

Genesis 46-48 • Chapter Study

INTRO

Joseph, who's risen to be the PM of Egypt has been reconciled to his brothers.

They return home to tell their father Jacob that the long-lost Joseph wasn't dead after all; he was the ruler of Egypt.

And the famine, which has already gripped the region for 2 yrs, will last for 5 more.

So Joseph has invited them to move S to here e's stored up plenty of provisions for them.

Joe even sent some moving carts along so they could pack up all their stuff.

Ch. 46

¹ So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, & offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

As they made their way S from their base at Hebron, they stopped at Beersheba, the place where both his father & grandfather had stayed for a while.

Beersheba, on the northern edge of the desert was a barren place.

In ch21, Abraham planted a grove of **shade trees** in anticipation of God's promise to give his descendants the entire land.

Now, as Jacob, called by his *new* name, *Israel*, passes thru, those trees have grown tall & provide a place to rest.

They stood as a testimony to Israel's grandfather's faith, and to God's faithfulness.

And in that moment, Israel wondered if going to Egypt was really the right thing – after all, going to Egypt had always been a sign of a **lack of faith** for his ancestors.

It was during a similar time of famine Abraham went to Egypt & got into trouble. [ch12]

God had told Isaac **NOT** to go to Egypt in ch26:2.

Yet from what Joseph had said to Israel's other sons, it was clear God had sent him to Egypt to prepare for THIS famine.

So, drawing a line from a well-known song by that ancient musical group The Clash, he asked, "Should I stay or should I go?"

² Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob!" And he said, "Here I am." ³ So He said, "I *am* God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. ⁴ I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up *again*; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes."

Meaning Joseph will be there to close Jacob's lifeless eyes when he dies.

⁵ Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶ So they took their livestock and their goods, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him. ⁷ His sons and his sons' sons, his daughters and his sons' daughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.

⁸ Now these *were* the names of the children of Israel, Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt: Reuben *was* Jacob's firstborn.

Now we get a listing of the sons of Jacob and their sons.

This list is given here because these become the 12 tribes of Israel, along with their major clans.

Vs. 9-15 = The descendants of Jacob from his wife Leah = 33

Vs. 16-18 = The descendants of Jacob's concubine Zilpah = 16

Vs. 19-22 = The descendants of Jacob's wife Rachel = 14

Vs. 23-25 = The descendants of Jacob's concubine Bilhah = 7

When you add up the entire household of Jacob that went to Egypt it was 70 people.

²⁶ All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob's sons' wives, *were* 66 persons in all. ²⁷ And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt *were* 2 persons. All the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were 70.

You have the 66 descendants of Jacob who made this trip; + Jacob himself = 67; + Joseph & his 2 sons = 70.

Over the next 400 yrs, that 70 turns into a nation of btwn 2&3 million!

²⁸ Then he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out before him *the way* to Goshen. And they came to the land of Goshen.

Israel sent Judah on ahead to contact Joseph & find out exactly *where* they were to locate.

It was somewhere in the region of **Goshen**; the Nile **delta**; what's called **Lower** Egypt.

²⁹ So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while.

Imagine what a happy reunion that was!

³⁰ And Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, because you *are* still alive."

Seems an odd thing to say.

What he means is, he can die now in peace.

³¹ Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and say to him, 'My brothers and those of my father's house, who *were* in the land of Canaan, have come to me.' ³² And the men *are* shepherds, for their occupation has been to feed livestock; and they have brought their flocks, their herds, and all that they have.' ³³ So it shall be, when Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' ³⁴ that you shall say, 'Your servants' occupation has been with livestock from our youth even till now, both we *and* also our fathers,' that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd *is* an abomination to the Egyptians.'" We might think Joe would want to keep it a secret that they were shepherds if it was an abomination for the Egyptians.

Joseph is again showing his skill & wisdom.

