

Intrigue among the sons of Jacob.

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As we enter a Chapter, the first among several prominent things that meet our eyes is the altar surrounded by its twelve ensigns and beyond, the four banners behind the Principals' chairs depicting ancient emblems with a fifth immediately to the rear of the first Principal's chair showing the Royal Arch emblem, the triple tau within the hexalpha all contained within a circle.

The banners and ensigns carry different emblematical devices which are governed by the posterity of Jacob's prophecy and the quality related to each of his sons, of which there were twelve, after whom the tribes were named.

The banner placed behind the first Principal's chair, is of course, excluded from any tribal significance. The devices on the ensigns carried some deep significant meaning intended to symbolise the qualities of each particular leader.

The Symbolical Lecture given as the Address of the Second Chair states that "the ensigns ... are the distinctive bearings of the twelve tribes of Israel and are figurative of a peculiar blessing bequeathed to each by the Patriarch Jacob who, shortly before his death, assembled his sons together for that purpose." We find this recorded in the 49th chapter of Genesis. The leading tribesmen are more particularly dealt with in the second chapter of Numbers.

Obviously then, these banners and ensigns mean much more than being just something placed where they are to be of a purely decorative nature, but rather to have a very instructive meaning to all who understand their purpose.

Jacob had twelve sons but as he knew that the end of his life was drawing near, he felt the need to establish in perpetuity the authority of his sons and those whom he accepted as such, according to their abilities and qualities, over the land over which he had wandered for so long.

Each of his sons was head of a tribe but on his deathbed he adopted Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph i.e. Jacob's grandsons, although in the distribution of land, the tribes counted but as twelve. Levi had no land, but some cities and many privileges. Jacob's son Joseph lived and died in Egypt.

These were the twelve tribes.- Judah, Naphtali, Asher, Dan, Benjamin, Manasseh, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad and Ephraim.

The tribes were established in four groups, the leading tribe in each being respectively Ephraim, Reuben, Judah and Dan. These are represented by the four banners placed behind the Principal's chairs as referred to earlier.

We now come to the two sons of Jacob who are not represented by ensigns.

Levi was the third son of Jacob and Leah and father of the tribe of Levi, from whom the Levites are descended. Since Leah had already given Jacob two sons, she said, "Now my husband will be joined with me". The Levites were distinguished as servants to God because of their refusal to worship the Golden Calf. (Incidentally according to the Hebrew Bible the golden calf was an idol (cult image) made by Aaron to satisfy the Israelites during Moses' absence, when he went up to Mount Sinai. The calf was intended to be a physical representation of the God of Israel, and therefore was doubly wrong for involving Israel in idolatry and for ascribing physicality to God.) Levi's own three sons, Gershon, Kahath and Merari, became Temple servants, so the tribe of Levi became priests. After Levi's sister Dinah was raped by Shechem, he and his brother Simeon destroyed the entire town. Levi was later involved in the plot to sell his brother Joseph into slavery.

There must have been a lot of jealousy and intrigue in those days as we now come to story of Joseph.

The biblical Joseph was the 11th son of Jacob. He was born to Jacob's favourite wife, Rachel, in PaddanAram after she had been barren for seven years. At the age of 17, Joseph was a shepherd alongside his brothers. Jacob loved Joseph more than he loved his other sons. Joseph would report his brothers'

misdeeds to his father and Jacob gave Joseph a "coat of many colours." (in 1966 Andrew Lloyd Webber wrote the musical about Joseph and his Technicolour Coat). The other brothers were jealous of Joseph and hated him. Joseph only further provoked this hatred when he told his brothers about two of his dreams. In the first, sheaves of wheat belonging to his brothers bowed to his own sheaf. In the second, the sun, moon and 11 stars bowed to him.

One day, Jacob sent Joseph to Shechem to check on his brothers. Joseph went to Shechem and, when his brothers were not there, followed them to Dothan. When the brothers saw him, they plotted to kill him and throw him in a pit. The oldest brother, Reuben, suggested they merely throw Joseph into the pit, so Reuben could secretly save Joseph later. When Joseph approached, the brothers took his coat and threw him into the pit. They sat down to eat and saw a caravan of Ishmaelite traders from Gilead in the distance. Judah came up with the idea to sell Joseph into slavery, - remember companions that the ensign of Judah is the lion representing "strength and power" and in the English Constitution this is the ensign used to constitute the candidates as "Princes and Rulers" in the Order. Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver. The brothers then dipped his coat into the blood of a slaughtered goat and brought it back to Jacob. Jacob recognised the coat and concluded that a beast had killed his son. He mourned for many days and was inconsolable. Meanwhile, the traders took Joseph down to Egypt where Potiphar, an officer and head of the kitchen of Pharaoh, bought him. Joseph was successful there and Potiphar made Joseph his personal attendant, putting him in charge of the entire household.

