeing the wealth they bring, Jacob believes the report of the brothers

SOURCE THEORY – DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

This chapter is a composite of J and E; the J source is dominant in verses 1-4 and the E source thereafter, but parallel verses are interwoven throughout.

CHAPTER 45

The game is up. It is time for the big reveal. We finally have the emotional reunion we’ve been waiting for. Once again, we see Joseph overcome with emotion (which echoes his first two encounters with his brothers in Egypt (see 42:24; 43:30-31), but this time it is amplified. He makes the Egyptians leave the room, and weeps (loudly), and makes himself known to his brothers. His brothers are so terrified and fearful that he has to reveal his identity twice (E source in vs. 3; J source in vs. 4); the second time adding *whom you sold into Egypt*. After his speech in which he interprets the events of his life and how God has been at work in them – how it was God’s purpose to send him to Egypt in order to “preserve for you a remnant” (key words to those who were enslaved in Babylon), Joseph instructs them to go to his father and tell him that he is alive and tell him about all the wonderful things that God has done for him. Of course, Benjamin is greeted first and give five times what the other brothers are given, plus three hundred silver coins. They go, tell Jacob and when Jacob hears the story and sees the wagons of goodies, he believes them and wants to go and see his son, the prince of Egypt, father to Pharaoh, Lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS 46-47 – FATHER AND FAMINE

Genesis 46:1-7	The Promise of God – God directs Jacob to move to Egypt, promising to care for him there.
Genesis 46:8-27	The People of God – Jacob and his entire family, seventy in all, move to Egypt.
Genesis 46:28-30	Jacob meets Joseph – Father and son meet and embrace in Goshen.
Genesis 46:31-47:10	Jacob meets Pharaoh – Pharaoh gives the best land to Jacob and his family.
Genesis 47:11-12	The Provision – Joseph personally sees to it that his family has all the food they need.
Genesis 47:13-26	The Purchase – Famine forces all Egyptians to sell their land to Pharaoh for food.
Genesis 47:27-31	The Promise – Joseph promises his father that he will bury him beside his ancestors.

SOURCE THEORY – DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

Chapter 46 consists of a combination of J and E in verses 1-7 and a P genealogy in verses 8-27. The J sources picks up again in 46:28-47:4 and 6b and the rest is from the P source, 47:5-6a, 7-12. The sources in verses 13-26 are difficult to identify. But P picks up again in verses 27-28, with J in 29-31.

CHAPTERS 46-47

At the altar that Isaac had built in Beer-sheba (Genesis 26:25), God reveals God's self to Jacob one last time through visions at night, calling to him, and assuring Jacob of his presence with them down to Egypt. After the genealogy, we learn that seventy people moved with Joseph (seventy representing wholeness; see Exodus 15:27; 24:1; Judges 1:7; 8:30; 2 Kings 10:1); but only 66 come into Egypt (Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan and Manasseh and Ephraim were born in the land of Egypt). For some reason Joseph is included in the 66 (something that is identified in the first chapter of Exodus, verse 5).

Then Jacob and Joseph ("the weeper") meet in Goshen. And in a strange sounding bit of deception, Joseph instructs his brothers to say that they and their family have always been shepherds and keepers of livestock in order that they can settle in the land of Goshen, because apparently "*all shepherd are abhorrent to the Egyptians.*" But later, in chapter 47, the brothers disregard the instructions of Joseph and tell the truth, but Pharaoh lets them live in the land of Goshen anyways.

In the middle of chapter 47, we have an unusual section that tells of Joseph's brutal strategy during the seven years of famine. First, he gets all the money in Egypt and Canaan for Pharaoh. Then he gets all the livestock and land for Pharaoh. The Egyptians themselves become slaves, which is pretty ironic. Joseph enslaves all of the Egyptians before Pharaoh will enslave all of the Israelites.

At the end of the chapter, we have Israel settling in the land, being fruitful and multiplying. For 17 years, Jacob lived in Egypt but now death was drawing near. And so Jacob calls Joseph to him and has him take that awkward oath (placing his hand under his thigh) and declare that he will not bury him in Egypt, but rather take him to lay at rest with his ancestors.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 48 – JOSEPH AND HIS SONS

Genesis 48:1-7	Jacob adopts Joseph's sons – Manasseh and Ephraim now enjoy the same status as their uncles.
Genesis 48:8-22	Jacob anoints Joseph's sons – Jacob bestows greater blessing on Ephraim the younger.

SOURCE THEORY – DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

This chapter is a composite of E (verses 1-21a, 8-9, 10b-12, 15-16, 21-22) and J (verses 2b, 10a, 13-14, 17-20), with a P version in verses 3-7. Note that Jacob is blind in the J version (see v. 10a), like Isaac in 27:1, but he can see in the E version (see verses 8, 11).

