

### **AN OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY:**

#### **From Abraham to Modern Israel**

#### **Lesson 3**

In our Old Testament Survey, we have so far connected the dots from Abraham to his sons Isaac and Ishmael, to Isaac's twin sons Esau and Jacob. Of these, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are commonly referred to in the Bible and in Judeo-Christianity as The Patriarchs.

Note that of these 5 names I listed (Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Esau, and Jacob) that Ishmael and Esau are left out and are not considered as Patriarchs. The reason for this is simple: the term Patriarchs as used in the Holy Scriptures speak of two things only: Hebrews and the specific God-chosen descendants of Abraham through whom the covenant that the Lord made with Abraham would continue in perpetuity. This is a critical issue that has resurfaced especially in modern times with the re-emergence of Islam as the enormous and dominant religion that it is, even if it had gone under the radar to the Western world since the end of the Ottoman Empire as one of the results of WWI.

Esau went on to become a founder of the tribes of Edom, and since they lived on the edge of the Arabian Peninsula have largely become assimilated into the Arab tribes. Ishmael is the founder of the Arab tribes, and there has been a permanent enmity between Hebrews and Arabs since Abraham sent his concubine Hagar and her child Ishmael away. So the descendants of Esau and Ishmael are (generally speaking) Arabs. Arabs are Semites (descendants of Noah's son Shem, just as are the Hebrews), however, they are gentiles.

We read how in Genesis 17 the Lord instructed Abraham that even though Ishmael was,

biologically and by custom, Abraham's firstborn son, that the son born later to Abraham's legal wife Sarah (Isaac) was to be considered as Avraham's firstborn for both inheritance purposes and (more importantly) as the next Hebrew to carry on the line of the covenant promises. Though we didn't cover it last time, Abraham bore other children through other women as well. However, **ONLY** those children born from Sarah were considered as Hebrews; all others were gentiles. And the only child born to Sarah was **Yitz'ach** (Isaac).

So, while Abraham fathered both Hebrews and gentiles, as did his son Isaac father both Hebrews and gentiles, only Abraham's grandson Jacob father exclusively Hebrews (that is Jacob fathered NO gentiles). And as we discovered, late in Jacob's life the Lord assigned him a new name: **Yisra'el** (Israel). The 12 sons who came from Jacob were therefore Hebrews and came to be called Israel-ites (descendants of Israel). All Israelites then were Hebrews. Therefore the separation of Hebrews from gentiles was complete at this point.

As we ended our previous lesson, Jacob's 11<sup>th</sup> son, Joseph, had been sold to Arab slave traders by his 10 jealous older brothers (Joseph was clearly Jacob's favored son), and the Arabs, in turn, sold Joseph to the Chief Steward to the Pharaoh of Egypt. After serving the Steward Potiphar for a time, Potiphar's wife leveled false charges against Joseph resulting in prison. However, the Pharaoh began having recurring nightmares that although the Pharaoh's seers couldn't interpret, Joseph could. The nightmares turned out to be a vision of a time of plenty that would be immediately followed by a widespread, long-term famine. Joseph was put in charge as the Vizier of Egypt to ready Egypt for what was coming; he did so very successfully.

As the famine took hold, back up in Canaan where Joseph's father Jacob and all the Israelites lived, they were running out of food. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain, and there found Joseph. Joseph was married to an Egyptian woman named Asenath, and they produced two sons Ephraim and Manasseh. It must be clear that these two children were therefore Egyptians, and were raised as Egyptians.

In Egypt, under Joseph, the 12 tribes prospered and grew. But Jacob was now a very old man and he knew he was nearing his death. So he called for Joseph to come to him and to bring his 2 Egyptian-born sons with him. What happened next cannot be overstated, as it would have significant impact on the progress of Israel and also has prophetic significance for our time and

beyond. Jacob sought to bless these two sons of Joseph, but he did so in a radical way that caught Joseph completely off guard. This strange blessing is known as Jacob's Cross Handed Blessing.

