

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 29, Podcast Audio

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All right, get ready because we're diving into ancient Egypt today. It's the story of Joseph, but not the one you might remember from Sunday school or anything like that. We're going deeper this time.

We got some excerpts from a lecture by this Old Testament scholar, Dr. Robert Vannoy, and let me tell you, some really interesting stuff in there. Yeah, we'll be digging into the historical context of Joseph's whole arrival in Egypt, you know, connecting it to specific timelines and dynasties and even those mysterious rulers called the Hyksos. Oh, yeah, those guys.

I've always been fascinated by them. But first, let's set the stage a little bit. We're working with this lecture from Dr. Vanmpoy's Old Testament history course, right? And he really goes deep on the whole timeline of Joseph's life, like trying to figure out when everything went down.

But one thing he points out is that pinning down exactly when Joseph got to Egypt, well, it's kind of a historical mystery, isn't it? It really is. The Bible, you see, doesn't just straight up tell us the name of the pharaoh who was ruling when Joseph was there. So to even get close to like an estimated date, you know, we got to rely on other clues and then connect them to what we actually know from Egyptian history itself.

OK, so how do we even begin to play historical detective here? Where do we start? Well, Dr. Vannoy explains that there are these two major factors we got to consider. So first, there's the date of the Exodus, right? That's when the Israelites left Egypt. And even that date, you know, it's debated among scholars.

Some put it around 1446 B.C., and others are more like 1290 B.C. Oh, that's like, what, almost a 150-year difference? That's a big gap. Exactly. Yeah.

And then on top of that, you have to think about how long the Israelites were even in Egypt in the first place. And that's where it gets even trickier. The Book of Exodus mentions a period of 430 years.

But then there's this other ancient text, the Septuagint, and it gives a different number, 215 years. Hold on, wait a second. Now, for those of us who maybe haven't spent years studying the Bible, what exactly is the Septuagint? Oh, good question.

It's basically an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. And sometimes, you know, it has some differences from the Hebrew text we use today, the one we call the Masoretic text. And those little variations, they can lead to, like, different interpretations and chronological calculations.

Oh, OK. So that makes sense. So it's like, we've got these two possible Exodus dates and then two possible lengths of stay for the Israelites in Egypt.

That's a lot to keep track of. It is. But it leads to some pretty cool possibilities.

You know, if we take an early Exodus date, the one, like, 1446 BC, and we combine that with the 430-year stay, the longer one, then that would put Joseph's arrival in Egypt around, let's see, 1896 BC. But if we use the late Exodus date, the 1290 BC one, and the shorter stay, the 215 years, then we're looking at something more like 1740 BC. And I'm guessing, as someone who loves history, those two dates probably fall into, like, totally different periods in ancient Egypt, right? So depending on which timeline we're going with, it's a completely different picture of what Joseph would have experienced.

Oh, you got it. If Joseph showed up around that 1896 BC mark, then he would have been dealing with the 12th Dynasty, those native Egyptian rulers. But if it was a later date, 1740 BC, well, that puts us right smack dab in the middle of the Hyksos period.

Now, this is where it gets interesting. For anyone who hasn't heard of the Hyksos, they were these, like, mysterious foreign rulers who actually took control of Egypt for a while. And it seems like Dr. Vinoy is really intrigued by this whole Hyksos connection, right? He is, yeah.

They ruled from about 1750 to 1570 BC, and their presence has always been like this puzzle for historians. There are some who believe Joseph's arrival actually happened during their reign. In fact, there are quite a few clues that point us in that direction.

Ooh, I love a good historical mystery. So what kind of clues are we talking about? Well, for one, Genesis 47:17 mentions horses being traded in Egypt while Joseph was around. And from what we know, historians believe the Hyksos were the ones who actually introduced horses to Egypt.

So this little detail, it could actually be a pretty big connection. That's really interesting.

That does seem like more than just a coincidence, especially if horses weren't really around in Egypt before that. Exactly. And there's this other piece, too, like in Exodus 1.8, it talks about this new king who did not know Joseph.

Some scholars think that this new king could have been one of those native Egyptian rulers who came to power after the Hyksos were driven out. So it's possible, then, that, like, the Egyptians just kind of wiped the Hyksos from their history. And maybe that's why we don't have any Egyptian records that specifically talk about Joseph.

Almost like some historical cover-up. It's a cool theory, right? And there's more. Joseph and his family, they were living in the Nile Delta, which is the same area where the Hyksos had their capital.

That connection adds another layer to the whole thing. So we've got the horses, the new king, and the location all kind of lining up. But wasn't it pretty uncommon for a foreigner, like a Semite like Joseph, to gain so much power in Egyptian society? Wouldn't that have been even more unlikely under, like, those native Egyptian rulers? You make a good point.

That would have been really rare under the native Egyptians. But under foreign rulers, you know, like the Hyksos, it might have been more possible for someone like Joseph to, you know, gain power and influence. Oh, I see what you mean.

So the Hyksos being in charge could actually explain how Joseph became, like, second in command, even though it was unusual for someone from outside Egypt to hold such a high position. Exactly. And Dr. Vannoy even points out another detail in Genesis 39:1. It describes Potiphar, Joseph's master, as an Egyptian.

