

Joseph – the Background. Adamsdown. 10 March 2009.

Read : Gen. 45. 1-11; 50. 14-20; Psa. 105. 16-18, 23-26¹.

One thing which must strike even the casual reader of Genesis as decidedly odd is the relatively large amount of space devoted to Joseph. For his story occupies no less than twelve full chapters², and is equalled for length only by the story of Abraham himself. And yet neither the priestly nor the royal tribe – which descended from Levi and Judah respectively – came from Joseph – and he doesn't figure in any way in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus. And yet, as I say, a relatively large amount of space is devoted to his story. Clearly therefore it must be of great importance for other reasons.³

And before we look at any of the details of Joseph's life-story – as we shall, God willing, in later meetings – I want us to stand back and consider its context – to ask, that is, where his life-story fits into the main Bible storyline. And I make no apology if my talk this evening comes over as something of a history lesson – because to some extent it is just that – but I believe firmly that, without some such background, we will be in real danger of losing sight of the wood for the trees in our later studies.

I guess we are all aware that, chronologically at least, the life of Joseph functions as a kind of bridge between the days of the patriarchs on the one hand and the formation of the nation of Israel on the other.

And the first point I need to make – and to make strongly – is that, given the account we have of the lives of the patriarchs, Jacob's family certainly couldn't stay where they were – no matter how comfortable they may have felt there. And this for at least two reasons.

(1) First, because Jacob and his immediate descendants needed a safe space in which they could increase numerically – a place where they could multiply and grow from a relatively small family into 'a great nation' – which is what the God of glory had promised Abraham long before – when Abraham was still living in Ur of the Chaldees, Gen. 12. 1-2; Acts 7. 2-3.

In Abraham's own days, his 'household' – his 'clan' – posed no threat whatever to the surrounding tribes and nations. Although there were Canaanites in the land – a fact we are told twice, Gen. 12. 6; 13. 7 – these clearly saw it as no problem that Abraham had 318 trained servants, Gen. 14. 14. The only strife which Abraham encountered was between his herdsmen and those of his nephew Lot, Gen. 13. 7, and the only conflict in which Abraham was ever involved was against the foreign invader Chedorlaomer, Gen. 14. 13-16. If anything, Abraham was highly respected by the people of Canaan. And when we read in chapter 23 of his negotiation for a burying place for Sarah, we hear 'the sons of Heth' answer him, 'You are a mighty prince (a mighty chief, leader) among us', Gen. 23. 6.

I note, however, that in the days of Isaac there were already indications that some of his neighbours resented his prosperity and relative strength. Genesis 26 records how 'Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him, and stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and filled them with earth. And Abimelech (the king of the Philistines) said to Isaac, Go from us, for you are much mightier than we. And Isaac', we read, 'departed from there', Gen. 26. 12-17.

When we come to the days of Jacob, we find he was terrified that, on account of the actions of two of his sons – when they massacred the men of Shechem without mercy – he was terrified that since he was 'few in number', the 'inhabitants of the land ... the Canaanites and the Perizzites' would 'gather themselves together against' him and destroy both him and his household, Gen. 34. 30.

Clearly then, in the days of the patriarchs, the clan was nowhere near large enough to conquer the land of Canaan and to possess it. Psalm 105 stresses that, when God both gave and confirmed His promise to the patriarchs to give them the land of Canaan as their inheritance, 'they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it', Psa. 105. 9-12.

And it is important for us to note that Jacob's direct descendants, who, in the event, went down from Canaan to Egypt, numbered only 70 – and that it was *there – in Egypt* – that they increased and multiplied in a most remarkable and unnatural manner. As Moses recorded later in Deuteronomy 10, 'Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the Lord your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude', Deut. 10. 22.⁴

But, had Jacob's family remained in Canaan, there was no way that the tribes and nations around them would have stood back and watched them develop towards nation status, and thereby pose a very real threat to them. At some point, Jacob and his growing clan would have been attacked and wiped out.

As yet, they were only a family – and as such were too insignificant to arouse the hostility of the Canaanites. But any indications of major increase and growth would inevitably – and immediately – bring them into conflict with their neighbours – from which conflict they had no hope of emerging. In the eyes of Israel's neighbours, a family was one thing ... a nation was something entirely different.

The big issue then was how to get the children of Israel past the critical point ... past that point where they were strong enough to excite the hostility and military action of the surrounding nations, yet not strong enough to defend themselves – let alone to defeat their attackers and occupy their land.