He wants to keep them from being absorbed into the Egyptian culture like so many other groups had been. Egyptian culture was so appealing, so overpowering, prosperous & influential, many smaller groups had been gobbled up by them, much like American culture has consumed dozens of others over the years.

That was the danger Jacob's family faced; they might be gobbled up by the monolithic Egyptian culture.

But there was something in the Egyptian mindset Joseph knew he could use to help his family maintain their God-ordained *uniqueness*; the knee-jerk aversion of the Egyptians toward shepherds.

Egyptians art from that time marks shepherds as the very *lowest level* of Egyptian society.

Goshen, on the NE'n border of their land was scarcely populated but prime grazing land.

Joseph knew it would be perfect for his family's needs & would keep them isolated from Egyptian influences.

Ch 47

¹ 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." ² And he took 5 men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. ³ Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants *are* shepherds, both we *and* also our fathers." ⁴ And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine *is* severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen."

There's a subtle but important insight here that we need to take a look at.

That word "dwell" used twice in v4 refers to a temporary, not permanent stay.

Joseph was careful to coach his brothers to say this because they weren't supposed to stay in Egypt.

They were only there for the duration of the famine.

They made it clear to Pharaoh that they were only sojourning in Egypt & ought to be allowed to go home when they chose.

And just as Joseph was careful to coach his brothers to state it that way, Moses was careful to record it years later.

The Jews detention & enslavement by the Egyptians yrs later was *illegal* because the original arrangement was that they ought to be free to leave when they chose.

⁵ Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. ⁶ The land of Egypt *is* before you. Have your father and brothers dwell [**same word**] in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know *any* competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock."

⁷ Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ⁸ Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How old *are* you?” ⁹ And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage *are* 130 years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.” ¹⁰ So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.

It was obvious Jacob was ancient, so Pharaoh asked just how old he was.

Pharaoh’s deference to **Jacob** reveals how much respect he had for **Joseph**.

¹¹ And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, 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. ¹² Then Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with bread, according to the number in *their* families.

Jacob’s family settled in in Goshen.

Critics love to point to v11 as a problem, because this region wasn’t called Rameses until long after Jacob & Joseph’s time.

They’re right. It was called that during Moses’ time, the guy who wrote this.

The region of Goshen in the Nile delta is where Jacob’s family settled.

When a later dynasty rises to rule of Egypt, they will follow a totally different policy toward foreigners living among them and will subject them to slavery.

They will then make new cities along the Nile using slave labor.

One of those cities they will make was called Rameses, after one of their greater Pharaohs.

The Jews will be a major part of the work-force that builds it.

And because the city of Rameses is the major landmark, the whole region becomes known as Rameses; like Ventura County is named after its oldest city.

Now: That’s an obvious & simply answer to this objection critics raise over the use of the word **Rameses** in v11.

And all it takes is a little thought to work it out.

So why do critics STILL mention it?

Because those who don’t WANT to believe the Bible cling to any- and everything to justify their unbelief.

And this points up a frustrating reality for those who study apologetics.

Critics, skeptics, scoffers, mockers: Whatever label you want to give to determined unbelievers

The objections they raise to both the veracity of the Bible and the vitality Christian Faith have **ALL** been amply answered.

No one is coming up with new objections.

They just recycle the same, old, tired and worn out arguments

That have already been refuted, rebuffed, & dismantled.

The more you examine the objections and their answers, the more clear it becomes:

The problem isn’t that people CAN’T believe; it’s that they WON’T.

In numerous conversations I’ve had with chronic skeptics, what happens is, they give a reason for their unbelief.

I’ll answer it, showing how the very thing they’ve used as a support for NOT believing turns out to be a reason they OUGHT to. IOW = their objection doesn’t hold; it isn’t reasonable in light of the evidence.

And they have no come back; no further reason to cling to that objection any longer.

Now – you’d think they would then move from unbelief to belief.

Logically: If they’ve been shown their unbelief has no evidential support, but that in fact, the evidence points to belief IN God, IN The Gospel, then they’d go there.

