

Introduction

After the revelation of Joseph to his brothers, and the communication of this to Jacob back in the land of Canaan, there is quite a bit of time until the deaths of Jacob and his son Joseph. This last section of Genesis covers that history and prepares us for the book of Exodus a few hundred years later.

Chronology

Jacob went down to Egypt at the age of 130 (47:9) and died at the age of 147 (47:28). This means that there were 17 years from the events of chapters 45-46, which included five more years of famine and 12 additional years. Joseph was 110 years old when he died (50:26) and he went to Egypt at age 17, and stood before Pharaoh in prominence starting at age 30 (37:2, 41:46). So he was in official office for about 80 years (110 – 30). Wow! During that time, it appears from the Bible text that Joseph survived for more than one Pharaoh. He called himself a “father to Pharaoh,” perhaps indicating that the first Pharaoh had died sometime during the seven years of plenty and a new Pharaoh was over the land. With 80 years of service to Egypt, he was probably a counselor to several Pharaohs.

We can compute some more chronological information. Since Joseph was 30 when he stood before Pharaoh, and there were 7 years of plenty and 2 years of famine by the time that Jacob came down to Egypt at age 130, this means that Jacob had baby Joseph when he was about 91 years of age. Since this was at the end of 14 years of Jacob’s service to Laban (30:25), Jacob was 77 when he went to serve Laban. So then at their reunion in Egypt, Jacob was 130, Joseph 39. When Jacob was 147, Joseph would have been 56. It would have been 54 years later that Joseph died at age 110. So:

Genesis 46–50 cover a period of $54 + 17 = 71$ years.

Genesis 37–45 cover a period of $39 - 17 = 22$ years.

Genesis 28–37 cover a period of $14 + 17 = 31$ years.

Of the 17 mentioned on the line above, 6 of those were in Jacob’s last segment of serving Laban when his flocks grew so enormous (he served him a total of 20 years, 31:38). The remaining 11 occurred after he left Laban, was reunited with Esau, and settled in the land of Canaan.

Genesis 23-27 cover a period of $77 - 37 = 40$ years.

The 37 comes from the fact that Sarah died at 127 and bore Isaac when she was 90.

Genesis 17-22 cover a period of $127 - 90 = 37$ years.

Genesis 12-16 cover a period of $100 - 75 = 25$ years.

So the first part of Genesis covers at least a couple thousand years. The last 39 chapters account for 226 years.

1. Jacob’s Reunion with Joseph, Genesis 46

This was one time that a journey down to Egypt was approved by God (see 26:2, 12:10) because God had ordained the nation to grow large there, to suffer bondage, and to be delivered by Moses.

The people who were part of Jacob’s family are listed in this chapter. There were 70 altogether (46:27). Imagine that in several hundred years, this group had

grown to number in the hundreds of thousands (as much as 2 to 3 million!) by the time of the Exodus.

Joseph meets his dad again in verse 29, and prepared his brothers for their interview with Pharaoh, so that Pharaoh would look favorably on them and give them the land of Goshen, which was suitable for their livestock.

2. The Five Additional Years of Famine, Genesis 47

Shortly after coming down to Egypt, Jacob and his family is presented before Pharaoh, who agrees to give them a choice piece of property in his land to sustain their livelihood. Beyond that, he offers that if there are any competent men among the brothers, he has a job for them tending his livestock. He has already seen that whatever is in Joseph’s hand has prospered, and so may have figured that if he gave Joseph’s brothers some responsibilities, they would prosper as well.

Pharaoh spoke with Jacob in 47:7-10. Notice that Jacob blessed Pharaoh! Consider this in light of Heb. 7:7. But also consider it in light of the fact that Jacob was saved and believed in the God of Israel and so had a real blessing to offer, unlike Pharaoh who was almost certainly not a believer in the God of Israel at all.

