

JOSEPH: Living with Integrity - PART 7

Mercy and Love

By: Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Genesis 45:25-Genesis 49:32
Subject:	The experience of Jacob as he traveled to Egypt to be reunited with his son Joseph.
Complement:	He was reminded of God's loving kindness.
Exegetical idea:	When Jacob traveled to Egypt to be reunited with his son Joseph he was reminded of God's loving kindness.
Homiletical idea:	Give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for He is good!
Purpose:	To remind my hearers of God's loving kindness to each one of us and to encourage them to give thanks to God.

Shabbat shalom. May El Shaddai, God Almighty, bless you. Shabbat shalom. I am Jacob. I am blessed to be with you today, and I pray that you will also be blessed. I am not here to testify about myself. I am here to give thanks to the LORD El Shaddai for He is good.

As I look back over my life, it is painfully clear that I have not always honored God. I have not always lived with integrity. But El Shaddai, God Almighty, has been merciful to me. He has shown His unfailing love to me. I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for He is good!

There is not enough time to retell my whole life story. I have lived more than 140 years. Is there anyone here as old as I am? Ninety seven years? God bless you, my child!

As I said, there is not enough time to retell my whole life story. I cannot even remember all of the events of my life! But there are some seasons that I can never forget.

I remember the day that my son Joseph was born—the firstborn son of my true love, Rachel. I worked seven long years for my uncle Laban in the region of Paddan Aram in Mesopotamia in order to marry his youngest daughter Rachel. I loved Rachel so much that those seven years seemed like only a few days to me. I had loved her since the first day I met her,

watering her flocks. She was the most beautiful shepherdess I had ever seen! Did I tell you that my uncle Laban asked me to work seven years for him as a dowry for his daughter Rachel? I would have gladly worked for twice that number of years in order to marry Rachel! And as it turned out, I had to! My uncle Laban deceived me. Though who am I to complain about deceit? I have also been a deceiver. May El Shaddai have mercy upon me and show me His unfailing love! But my uncle Laban deceived me and when I woke up the next morning, there was Leah, his oldest daughter, lying in my tent! I don't even want to talk about that day! Uncle Laban never did apologize, but after one week he allowed me to marry Rachel as well, if I promised to work for him for another seven years.

Where was I? Ah yes, I was talking about the birth of my son Joseph. Rachel had been barren for many years. That resulted in many family problems, and I must confess that I was part of the problem. But eventually Rachel conceived and gave birth to her firstborn son, Joseph. I knew that there was something special that the LORD El Shaddai would do for Joseph. I just knew it!

Years later when Joseph had his dreams, I knew that they were a message from the LORD, El Shaddai, even though the result was conflict in our encampment! I still vividly remember the day I received news that my son Joseph was dead! None of my sons specifically told me that Joseph was dead. In fact, they seemed strangely silent that day. But the blood stained robe spoke for itself. My heart was broken. Was El Shaddai bringing this calamity upon me? I had dishonored him on many occasions. I had fought with my brother Esau. I had lied to my father Isaac in order to receive the blessing of the firstborn. Covering my hands and the smooth part of my neck with goatskins! And worst of all, when my father asked me how I had

found the game so quickly, I replied, “The LORD your God gave me success!” Those words of deceit stuck in my throat like a piece of broken pottery. “The LORD your God gave me success!”

Where was I? Ah, yes. I was speaking about the news of Joseph’s death. Was this tragedy now a result of my sin? Joseph? Dead? My grief was more than I could bear. Some days I thought that I would die of a broken heart. Other days I just wished that I would die. My sleeping mat was drenched with my tears. I have since learned that even during those times we can give thanks to El Shaddai for He is good. His mercy and love never fail!

I can vividly remember the day when I heard that Joseph was still alive! There was a terrible famine in the land of Canaan. My sons had made a second trip to Egypt to buy grain, taking with them their youngest brother Benjamin. In fact, their brother Simeon was still imprisoned in Egypt as a result of some misunderstanding during their first visit there. I sent my sons off with a blessing: “**May El Shaddai grant you mercy before that man in Egypt.**” I had no idea “that man Zaphenath Paneah” was my long lost son Joseph! It had been 22 long and lonely years since I had seen my son Joseph alive, and I was certain that he was no more.

Weeks passed; one new moon to another. When word finally came to me in my tent that a caravan was approaching our encampment from the south, I was filled with expectation, and with some anxiety. Had that man Zaphenath Paneah released Simeon? Was Benjamin safe? Had my sons quarreled along the way as they usually did? When I came out of my tent to greet the caravan, I was shocked by the news that I heard: “**Joseph is still alive! Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.**” I was stunned. What did you say? “Joseph is still alive; the ruler of all Egypt?” At first, I must confess, I did not believe the report. Impossible! Joseph?

Alive? But then my sons gave me a complete account of their journey and showed me the carts filled with supplies that Joseph had sent to us. Finally, I said to my sons, “I’m convinced! My son Joseph is still alive.”