But the inveterate skeptic doesn’t. They just shift to their next objection; and the next, and another.

So, what I like to do is, after dismantling one of their objections, when they say, “Well, what about . . .” I don’t let them off; don’t let them shift to another objection.

My goal is to help them realize their unbelief **isn’t reasonable**.

They need to come to grips with the evidence of their own prejudice against The Faith.

The bottom line is they don’t believe because they don’t WANT to.

Joseph’s Administration of Egypt

Now we get an account of Joseph’s administration of Egypt during the famine.

¹³ Now *there was* no bread in all the land; for the famine *was* very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land

of Canaan languished because of the famine. ¹⁴ And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.

The only food to be had was what had been stored during the 7 yrs of bumper crops prior to the onset of the famine.

So the people went to the storehouses for supplies & bought what they needed.

But after a while, their savings were gone and they still needed food.

Pharaoh's coffers were full, but the people's bellies were empty.

¹⁵ So when the money failed in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For the money has failed." ¹⁶ Then Joseph said, "Give your livestock, and I will give you *bread* for your livestock, if the money is gone." ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread *in exchange* for the horses, the flocks, the cattle of the herds, and for the donkeys. Thus he fed them with bread *in exchange* for all their livestock that year.

The next most liquid asset after money was livestock, which they traded for food.

This doesn't mean their herds were ***literally transferred*** to Pharaoh.

There's no way his servants could tend such huge herds and flocks.

The ***title*** to them merely transferred to Pharaoh, and the people themselves ended up becoming his servants taking care of his herds.

¹⁸ When that year had ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is gone; my lord also has our herds of livestock. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. ¹⁹ Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants of Pharaoh; give *us* seed, that we may live and not die, that the land may not be desolate." ²⁰ Then Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. So the land became Pharaoh's. ²¹ And as for the people, he moved them into the cities, from *one* end of the borders of Egypt to the *other* end. ²² Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had rations *allotted to them* by Pharaoh, and they ate their rations which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their lands.

Once the title to the livestock was transferred to Pharaoh, all that was left was the land, which they also turned over to him.

It was during Joseph's rule that Egypt became a kind of feudal society & economy.

Pharaoh's power was absolute with the people serving as serfs, working the land.

The only group Pharaoh did not gain control over were the priests.

He himself feared their connection to the gods and since his condition in the afterlife was determined by the gods, we wanted to stay in good standing with the priests.

So they weren't subject to the same requirements as the rest of the people.

Pharaoh had set aside provisions for the priests. They were on a government funded dole.

Religion reigned supreme in Egypt with a usually steady alliance between the temple and the throne.

The priests said the Pharaoh was a living embodiment of 1 of the Egyptian gods.

In return, Pharaoh allowed the priests control over a large segment of Egyptian society.

²³ Then Joseph said to the people, "Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, *here is* seed for you, and you shall sow the land. ²⁴ And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and for your food, for those of your households and as food for your little ones."

Joseph comes up with a brilliant plan.

All the land now belongs to Pharaoh, but he needs the people to work it.

So he tells the people when the famine is over and they return to farming, they can stay on their land but will need to give Pharaoh 20% of their income.

Back in v21, it says that Joseph moved the people into cities.

That may have been a temporary arrangement during the famine so they could be more easily provided for from the regional storehouses.

Then they returned to their ancestral homes when the famine was over.

Or, the relocation may have led to a more permanent arrangement in which **after** the famine, the Egyptians re-allocated the land according to a different system.

There is some evidence of a major re-distribution of land during Egypt's history.

That then led to a radical restructuring of Egyptian society that further added to Pharaoh's power.

²⁵ So they said, "You have saved our lives; let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants." ²⁶ And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt to this day, *that* Pharaoh should have one-fifth, except for the land of the priests only, *which* did not become Pharaoh's.

²⁷ So Israel [**Moses now uses that name not just for Jacob, but for the people that will come to be known as Israel**] So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly. ²⁸ And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years. So the length of Jacob's life was 147 years. ²⁹ When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, ³⁰ but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." ³¹ Then he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.