Open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 48; we're going to read it all.

### READ Gen 48 all

What actually happened here? Well, as I mentioned last time, the younger child of Joseph, Ephraim, was in essence given the firstborn, or double portion blessing, that normally should have gone to the older child, Manasseh. But, just as important, Jacob gave the birthright that should have belonged to his OWN firstborn son, Rueben, to his grandson Ephraim. Rueben was not excommunicated from the family but he was replaced for inheritance purposes with Joseph's son Ephraim. How do I know this was the result? Listen to **1st Chronicles 5:1**..... ***"..... Rueben the firstborn of Israel (of Jacob) for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel (Jacob); so that he (Rueben) is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright."***

So here is something we must put into our minds and hold onto for a while: the firstborn rights of inheritance for Israel's (Jacob's) children, winds up NOT going to the rightful heir, Rueben, but instead, those rights are given to Ephraim, who is actually a grandchild, a son of Joseph. But one of the effects of this Cross Handed Blessing was that Jacob adopted away these 2 grandchildren from Joseph and made them his own sons. Joseph protested but Jacob said that all of Joseph's future sons remain as his sons; that is Jacob wouldn't adopt any more of Joseph's sons away from him. Strange; very strange. What possible reason could there be for such a thing? Well first and foremost, these two children were no longer Egyptian but rather, by means of adoption, they became Hebrews

Let's fast forward now, to several hundred years into the future; to the time after the Exodus

from Egypt (we'll cover the Exodus next week), and to the time of Solomon, King of Israel. Solomon is a ruler over a united Israel but that is going to change almost immediately after his death. His son inherits the throne and right away turmoil and a civil war occur; the nation of Israel is divided into two kingdoms. The Bible refers a number of ways to these two kingdoms: most typically as the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom..... or.... As the kingdoms of Judah and of Israel (Judah in the south, Israel in the north).

Ah, but there's a problem here. You see, the northern kingdom was not really called Israel after a short time. Calling that kingdom Israel is a fairly recent redaction in our Bibles. The oldest manuscripts clearly call the northern kingdom Ephraim. By now, of the 12 original tribes of Israel, 2 (Judah and Ephraim) had become dominant and ruled over the other 10. In Biblical times territories tended to be named after the dominant tribe who occupied an area. So the two kingdoms that resulted from the civil war of Israel were called by the names of the two tribes that controlled them: Judah in the south and Ephraim in the north.

Fast forward again; this time about 200 more years. Judah has struggled to stay separate from its pagan neighbors, and close to God; on the other hand, Ephraim has worked hard to associate itself with its neighbors' false gods. Assyria is now a regional power and it attacks Ephraim and empties it of its people. The people of Ephraim are scattered all over the Assyrian Empire and absorbed into the myriad cultures of Asia to the point that most of them lost their Hebrew identity. Ephraim/Israel is no longer a people; most of the people of Ephraim don't even know their heritage; much of the 10 tribes that formed Ephraim had mixed its Hebrew genes with the gentile people of the world. From the Western perspective, Ephraim had become lost into the world of gentiles.

Please pay attention to this: from Genesis forward Ephraim and Judah (at times called Israel and Judah) are referred to as the **two houses** of Israel. Together they make up the whole house of Israel. That is, these two halves of Israel together make up all of Israel. Now, with this as a background, we fast forward again. The Prophet Ezekiel, writing about 130 years after Assyria conquered Ephraim, writes about a prophetic future for the people of Ephraim in Ezekiel. 37. It is fascinating, and for Believers of our time, it ought to be earth-shaking if we understand what is being said. Let's read it.

