

September 3, 2017 - Gen. 46:28 – 47:31 - Joseph deals with famine

Torah Reading: Genesis 46:28 – 47:31 - Joseph deals with famine

Psalm 38

Haftorah - (1) Zechariah 10:6-12 + 11:4-11

(2) Hosea 10:11 -11:1 + 8-11

(3) Malachi 2:4-10 + 3:1-4

Genesis 46:29 - “And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.”

A reunion as heartfelt as that of the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:20**)

But who was weeping? Rashi says it was Joseph, while Ramban says Jacob. There are grammatical reasons for each.

Ramban (Nachmanides) says: Jacob’s eyes were already dim with age, so that “he appeared to him” means he recognized Joseph at that moment, and he wept “a good while” (a word that can mean “even more,” since he had been mourning for those many years already.

But Rashi adds: “Love, however intense, must never make one forget the supreme object of all love - the Creator, blessed be he. Absolute love must be reserved for Gof alone. The ecstatic love and joy experienced by Jacob at his reunion with his long-lost favorite son Joseph almost enveloped him to the exclusion of all else. From this Jacob recoiled, realizing that such overriding love must be reserved exclusively for the Creator and Cause of all. That is why our Sages observed that at the moment of their reunion Jacob was reciting the Shema.”

Another reason it might refer to Joseph’s weeping:

Genesis 41:51 - “And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.”

God had relieved Joseph of not only his resentment, but also memory of his troubles and his previous life. It had faded into the background. But it came flooding out when he revealed himself to his brothers, and now on his reunion with his old father.

The Land of Goshen

The Land of Goshen was the nearest part of Egypt near Canaan, and near On or Heliopolis, where Joseph lived. It was also an area with much good pasture for their flocks.

The Rabbis emphasized the importance of Israel dwelling apart from the rest of the

Egyptians so they would remain distinct and not assimilate and lose their identity.

Shepherds an abomination?

Because of their worship of goat and ram-headed gods? It's more complicated: Egypt had shepherds, cattle and flocks, too.

Herodotus on Egyptian Sacrifices

"The clean males then of the ox kind, both full-grown animals and calves, are sacrificed by all the Egyptians; the females however they may not sacrifice, but these are sacred to Isis; for the figure of Isis is in the form of a woman with cow's horns.

"Egyptians without distinction reverence cows far more than any other kind of cattle; for which reason neither man nor woman of Egyptian race would kiss a man who is a Hellene on the mouth, nor will they use a knife or roasting-spits or a caldron belonging to a Hellene, nor taste of the flesh even of a clean animal if it has been cut with the knife of a Hellene." - Herodotus

(This sounds similar to the term "abomination" used to describe Egyptians eating with Hebrews).

After an ox is sacrificed, or when a cow dies naturally, Herodotus explained, they bury it and later, when only the bones are left, they dig it up and carry it to a special island in the Nile.

Egyptians in Thebes sacrificed goats but revered sheep. However, one of their myths involved one god gaining an audience with the supreme god by coming disguised in the head and skin of a ram.

So on just one day of the year, Herodotus notes, "they chop up a single ram, skin it, dress the statue of Zeus (Amon) in the way mentioned, and then bring the statue of Heracles up close to the statue of Zeus. Then everyone around the sanctuary mourns the death of the ram and finally they bury it in a sacred tomb."

In a different city, Mendes, their god was represented by a goat's head and fleece, and they "will have nothing to do with (sacrificing) goats, but use sheep as ... sacrificial animals."

So, no matter what you ate, you might be offending at least some Egyptians.

(See <http://www.ancient.eu/article/87/>)

Simple distrust?

This verse could mean "every *foreign* shepherd" and for that reason they would settle in

an area away from the Egyptian flocks. Others say this merely reflects the suspicions by civilized town-dwellers toward gypsy-like bands of nomads.

According to Lightfoot, the Egyptians were plagued because of the incident with Abraham and Sarah (**Genesis 12**), and had made a law that in the future none should converse with Hebrews, nor with any foreign shepherds at all.

Who was the Pharaoh?

There is controversy over which Pharaoh ruled at this time. Some say it must have been a Hyksos Pharaoh, because his Semitic background would explain how Joseph was trusted in such an important position.

But other evidence points toward a Middle Kingdom pharaoh.

- **1 Kings 6:1**, a pivotal reference for all Old Testament chronology, dates the Exodus 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon, accepted by virtually all scholars as 966 BC. This places the Exodus in ca. 1446 BC. E

- **Exodus 12:40** states that Jacob came to dwell in Egypt 430 years before the Exodus. Thus he came to Egypt in ca. 1876 BC. i.e. during the Middle Kingdom period in Egypt.

- **Genesis. 41:14** - Joseph puts on clean clothing and shaves himself before meeting the Pharaoh. Egyptians were fanatical about cleanliness. But the Hyksos were not bothered by facial hair and a general lack of cleanliness.

