

Prayer

Praise You, Lord God, for Your Light is life to me. You lead me through life by Your Light, and by the Light of Jesus Christ, I am saved for ever. Fill me even now with Your Light, so that I may shine in all I do and help to bring Light into this world of darkness. I ask this in the Name of Jesus, who is forever the Light of the World. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Deaf

We will focus our prayers this week on the deaf. Many people become hard of hearing as they grow older, so pray for those you know who struggle with this problem.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for governments to have the courage to face hard decisions*
- *Pray for young people who are tempted into taking drugs*
- *Give thanks to God for the support you receive from friends*

Meditation

(from 1 Chronicles 4:10)

I ask for Your blessing,
Creator God of Universal splendour.
Draw near to me, search my life and tell me the truth.
Forgive my sins and establish my faith.

I ask for Your provision,
Almighty Lord of ultimate authority.
Help me, and from the storehouse of Your precious gifts,
Grant me what I need to do Your will.

I ask for Your presence,
Jesus Christ of Calvary and Easter.
Touch me with the assurance of Your precious salvation,
And lead me in the path of peace.

I ask for Your protection
All powerful Holy Spirit of wind and fire.
Gather me in Your protective arms and make me whole again,
To do, and be, and live; renewed.

Bible Study - Genesis 47:1-12

¹ Joseph went to tell the news to Pharaoh, 'My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all they own, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen.'² From among his brothers he chose five men and presented them to Pharaoh.³ Pharaoh asked his brothers, 'What is your occupation?' And they said to Pharaoh, 'Your servants are shepherds, just as our ancestors were.'⁴ They said to Pharaoh, 'We have come to live in the land for a while as immigrants, because there is no pasture for your servants' flocks due to the severity of the famine in Canaan. So, please, we ask you to let your servants settle for the time being in the land of Goshen.'⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Now your father and your brothers have come to you, ⁶ The land of Egypt is at your disposal. Settle your father and your brothers in the best regions; allow them to live in the land of Goshen; and if you know of any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.'

⁷ Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ⁸ Pharaoh said to Jacob, 'How many years have you lived?' ⁹ Jacob said to Pharaoh, 'The length of my earthly life has been 130 years. These years of my life have been few and

hard, and they do not compare with the years my ancestors lived whilst on this earth.’¹⁰ Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and left his presence.

¹¹ As Pharaoh instructed, Joseph settled his father and his brothers, granting them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land in the region of Rameses. ¹² And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and his entire household with food, according to the number of dependents.

Review

The whole family of Jacob had made the journey from Canaan. This included seventy direct descendants and other family members, together with all their worldly goods and possessions; the whole group must have been an impressive sight! When they finally reached Egypt, the eventual reunion between Joseph and his father Jacob is one of the highlights of the Old Testament. The completion of this story indicates the powerful hand of God acting providentially through the passing of the years to bring about His Covenant purposes, despite the strangeness of human affairs. This powerful story towards the end of Genesis tells us many things; it tells us that God fulfils his promises despite impossible human odds, that the Covenant purposes of God will never be thwarted, and that unity, forgiveness and reconciliation lie at the heart of God's saving grace.

In our passage today, we read about the meeting between Jacob and Pharaoh. Joseph undertook the diplomatic mission of his life to ensure that all went well in the meeting between the two men who were most influential to him; Pharaoh his master and Jacob his father. Having prepared his brothers in advance (46:28-34), Joseph went ahead of them to announce formally to Pharaoh at court that his family had arrived from Canaan. Pharaoh knew what was going on, and had previously charged Joseph to bring his family to Egypt ‘with no thought of your possessions’ (45:20). With royal authority, he had commanded that the best of Egypt should be made available to the family of the man who had single-handedly saved Egypt from the terrors of famine (and there were many more years of it to come). Joseph had several concerns. Firstly, would Pharaoh accept the common ‘shepherd’ community of his brothers given the dislike of herders and cattle-hands amongst the Egyptian upper classes; secondly, would he manage to engineer the settlement of the family in their favoured region of Goshen, on the North East border of Egypt with the shortest route back to Canaan! Thirdly, the entire family was a sizeable group of people for Egypt to adopt as immigrants at a time of drought, and contrary to Pharaoh's orders, they had brought everything with them. Pharaoh's reaction to his father Jacob would determine what happened next!