**READ EZEKIEL 37 all**

Here we find what is sometimes called the two sticks prophecy or the dry bones prophecy. It says that in the End Times, the latter days, Ephraim will be rejoined with Judah. The two halves of Israel will once again be united; they will become a whole....the whole house of Israel. Let that sink in for a second. How could Ephraim, who had mostly become a part of the gentile world..... millions of people who don't even know that they have ancestral roots to the tribe of Ephraim (and some who do suspect the connection but struggle to prove it)..... how are they going to be reunited with the tribe of Judah? But even more, who is Judah, today? It is Jews. Jews are what members of the tribe of Judah have been called since the time of Babylon. Somehow, in the modern nation of Israel, which ONLY allows citizenship to those who can prove they are Jews, the lost and scattered people of Ephraim are going to be identified, and allowed to migrate and join with their Jewish brothers. And, it all stems from this odd happening from Genesis 48. And, by the way, this process has already begun and in a few weeks, we'll talk about it in more detail.

### **ISRAEL IN EGYPT**

Let's return to our discussion of the time of Joseph. It's a little after 1800 B.C. and the 12 tribes of Israel, now in Egypt, will remain there for 4 centuries at first as guests, then citizens, and finally as slaves.

Much has been written about the time that Israel, the Hebrews, spent in Egypt; most of it expressing skepticism that they were even there. Interestingly, the problem is not that a large center of ancient Hebrew culture hasn't been found in Egypt..... for it has. The problem is with the timing, the dating; according to archaeologists the Hebrew culture found in Egypt does not match with the Biblical timeline of WHEN Israel was supposed to have been in Egypt; therefore many scholars say the Bible story of Israel's captivity and exodus must simply be a folk tale.

Let me help you understand this issue. Archaeologists and Egyptologists approach the matter of understanding history in terms of time. WHEN something happened is at least as important as DID something happen, and if so, exactly WHAT happened. And the further back into

history we go the harder it is to ascertain the sequence of events, and what it led to. Today virtually all world history that takes place prior to about 600 BC is determined by one ancient institution: the line of Egyptian Pharaohs (or using the common scholarly term, the Egyptian Dynasties). That is because the most complete records of ancient times (found thus far) prior to 600 BC occurs with the Egyptians and this is because the Egyptians would carefully record certain significant events associated with each Pharaoh's reign. So we have the listing of a Pharaoh, major events that happened in his lifetime, and then often who it was that followed him as the new ruler. Because Egypt had interests far and wide in Africa, all over Asia, and as far as Europe to the west and India to the east, events that happened even in these far-flung areas were at times recorded and attributed to whichever Pharaoh was reigning at the time....IF the event was deemed important and had a favorable outcome for Egypt. By comparing these recorded events to the records of other civilizations dates can sometimes be reasonably extracted.

Now, here's the problem: this is hardly foolproof. There are major holes in the Egyptian Dynastic timeline. Sometimes there are gaps where they have never found information about a particular Pharaoh. Or there isn't enough information to know which Pharaoh he might have followed. So, scholars have to guess.

The next interesting ingredient is that in the modern scientific world, the Bible timeline is usually discarded. Because the Bible is, of course, a religious document, Archaeologists and Egyptologists generally refuse to even consider that it might be accurate. Even events that are chronicled in the Bible that would fill in large periods of time, in which there is no other source of information, are tossed aside as unworthy to either consider or investigate.

Now back to the issue of whether or not Israel was actually ever in Egypt: Egyptologists have indeed found the remains of an enormous Hebrew community in Egypt in the land of Goshen (a region of Lower Egypt), right where the Bible says they were. This community was estimated to have been able to accommodate perhaps 2 million people. It is called in scientific circles by its archaeological name, Tell ed-Daba. By its most recent historic name, it's called Avaris. And, it is located right next to Pi-Rameses, the great city of Pharaoh. It all matches up perfectly with the Biblical account except for one thing: because of the currently accepted dating system, using what scientists call "Regnal Dating", which is dating based on the incredibly incomplete and often baseless line of Egyptian royalty, archaeologists say this city of Hebrews existed at the wrong TIME!!