CHAPTER 48

In chapter 48, Joseph takes his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to his father Jacob for a proper farewell. Jacob proceeds to adopt Joseph's two sons as his own, thereby placing them on a par with his actual twelve sons. To conclude the adoption ceremony, a ritual of blessing follows (48:8-20). Jacob plays one last trick on Joseph, and elevates Ephraim (the youngest) over Manasseh (the firstborn)—which reminds us of how Jacob deceived his father Isaac and received the blessing over Esau (chapter 27). The forever trickster crosses his hands and Joseph is not happy. But Jacob calms

him by saying that both sons will be great. The tribe of Ephraim, the younger, eventually will become so prominent that in time the entire northern kingdom becomes known as Ephraim.

The language of the blessing gathers themes from the Genesis narrative. Its threefold character reminds one of the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:23-26). God is the one before whom Abraham and Isaac walked. God is the one who has been Jacob's shepherd all the days of his life, evoking his own experience of divine guidance, protection, and provision for the journey. God is the one who has redeemed him from all harm. The story of God's activity on behalf of Jacob's family is now to include the stories of Joseph's sons, who receive the promises given to the chosen family.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS 49:1-27 – JACOB BLESSES HIS SONS

Genesis 49:1-4	Reuben – Unruly as a stormy sea, he is demoted because of his immorality.
Genesis 49:5-7	Simeon and Levi – Violent men given to anger and cruelty, they will be scattered.
Genesis 49:8-12	Judah – He will be praised by his brothers and defeat his enemies; the royal line through him.
Genesis 49:13	Zebulun – He will live by the seashore and become a harbor for ships.
Genesis 49:14-15	Issachar – He will work with animals and till the land.
Genesis 49:16-18	Dan – Born to Jacob and Bilhah, Rachel's maid. He will be like a snake beside the road.
Genesis 49:19	Gad – Born to Jacob and Zilpah, Leah's servant. He will defend himself against all enemies.
Genesis 49:20	Asher – Born to Jacob and Zilpah, Leah's servant. He will produce rich food fit for kings.
Genesis 49:21	Naphtali – Born to Jacob and Bilhah, Rachel's servant. He will be as free as a deer.
Genesis 49:22-26	Joseph – Like a fruitful tree beside a fountain, blessing others; a prince among his brothers
Genesis 49:27	Benjamin – He will devour his enemies like a hungry wolf.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS 49:28-50:26 – JACOB BLESSES HIS FRUITFUL FAMILY

Genesis 49:28-33	The Request – Jacobs requests burial in cave at Machpelah in Hebron and then dies.
Genesis 50:1-14	The Return – After 70 days of mourning, the twelve carry their father's body to Hebron.
Genesis 50:15-21	The Reassurance – After they return to Egypt, Joseph calms their fears of revenge.
Genesis 50:22-26	The Remaining Years – Joseph lives to see the third generation of Ephraim's children.

CHAPTERS 49-50

The evil intentions of the brothers against Joseph are incorporated by God into God's intentions for good on behalf of this family. Genesis 50:20 has long been debated: How are God's intentions in the story of Joseph to be related to the intentions of Joseph's brothers? Are, as some suggest, the intentions of God and the brothers collapsed into each other so that the only real agency is God's (see, for example, 45:4-15)? Or, as others claim, are the evil actions of the brothers a genuine reality that God uses to further God's own purposes with this family?

In response to such questions, it is important to note that the related texts ascribe effective agency to the brothers (for example, 45:4-5; see 37:28) and to Joseph (45:9-13). The story refers to the brothers' actions with the language of sin and evil (42:22; 50:15, 17, 20), for which they are guilty (42:21; 44:16). It seems unlikely that this language would be used for God's actions. Moreover, if God were the absolute subject of these events, there would be no real test for the brothers; their actions and those of Joseph would only be a façade for a divine game.

The text of Genesis 50:20 speaks of both human and divine intentions as effectively at work in these events, albeit in the service of different objectives. But God's actions are decisive for shaping the future: God's activity from within the context set in part by the brothers' evil behaviors has proved, finally, to be decisive. In other words, the brothers' sinful objectives have been thwarted by being drawn into the larger orbit of God's purposes and used by God in such a way as to bring life rather than death. In effect, God has "taken over" what the brothers have done; their actions have become God's actions by being woven into God's life-giving purposes. God does not intend human evil; God's intention is to take even such evil and bring about good for all involved. This God does and in the wake of such action the divine promises are reiterated (50:24).

Source: Enterthebible.com

NEXT WEEK: Read Exodus 1 & 2 – The Birth of Moses