Joseph did not have to worry. He had attempted to ensure his brothers used the proper court protocol so that their request for Goshen would be heard, and as soon as Pharaoh met the family, he acceded to the requests made to him (47:6). Although he talked to Joseph only and not directly to his brothers, this part of the meeting went well, with the bonus that Pharaoh was willing to give some of the brothers jobs looking after his own herds and cattle (47:6); a valuable opportunity for work, and an opportunity that carried with it considerable court benefits. Finally, the meeting between Pharaoh and Jacob went remarkably well. Pharaoh showed due respect for the age of Jacob, and Jacob acted with proper decorum towards the monarch (see main Bible study).

In this way, agreements were made for the people of Israel to settle in Egypt and maintain their identity; but the story is not just about gaining benefits for God's people. Jacob's family had to learn a great deal about the power of forgiveness and reconciliation, but more than that, their obedience to God in overcoming their divisions and accepting their unity in God was important for the people of Egypt, as represented by Pharaoh. It is likely that Pharaoh was generous because for the stability of the country, he needed Joseph to continue his job. His acceptance of his family secured Joseph's continued services.

From the beginning of the story of the forefathers, it was God's intention (see Genesis 12:1-3) that His people would be a blessing to other nations of the world. It is therefore fitting that the last story in Genesis should demonstrate this important Covenant principle, recounting how through Joseph, Jacob's family became a blessing the greatest civilisation in the world at that time. We can surely learn from this that God wants to bless the world through His people, the church.

Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- Joseph present his brothers to Pharaoh
- The brothers make an impression on Pharaoh
- Jacob meets Pharaoh and a final deal for settlement is reached

Going Deeper

If we find it hard to face people of power and authority today, then how much more difficult would it have been to do this in ancient times when an autocrat who did not like you could have you executed without reflection or thought! The details of this small part of the story of Joseph contain a number of hints at the tensions involved in obtaining the necessary permissions for the people of Israel to settle in Egypt.

Joseph presents his brothers to Pharaoh (vv 1-6)

Joseph had promised to make a formal presentation of his brothers to Pharaoh. Apart from the family's obvious wealth and authority, such an audience would serve the purpose of both formalising his family's presence in Egypt, and also proving to his father Jacob and the whole family that he did in fact have the highest office in the land of Grand Vizier of Egypt. Few people were allowed to speak to Pharaoh, and one of those was the Vizier.

Joseph went to Pharaoh and immediately told him that his family had arrived as expected, and he announced that they arrived in Goshen. Some commentators reckon that Joseph arranged their arrival there and said this to Pharaoh precisely because he wanted the family to settle there, rather than anywhere more central to the country of Egypt. With the minimum of words, Joseph explained that they had arrived with 'all they own' from Canaan, diplomatically making light of the large number of cattle and possessions that they had brought. This was so that Pharaoh would not feel that his generous earlier offer (in effect to provide for them if they arrived with nothing at all) had been turned down.

The brothers make an impression on Pharaoh

Joseph had prepared and selected five of his brothers to meet Pharaoh. When presented to him, they initially said to Pharaoh exactly what Joseph had told them to say (47:3), but they proved to be somewhat more talkative. They spoke about being shepherds and having a long ancestry in this lifestyle, and they also they added their own comments about coming to Egypt as 'immigrants' and also requested the land of Goshen as a place to settle (47:4).

The brothers made an important point. The family of their father Jacob was nomadic at heart, living as 'aliens in the land' (a phrase often found in the Bible). I have chosen the term 'immigrant' in the translation above because this accurately describes the status of the family now they were in Egypt. When the brothers said this to Pharaoh, it emphasised to the ruler of all Egypt that they did not wish to make a permanent settlement in the land. Their comments may well have helped their cause, even though they went further in their comments than their illustrious brother! In addition, the Hebrew words they actually used were politeness itself, and indicated that they thought they could handle the situation perfectly well without having the words placed into their mouths for them by their brother! It would be fascinating to know exactly who out of the brothers was presented to Pharaoh!

As a consequence to this bold approach, Pharaoh appears to have warmed to the brothers (47:6), and he suggested to Joseph that some of the brothers could join Pharaoh's own band of cattle-men and herders (Rameses III, for example, is recorded as having 3,264 such people in his employment, enjoying court privileges as well as looking after Pharaoh's stock). All had gone very well.

Jacob meets Pharaoh, and a final deal for settlement is reached.

