



GENESIS 38-41 JUDAH AND TAMAR; JOSEPH IN EGYPT

So far we have covered the lives of three of the four patriarchs in Genesis--Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now we will study the interesting life of Joseph in Egypt, where God wants us to learn through the incidents of his life that once we are called by Him and walk in faith, He will see to it that in the end, everything will work out for good.

Judah and Tamar

Before we study Joseph's life in Egypt, the Bible interjects a section about Judah and Tamar in chapter 38. There are two lessons to be learned here. One is what can occur when marrying outside the faith. The other one is that God had to move his people out of the corrupting influence of Canaan. Throughout Genesis, we see how Abraham insisted on Isaac not marrying a Canaanite, and the same goes for Jacob. Esau disobeyed and caused great family problems. Now Judah disobeyed and married a Canaanite woman that will cause great tragedies.

What were the results of marrying an unconverted Canaanite? The Bible says, "But Er, Judah's firstborn, was *wicked* in the sight of the Lord, *and the Lord killed him*" (38:7). "This marriage to a Canaanite," mentions *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, "almost ruined Judah's family. Intermarriage with the Canaanites had been avoided earlier, but not here. This account of assimilation with the people of the land helps one understand why God settled His young nation in the safety of Egypt for its growth." Having a Canaanite mother with abominable religious practices corrupted Er. Remember the biblical principle, universal sin brings universal destruction. Er was so evil God had to step in so he wouldn't corrupt the rest of God's people in this incipient stage of Israel's history.

After Er died, Judah tried to apply a biblical principle that was later codified in Dt. 25:5-10, of the levirate marriage. He said to his other son, Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother" (38:8). But Onan, probably under his mother's influence, did not obey God's law and "knew the heir would not be his, and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the Lord, therefore he

killed him also" (38:9-10). So what was Onan's sin? It was not, as some Catholics have claimed, because he was practicing some type of birth control. Not so, for the Bible makes it very clear it was *because he did not want to get Tamar pregnant and lose his own lineage, thus breaking God's law*. So God also took Onan's life. Tamar, Er's widow, was desperate to keep the firstborn line of her husband still alive. This attitude was commendable, and initially, Judah promised her as soon as his third son, Shelah, was old enough, she would have a son with him. She waited patiently, but Judah completely forgot about it. So she resorted to a humiliating deception to have a son to preserve Er's lineage.

"And it was told Tamar, saying, 'Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep. So she took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil [used by harlots] and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which was on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and *she was not given to him as a wife*'" (38:13-15). The result was that Judah mistook her for a harlot, went into her, and she became pregnant.

When Judah realized she was pregnant, he thought she had committed adultery and sentenced her to be burnt. But she had kept some of Judah's things as evidence of his involvement, and he later recognized she had been more righteous than he (38:26). She conceived and had twin boys, Perez and Zerah, and though Zerah put his hand out first, and they tied a red thread to his hand, it was the other brother, Perez who came out first. The importance of this breach is brought out in chapter 8 of Herbert Armstrong's *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. Suffice it to say here that through Perez came the Davidic monarchy and ultimately, Jesus the Messiah (see Luke 3:33). But by understanding the prophecies in Ezekiel 17, 21 and Isaiah 37, we see the breach of these twins would be healed. Hence, Zerah's kingly lineage would continue through the marriage of Zedekiah's daughter to the male line of Zerah which, according to some annals of Irish history, apparently had settled in Ireland and their heirs would become the present day kings and queens of England.

Joseph in Egypt

The biblical account now returns to narrating Joseph's life. For the next 430 years, Israelite history would take place in Egypt, a sort of incubation chamber until the time to return to Canaan would be fulfilled. It is precisely what God had prophesied to Abraham about his descendants being in Egypt for four hundred years (Gen. 15:13).

God chose to carry out this master plan through a very special and obedient person—Joseph. God saw Joseph had true faith, and strengthened it.

Dating Joseph's arrival at Egypt

We can generally date Joseph's entrance to Egypt through several key dates in the Bible. Moses said their sojourn in Egypt was *430 years* (Exodus 12:40). In 1 Kings 6:1 it mentions their arrival in Canaan was 480 years *before* the Temple was dedicated. The box below shows the probable dates:

(BKC [OT] p. 89)

Chronology from Solomon Back to Joseph

Years (B.C.) Events

971	Beginning of Solomon's reign
<u>- 4</u>	
967	Fourth year of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 6:1)
<u>- 1</u>	Year to adjust for the fact that the fourth year of Solomon's reign was actually the fourth <i>full</i> year of his reign (but into the fifth year of his reign calendarwise)
966	Year the temple construction began
<u>+ 480</u>	Years from the Exodus to Solomon's beginning to build the temple (1 Kings 6:1)
1446	Year of the Exodus from Egypt
<u>+ 430</u>	Year the Israelites were in Egypt (Ex. 12: 40)
1876	Year Jacob and his family moved to Egypt (after 2 years of famine; Gen. 45:6)
<u>+ 2</u>	Portion of the seven-year famine before Jacob moved to Egypt (Gen. 45:6)
1878	Year the seven-year famine began
<u>+ 7</u>	Years of abundance (Gen. 41:47)
1885	Year Joseph was taken out of prison and made second-in-command (at age 30; Gen. 41:46)
<u>+ 13</u>	Years Joseph was in Potiphar's house and in prison
1898	Year Joseph was sold to Egypt (at age 17; Gen. 37:2,28)