- Joseph's wife was the daughter of Potiphera, Priest of On. On was the center of solar worship of Ra, the northern manifestation of Amon-Re, the supreme deity of both the Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom periods of Egyptian history. In contrast, the Hyksos identified with Set, who reminded them of their own god Baal.

So, the pharaoh Joseph served was probably Middle Kingdom pharaohs Sesostris II (1897–1878 BC) or Sesostris III (1878–1843 BC).

On the other hand, Gal 3:17 which explicitly states that the 430 year period began with the promise of God to Abram (inferred, that it subsequently included the period of the sojourn of Isaac and Jacob, the generations of Israel's time in Egypt, the slavery) and finally culminated with the giving of the Law. The Jewish historical calendar, Josephus, the Septuagint, Sefer Ya Hashar (The Book of Jasher) all hold that the Israelites were in Egypt for 210 or 215 years.

So, nothing definitive.

See a fuller discussion of this here:

<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/02/18/Joseph-in-Egypt-Part-I.aspx#Article>

Genesis 47:7 - “And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.”

The Targum of Jonathan gives us his prayer: “May it be the pleasure (i.e. of God) that the waters of the Nile may be filled, and that the famine may remove from the world in thy days.”

Genesis 47:11 - “And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.”

This of course happened long before Rameses was pharaoh. It’s probably a comment by a later scribal editor of the scrolls to make the location understandable to current readers. The cities of Rameses were located in the land of Goshen.

Money Failed

Genesis 47:13-26 - This is a remarkable report of how Joseph managed to obtain all the silver, the cattle and the land holdings of everyone in Egypt and put it in Pharaoh’s control. The people then became servants/slaves of Pharaoh in exchange for food.

With people coming from all the surrounding countries, the Talmud indicates Joseph employed measures to forestall profiteering:

“It was prohibited for one man to enter the country with two asses and for asses to transport the produce from one place to another, and no one was permitted to enter the country without registering his name, that of his father and grandfather.” - (Bereshit Rabbah 91,4)

Similarly, it was forbidden for the grain to be moved outside its area, preventing unfair distribution and profiteering. Joseph and his brethren adhered to this prohibition as well. Though he could have given his relatives more, he merely supplied their needs, following the Talmudic dictum “When the public experiences calamity, let no man say, ‘I shall betake myself to eat and drink and couldn’t care less.’” (Ta’anit 11a)

Genesis 47:26 - “And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh’s.”

When the Egyptians offered to turn themselves over to Pharaoh as slaves in exchange for grain, Joseph offered a less-stringent proposal. He took only their land, and instead of claiming 4/5th for Pharaoh, he only required 1/5.

“I have bought you this day and your land,” according to Ramban, means that instead of accepting your first proposal of going into total slavery, you’re only going to be tenants

of the land you once owned, and can retain 4/5th of your produce.

Part of this involved resettling the people, not “to cities” but city by city, according to their original areas.

Genesis 47:22 - “Only the land of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion assigned them of Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: wherefore they sold not their lands.”

This was in ironic contrast to the future distribution of Israel’s Levites, who had no portion nor inheritance in the land because “the Lord is his inheritance.” (**Deuteronomy 10:8-9**) In Israel, the land belonged not to any ruler, but to God.

Leviticus 25:23 - “...for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me”

Nevertheless, Joseph’s brethren increased during this time:

“Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous” (**Genesis 47:27**).

But Joseph’s actions did not bring him personal gain at Egypt’s expense. His duty was to further Pharaoh’s interests, and this he did very well. Possibly all Egyptians had heard that hard times were coming and could have even acted to preserve grain on their own.

See an interesting discussion of questions of prosperity and poverty in all this at bible.org:
<https://buff.ly/2vRYNyD>

Jacob’s Approaching Death

Genesis 47:28-31 - Jacobs asks Joseph to swear to bury him in Canaan rather than Egypt.

But, didn’t God promise Jacob he would bring him up again, back to Canaan?

Genesis 46:4 - “I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.”

God had appeared to him in the “visions of the night” and used his old name “Jacob” because he was going to go into exile. But God’s promise was that He would accompany him, and that he would return.

“The Divine revelation came to him at night to show him that the Divine presence rests on Israel even in the night, in the darkness of exile, as they stated: ‘Wherever Israel was

exiled, the Divine presence accompanied them, They were exiled to Egypt, the Divine presence accompanied them ... to Babylon, the Divine presence accompanied them.' Regarding this, Psalm 20 observes: 'The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob set thee on high.' While they are in trouble and in the darkness of the night, the God of Jacob who was revealed to him at night, will set thee up on high." - (Meshech Chochma)

And he indeed brought Jacob up again in the form of his descendants, the 12 tribes of Israel:

"Said the Holy Blessed One to Moses: I said to their father Jacob: 'I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will surely bring thee up again.' Now I have come down here to bring out his descendants, in accordance with My promise to their forefather, Jacob. Where will I take them to? To the place from whence they came forth, to the land that I swore to their fathers, as it is written: 'To bring them up out of that land' (Ex. 3:8)" (Shemot Rabbah)