

Blessings & Cursings

Long Beach Alliance Church • April 25th, 2010 • Pastor Chris Lankford

But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

~Exodus 1:7 (NASB)

1) The Theme Of The First Five Books Of The Bible

- A) Early in the book of Genesis, Abram is commanded by God to go “to the land which I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). Before the promises comes the command!
- B) In light of Abram’s obedience to the command, God delivers a three-fold promise to Abram (12:1-3).
 - i) God promises to deliver Abram (and family) to a land “which God will show them” (12:1). God promises land!
 - ii) God promises to make Abram into a great nation with a great name (12:2). God promises descendants!
 - iii) God promises to bless the whole earth through Abram (the man and, subsequently, the nation – 12:3). God promises blessing!
- C) These three elements (land, descendants, and blessing) are the central and guiding theme of the first five books of the Older Testament.

- D) The command to obey and the promises which follow are the central crux of the “Abrahamic Covenant,” which God foreshadows in Genesis 12, and explains in greater detail in Genesis 15 & 17.

2) The Transition Between Genesis & Exodus

- A) The latter portion of the book of Genesis specifically deals with how God blessed the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with descendants (Genesis 12:2, 7, 13:15, 15:4, 13, 16, 18, 16:10, 17:2, 4-7, 16, 19, 21:12, 18, 22:16, 26:3, 24, 28:13, 35:11-12, 46:3).
- B) By the time we reach the end of Genesis, the descendants of Jacob are “organized” as tribes which receive the blessings of their father*, Jacob who is also called “Israel” (Genesis 32:28). Thus, these are the “sons of Israel...”

MOTHER	SON	MEANING OF NAME	REFERENCE OF BIRTH (GENESIS)	ORDER OF BLESSING	SYMBOL OF BLESSING	REFERENCE OF BLESSING (GENESIS)
L E A H	Reuben	Behold, a son	29:32	1	Reckless	49:3-4
	Simeon	Hearing	29:33	2	Violence	49:5-7
	Levi	Attachment	29:34	3	Violence	49:5-7
	Judah	Praise	29:35	4	Lion	49:8-12
B I L H A H	Dan	Judgment	30:6	7	Serpent	49:16-18
	Naphtali	Wrestle	30:8	10	Doe	49:21
Z I L P A H	Gad	Good fortune	30:11	8	Raider	49:19
	Asher	Happy	30:13	9	Rich food	49:20
L E A H	Issachar	Reward	30:18	6	Donkey	49:14-15
	Zebulun	Abode	30:20	5	Ships	49:13
R A C H E L	Joseph	May he add	30:24	11	Fruitful	49:22-26
	Benjamin	Son of the right hand	35:18	12	Wolf	49:27

C) The extraordinary story of Joseph's miraculous rise to leadership in Egypt (cf. Genesis 41:38-45), forgiveness of his brothers (45:1-15), and the eventual migration of his father Jacob's entire household (46:1ff) finally comes to an end with Joseph's death and embalming (50:22-26).

D) The conclusion of Joseph's story emphasizes God's loving control of both people and circumstances (50:20), which serves as a "bridge" to a new chapter in God's great story, how He will take Israel's 12 tribes (Exodus 1:1-6) and make them into His own nation to bless all peoples!

3) Time Of Great Blessing

A) The wording of Exodus 1:1 is exactly the same as Genesis 46:8. Most notable are the differing contexts. Genesis 46:8 looks forward to the tribes of Israel coming to Egypt, whereas Exodus 1:1 looks forward to eventual departure.

B) The death of Joseph and his brothers (Exodus 1:6) in Egypt marked the beginning of an age of extraordinary blessing. Most notable is that Israel becomes numerous and "exceedingly mighty" (1:7).

* Old Testament blessings can seem mysterious and confusing for most 21st-century readers. Since we have little parallel for verbal blessings, it is difficult to understand why they had any lasting significance for families or individuals in Genesis. Let me add a few important insights into the custom, to help us understand the significance and impact of Jacob's blessings of his sons. First, a blessing was the recognized way for the transfer of goods and authority to children prior to death. It was the ancient manner of transferring your inheritance. Second, the eldest male child (women seldom received an inheritance. A woman's well-being was secured exclusively by her father or husband) received a double-portion of the inheritance to signify authority and birthright. Third, blessings were covenants (legally binding) with God – so there was no renegotiating or revocation of a blessing once it was given. Blessings were binding. Finally, blessings sometimes had spiritual significance to them, as though the speaker was giving a prophetic view of what the future would be like. This was true of the blessings amongst God's chosen people (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel) in Genesis. There are aspects to the blessings (ignoring primogeniture, precision and detail of blessing, future fulfillment of blessing) which extend beyond the human element and reveal God's sovereign hand in the words of the patriarch giving the blessing. Ultimately, what we are witnessing is God's voice through the patriarch, establish God's Kingdom by God's design. (Various sources cited, especially *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE), Volume 1 (A-D)*, by A.C. Myers, pgs. 523-524 & *Genesis*, by Victor P. Hamilton, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT) various selections).

4) A New Age Of Difficult Cursings

A) Everything in Egypt suddenly changes with the rise to power of a "new king[†]" (1:8) who had no knowledge of Joseph. This ushered in a period of tremendous persecution (1:11ff) and curses for Israel.