Since this is not a class on scientific anthropology let me summarize with this: an agnostic Egyptologist, Dr. David Roehl, decided in the mid 1980's to take the unprecedented action of assuming, from ONLY a historical perspective, that perhaps the Bible was an accurate record. Through 10 years of active research, and with the help of many of his non-Bible believing colleagues, he integrated the Egyptian dating system with Bible chronology and suddenly it all started lining up. He is now making great headway among the scientific community of revamping the entire archeological dating system that hasn't changed in nearly 150 years. And guess what; by using his new and revised system (still not universally accepted by the academic community) the time that this huge population of Hebrews lived in Avaris in the land of Goshen in Egypt, perfectly matches with the Bible story of captivity, the exodus, the conquest of the land of Canaan, and more.

So understand; you should listen with much skepticism to A&E, the History Channel, Discovery, and others that most often attempt to refute the Biblical accounts. Archaeologists have indeed found many Biblical cities; but because the scientists want to stick to the outdated and largely discredited Regnal Dating system they refuse to acknowledge these Biblical archeological finds.... not because they're not there, but because they supposedly occur in the wrong time.

Well, back to our account of Israel in Egypt.

The Bible is silent from the time of the death of Y'hosef (*Joseph*), who died at the age of 110, until the birth of Mosheh (*Moses*), a period of about 300 years. Extra-biblical sources indicate that for the first 150-200 years after their arrival in Egypt, the Israelites prospered and their numbers grew. The succession of Semite (not Egyptian) Pharaohs is tolerant of the Israelites, likely due to their realization of the family attachments to these distant relatives. They also remember, and continue to honor, the promises made by Pharaoh to Joseph, Joseph's decrees granting Israel citizenship and land, and Joseph's historical position as a sort of savior of Egypt.....saving them from famine. But, Egypt is now in turmoil. Y'hosef died about 1700 BC. Memories and promises can be short-lived things.

Egypt at this time was two nations: Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. In addition, a few areas within the boundaries of the formerly unified nation were governed by warlords; tribal

chieftains. It is helpful for us to know that the names Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt are exactly reversed according to our current traditions of indicating direction. Upper Egypt is to the south, while Lower Egypt is to the north.

After years of failed attempts by dozens of factions seeking power, an army led by an Egyptian general from Thebes (modern-day Luxor) finally overthrows the detested foreign Pharaoh. It's about 1600 BC and the new Pharaoh, an Egyptian, feels no obligation to Y'hosef's (Joseph's) 200-year-old decree regarding the Israelites. The driving need is to reunite the fractured Egyptian society and to re-establish a strong central government. To accomplish this, a common cause is needed. Changes are made. Overnight, the large Israelite population residing in Egypt is made the scapegoat for the nation's problems, and they are suddenly regarded as a threat to the throne. This scenario, with the Israelites, later called Jews, being blamed for a nation's problems and persecuted for it, will repeat itself time and again in the future.

Within a few years private ownership of property, which helped the Israelites achieve prosperity in Egypt in years past, was outlawed. The new Pharaoh, an Egyptian, decreed that the temples to the gods would now own 20% of the land, with the remainder belonging to Pharaoh alone. Peasants had no choice but to work the land as little more than serfs. Most Israelites had been reduced to peasants.

Egypt, propelled by a horrific memory of foreign control and shameful subjugation, protected their borders at all costs. But, they also directed their hatred and insecurity inward to the "foreigners", the Israelites, whose population had exploded into menacing proportions. Egypt re-built her armies, meant not to only defend but to conquer, with national Egyptians. The Israelites formed the foundation of the servant class workforce for Egypt's ambitious building projects. Egypt's loyal nationalist army, together with the forced labor of the Israelites, allowed Egypt a return to glory and once again to become a player on the world stage.

The Israelites paid a high price for their master's imperialistic designs. Their lives were miserable and without hope. Anti-Semitism was at fever pitch in Egypt. Even with the impossible conditions the Israelites suffered under, their numbers continued to increase which alarmed the populace and the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh, in an ancient method of birth control, ordered all male Israelite children killed immediately upon birth, to stem the tide.