And we do remember – don't we – that God had spoken to Abraham in terms of making his descendants, not only into a nation, but into a 'great' nation, Gen. 12. 2.⁵

And there was not only the issue of their numerical size, and status as a nation. Territory was another key issue. Up until now, the patriarchs and their descendants had been 'strangers ('foreigners') and sojourners' in Canaan, Gen. 23. 4 – owning next to no property there. Yes, Abraham had his cave and field at Machpelah, near Hebron, which he had purchased from Ephron the Hittite – initially as a burying place for Sarah, Gen. 23. 17-20, and where later, not only Sarah, but Abraham himself, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah were buried – and where, one day, Jacob would also be buried, Gen. 50. 13.⁶ Yes, Jacob had the parcel of ground which he had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem, Gen. 33. 19; Josh. 24. 32; John 4. 5.⁷ But, so far, the patriarchs and their descendants possessed no other property.

And yet ... if God was to fulfil His repeated promises to Abraham, recorded in Gen. 12. 7; 13. 15 – and to keep His repeated covenant with him – that He – the Lord – would surely give 'all the land of Canaan' to his descendants, Gen. 15. 18; 17. 8 ... if God was to prove true to His renewed promises to Isaac in chapter 26 (verse 3⁸) and Jacob in both chapters 28 (verse 13) and 35 (verse 12) that He would give the land to their descendants ... if the Lord was to fulfil His promises, then at some point the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must become powerful enough to field an army capable of routing and conquering the Canaanites – and of taking possession of their land. And we know that, in the event, according to Exodus 12, it was 'about 600,000' men of military age who left Egypt, v. 37⁹ – which implies a nation numbering somewhere in the region of two million.¹⁰

But where could Jacob's family possibly go that they would be allowed to expand into a nation of that size?

The great need was for an 'incubator' – a *big* 'incubator' – a *very big* 'incubator' – where the potential nation could grow and become strong.

And the only candidate was the land of Egypt. Indeed, the Egypt of the day was the only kingdom in the entire Middle East large enough to permit such growth – the only kingdom big enough to fit the bill. And, indeed, as we know well, even there the Pharaoh of Exodus 1 became nervous and uneasy about Israel's abnormal growth rate and size, viewing them as a very real threat to his authority, Exod. 1. 9-10.¹¹

And so Egypt must be the God-provided 'incubator' – where the Lord could preserve, nurture and multiply the children of Israel until, as we read from Psalm 105, 'He ...made them stronger than their enemies', Psa. 105. 24, and so able to invade and conquer the land of Canaan.

I said that Jacob's family couldn't stay where they were – and that for at least two reasons. The first was that they needed a safe and large location in which they could increase numerically.

(2) The second reason was that they couldn't stay *where* they were because they couldn't stay as they were.

In their early days, there was little evidence of any sense of unity among Joseph's brothers. The intended founder fathers of the nation were the sons of four different mothers, showing little, if any, brotherly love the one for the other.¹²

But, at least equally important, God had called them that they might be, not only 'a great nation', but 'a holy nation', Exod. 19. 6. And, for the most part, their present lifestyle was anything but holy. Both spiritually and morally the state of the sons of Israel was at an all-time low. We see nothing in them of the close relationship with God which had marked their forefathers.

For example, both Abraham and Isaac had objected to marriages outside of their own people and had taken steps to ensure that their sons did not marry Canaanites, Gen. 24. 3; 28. 1.

But things were very different now. Indeed, it seems that the Holy Spirit draws this very point to our attention by wedging chapter 37 between chapters 36 and 38. Noting that the opening verse of chapter 37 stresses that Jacob and his family were in the land of Canaan, we find, on the one hand, that the second verse of chapter 36 reminds us how Esau took wives of the daughters of Canaan, a reference back to the end of chapter 26, which tells us that

'Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: who were a grief of mind to Isaac and to Rebekah', Gen. 26. 34-35 – which is why Rebekah later said the Isaac, 'I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?', Gen. 27. 46. And, although Rebekah didn't actually say it, the implication was clear ... 'And if that happens yours won't be worth living either!'

