

# Israel *in* Egypt



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Genesis 46; Rom. 10:12, 13; Genesis 47; Genesis 48; Acts 3:25, 26; Genesis 49; Phil. 2:10; Gen. 49:29–50:21.*

**Memory Text:** “So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly” (*Genesis 47:27, NKJV*).

**G**enesis covers the last years of Jacob and Joseph together. We see Jacob (Israel) leave Canaan (*Genesis 46*) in order to settle in Egypt (*Genesis 47*), and there he will die (*Gen. 49:29–50:21*). And yet, even in this Egyptian setting, the prospect of the Promised Land still looms large in the background (*Gen. 50:22–26*).

As soon as Jacob arrives in Egypt, Jacob blesses Pharaoh (*Gen. 47:7–10*), thus fulfilling (partially, of course) the Abrahamic promise to be a blessing to the nations (*Gen. 12:3*). Later, about to die, Jacob blesses Joseph’s sons (*Genesis 48*). Jacob also blesses his own sons (*Gen. 49:1–28*) and makes impressive predictions concerning each of them in the context of the future 12 tribes of Israel (*Gen. 49:1–27*).

The fact, however, that Israel “dwells” in exile, in Egypt as strangers, is in tension with the hope of the Promised Land. And though the book of Genesis itself ends with the children of Israel in Egypt, some of the last words of Joseph point to another place: “ ‘I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob’ ” (*Gen. 50:24, NKJV*).

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 25.

## Jacob Goes to Joseph

**Read** Genesis 46. What is the significance of Jacob's departure from Canaan?

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When Jacob leaves his place in Canaan, he is full of hope. The assurance that he will no longer be hungry and the good news that Joseph is alive must have given him the momentum that he needed to leave the Promised Land.

Jacob's departure echoes the experience of Abraham, though in Abraham's case he was heading to the Promised Land. Jacob hears the same promise Abraham heard from God, namely that He will make him "a great nation" (*Gen. 46:3; compare with Gen. 12:2*). God's call here also is reminiscent of God's covenant with Abraham; in both occasions God uses the same reassuring words "do not fear" (*Gen. 46:3, NKJV; compare with Gen. 15:1*), which carry the promise of a glorious future.

The comprehensive listing of the names of the children of Israel who went to Egypt, including his daughters (*Gen. 46:7*), recalls God's promise of fruitfulness to Abraham even when he was still childless. The number "seventy" (including Jacob, Joseph, and his two sons) expresses the idea of totality. It is "all Israel" that goes to Egypt. It also is significant that the number 70 corresponds to the number of nations (*Genesis 10*), suggesting that the destiny of all the nations also is at stake in Jacob's journey.

This truth will become more evident only many years later, after the Cross and the fuller revelation of the plan of salvation, which, of course, was for all humanity, everywhere, and not just for the children of Abraham.

In other words, however interesting the stories are regarding this family, the seed of Abraham, and whatever spiritual lessons we can take from them—these accounts are in the Word of God because they are part of salvation history; they are part of God's plan to bring redemption to as many as possible on this fallen planet.

**"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved' " (*Rom. 10:12, 13, NKJV*). What does Paul say here that shows the universality of the gospel? More important, what do these words say to us regarding what we as a church should be doing to help spread the gospel?**

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## Jacob Settles in Egypt

It's very interesting how, despite all that Jacob had been told about Joseph's being alive in Egypt, the Lord still gave him "visions of the night" (*Gen. 46:2*) and in them commanded him to leave. Jacob leaves the Land of Promise for, of all places, Egypt—which later becomes associated with the one place that God's people do not want to go (*Deut. 17:16*).

**Read** Genesis 47. What spiritual truths and principles can we find in this account?

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“Joseph took five of his brothers to present to Pharaoh and receive from him the grant of land for their future home. Gratitude to his prime minister would have led the monarch to honor them with appointments to offices of state; but Joseph, true to the worship of Jehovah, sought to save his brothers from the temptations to which they would be exposed at a heathen court; therefore he counseled them, when questioned by the king, to tell him frankly their occupation. The sons of Jacob followed this counsel, being careful also to state that they had come to sojourn in the land, not to become permanent dwellers there, thus reserving the right to depart if they chose. The king assigned them a home, as offered, in ‘the best of the land,’ the country of Goshen.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 233.

Wisely, too, Pharaoh does not encourage these sojourners to become beggars, living off the largess of their host. He enquires about their “occupation” (*Gen. 47:3, NKJV*) in order that they may adjust better in their new environment. He also is eager to use their expertise, and even suggests that they serve him as “chief herdsman over [his] livestock” (*Gen. 47:6, NKJV*).