The famine continued on for five more years and the Egyptian people ran out of money with which to buy grain. One wonders why they might not have saved some for themselves during the years of famine. In any case, they had to sell their livestock, then their property, in order to continue to buy food. As a result, all the land in Egypt became “government owned” after this. The only exception was the land of the priests, who owned their property by title from Pharaoh. Then Joseph helped the people by giving them seed to sow their fields. They owed 20% of the return to the government as a tax and could keep the rest for themselves.

By this point, Jacob is getting nearer to the end of his life and he makes some funeral plans ahead of time by making Joseph promise that he would not be buried in Egypt, but rather in the burial plot that Abraham had purchased (Genesis 23).

3. The Blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim, Genesis 48

This chapter is about the blessing that Jacob bestowed on his two grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim, who were Joseph’s two sons. Jacob recounted how God had promised him the Abrahamic covenant and the land for an everlasting possession. He then said that he was “adopting” Joseph’s two sons as his own, so that they would become two tribes in Israel.

You will recall the important place of the blessing at the end of the family patriarch’s life (chapter 27). This was going to happen again, this time with Jacob presiding over the blessing instead of stealing the blessing. Then a surprising thing happened. Despite Jacob’s advanced age and poor eyesight, he knew to bless the younger son Ephraim above the older son Manasseh. This blessing is actually a prophecy that Ephraim would become greater than his older brother, just like the younger Jacob was chosen over his older brother Esau.

The adoption ended up leaving Joseph with a double portion of the inheritance above his other brothers.

The Prophetic Blessing of Jacob on His Sons, Genesis 49

Chapter 49 gives each son a prophecy. Reuben is laid low because of his sin with his father’s concubine Bilhah (35:22). Simeon and Levi were also chastised

because of their violent behavior. Judah is prophesied to be prominent among the brothers, as a lion, and a scepter is mentioned as not departing from him. This is obviously a picture of the Messiah.

Zebulun is prophesied to live by the seaside. Issachar would become a band of slaves. Dan was given a special place of judgment (as his name indicated, 30:6). Gad, Asher, and Naphtali get very small portions of the chapter, but they are blessed as well.

Next comes Joseph. His fruitfulness is extolled. He was tried very sorely in his early life, but he came through and was strengthened. Jacob especially offered his blessing on Joseph. Benjamin, his youngest, was also complimented on his strength.

Jacob (Israel) once again commanded that his body be buried in the land of his fathers in the cave of Machpelah. Very soon after saying these words, he mustered his last strength to get into bed and he died there.

The Burial of Jacob and End of the Story of Joseph, Genesis 50

The process of embalming is first mentioned here in the Bible. This took 40 days, and a total of 70 days passed for the mourning period. The Egyptians mourned the death of Jacob, as he was the father of one of their prominent leaders. Joseph appealed to Pharaoh to let him bury his father as instructed, and Pharaoh consented. There were 7 days of additional mourning once they reached their homeland.

Upon the passing of their father, the other brothers were once again stricken by their guilty conscience that perhaps Joseph would now get back at them for their sins against him. He reaffirmed to them that he believed God had allowed the sin to happen to save the nation of Israel. He trusted in God, not his brothers, and could truly forgive his brothers for what they had done. How marvelous!

To end the account, we are told that Joseph died at the age of 110 and was embalmed in Egypt. He made the family promise that when the nation left Egypt, they would take his bones to be buried in the land of Canaan.

Conclusion

Remember that all of the book of Genesis was penned by Moses under the inspiration of God some 400 years after the events had occurred. It is without doubt that there was a healthy and accurate oral tradition of these great events passed down for generations, but God ensured that we have the completely accurate account of what happened.

There are lots of things to remember from the book of Genesis, but here are a couple of big ones:

1. The Abrahamic covenant, and its continuance through Isaac, Jacob, and the children of Jacob. It remains in effect today in the sense that some of its promises have not yet been fulfilled.
2. The providence of God over human history, as seen throughout the book of Genesis and particularly in the life of Joseph. God knows what He is doing!
3. The negative and potentially long-lasting and far-reaching consequences of sin. We saw that death reigned because of the sin of Adam. Blessings and opportunities were lost because of sin.