

Lesson 4

PEOPLE OF ISRAEL IN EGYPT



Jacob had twelve children. Reuben was the eldest and Benjamin, the youngest. And Jacob was most fond of Joseph among all his children. Jacob had even given him a long robe with long sleeves as a sign of his favour. Joseph's brothers began to hate him because of their father's favouritism towards him.

Joseph's Dream

Once Joseph told his brothers of a dream that he had. He said to them: "Listen to this dream that I dreamed. **There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf**". They asked: "**Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?**" So they hated him even more because of his dream and his words.

Joseph had another dream. He told his family: “Look, I have had another dream; the sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me”. Hearing this his father rebuked him saying: “What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come. I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?” His brothers felt all the more jealous of him (Gen. 37:5-11).

Joseph in Egypt

One day Joseph went to these brothers who were grazing their sheep far from home. When they saw him from afar they conspired to kill him. But Reuben the eldest forbade this. So they took his special robe from him and threw him into a pit. Then a group of traders going to Egypt came that way. So they rescued Joseph from the pit and sold him to the traders who took him to Egypt. His brothers then dipped his long robe in a goat's blood and took it to their father to convince him that some wild animal could have eaten him.

The traders took Joseph to Egypt and sold him there. Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard, bought him, Pharaoh was the ruler of Egypt. The Lord God was with Joseph and so he excelled in all that he did. Seeing that Joseph was efficient and good, Potiphar made Joseph his overseer and entrusted all he had to his care. Potiphar's wife got interested in Joseph as he was handsome and good-looking and requested him to sleep with her. As Joseph never yielded to her wish, she told lies about him to Potiphar who then put Joseph in prison.

Interpreting Dreams

The Lord was kind to Joseph and he found favour with the jailer. The jailer entrusted the supervision of the prisoners to Joseph. The Lord made him prosper in everything he did (Gen. 39:21-23).

After some time the chief cook and the cupbearer of the Pharaoh were kept in custody for some crime in the same prison as Joseph was. While in prison these two had two different dreams. Joseph interpreted each of them. Joseph's interpretation were proved correct soon after.

After two years the Pharaoh had a dream. In his dream, Pharaoh was standing by the Nile when seven sleek and fat cows came up from the river and started grazing in the grassy field by the riverbank. Then seven other cows, ugly and thin, came out of the river and stood before the other cows. The ugly, thin cows swallowed the sleek, fat cows. And pharaoh woke up. When he slept again he had another dream. Seven ears of grain, plump and good were growing on a stalk. Then seven ears, thin and blighted, sprouted after them. The seven thin ears of grain swallowed up the seven plump ears. When he woke up he knew it was a dream. But in the morning his spirit was troubled. So he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt and described the dream to them. But there was no one who could interpret them to pharaoh.

Joseph: Governor of Egypt

Pharaoh's cupbearer whose dream Joseph had interpreted in the prison was by now back with Pharaoh. He informed the Pharaoh of Joseph. Pharaoh immediately sent for Joseph and asked him to interpret his dreams. Saying that both dreams meant the same thing Joseph interpreted the dreams thus: "There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. After that there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the Land" (Gen. 41:29, 30). Joseph added that the dreams will become a reality very soon and that the Pharaoh must start work to face the problem. He also suggested that a suitable person must be found and appointed to collect and store, during the years of plenty, grains and other provisions to feed the people during the famine. Pharaoh was pleased with

Joseph's suggestions and appointed him governor of Egypt. To survive the years of famine Joseph collected and stored foodstuff in all the cities of Egypt. Meanwhile, Joseph got married and had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. After seven years the famine came. People of all regions suffered poverty. They all came to Egypt and Joseph sold grain to all these.

Israel to Egypt

When they heard that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob told his sons; “Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die” (Gen 42:2). Thus Jacob's sons proceeded to Egypt. Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not. Though Joseph gave them grain he subjected them to many tests and tricks. In the end he revealed himself. He said: “ I am Joseph. Is my father still alive? (Gen. 45:3).

This revelation frightened them: for they thought that Joseph will put them in prison. But Joseph reassured them saying: “Do not be distressed or angry with yourself that you sold me here, for God sent me here before you to preserve life, to keep alive a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here but God himself” (Gen. 45:5-8).

Joseph asked his brothers to bring their father to Egypt. Joseph's brothers returned to Canaan and told everything to Jacob. Jacob was very pleased to hear all this. He collected all his property and proceeded to Egypt. On the journey God spoke to Jacob in a vision saying: “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I myself will go down with you to Egypt” (Gen. 46:3-4).

When Jacob arrived in Egypt Joseph received him in great joy. As per the decree of Pharaoh a region of the land was given to Jacob and his children. The land given to them, called **Ramses** was the most fertile region of Egypt. Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years more. Israel became very rich there.

The story of Joseph in the Old Testament is something that attracts anybody. He came to Egypt as a slave. He had many problems there even a long prison term. But in the end he became the chief administrator of Egypt and was able to afford safety and protection for his father and brothers. The life of Joseph makes it clear to us that the ways of the Lord are indeed miraculous. It was through Joseph that God prepared the way for Israel to reach Egypt. That was Joseph's share in God's plan of salvation.

Twelve Tribes and Apostles

It was the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob that became the twelve tribes of Israel. These twelve tribes have great importance in the history of salvation. The people of God in the Old Testament were led by the heads of the twelve tribes and their descendants. In the same way the people of God in the New Testament are led by twelve apostles and their successors.

What we see in the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. As we learn the Old Testament History, we should try to understand properly God's plan of salvation. We should also realize that today it is through us that God's plans are being fulfilled. And we must offer our lives for that cause.

Let us pray

O' God, who protects us in all the situations of our life,
help us to be faithful in our life.

Read and recount

Narrate how Joseph revealed himself to his brothers who came to Egypt. (Gen.44:1-34).



Word of God for our guidance

“by the God of your father, who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above”
(Gen. 49:25).

My decision

Like Joseph who dealt lovingly with those who maltreated him I will also deal lovingly with those who treat me bad.

Let us do

Find out the names of the apostles from the Bible and write down in the columns below.

Let us find out the answer

1. What was the interpretation that Joseph gave to Pharaoh's dream?
2. Why did Jacob's sons go to Egypt?
3. What did God say to Jacob on his journey to Egypt?
4. As per the divine plan what does the life story of Joseph communicate to us?
5. Who are the persons who guide the church, the New Testament people of God, in the place of Old Testament fathers?