Then, although Jacob, the foreigner, is the inferior, the stranger, he stands before the leader of the land, and, as the text says, “Jacob blessed Pharaoh” (*Gen. 47:7*). He, the lowly stranger, is the one who blesses Pharaoh, the ruler of mighty Egypt? Why should that be?

The verb ‘*amad lifney*, “set . . . before” (*Gen. 47:7*), is normally used in priestly contexts (*Lev. 14:11*). Considering that in ancient Egypt the pharaoh had the status of the highest priest, this means that, in a spiritual sense, Jacob stands higher than the highest priest of Egypt, higher even than Pharaoh himself.

**Whatever our station in life, what should it mean to us, in how we treat others, that we are “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Pet. 2:9)? What obligations does our faith put on us?**

## Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons

As Jacob approaches death, he remembers his earlier return to Bethel (*Gen. 35:1–15*), when he received from God the renewed promise of the “everlasting possession” (*Gen. 48:4*) that was given to Abraham (*Gen. 17:8*). The hope of the Promised Land is, therefore, a comforting thought that nurtures his hope as he feels death coming. Jacob turns, then, to Joseph's two sons, who were born in Egypt, and blesses them, but does so in the context of the future promise regarding his own seed.

**Read Genesis 48. Why did Jacob bless Joseph's two sons here, and not his other grandsons?**

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Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, are the only grandsons that Jacob blessed. They are thus elevated from the status of grandsons to the status of sons (*Gen. 48:5*). Although Jacob's blessing implies a preeminence of the second (Ephraim) over the first (Manasseh), Jacob's blessing essentially concerns Joseph (*Gen. 48:15*).

What we see here is a personal testimony about God's faithfulness to them in the past and His promise for them in the future. Jacob refers to the God of Abraham and Isaac (*Gen. 48:15*), who had provided food and protection for them. He is the same God who “has redeemed me from all evil” (*Gen. 48:16, NKJV*). Jacob also has in mind “the God of Bethel” (*Gen. 31:13*), with whom he wrestled (*Gen. 32:29*) and who changed his name from Jacob to “Israel” (*Gen. 32:26–29*).

By referring to all these experiences where God turns the evil into good, Jacob expresses his hope that not only will God take care of the present lives of his grandsons, just as He cared for his own life and Joseph's, but Jacob also thinks of the future, when his descendants will return to Canaan. This hope is clear from his reference to Shechem (*Gen. 48:22*), which not only is a piece of land that he had acquired (*Gen. 33:19*) but also is a place where Joseph's bones will be buried (*Josh. 24:32*) and where the land will be distributed to the tribes of Israel (*Josh. 24:1*). Even amid all that has happened, Jacob keeps in mind the promises of God, who said that through this family “‘all the families of the earth shall be blessed’ ” (*Gen 12:3, NKJV*).

**Read Acts 3:25, 26. According to Peter, how was this promise of Genesis 12:3 being fulfilled? How have we, ourselves, received this blessing?**

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## Jacob Blesses His Sons

**Read** Genesis 49:1–28. What is the spiritual significance of Jacob’s blessing on his sons?

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Beyond the prophecies concerning the immediate history of the tribes of Israel, Jacob sees the Messiah and the ultimate hope of salvation. This hope already is indicated in Jacob’s opening words that use the expression “in the last days” (*Gen. 49:1*), a technical expression that refers to the coming of the Messianic King (*Isa. 2:2, Dan. 10:14*).

The text then goes through the future line of each of these men. These are not predestinated fates, as if God willed that each of these would face what they faced; rather, they are expressions of what their characters and the characters of their children would bring about. God’s knowing, for instance, that someone will kill an innocent man is a radically different thing from God’s having willed that the killer do it.

**Read** Genesis 49:8–12. What prophecy is given here, and why is it important?

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Over and above human free will, God does know the future, and He had arranged that it would be through Judah that the Messiah would come. Judah (*Gen. 49:8–12*), who is represented by a lion (*Gen. 49:9*), refers to royalty and praise. Judah will not only produce King David, but also the Shiloh; that is, the One who will bring *shalom*, “peace” (*Isa. 9:6, 7*), to Him “shall be the obedience of the people” (*Gen. 49:10, NKJV*).

The Jews have long seen this as a Messianic prophecy pointing to the coming Messiah, and Christians, too, have seen this text as pointing to Jesus. “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (*Gen. 49:10*), which is, perhaps, a precursor to the New Testament promise “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (*Phil. 2:10*).