And we find, on the other hand, that the second verse of chapter 38 tells us how Judah took a wife of a daughter of a Canaanite. Judah, the son of Jacob through whom the Messiah would one day come¹³, was so carnal that he was willing, not only to take a heathen for his closest companion and to marry a Canaanite woman, but happily to purchase the services of a young woman he believed to be a pagan cult prostitute. And I note, in passing, his real, but secret, reason for refusing to give his son Shelah as a husband to Tamar: 'Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown. For he said (that is, his unexpressed thought was), Lest he also die like his brothers', Gen. 38. 11. The verses immediately before tell us that the real cause of death of his first two sons was their own sinfulness. But Judah clearly believed that Tamar was a woman 'who brought bad luck' – a superstitious notion more worthy of a heathen Canaanite than of a member of the family of faith. And I note that this rather sordid story told in Genesis 38 is the only recorded incident in 22 years of the history of the house of Jacob.¹⁴

And we learn elsewhere that Judah was not the only son of Jacob who took a Canaanite wife – Simeon had done the same, Gen. 46. 10.

Again, we discover, back in chapter 35, that Reuben – Jacob's firstborn – and then probably about 30 years of age – had gone in to Bilhah, Jacob's concubine, and had slept with her, Gen. 35. 22. This act cost Reuben dear, for the same verse tells us that his father Israel 'heard' of it – indeed, Jacob made reference back to it in his blessing on his sons in chapter 49¹⁵ – and the opening verse of 1 Chronicles 5 tells us that because Reuben, 'the firstborn of Israel', 'defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph', 1 Chron. 5. 1¹⁶ – as a result of which the double portion of the inheritance passed from the first-born of Leah to the first-born of Rachel – Jacob's first love, Gen. 29. 18, 20. But, from Reuben's typical Canaanite lifestyle, we can see that the family of Jacob was greatly exposed to Canaanite influence.

And so, without a doubt, in terms of the purity of Israel's faith, the land of Canaan was proving to be a very dangerous place indeed. To no small degree, the family was beginning, not only to intermarry with the Canaanites¹⁷, but to adopt the moral and religious standards of the Canaanites. The God-appointed walls of separation were breaking down – and breaking down fast.

And the situation was made all the worse by the general attitude of the Canaanites themselves. For the name of the game among the various clans and nations of Canaan around the sons of Jacob was 'mixing and mingling'. And so, although the Canaanites were far inferior to Israel spiritually, by and large they showed themselves to be very genial and amiable people – only too ready to establish closer contacts with the descendants of Abraham.

We see this in chapter 34 particularly – which chapter records the incident of Dinah and the slaughter of the men of a Hivite city by Jacob's two sons Simeon and Levi. Whereas in chapter 38, as we have just seen, a Jew (Judah) went in to Gentile girl, back in chapter 34, a Gentile (Shechem) went in to a Jewish girl (Dinah).

Even the language used in the two incidents is similar. We are told of Shechem that, concerning Dinah, he 'saw her, he took her, and lay with her', Gen. 34. 2, and of Judah that, concerning the daughter of Shuah the Canaanite, he 'saw' her, he 'took her', and 'went in to her', Gen. 38. 2.¹⁸

The story of Dinah in chapter 34 demonstrates just how great a threat the Canaanites living in the land posed to the separation of Jacob's family. For, when the sons of Jacob required the circumcision of all the males of Shechem's home city as the condition for marriage between Shechem and Dinah, Shechem and his father proposed to their fellow citizens that they should submit to the rite, saying, 'These men are at peace with us. Let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for indeed the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters ... let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us', Gen. 34. 21-23 ... which his fellow citizens were only too happy to do.¹⁹

In such circumstances, sooner or later – and probably sooner – the children of Israel, as the smaller group, would be submerged in, and absorbed by, the culture and the ways of the Canaanites, and their distinct identity and role as the people of God would be lost.

And there was also the danger that alliances and intermarriage with *the people* of Canaan would lead, as sure as needle pulls thread, to the worship of *the gods* of Canaan. The Lord later made it clear to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, 'Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with *the inhabitants of the land* where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst ... and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play

the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with *their gods* also', Exod. 34. 11-16. Clearly, God knew this to be a very real danger.²⁰

To borrow the graphic language of Ezra, 'the holy seed' were in grave danger of becoming 'mingled' with the heathen people around, Ezra 9. 2.

Clearly, something drastic had to be done! There was obviously an urgent need for the family of Jacob to be removed from Canaan to some place where they would be insulated socially, morally and spiritually.