There are two reasons for their stay in Egypt. One is what God explicitly says, "for the iniquity of Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16). The other is less obvious, but it had to do with the continual corruption of God's people by wicked Canaanite practices. God would give His people a

type of "place of safety" in Goshen, Egypt. There, safe from the corrupting Canaanite influence, they could keep their faith intact until it was time to return and eliminate the Canaanites from there.

According to this time line, Joseph would arrive in Egypt around the year 1900 BC in what is called the Middle Kingdom Period (2000-1786 BC), and comprising Egypt's 12th dynasty.

Some have thought Joseph could have entered Egypt later, during the Hyksos period. But this time, beginning around the 1660 BC is much too late to have Abraham's descendants staying 430 years in Egypt, and would have them leaving around 1220 BC, more than 200 years too late. Moreover, as we will see, everything in the account points to a *native* rather than a Hyksos ruler. The Hyksos were foreign rulers that governed Egypt from 1660 to 1570 BC.

According to the present scenario, Joseph was in Egypt during the reigns of Sesostris II (1897-1878 BC) and Sesostris III (1878-1843 BC). These were peaceful reigns having an improved economic scene, closer ties with western Asia, and massive land reclamation and flood control projects (see Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 50). Incredibly enough, one of those projects was a canal dug to the Nile, whose ruins still can be seen today, and bears the name *Bahr Josef*, or River of Joseph.

According to the chronology of the renown *Cambridge Ancient History*, Sesostris II died at the end of a period of prosperity, which could coincide with the seven years of plenty. The records show his successor, Sesostris III began his reign during a period of famine. It would then have been this ruler, out of gratefulness for what Joseph had done, that invited Jacob and his sons to settle in the eastern Delta, the garden spot of ancient Egypt.

When Joseph arrived in Egypt, he must have passed by the Great Pyramids in Memphis, before being sold as a household slave to Potiphar, an officer of the Pharaoh (39:1). Joseph would be welcomed at this time, when foreign household slaves were popular and very essential to the economy. A papyrus discovered from this time, the Hieratic Papyrus, lists the names of slaves, some of which are familiar OT names, such as a female version of Menahem, Issachar, and Shiphrah. One of the most common titles held by slaves was that of "Household Servant," the same term used in the

Bible (Gen. 39:4). Such similar terms help confirm the accuracy of the Scriptures.

God was working things out through Joseph, and gave him grace before everyone's eyes. Potiphar placed Joseph over all his estate, but his wife lusted after Joseph. He resisted her and then she falsely accused him before Potiphar. Normally, this would have been a death sentence for a slave, but instead, he was placed in jail. God was still with Joseph, and perhaps Potiphar, knowing his wife's whimsical character, probably suspected Joseph was innocent, but to save face, had to somehow punish him (39:8-20). Egyptian history mentions wives are often quite vain and frivolous.

The Bible says, "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (39:21).

Soon, Joseph was helping administrate the whole prison. Then, through God's help, he successfully interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's baker and butler who were in prison. He predicted the baker would be put to death, but the butler would be freed, and when this came about, the butler promised he would plead for Joseph before the Pharaoh, but then promptly forgot. Yet, two years later, the Pharaoh had a dream that no one could successfully interpret and then the butler remembered Joseph, and Pharaoh brought him in.

Joseph humbly told the Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace." (41:16). And God revealed to Joseph what Pharaoh's dream meant. There would be seven years of plenty, and then seven years of want. He also suggested how to deal with this problem. "Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine" (41:33-36). God again was giving Joseph great favor, and the Pharaoh, having known the background of Joseph, and the gifted administrator he said, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?...Inasmuch as God has

shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you...See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, 'Bow the knee!' So he set him over all the land of Egypt."

It is interesting that in an Egyptian tomb scene, a prime minister is shown receiving his investiture and is given a signet ring, which is the Pharaoh's seal, and equivalent today to a signature, he was dressed in fine linen, and had a gold chain put around his neck. Again, the Bible accurately records these Egyptian investiture ceremonies.

Joseph, with God's help, proved to be more than up for the task, and during the seven years of plenty, he built great silos with grain reserves in every city. "Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable" (41:49).

Then Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife, Asenath, and they had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (41:45-52). Despite this situation imposed on him, Joseph would continue firm in the faith. His two sons would also continue with the true faith as well.

"Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.' The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands" (41:53-57).

In the next study, we will see what happens when his brothers come to Egypt needing grain.