Joseph was well built and handsome and after some time Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. She approached Joseph day after day but he refused her each time, citing loyalty to Potiphar and to God. One day, Joseph came into the house to work.

Potiphar's wife grabbed his coat and he ran away. She then pretended Joseph had tried to seduce her and slandered him first to her servants and then to her husband. Potiphar was furious and sent Joseph to a jail for the king's prisoners.

In prison, the chief jailor liked Joseph and put him in charge of all the other prisoners, including Pharaoh's butler and baker. One night both the butler and the baker had strange dreams. Joseph interpreted the dreams, saying that in three days time the butler would be recalled to his former position while the baker would be killed. Sure enough, three days later, Pharaoh restored the butler to his job and killed the baker. Joseph asked the butler to mention his name to Pharaoh in the hope he would be freed, but the butler forgot about Joseph.

Two years later, Pharaoh himself had two dreams that his magicians could not interpret. The butler then remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him. Pharaoh sent for the 30-year-old Joseph. He appeared before Pharaoh and told him in the name of God that the dreams forecasted seven years of plentiful crops followed by seven years of famine. He advised Pharaoh to make a wise man commissioner over the land with overseers to gather and store food from the seven years of abundance to save for the years of scarcity. Joseph's prediction and advice pleased Pharaoh and he made Joseph his second in command. He gave Joseph his ring and dressed him in robes of linen with a gold chain around his neck. Pharaoh gave him the Egyptian name Zaphenath-paneah and found him a wife Asenath, daughter of Pot i-ph era the priest of On.

Joseph travelled throughout Egypt, gathering and storing enormous amounts of grain from each city. During these years, Asenath and Joseph had two sons. The first Joseph named Manasseh, meaning, "God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home". He named the second son Ephraim, meaning, "God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction". After seven years, a famine spread throughout the world, and Egypt was the only country that had food. Joseph was in charge of rationing grain to the Egyptians and to all who came to Egypt.

The famine affected Canaan and Jacob sent his 10 oldest sons to Egypt to get food, keeping only Benjamin, Rachel's second son and Jacob's youngest child, at home out of concern for his safety. Joseph's brothers came and bowed to Joseph, who recognised them immediately but pretended they were strangers. He asked them where they were from and accused them of being spies. They denied his claim but he continued to speak harshly to them and interrogate them. They told him they had a younger brother at home. Joseph then locked them in the guardhouse for three days before commanding the brothers to go home and bring their youngest brother back with them to prove that they were telling the truth. The brothers spoke amongst themselves

lamenting that they were being punished for what they had done to Joseph, who overheard them, turned away and wept, but then continued his act. He gave them grain and provisions for the journey, secretly returning their money and kept Simeon in jail pending their return.

The brothers returned to Canaan and told Jacob all that had happened in Egypt. They asked Jacob to send Benjamin down with them but he refused, "Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you would take away Benjamin". Even Reuben's offer that Jacob could kill Reuben's two sons if Benjamin did not return safely did not move Jacob. Eventually, they finished the rations from Egypt and the famine became so severe that Jacob no longer had a choice. Judah told Jacob to send Benjamin in his care and if Benjamin did not return, "I shall stand guilty before you forever". So Jacob sent the brothers back to Egypt with Benjamin, along with a gift for Joseph and double the necessary money to repay the money that was returned to them. When the brothers arrived, Joseph brought them to the entrance of his house and instructed his servant to prepare a meal. The brothers were scared and told Joseph they did not know how the money got back in their bags. Joseph replied that their God must have put it there because he received their payment. The brothers then went inside and waited for Joseph to come and eat with them. When he returned, they gave him the gifts and bowed to him. He asked about their father, and they responded he was well, and bowed a second time. He asked if Benjamin was their brother, and left the room, overcome with emotion after seeing his brother again. He then returned and ate and drank with his brothers, giving Benjamin more food than the others. He then instructed his servant to fill the brother's bags with food, return each one's money a second time, and put his own silver goblet in Benjamin's bag.