Meaning he is now **bed-ridden**.

Jacob makes Joseph promise to bury him back in Hebron with his father & grandfather.

We took a look at that phrase, where it says Jacob told Joseph to put his hand under his thigh as he made his vow to bury him back in Hebron in an earlier study.

We'll just summarize by saying it was a super-solemn way to make a promise.

Ch 48

¹ Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, "Indeed your father *is* sick"; and he took with him his 2 sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ² And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. ³ Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz [**aka Bethel**] in the land of Canaan and blessed me, ⁴ and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you *as* an everlasting possession.' ⁵ And now your 2 sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, *are mine*; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.

Reuben & Simeon were Jacob's 2 eldest sons whereas Joseph was his 2nd to youngest.

But now Joe's 2 boys are going to be reckoned in the family inheritance in the place of preference Reuben & Simeon would have held.

In the ancient & even medieval world, dividing up an inheritance could be complicated.

But the general rule went like this . . .

Besides inheriting the rights to the family name & legacy, the firstborn son got a **double portion** of the estate's wealth & property.

If there were 3 sons, the estate was divided into 4 portions.

The firstborn got 2, while his 2 brothers each got 1.

He got 50% and they each got 25%.

By custom, as Jacob's firstborn, **Reuben** ought to have received a double portion of the inheritance.

But **Reuben** had disqualified himself years before by hooking up with one of his father's concubines.

Simeon, the next in line, disqualified himself by being the ring-leader in the plot against Joseph.

Jacob shows his preference for Joe by giving him the firstborn's double portion, but assigning it to his 2 sons, Manasseh & Ephraim.

⁶ Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. ⁷ But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when *there was* but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)." ⁸ Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who *are* these?"

Jacob knows he has grandsons by Joseph, but he may not have seen them yet.

This may be their first formal introduction to their grandfather.

Or, it may be that's it's been a while and they've grown.

So Jacob does the grandfatherly thing; "Oh my, who are THESE fine looking young men?"

⁹ Joseph said to his father, "They *are* my sons, whom God has given me in this *place*." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them." ¹⁰ Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, *so that* he could not see.

Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. ¹¹ And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" ¹² So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth.

They're so young they only come up to Joe's knees. // When Jacob blesses them he had to bend over.

¹³ And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought *them* near him.

The right hand was the hand of favor, so Joseph brought the boys to his father so that Jacob would set his right hand on the first-born's, Manasseh's, head.

¹⁴ Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid *it* on Ephraim's head, who *was* the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh *was* the firstborn. ¹⁵ And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, ¹⁶ The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." ¹⁷

Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this *I* is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." ¹⁹ But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

Jacob speaks prophetically. Ephraim *will* indeed be pre-eminent in Israel's history.

What's interesting is that though Joseph was the 11th of 12 sons yet received the firstborn blessing, when it came to his own sons, he wanted to follow custom & see *his* firstborn blessed.

Yet consistently in the story of Israel, starting with Abraham, what we see is **God blessing the unexpected.**

The Bible is a Story of Grace from start to finish.

²⁰ So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!'" And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh. ²¹ Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. ²² Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

Again, by making Joseph into 2 tribes thru his sons, he gives him twice as much as his brothers.

Jacob drops a bomb on us when he says part of the land Joe's sons will have allotted to them was taken by him **by force.**

That can't be referring to Shechem and what Simeon & Levi did in massacring the Shechemites, because Jacob **disavowed & distanced** himself from all that.

In fact, they packed up and moved away as fast as they could.

So, there's a whole chapter of Jacob's sojourn in Canaan we don't know about when he had to battle some Amorites, defeated them and took possession of their territory.

This is why v22 is helpful & instructive

It reminds us the Bible isn't exhaustive. It doesn't give us the complete story or tell us everything that happened.

It sketches out the broad outline & tells us what we NEED to know, not all we might WANT to.