### **MOSHEH (MOSES)**

It's about 1400 BC some 600 years after Abraham lived in Ur. In Egypt, a baby boy is born to the Levite family of Amram and Jochebed [Ex. 2] (Levites are one of the 12 tribes of Israel). They hide the child and, knowing the Egyptian guard will soon discover their secret, embark on a desperate plan putting the baby's fate entirely into God's hands. An Egyptian Princess, finding this Levite baby floating in a waterproofed basket in the Nile, rescues the child from sure death, likely at the mouth of a hungry Nile crocodile. The Princess makes him her own and names him Mose. We call him Moses. Mose is an Egyptian, not a Hebrew, name, and it means "born of". Mosheh, his Hebrew name means "to draw out" ..... that is, he was "drawn out" of the waters of the Nile.

Moses was raised in the palace of the Pharaoh, receiving nothing but the best. He learned math and writing and was taught fighting skills, accounting, and court etiquette. He would have been given authority over others and put his skills to use, by his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Most people of his time had an average life span of about 25 - 30 years, so maturing and assumption of useful duties occurred early by our standards. Yet, all evidence is that Israelites, for some reason, had considerably longer life spans. Despite some Hollywood versions to the contrary, Mosheh (*Moses*) was always aware of who he was and likely visited his birth mother often. She even suckled him for many months after he was plucked from the Nile, for his sister Miryam suggested as much to the Egyptian Princess.

One day when Mosheh (*Moses*) was grown he saw an Egyptian soldier strike an Israelite slave. Mosheh killed the guard and buried him in the desert sand. Why would he have done such a thing? Notice that the soldier didn't kill the slave, nor maim him.....he merely struck him. Surely an Egyptian soldier striking a Hebrew slave was a common, everyday occurrence that he witnessed often. Egyptian law called for capital punishment for the killing of an Egyptian, no matter whom the perpetrator. Mosheh (*Moses*) well knew this. At the very least, Mosheh willingly threw away the royal life he could have chosen. Could it have been that Mosheh (*Moses*), guilt-ridden and angry at being considered a half-breed by Israelite and Egyptian alike, and likely unwelcome in either camp, simply could no longer tolerate watching his parent's people whipped like animals while he lived a life of luxury? In any case, Mosheh (*Moses*) found out, much to his surprise, that there were witnesses to his murderous

act, so he fled the country.

He could not go to Canaan where the roads and cities were guarded by Egyptian troops who might recognize him; there would have been a warrant out for his arrest. Instead, he fled to a place of little interest to any conquering nation, and where only the hardest souls attempted to live: the Sinai [Ex. 3]. After trekking across the Sinai he crossed over to the other side of a finger of the Red Sea (now called the Gulf of Aqaba) and into the land of Midian, home to Bedouin desert wanderers. After an incident at the water well where Moses protected some local girls from being bullied by herders, a Midianite priest takes him in and gives him his eldest daughter as a wife. Mosheh (*Moses*) becomes a shepherd of flocks in a barren, primitive land. He spends the next several years contemplating the impulsive act that brought him here, fighting loneliness, trying to forget the privileged life he once lived in the Pharaoh's palace and learning to adapt to his new reality. He was seeking answers to why things are as they are; if all the gods of Egypt are false, as his father-in-law Yitro (*Jethro*) says, then who is God? Such are the things that can humble a man, and make him moldable.