As Ellen G. White wrote: “The lion, king of the forest, is a fitting symbol of this tribe, from which came David, and the Son of David, Shiloh, the true ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah,’ to whom all powers shall finally bow and all nations render homage.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 236.

**Why should we be rendering homage to Jesus now, even before all nations will do it?**

## The Hope of the Promised Land

**Read** Genesis 49:29–50:21. What great themes of hope are found in the conclusion of the book of Genesis?

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The conclusion of Genesis is made up of three events that are filled with hope.

First, there is the hope that Israel will return to the Promised Land. Moses, the author of Genesis, describes Jacob's and Joseph's deaths and burials as events pointing to the Promised Land. Immediately after his blessing and prophecy on the "twelve tribes of Israel" (*Gen. 49:28*), Jacob thinks of his death and charges his sons to bury him in Canaan, at the cave of Machpelah, where Sarah was buried (*Gen. 49:29–31*). The narrative describing the funeral procession toward Canaan becomes a precursor to the exodus from Egypt several centuries later.

Second, there is the hope that God will turn evil into good. After Jacob's death and burial, Joseph's brothers are worried about their future. They are afraid that Joseph will now take his revenge. They come to Joseph and prostrate themselves before him, ready to become his servants (*Gen. 50:18*), a scenario that is reminiscent of Joseph's prophetic dreams. Joseph reassures them and tells them to "not be afraid" (*Gen. 50:19, NKJV*), a phrase that refers to the future (*Gen. 15:1*); because what was "meant evil" against him, "God meant . . . for good" (*Gen. 50:20, NKJV*), and turned the course of events toward salvation (*Gen. 50:19–21; compare with Gen. 45:5, 7–9*). That is, even despite so many human failures, God's providence will overrule.

Third, there is the hope that God will save fallen humankind. The story of Joseph's death in this last verse of Genesis is broader than just about his death. Strangely, Joseph does not command to have his bones buried. Instead he points to the time when "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here" (*Gen. 50:25, NKJV*), which they did, many years later, in direct obedience to those words (*see Exod. 13:19*). Ultimately, the hope of the Promised Land, Canaan, is a symbol, a precursor, to the ultimate hope of salvation, of restoration, of a New Jerusalem in a new heaven and a new earth—the ultimate hope for all of us, a hope made certain by the death of Shiloh.

**Read Revelation 21:1–4. How do these verses represent the grandest hope that we have? Without this promise, what hope do we have other than death alone as the end of all our problems?**

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**Further Thought:** Ellen G. White, “Joseph and His Brothers,” pp. 233–240, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The life of Joseph illustrates the life of Christ. It was envy that moved the brothers of Joseph to sell him as a slave; they hoped to prevent him from becoming greater than themselves. And when he was carried to Egypt, they flattered themselves that they were to be no more troubled with his dreams, that they had removed all possibility of their fulfillment. But their own course was overruled by God to bring about the very event that they designed to hinder. So the Jewish priests and elders were jealous of Christ, fearing that He would attract the attention of the people from them. They put Him to death, to prevent Him from becoming king, but they were thus bringing about this very result.

“Joseph, through his bondage in Egypt, became a savior to his father’s family; yet this fact did not lessen the guilt of his brothers. So the crucifixion of Christ by His enemies made Him the Redeemer of mankind, the Savior of the fallen race, and Ruler over the whole world; but the crime of His murderers was just as heinous as though God’s providential hand had not controlled events for His own glory and the good of man.

“As Joseph was sold to the heathen by his own brothers, so Christ was sold to His bitterest enemies by one of His disciples. Joseph was falsely accused and thrust into prison because of his virtue; so Christ was despised and rejected because His righteous, self-denying life was a rebuke to sin; and though guilty of no wrong, He was condemned upon the testimony of false witnesses. And Joseph’s patience and meekness under injustice and oppression, his ready forgiveness and noble benevolence toward his unnatural brothers, represent the Savior’s uncomplaining endurance of the malice and abuse of wicked men, and His forgiveness, not only of His murderers, but of all who have come to Him confessing their sins and seeking pardon.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 239, 240.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Once Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers feared that now Joseph would get revenge. What does this teach about the guilt that they still harbored? What does Joseph’s reaction teach us about forgiveness for the guilty?
- 2 What other parallels can you find between the lives of Joseph and Jesus?
- 3 Dwell on the fact that although God intimately knows the future, we are still free in the choices we make. How do we reconcile these two ideas?