

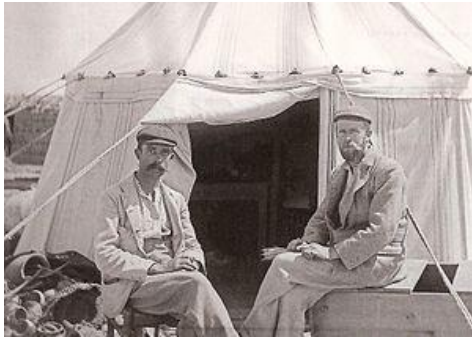
6. Joseph & the Sojourn

Overview

- a. Inscriptions and Writings: The Oxyrhynchus Papyri
- b. Significance of the Sojourn in Egypt

Discussion Questions

a. The Oxyrhynchus Papyri



Oxyrhynchus is a city in Upper Egypt, located about 160 km south-southwest of Cairo, in the governorate of Al Minya. It is also an archaeological site, considered one of the most important ever discovered. For the past century, the area around Oxyrhynchus has been continually excavated, yielding an enormous collection of papyrus texts dating from the time of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods of Egyptian history. Among the texts discovered at Oxyrhynchus was the first New Testament papyrus (P1), on only the second day of excavation, in the winter of 1896–7.

The Oxyrhynchus papyri have provided the most numerous sub-group of the earliest copies of the New Testament. These are surviving portions of codices (books) written in Greek uncial (capital) letters on papyrus. The first of these were excavated by Bernard Pyne Grenfell and Arthur Surridge Hunt in Oxyrhynchus Egypt, over the turn of the 20th century. Of the 118 registered New Testament papyri, 44 (37%) are from Oxyrhynchus. The earliest of the papyri are dated to the middle of the second century, so were copied within about a century of the writing of the original New Testament documents.

Since the 1930s, work on the papyri has continued. For the past twenty years, it has been under the supervision of Professor Peter Parsons of Oxford. Seventy one large volumes of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri have been published, and these have become an essential reference work for the study of Egypt between the 4th century BC and the 7th century AD. They are also extremely important for the history of the early Christian Church, since many Christian documents have been found at Oxyrhynchus in far earlier versions than those known elsewhere. At least another forty volumes are anticipated.

b. Significance of the Sojourn in Egypt

1915 B.C. – Birth of Joseph. 1898 B.C. – Joseph sold into Egypt. 1885 B.C. – Joseph exalted. 1876 B.C. – Israel enters Egypt. 1446 B.C. – The Exodus.

Jacob demonstrated that Joseph was his favorite son and heir to the double-portion inheritance by awarding him a “coat with sleeves.” This was the sign of one who was to be the leader of the clan.

1. Sold into Egypt.

The hatred of the brothers had its climax in a murderous plot which ended only when Joseph had been sold to some passing slavers. Joseph found himself being sold to an official of Egypt. (*Genesis 37:36*).

2. Egypt in the Days of Joseph.

Joseph entered Egypt in the days of the Middle Kingdom. Pharaoh Amenemhat II was upon the throne of both Upper and Lower Egypt.

Egypt during this period was ruled by a strong, centralized government. The pharaohs of this period had their power held somewhat in check by the individual governors.

Mines in the Sinai and in Ethiopia brought precious metals and ivory to the courts of the pharaoh and a line of military fortresses were established around the borders of Egypt to protect from outside invaders. Just prior to Joseph entering Egypt, the capital was moved from Thebes to Ith-tawi, near the Delta.

3. Joseph's Imprisonment.

For a time, Joseph prospered in the house of Potiphar. This time of prosperity was brought to a close in the attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife. When Joseph rebuffed her, she falsely accused him of attempted rape.

Joseph was taken and thrown into the royal prison where political prisoners were held. It was there that he befriended the pharaoh's butler. This friendship, along with a God-given gift of interpreting dreams, would result in Joseph's promotion to the Court of Pharaoh.

4. Joseph's Exaltation.

In a single day, Joseph found himself propelled up to the position of Viceroy over all Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh. Joseph's economic plan called for him to store up

grain and food supplies for a coming time of famine. When that time came, Joseph was able to heighten the Pharaoh's political hold over the nobility and the landowners of Egypt by allowing the people to sell all of their lands to him in return for food. From this time on, Egypt became a virtual feudal state with the Pharaoh owning the land and allowing the people to work it and keep 80% of the profit.

5. Israel's Entrance into Egypt.

The immediate reason for Israel's entrance into Egypt was because of the famine; but there were some underlying reasons. God's plan and purpose for Israel was to develop its own faith traditions and theology based on their experience of and revelation by God

In Joseph do we find someone within that generation who demonstrates a sense of patriotism, purpose and faith.

Because of the draught, the patriarchal family system relocates from Canaan to Egypt. Why Egypt? Aside from the obvious fact that Egypt was the breadbasket of the world, there was a very significant reason for Egypt to be the host-mother of Israel.

The Canaanites followed a policy of integration. They were constantly seeking to intermarry and form family alliances with those around them (Genesis 19:14, 26:10; 26:34; 27:46; 34:8-103). This would likely have resulted in the merging of the Jewish traditions before they had taken a hold on the people.

The Egyptians, on the other hand, were extremely strict segregationists (Genesis 43:32; 46:34).

Thus the Israelites in Egypt would have no choice but to remain a separated people group as God prepared them in Egypt. Four hundred years later, this group of people emerged as a fledgling nation with a very unique and defined theology and religious traditions.

Discussion Questions:

1. What moral lessons can we learn from the story of Joseph? How can the story of Joseph encourage us in our own faith?
2. Theologians have drawn parallels between Joseph and Jesus. If you think about that, can you identify any of those parallels? How does that change the meaning of the story for you?
3. God led Israel through Egypt so their faith would be strengthened and preserved for all future generations (see handout page 2). Was there a time in your life when you realized that God had led you through a hard journey only to strengthen your faith or to protect you from something potentially worse? Did God ever use a tragedy for something good in your life?