And, again, everything pointed to Egypt as the safest haven for them. For the spiritual and moral dangers were by no means as great there. Apart from any other factors, it was common knowledge in the Ancient Near East that Egyptian pride led that nation to disdain all foreigners – and, in the good providence of God, to abhor shepherds and herdsmen in particular – which is, of course, exactly what Jacob's family were.²¹

Ancient Egyptian monuments depict shepherds as withered, distorted, and emaciated, giving some idea of what the Egyptians thought of them. As Joseph later explained to his brothers in chapter 46, when counselling them how to answer Pharaoh's question, 'What is your occupation?' ... 'every shepherd is an abomination (is an object of loathing) to the Egyptians', Gen. 46. 34.²² And I guess that Joseph may well have been speaking out of his own bitter experience when he had first arrived in Egypt.

Indeed, we are told before that – when we read of the seating arrangements at the dinner which Joseph had prepared for his brothers – that 'the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians', Gen. 43. 32.

Because then, in Egypt, Jacob's family would be living among a people who were averse to eating with Hebrews and to whom shepherds were repugnant, it was the one land where there would be no risk of intermarriage or loss of their national identity. For, even if Jacob's sons had been willing to inter-mingle and intermarry with them, the Egyptians would have never considered that a possibility.²³

And so, in summary, the children of Israel faced two very acute dangers if they remained in Canaan – of either being wiped out completely as they grew in number, or of being integrated into the Canaanite nations around them and of adopting their pagan practices.

So to Egypt they must go!

Ah, but to not just anywhere in Egypt!

For, if they are to remain *spiritually* and *morally* separate, they will need to be *geographically* separate from the centres of mainstream Egyptian life and culture.

This because, although, as shepherds, they would be unacceptable to by far the vast majority of Egyptians, there would always be a Potiphar's wife – there would always be those whose baser desires would surmount all social and racial barriers – and we remember that Potiphar's wife made her advances to Joseph when she knew full well that he was a 'Hebrew', Gen. 39. 14, 17.

And, apart from the likes of Potiphar's wife, there was always the risk – that though socially set apart, Jacob's descendants would be dazzled and allured by the impressive idolatry of Egypt. And I note that things turned out bad enough even with the precautions which Joseph – and behind him, God – took. For, just before his death, Joshua pointed out that, during the people's sojourn and bondage in Egypt, the children of Israel had actually worshipped the gods of Egypt – 'Put away', he urged, 'the gods which your fathers served ... in Egypt', Josh. 24. 14. And I think we can assume that the 'golden calf' (the 'golden bull-calf') worshipped by the recently redeemed Israel in Exodus 32 was patterned on the Egyptian god Apis.²⁴

And so, to be completely sure that Jacob's family remain spiritually and morally pure, they must be located in their own territory – well away from the corrupting influence of the centres of Egyptian life.²⁵ In other words, to preserve their *spiritual* separation they would need to achieve *physical* and *geographical* separation.²⁶ Only this would guarantee the preservation of their God-given role as His people.²⁷

And so, all we need to do is to move Jacob's family from Hebron in Canaan, Gen. 35. 27, to a suitable suburb in Egypt! That's all! But, believe me, for anybody other than God, that was far easier said than done.

First, we will need to persuade Jacob to take his family there – to persuade him, please, to leave the Promised Land to which God had called his grandfather Abraham – and to make his merry way down to Egypt of all places! ... which, given his grandfather Abraham's rather unhappy experience there back in chapter 12, and the fact that his father Isaac had been expressly forbidden by God to go there in chapter 26 – notwithstanding that there had then

been a famine in Canaan at the time, Gen. 26. 2, Jacob may well have been less than keen to do. But I have no doubt that Jacob would have gone if God had told him to – and I have my eye on God's word and undertaking to him in chapter 46, 'Do not fear to go down to *Egypt*, for I will make of you a great nation *there*. I will go down *with you* to Egypt', Gen. 46. 3-4.

Well, that's all right then! No, not quite. You are overlooking one small detail, Malcolm. For getting Jacob to pack his suitcase and set out for Egypt, in and of itself, would achieve precious little. For we will also need to persuade the great Pharaoh of Egypt to make the suitable suburb available. Jacob's family will need resident visas and a land grant – and the grant of good pasture land at that.

Now, I ask you, is Pharaoh likely to bestow all this just because a band of 70 or so strangers from the land of Canaan turn up one day at his royal court – somehow obtain an audience with him! – and ask him if he would be so good as to allocate them the best of his pasture land? I think not! Frankly, Jacob and his sons would have had more chance of being struck by lightning! They would be far more likely to get the Order of the Boot! – as had their ancestor Abraham the first and last time any of their family had previously ventured into Egypt, Gen. 12. 20-13. 1.