† As a result of the similarity in Semitic ethnicity and the assumption of Asiatic deference between Joseph and the Hyksos, many scholars have dated the Joseph narrative (Genesis 37, 39-50) within the Second Intermediate Period of Hyksos rulership. This view assumes a later date for the Exodus of Moses (within the reign of Rameses II), around the period of the 19th Dynasty (c.a. 1250 B.C.). As support, some scholars note that the specificity of Potiphar as "an Egyptian" (Genesis 39:1) as indication of Hyksos rulership and geography (probably Avaris), otherwise there would be no need to indicate Potiphar's ethnicity. Placing the Joseph narrative within the Hyksos period requires one to disregard a literal dating of 1st Kings 6:1, which details that the Exodus occurred 480 years before the fourth year of King Solomon's reign (c.a. 966 B.C.). This is justified (in part) because of the use of "the land of Raameses" in Genesis 47:11, and the use of the city-name "Raameses" in Exodus 1:11, which would not have been in use in either Joseph or Moses' time period. A strictly conservative chronology of 1 Kings 6:1 and Exodus 12:40 presents the Joseph narrative happening prior to Hyksos rulership, with Jacob's family migrating to Egypt around 1876 B.C. (966 B.C. (Solomon's 4th Year) – 480 (Exodus = 1446 B.C.) – 430 (Captivity) = c.a. 1876 B.C.). This would place Joseph in service to two Pharaohs, Sesostris II (1897-1878 B.C.) & Sesostris III (1878-1843 B.C.).

I am in support of this conservative view which supports a late Middle Kingdom Joseph narrative chronology. First, we know that groups from Canaan were sold into slavery in Egypt, a strong parallel with Joseph's circumstances. Second, Potiphar was an Egyptian leader of the royal bodyguard, which would have been an oddity within a Hyksos setting. Third, given knowledge of the hostilities of inter-city warfare and political divisions which existed between Canaanite groups, it is increasingly doubtful that the Hyksos would have automatically been friendly to Joseph, a Hebrew. In fact, given their hostility and propensity for violence, the Hyksos are the most reasonable group to have enslaved the Hebrews as security against "those who hate us" (Exodus 1:10) and initiated the building of Pithom and Raameses in Exodus 1:11. Fourth, Joseph is described several times as the ruler over all the land of Egypt (Genesis 41:41, 42:6, 30, 45:26), a much more feasible possibility in the Late Middle Kingdom than in the Hyksos period (where the rulership of all of Egypt was limited to the 15th Dynasty, c.a. 1663-1555 B.C.). Fifth, the presentation of Potiphara (Genesis 41:45), who was a priestess of On/Heliopolis is much more likely an Egyptian ruler's reward than a Hyksos ruler's reward, because the cult-god Seth was venerated by the Hyksos, instead of a solar (Heliopolis) deity, very common amongst native Egyptians. Sixth, the Genesis 46:34 reference to "all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians" doesn't fit the ethnic background of a Hyksos rulership. Rather, this would indicate a native Egyptian perspective. Finally, it is notable that upon the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt by Pharaoh Ahmose (Amosis) (c.a. 1545 B.C.), the Hebrews were not expelled from the land, which would be expected if they were "friends" of the Hyksos rulers.

It is my view that the Joseph narrative fits best, both biblically and pragmatically, into a late Middle Kingdom setting. As is illustrated on the timeline (insert), this presents Joseph serving Pharaoh Sesostris II & III, as his family immigrated to Egypt around 1876 B.C. Since Joseph would have been around 40 years old (cf. Genesis 41:46 & 45:11) at this time, he would have died around c.a. 1806 B.C. (cf. Genesis 50:22, 26). Interestingly, this is the exact time period of which the Hyksos would have begun to come into significance. The Hyksos, Asiatic immigrants themselves, functioned as "taskmasters" (Exodus 1:11), enslaving the Hebrews and compelling them to build both Pithom and Raameses, anachronistic location references for the benefit of later readers of the Pentateuch. (Collected from various journal, commentary and historical sources).

Comparative Study Between Modern West vs. Ancient Near East (ANE) Culture & Worldview

In order to enhance the transfer of Scripture's timeless truths, it is helpful to have an understanding of the differences between the behavior, beliefs, culture, values, and worldview of the Ancient Near East (the biblical context) and the Modern West (our own context). The following chart, created by John Pilch*, provides a helpful list in identifying some of these critical differences.

Modern West	Ancient Near East
Egocentric identity	Group-centric identity
Promote independence	Promote interdependence
See the parts	See the whole
Urge uniqueness	Urge conformity
See autonomy from social solidarity	Seek integration into social reality
Primary responsibility to self and individual potential	Primary obligation to others and the development of the group
Group membership results from a renewable contract	Group membership results from one's inherited social and familiar place in society
Behavior is governed by rights and duties specified by one's personal goals	Behavior is dictated by the group's mores and sanctions of the leader's authority
Individual worth is based on individual achievements or individual possessions	Individual worth is rooted in familial status, social position, class, or caste
Status is achieved	Status is ascribed
Achieving and competing are motivational necessities and the norm	Achieving and competing are disruptive to the group
Assert one's own rights	Submit personal rights to the group
Equality is a key value	Hierarchy is the key value
Friendships are functional	Friendships involve long-term loyalties or obligational commitments
Any group is viewed only as a collection of individuals	Any group is viewed as an organismic unit, inextricably interlocked
The individual self is viewed as an entity separate from the physical world and from other persons	The individual self is viewed as organically connected with the physical world and with other persons
Any personal decision is made by the self alone, even if it is not in the group's best interests	Any personal decision is made in consultation with the group and often in obedience or deference to its will
Private autonomy	Corporate solidarity
Strong personal identity	Strong familial identity
Self-reliant achievement	Interdependent collaboration
Strong desire to be personally satisfied	Strong desire to be interpersonally satisfying or satisfactory

* Walton, John. *The NIV Application Commentary ~ Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001, 25-26, from John Pilch, *Introducing the Cultural Context of the Old Testament* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1991), 97.