The meeting between Jacob and Pharaoh was much more homely and direct than the previous presentation of the brothers, but it may have reflected the success of the first encounter. Jacob blessed Pharaoh both upon entering his presence and on leaving, the appropriate thing for the older man to do even in this setting. Age was venerated in ancient cultures in a way that is hard for us to understand and accept today, and although Pharaoh was the king, he was expected to accept the blessing of an older father figure such as Jacob. In addition, the conversation between Pharaoh and Jacob was not about the details of the settlement for his family, but his age; 'how many years have you lived?' (47:8).

Jacob replied to Pharaoh with due deference, declaring his age but making light of its significance in respect of his forebears. In this way, he indicated to Pharaoh that his family group, though substantial in size, had a significant history, and this helped give the impression of a group of people who did not want to come to Egypt for the sake of occupation, because they had a sense of history and a land to which they would return. The conversation with Pharaoh was brief, but it comes across as respectful and sincere.

Pharaoh and Joseph were left to finalise the arrangements for the family group (47:11-12). Pharaoh had repeatedly ordered that the 'best of Egypt' should be made available to Joseph's family, and Joseph now felt able to claim this, given that his family had been well received by the ruler of all Egypt. What is interesting is that although the talk was all about living as immigrants, emphasising the temporary nature of the family's presence in Egypt, Joseph did in fact claim a 'holding'; that is, a permanent right of land ownership on some region of what was called Rameses (47:11). As mentioned previously, there is some confusion about the dating of places and place names, but most scholars reckon that this Rameses is a large town built as an imperial store, to the north of Egypt in the Nile Delta, and therefore adjacent to the region we call 'Goshen'.

It was sufficient that Joseph now felt he had the necessary authority to act for his own family without fear of any court opposition. His job for the family was done; but he still had to deal with a famine covering a large region of the world!

Application

We all know what it is like to be in a position where what we say and do can have lasting effects upon our lives, our future, and the future of our families and others: yet we cannot avoid such circumstances. We prepare for them, but we can never feel certain about what will happen. Being a Christian and having faith in the guiding hand of God will not necessarily spare us from the human uncertainties of such situations. However, we can be confident because just like Jacob and Joseph, we can know that God is capable of 'making all things work together for good' (Rom 8:28), and knowing this can give us great inner peace. In addition to this, the passage we have read today seems to unfold with a certainty borne of knowing that God was not just involved in working things out for His people 'behind the scenes', but before their very eyes. Such moments come for each of us from time to time, and they are to be treasured; for it seems that God is acting in power even as we speak. We cannot predict such moments, but they do come.

The momentous story of Joseph and Jacob and the movement of God's people to Egypt is presented as a triumph of God's work amongst His people; and the people of Israel stayed there for many years, probably around four hundred years. In the end, they lost their knowledge of where they had come from, and any sense of needing to return to the Promised Land (Exodus 2:23,24). We must therefore conclude that just because God works powerfully at one time to do something for His people, it does not mean that everything will stay the same. He is always moving on, and the best way to move on is in the knowledge of what He has done for us in the past.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Compare what the brothers said in their interview with Pharaoh with what Joseph told them to say (46:28f.) Why do you think they added to what they said?
2. To what extent is age venerated in our own times and in what societies? What do we need to learn from the Bible about venerating the aged?
3. Discuss whether it was important for the people of Israel to have a permanent holding in Egypt as organised by Joseph. Would they have been better off without this?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

If this story of Joseph is about the blessing of those who are not God's people by those who are God's people, then it has much to teach us. The rest of the Old Testament tells us a long and painful story that mostly reveals the opposite. Isaiah was horrified that God's people were not a 'light to the nations' (42:6, 49:6), for example. Surely, now we have been saved by the power of Christ and His death on the Cross, we can accept our role to bless the world in the name of Jesus Christ? Yet I am unsure that the world would see the Christian church as a blessing and a help, even though it does much to help the poor and service the community. God's challenge remains, and in the name of Jesus and for the sake of the Gospel, we must take it up.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Look back over your life and assess how often the Lord has blessed you. Can you say that you have been a blessing to others? It is common for us to be coy about saying that we have done good things for others, but in the quietness of your hearts, talk with the Lord about the effect of your own life on others.*
- *Pray for the people who are most affected by your life, and pray that you will be able to sustain the good influence you have in the community and in the lives of those who are close to you. Be unashamed to aspire to being a good influence in the lives of others.*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, bless us as we place our trust in You both now and in our future. As we have heard about the heaven which awaits us, let us have faith in what You have promised and confidence that You will one

day greet us in the heavenly places with excitement and joy! Grant us peace and security now, and in our eternal future: AMEN