About 40 years pass. Mosheh (*Moses*), now 80 years old, sees a flickering of light off in the distance, an uncommon occurrence in the desert wilderness [Ex. 3, 4]. He goes to investigate. On a tall hill the Bible alternately refers to as "the Mountain of God" and Mt. Horeb (and later as Mt. Sinai), Moses finds a bush that shines as if engulfed in flame, yet it doesn't burn up (in other words, the "burning bush" wasn't on fire". As he approaches it for a closer examination, a thundering voice from above forces him to his knees in terror. The God he has been seeking reveals Himself to Mosheh and tells him, "I will send you to Pharaoh, and you will free My people". This is not at all what Mosheh (*Moses*) had in mind for his life and informs God of that. God, in His mercy, makes him promises. Mosheh responds skeptically. God produces proofs. Mosheh asks to please be excused from the task and offers some lame excuse about a speech impediment. God gets angry. Mosheh (*Moses*) accepts the assignment.

It is of interest to note that modern Christians speculate that the speech problem Moses offered as an excuse for not wanting the job as liberator of God's people was a lisp or perhaps stuttering. Jewish tradition is that the speech problem had nothing to do with dysfunction. Rather, they believe that after all those years spent being raised by Egyptians, then 40 more years in Midian where the language would not have been Hebrew, Moses simply had an extraordinarily poor grasp of the Hebrew language.

Moses informs his Midianite family of his supernatural experience and takes his wife and children and strikes out for Egypt. I suspect somewhere along the line he decides that what lies ahead is too risky for his family and sends them back, because sometime later while leading the freed Israelite nation through the desert wilderness, the Book of Exodus tells us of a reunion between Mosheh (*Moses*) and his family.

Mosheh's older brother, Aharon (*Aaron*), who will soon become the first High Priest of Israel, greets Moses upon his arrival back in Egypt [Ex. 5]. Aharon (*Aaron*) has also been visited by God and informed of the plan. So Aharon (*Aaron*) convinced the tribal elders, in advance of Moses' arrival, that Mosheh has been sent from God to free them. Mosheh and Aharon take God's message to free His people to the Pharaoh, who promptly rewards their efforts by increasing the Israelites' already deadly workload. The tribal elders and the people are not thrilled with this turn of events and blame Mosheh. Mosheh confronts God about it [Ex. 6].

God, at this point, says some things that might be easily overlooked in the oft-told story of Mosheh (*Moses*) and Pharaoh. But, what God says is truly momentous. In paraphrase, God says "I appeared to Avraham (*Abraham*), Yitz'chak (*Isaac*), and Ya'acov (*Jacob*), but I did NOT make myself known by my name. That is, up to now God had not revealed His formal name to humankind. So people called Him by a number of titles. His name, says God, is YHWH (Yahweh or perhaps Yehoveh). Say to the Israelite people: I am Yahweh, I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians.....and I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God."

Here is a new beginning. A beginning with a promise from God to Mosheh and the Israelites, a people God is calling out to be His own. A personal God who wants to be known by His name, who detests Egypt, loves His people, and will fight for them. This is the start of Israel's history as a nation.

Mosheh (*Moses*) visits Pharaoh again and insists that the Israelites are freed. Pharaoh declines [Ex. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11]. Mosheh warns Pharaoh. Pharaoh is not used to being threatened. Pharaoh bristles with anger and refuses to let go of the Israelites. Pharaoh's refusal can be well understood when one considers that to allow the Israelites to leave would be tantamount to destroying the entire working class of Egypt. The Israelites represented not only the unskilled labor but the best craftsmen as well. Imagine what would happen to the United States if all of our carpenters, plumbers, electricians, cement layers, steelworkers,

roofers, painters, and laborers of every variety suddenly disappeared. This is exactly what was being proposed to Pharaoh by Moses.

So, to attain the release of His people, something drastic was needed. Yehoveh attacks the Egyptians through their supposed gods. The Nile turns to blood, frogs inundate the land, boils inflict the people, locusts attack crops, and finally, God lets the Egyptian people and their Pharaoh feel the devastation the Israelites felt at the time of Mosheh's birth: all firstborn die **[Ex. 12]**. Interestingly this deadly curse applies to all Egyptian-owned livestock as well.

We'll continue next time as Israel readies itself to leave Egypt and chart a new, but unknown, course.