As soon as the brothers left the city, Joseph's servant overtook them and accused them of stealing Joseph's goblet. He said that whoever had the goblet in his possession would be kept as a slave, while the others would go free. He searched their possessions and found the goblet in Benjamin's bag. All the brothers returned to the city and threw themselves on the ground before Joseph. Judah expressed his willingness to become Joseph's slave. Joseph answered that only the one in whose possession the goblet was found would become a slave. Judah then pleaded with Joseph, telling him of Jacob's reluctance to send Benjamin and of his own responsibility for Benjamin. He told of the sorrow that would overtake Jacob if Benjamin did not return. At this point, Joseph could no longer control himself. He sent away all his attendants, began to cry loudly and revealed his true identity to his brothers.

Joseph's first query was about his father, but the brothers were too shocked to answer. He reassured them that it was God's providence that sent him to Egypt to ensure their survival during the famine, and he was not angry with them. He sent them back with instructions to tell Jacob what had become of Joseph and to bring Jacob and his household to the nearby town of Goshen where Joseph could care for them during the next five years of famine. He then embraced Benjamin, kissed all of his brothers and wept.

Pharaoh heard that Joseph's brothers had come and told them to bring their households to Egypt where he would give them the best of the land. Joseph gave each of them a wagon, provisions for the trip and a change of clothing. He gave Benjamin 300 pieces of silver and several changes of clothing. He also sent a large present back for his father.

At first Jacob did not believe that Joseph was alive. After he saw the wagons that Joseph sent, however, he realised it was true. Then Jacob, at the age of 130, set out for Goshen with 70 members of his household. He sent Judah ahead of him so Joseph would know he was coming. Joseph went to meet him and they embraced and cried. Joseph told Pharaoh that his brothers and father had arrived. The brothers informed Pharaoh they were shepherds and Pharaoh put them in charge of his livestock. They lived in the best part of Egypt, in Rameses, and Joseph provided them with bread.

As the famine continued, the Egyptians eventually ran out of money. They begged Joseph for food and he gave them bread in exchange for their animals. After a year, their animals were gone and Joseph made a new deal with the people. He gave them seed to plant on their farms and in exchange they gave Pharaoh one-fifth of their crops. He nationalised all farmland except that belonging to the priests, and turned the people into serfs.

After Jacob had lived in Egypt for 17 years, he called Joseph to him and made him swear that when Jacob died, Joseph would not bury him in Egypt, but would take him to the burial place of his fathers. Joseph swore

to this. Soon after, Joseph was told that his father was sick. He brought his two sons to Jacob. Jacob assured Joseph he would consider Ephraim and Manasseh to be his sons just like Reuben and Simeon were when it came to the inheritance that God had promised Jacob's offspring. Jacob then blessed Ephraim and Manasseh. Although Manasseh was the first-born, Jacob put his right hand, the stronger hand, on Ephraim's head. When Joseph corrected him, Jacob said he did it on purpose and predicted that Ephraim would surpass Manasseh in greatness. Jacob told Joseph he was about to die, but reassured him that God would be with him. He also assigned him an extra portion of his inheritance, a privilege usually given to the first-born. Jacob blessed all his sons, giving the longest blessing to Joseph. He instructed them to bury him in the cave of Machpelah, and then he died. Joseph flung himself at his father, cried and kissed him. Joseph then ordered his physicians to embalm Jacob. The Egyptians mourned for 70 days. Joseph received permission to go to Canaan to bury Jacob. He took his brothers and his father's household, along with all of Pharaoh's officials and dignitaries, and left Egypt in a large group. When they came to Goren ha-Atab, he observed a seven-day mourning period. Joseph and his brothers then continued to the cave of Machpelah where they buried Jacob. They then returned to Egypt.

Once Jacob was dead, the brothers were scared that Joseph would take revenge on them for selling him. They sent a message to Joseph saying that before his death Jacob had instructed them to tell Joseph to forgive them. They then offered to be his slaves. Joseph reassured them, saying that God intended for Joseph to go down to Egypt to ensure the survival of many people, and Joseph would take care of them and their children. So Joseph, his brothers and his father's household remained in Egypt.

Joseph lived 110 years. He saw great-grandchildren from both his sons. Before he died, he told his brothers that God would one day bring them up from Egypt into the land that God promised their fathers. He made them swear to carry his bones out of Egypt into that land. Joseph died and was embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt.

When the Jews eventually left Egypt, Moses carried out Joseph's bones. Joseph was buried in Shechem, on a piece of land that Jacob had previously bought. Joseph's two sons both became tribes in Israel and the northern Israelite kingdom is many times referred to as the "House of Joseph"