So we are going to need a man in Egypt who will be able not only to persuade Jacob to pack his bags and leave the Promised Land for pagan Egypt²⁸, but who will wield sufficient clout in Egypt to obtain from Pharaoh some suitable and spacious territory for Jacob and his family.

We are going to need a man then who can secure Jacob's family a province such as 'Goshen' – a sensitive border region in the north eastern section of the Nile delta – not only large – occupying as it does some 900 square miles – but most suitable for their needs – abounding in good pasture land – 'the best of the land', to quote Pharaoh, Gen. 47. 6 – and I guess he should know!²⁹

Well, this is our challenge. So, how can we set about achieving this?

We will need to find a man to whom Jacob will listen – preferably, I guess, one of his own immediate family – and preferably one he loves very much. We will then need to get this man to the very top of the political powerhouse of Egypt – to a position where he both has Pharaoh's ear and enjoys Pharaoh's confidence.

But first we will need to get him into Egypt itself – not, I suggest, an easy move if he means as much to his father as we know to be necessary – and then we must secure him an audience with Pharaoh himself, and in such circumstances that he can so impress Pharaoh that Pharaoh will – there and then – appoint him to the top job – will – there and then – make him 'lord of all Egypt', Gen. 45. 9.

Oh, boy, where do we start?

Well, how did God do it?

Enter Joseph – and the story of Genesis 37-41!

As we read, with the benefit of hindsight, Joseph saw his chequered experiences as God's appointed means of saving many lives in time of severe famine. He made it clear to his brothers that, though they 'sold' him into Egypt, they didn't 'send' him there – that God did that – to save the lives both of his – Joseph's – family and of many others.

Listen to his words in chapter 45: 'Now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you *to preserve life* ... God sent me before you *to preserve a posterity* ('a remnant', literally) *for you* in the earth, and *to save your lives* by a great deliverance.³⁰ So now it was not you who sent me here, but God', Gen. 45. 5-9.

And he made the very same point again in the last chapter: 'As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, *to save many people alive*', Gen. 50. 20.

Oh, yes, Joseph could see very clearly how God had overruled all the affairs of his life that he might be, under God, the 'Sustainer of Life' – which is what his name 'Zaphnath-Paaneah' – given to him by Pharaoh – may well mean.

But, as far as I can tell, for all that, Joseph never did see 'the big picture' – he never did grasp that God was in fact painting on a much larger canvas than he was! – he never did work out that in reality God had 'sent' him, not only to save lives, but as the Lord's chosen instrument to move Jacob and his family from Canaan to Egypt – and that, to that very end, as we read in Psalm 105, 'He (the Lord) called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread. He sent a man before them—Joseph—who was sold as a slave', Psa. 105. 16-17 – that this all formed part of God's glorious – albeit mysterious – purpose.³¹ For, as you can imagine, if there had been no famine, Pharaoh, for his part, would never have had his dreams, and would therefore have had no reason to exalt Joseph –

and Jacob, for his part, would have had no reason to send his sons down to Egypt and even less reason to have gone down there himself.

So it is then that, just as, according to Psalm 105. 26, God later 'sent' a man, Moses, to lead Israel out of Egypt, He first, according to verse 17, 'sent a man ... Joseph', to lead them in!

Well might we exclaim in wonder, 'Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and *His ways past finding out!*', Rom. 11. 33.

Well, the history lesson is over! But we do have two simple lessons to take away with us. First, the assurance that our God rules in the affairs of nations as well as He does in the lives of individuals – which we are going to see demonstrated beyond any doubt in His ways with Joseph personally. And, second, a simple practical point. That God is concerned – that God cares deeply – I almost said 'passionately' – about the separation of His people from the world around, with its appalling moral standards. 'Do not be conformed to this world', says Paul, 'but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God', Rom. 12. 2³² – as Joseph did long ago.

On the following three Tuesday's, God willing, we will consider together how it was that the Lord achieved His great and gracious purpose for Joseph and for Israel – and, through Israel, for the whole of mankind.

And we will discover from the text of Genesis 37-41 that, apart from certain revelations which God made by way of dreams (by three pairs of dreams in fact), there was a chain of at least ten links which brought the young man whom God chose to be His instrument, *from* the home of a loving – even a doting – father in the land of Canaan, *to* the very highest position open to him in the whole of the land of Egypt.

I am not claiming that there *are only* ten links in the chain of divine providence which runs through chapters 37 to 41. I may well have missed some – but ten will certainly see us through our short series of studies.