That’s when my sons told me about the terrible truth that they had concealed from me for more than 20 years. My own sons had sold their younger brother Joseph as a slave to Ishmaelite traders. And then they had lied to me day after day, year after year. I began to weep. They began to weep. We wept together; tears of repentance and tears of forgiveness. Healing comes when a family weeps together. Did you know that? I gathered my sons around me. I forgave them and blessed them. After all, the LORD, El Shaddai, has shown mercy and love to me. The LORD El Shaddai has forgiven me and blessed me.

Over and over again, I repeated the joyful news—“My son Joseph is still alive! I will go and see him before I die.” My sons told me that according to the revelation of God, the famine would last for another 5 years. Joseph had invited us to take refuge in Egypt. So we dismantled our entire camp and took everything with us: our whole family, with all of our livestock and all of our possessions. We left nothing behind. We were a caravan of about 70 all together. Not a very large company when you think of the promise that El Shaddai made to my grandfather Abraham, that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens. We traveled slowly with our flocks and herds. After several days of traveling to the south, we arrived at Beersheba. That is the southernmost city in Canaan, before entering the Negev and then turning west toward Egypt. My grandfather Abraham and my father Isaac had both lived for some time in Beersheba. In fact, that’s how the city got its name. My grandfather made a treaty here with the Philistines and called the place Beersheba, well of the oath.

There we stopped at Beersheba to offer sacrifices to the God of my father Isaac. It was during our stay at Beersheba, on our way to Egypt, that God appeared to me in a night vision. I had encountered the LORD, El Shaddai, many years earlier as a young man when I was fleeing from my brother Esau. That place was called Luz at the time, but I renamed it Bethel, house of God, because the LORD El Shaddai met me there.

I encountered the LORD El Shaddai another time, though I didn't realize it at first, at a place that I later named Peniel, face of God. That is when He took hold of me in the night, and I started wrestling with Him. What a fool I was to try to wrestle with El Shaddai. I should have been resting in His arms. I still limp as a painful reminder of my great need of El Shaddai's mercy and love.

Years later, when I returned to Bethel, El Shaddai appeared to me again and promised me, **“I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.”**

Where was I? Ah yes. We were on our way to Egypt, and we stopped to offer sacrifices at Beersheba. There the LORD El Shaddai called to me in a vision of the night: **“Jacob! Jacob!”** **“Here I am,”** I replied. **“I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there.”** It was obvious that we were not a great nation yet. The promise made by El Shaddai to my grandfather Abraham was not yet fulfilled. The promise repeated to my father Isaac was not yet fulfilled. But the promise would be fulfilled! **“Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation *there.*”**

With joyful anticipation we continued south into the Negev and then west toward Egypt. When we arrived at the border of Egypt, we made camp and I sent Judah ahead to receive instructions. When Judah finally returned, he urged us to break camp and travel to a region called Goshen. It was there that I was reunited with Joseph. I could hardly recognize him at first. His stately chariot. His numerous attendants. His Egyptian clothes. But as he drew closer and I looked into his eyes, I saw Rachel's firstborn son. Joseph! He threw his arms around my neck and wept. We wept together! There are times when it is a good thing for a family to weep together. I whispered in his ear, **"Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive."**

And I was ready to rest with my fathers, but El Shaddai, God Almighty, had other plans. I was only 130 years old at the time. First, Joseph escorted me to Pharaoh's palace for a personal audience with the Pharaoh. I had heard that the Egyptians despised shepherds, but the Pharaoh received me with kindness. When he saw me, he asked, "How old are you?" Apparently, people don't live as long in Egypt. It must be something to do with the food they eat! I replied, **"The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers."** I did not tell him about all of the times that I had failed to live with integrity. If I had done that, he would have been amazed that Joseph ended up the way that he did. I know the reason: the mercy and love of El Shaddai, God Almighty. No, I didn't share my entire life story with the Pharaoh. I simply blessed him and for his kindness to our family.

I have spent the past 17 years living here in Goshen, and God is making of us a great nation! The famine ended 12 years ago, just as God had revealed to the Pharaoh. Now, we are

prospering even though we are despised by the Egyptians. But my eyes are growing dim and soon I must rest with my fathers. I have given these instructions to my son Joseph: “If I have found favor in your eyes, (put your hand under my thigh and) promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. **Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.**”

Until then, I am resting in the arms of El Shaddai. No more wrestling. Did I tell you about the time that I foolishly tried to wrestle with the LORD. No more wrestling. Just resting, and giving thanks. I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for He is good. His loving kindness endures forever!

I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for His mercy.

I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for His love.

I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for He is good!

I am tired now, and I must rest. May I bless you before I leave?

**May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,
may El Shaddai, God Almighty bless you
and may you always give thanks to El Shaddai for He is good.**