

21. Stephen Reviewed the History of Israel in Egypt

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how Stephen showed that God worked in the life of Joseph even when his rebellious brothers sold him into Egypt. We saw that God carried out His plan in spite of the envy and rebellion of those brothers. In the same way, we want to help our children learn that God will work through the difficult circumstances in their lives. In our topic today, we are going to see how God continued to work.

In Acts 7:11-13, we read, “Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh.” Joseph had told Pharaoh what to do to prepare for this famine. Pharaoh had recognized that the Spirit of God was with Joseph and that there was no one in the entire land of Egypt that had the wisdom that God had given to Joseph. Pharaoh then appointed Joseph to prepare for the coming famine.

As a result, Joseph had been gathering grain for seven years to help prepare Egypt for the famine. There was so much grain stored at the end of the seven years that it was impossible to measure the amount stored. Genesis 41:56-57 tell the condition of Egypt and the surrounding countries once the famine began. Those verses say, “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.” Both people from Egypt and people from other countries began to come to buy food from Joseph because of the famine.

Jacob and his family were also experiencing the famine in the land of Canaan. As a result, Genesis 42:1-3 says, “When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why do you look at one another?’ And he said, ‘Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.’ So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.” Here, we see that the very brothers who had sold Joseph as a slave were now going down to Egypt to buy food in order to survive.

On their first trip to Egypt, they did not realize that that were talking to Joseph. Then, on the second trip, Joseph revealed to his brothers who he was. Genesis 45:3-5 says, “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I *am* Joseph; does my father still live?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Please come near to me.’ So they came near. Then he said: ‘I *am* Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.’” Here, we see that Joseph explained to his brothers that God had sent him to Egypt to preserve the lives of many people. Here, we see that Joseph understood that God had worked to carry out the will of God even though the brothers had sold Joseph as a slave because of their envy and hatred.

Pharaoh heard that the brothers of Joseph had come. Genesis 45:16-18 says, “Now the report of it was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, ‘Joseph's brothers have come.’ So it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Say to your brothers, “Do this: Load your animals and depart; go to the land of Canaan. Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land.”’ Joseph followed the instructions of Pharaoh and sent his brothers back to bring his father and the rest of their families.

Acts 7:14-16 says, “Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father* of Shechem.” When the entire family arrived in Egypt, Joseph had the opportunity to introduce his family to Pharaoh. Genesis 47:1-2 says, “Then Joseph went and told Pharaoh, and said, ‘My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they *are* in the land of Goshen.’ And he took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh.” A short time later, Joseph presented Jacob to Pharaoh. Genesis 47:7 says, “Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.” In this way, the family of Jacob began their 400-year period in the land of Egypt.

Seventeen years later, Jacob came to the time of his death and gave instructions to his sons to bury him back in the land of Canaan. Genesis 49:29-30 says, “Then he charged them and said to them: ‘I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that *is* in the field of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place.” Joseph followed the instructions of their father regarding his burial.

After his father died, Joseph told Pharaoh in Genesis 50:5-6, “‘My father made me swear, saying, “Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.” Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.’ And Pharaoh said, ‘Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.’” A large group of people traveled with Joseph and his brothers back to the land of Canaan. Then, Genesis 50:13 says, “For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place.” Joseph and his brothers returned to the land of Egypt and Joseph continued to serve Pharaoh for many years.

Later, Joseph also died. However, he believed the promises of God and looked forward to the day when God would carry out His promise to bring the people of Israel back to the land of Canaan. The last recorded words of Joseph are found in Genesis 50:25 where we read, “Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.’” Here, we see that Joseph had such a great faith that God would carry out His promise to Abraham that he asked to have his bones taken back to the land that God had promised to Abraham.

Joseph had an impact on the land of Egypt for many years. However, through the years he was gradually forgotten. Acts 7:17-19 says, “‘But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.’” God had told Abraham that his descendants would be in Egypt for four hundred years. As a result, Moses was born more than three hundred years after Jacob and his family came into Egypt.

The time mentioned here when God prepared to fulfill the promise that had been made to Abraham was over three hundred years later. During this three-hundred-year period, the descendants of Jacob multiplied greatly. In fact, in Exodus 1:8-10 we read, “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Look, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.’” Here, we have a description of the fear of the king that did not know Joseph.

This ruler became fearful of the people of Israel because God had greatly blessed the descendants of Abraham. The new king felt that there were more people of Israel than there were of his people. He felt that the people of Israel were stronger than the people of Egypt. Here, we see that his thoughts were controlled by fear. He suggested to his leaders that they develop a plan to keep the people of Israel from continuing to multiply. His fear caused him to realize that in the event of war Israel would fight with the enemies against the people of Egypt. He was afraid that Israel would use such an opportunity as an excuse to fight against Egypt and to leave the land of Egypt.

As a result, the king of Egypt devised a plan to try and control the multiplication of the people of Israel. His plan was to kill the male children of Israel. In Exodus 1:16, he commanded the Hebrew midwives, “And he said, ‘When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see *them* on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.’” The Hebrew midwives did not obey the king. Then, the king told the Egyptians in Exodus 1:22, “So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, ‘Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.’” Here, we see that the Egyptians were commanded to throw every male child of the people of Israel into the river. As Stephen spoke to the leaders of Israel, he showed in these verses the rebellion of the king of Egypt. We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that when people become controlled by fear that it will cause them to try to hurt and destroy others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the impact of fear.