Shechem and Hamor reverse the situation, making the Hivites the active "givers" and "takers"; it is they who will control which Israelite daughters are taken and which Hivite girls are given. Finally, only after all this wonderful build-up, do Hamor and Shechem add the fact, almost matter-of-factly, oh yes, we also need to circumcise ourselves for this deal to work (v. 22). And for closers, just for good measure, the king and the prince tell their people: "their livestock and their substance and all their animals will be ours" (v. 23).'
[Extracted from ... <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/jewish/30yrs/rendsburg/index.html>]

²⁰ Indeed, this very danger received graphic illustration later from the experience of King Solomon. Nehemiah pointed out to some of the Jews of his day : 'You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin', Neh. 13. 25-26. And the Lord's prohibition of intermarriage with outsiders extended beyond the Canaanite nations, 1 Kings 11. 1-2.

²¹ Hence Joseph's success in obtaining the pasture land of Goshen for them, Gen. 46. 34.

²² 'We find in the herds depicted upon the (Egyptian) monuments, sheep, goats, and rams introduced by thousands, along with asses and horned cattle', *Keil and Delitzsch* on Genesis 46. 28-34.

²³ Joseph was, of course, in a unique position – having been exalted to 'Lord over all Egypt' and having had an Egyptian name bestowed on him by Pharaoh himself, Gen. 41. 45.

²⁴ See *Keil and Delitzsch* on Exodus 32. 4. Note that it was also called an 'ox', Psa. 106. 20.

²⁵ Joseph was strong enough to survive life in the city and in the palace ... but what would become of the rest of the family if they were brought into the city and integrated into Egyptian life?

²⁶ It can be argued that it was their unbelief which kept the children of Israel from returning to Canaan from Egypt after the famine ended – that they had forgotten their God-revealed destiny. (See, for example, Renald Showers in 'There really is a difference', page 41.) But it was clearly part of God's purpose that they should not return then.

²⁷ It is clear from Exodus 1. 7-9 that God's plan proved successful because Israel had retained their separate status throughout. Yet they needed to be in a place and situation which could be made sufficiently unbearable that they would be anxious to leave it. And in God's time, they were only too glad to go, Exod. 12. 40-41. For God overruled the hostility and persecution of the Pharaohs to make Egypt very uncomfortable for Israel. He stood behind their trials – permitting all; 'He increased His people greatly, and made them stronger than their enemies. He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants', Psa. 105. 24-25. Otherwise they would have been sorely tempted to stay forever where they were. Contrast Ezra 2, where only 50, 000 seized the opportunity to return to the Promised Land.

God's purpose was therefore accomplished at the Exodus. For the people – then numerous and strong enough to tackle the Canaanites – sighed and cried to God by reason of their severe bondage. They were more than ready to go. On the matter of timing, the iniquity of the Amorites was now fully ripe for judgement, Gen. 15. 16. And, when those sins were filled up, Israel was ready to be the instrument of God to destroy them.

God's purpose, as revealed to Abraham years before, was for a period of bondage, Gen. 15. 13-15, and His plan was for Israel to sojourn in Egypt. But this was not known to the sons of Jacob at this time. In fact, God had carefully avoided telling Abram when or where this sojourn was to be, or how it would come about.

Joseph's brothers therefore had no intention of carrying out God's purpose—they wished only to get rid of Joseph. We know that God's purpose was also that, by the Exodus, He would show His power in Pharaoh, Rom. 9. 17.

²⁸ When Jacob knew that his father had been forbidden to go there – even in time of famine, Gen. 26. 2!

²⁹ This is why the Holy Spirit devotes so much text to the acquisition of Goshen, while such an emotional moment as the reunion of Jacob and Joseph is so briefly described. Goshen was not only located near Joseph so that he could see his family frequently ('And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have', Gen. 45. 10), and was the nearest part of the land to Canaan, that they might more easily and sooner get away, but, of even greater importance, it kept the family insulated from the culture and religion of Egypt.

³⁰ There was no question but that Jacob's family were greatly blessed on account of Joseph, but the blessing continued even long after his death, when Israel continued to grow by leaps and bounds. This because ultimately it was not Joseph who was the source of Israel's blessings, but God.

³¹ Compare Joseph's words to Pharaoh, 'God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do ... the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine ... God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do ... after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land ... the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass', Gen. 41. 25-32.

³² Compare, 'Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord', 2 Cor. 6. 14-17.