Some scholars say that specific wording wouldn't have been necessary unless the pharaoh himself wasn't actually Egyptian, like during the time of the Hyksos. Oh, wow. So they're, like, emphasizing Potiphar's Egyptian identity because it was different from the ruler at the time.

That's such a small detail, but it could be significant. Right. Now, keep in mind that none of these things alone are, like, a slam dunk, you know.

But when you put them all together, they make a pretty interesting case. It really does make you wonder if Joseph's story took place during this whole Hyksos period. My mind is blown.

I love how something like the mention of horses can totally change how we see this story. But before we get too carried away with this Hyksos theory, Dr. Vannoy does say that not everyone agrees. Oh, right, he does.

He acknowledges that some people think Joseph might have arrived even before the Hyksos came to power. Welcome back. It's amazing how much we uncovered just by looking at the historical context in those Hyksos theories.

Yeah, it really is. It shows how much depth there is to these stories when you start looking at them through different lenses. Totally.

And speaking of different perspectives, we were just talking about the arguments for and against Joseph arriving in Egypt during that Hyksos period. Dr. Vannoy seems to present a balanced view, you know, acknowledging both sides. Oh, absolutely.

He does. And while he seems to be into that Hyksos connection, you know, he doesn't completely ignore the other arguments. He mentions some scholars think Joseph got there before the Hyksos even showed up.

But he doesn't really, like, go into detail about those arguments in this lecture. So, just a good reminder that history is rarely, like, black and white. There's always debate.

Right. Right. Especially with events that happened so long ago.

Exactly. Scholarship is a constant process. You know, new stuff comes up, people offer new interpretations, and our understanding of the past changes.

It's like trying to solve a puzzle, but you're missing some pieces. Maybe we'll never have the complete picture, but we can still appreciate what we do have. But even with all this

uncertainty about, like, the exact dates, Dr. Vannoy really seems to emphasize that Joseph's story is about way more than just the historical details.

Yeah. He's clear about that. Regardless of the exact date of arrival, you know, Joseph's story is a key part of how the Israelites became a nation.

You know, that's interesting. How does one family, even a family with a story like this, how does that lead to the birth of a whole nation? Well, just think about it for a second. Joseph's actions, even though in the beginning it was all about survival, you know, ended up saving his whole family from starving during that famine.

If he hadn't ended up with so much power in Egypt, his family, and by extension, the future nation of Israel, they might not have even survived. So it's like all those events, as painful as they were, they set the stage for something much bigger. Yeah, exactly.

It's not just physical survival either. Dr. Vannoy talks about how important forgiveness and reconciliation are in this story. You know, Joseph forgives his brothers, and Judah, well, he goes through this incredible transformation and all that healing within the family that's like essential for their future as a people.

It's like their personal journeys are mirroring the bigger story of this whole nation coming together. It's a really cool parallel. And Dr. Vannoy points out that it's actually during their time in Egypt, despite the struggles and everything, that's when the Israelites really start developing their own identity.

He calls it the isolation of Goshen, where they're like set apart from everyone else, and they can grow and multiply. So it's in that separation, being in a totally new environment, that they figure out who they are as a people. Exactly.

And that foundation in Egypt, that's what leads to the Exodus, you know, and then eventually their journey to the promised land. It's amazing how the story of Joseph, with all the ups and downs, really lays the groundwork for like so much of what happens next in the Bible. It's a reminder that even things that seem small, you know, or just personal, they can have these huge implications.

It speaks to how connected history is, right? And how choices we make, even ones that seem small, can really change things. This is making me realize that, you know, this deep dive into Joseph, it's not just about dates and pharaohs. It's about families, forgiveness, and how people are resilient.

And ultimately it's about how God works through history. That's a great way to put it. It's a story that makes you think about the choices people make and how those choices can have divine purpose.

How even tough situations can have meaning. Speaking of meaningful moments, Dr. Vannoy talks about that scene where Judah begs Joseph to spare Benjamin. It's in Genesis 44.

It really shows how much Judah has changed, you know, and how deep his love is for his family. Oh, for sure. It's a big moment in the story.

Dr. Vannoy shares this interpretation from a literary scholar, Robert Alter, and Alter says that Judah's speech is like a complete reversal from what he did before, showing how much he's grown and how much he cares about his father and his brother. It's like he's trying to make up for the past, you know, a tone for selling Joseph. And he's trying to protect his family from even more pain.

Exactly. And by doing that, he shows that he understands what responsibility means and how complicated love can be. This deep dive is making me see the Bible in a whole new way.

It's like, it's not just stories, you know, it's this tapestry, and it's full of complex characters and themes and really important truths. It really is. And when we really study and reflect, we unlock all that richness.

I'm so glad we have these insights from Dr. Vannoy and that we can like really dive into the story of Joseph. But before we finish, I have one more question. If we take a step back from Joseph's story, what bigger lessons can we learn about how faith and history intersect? That's a great question.

And it's a perfect one as we move into the last part of our deep dive. Join us next time as we explore what Joseph's story means for us and the insights it gives us about the relationship between what we believe and what we know from history. See you soon.

Welcome back to our deep dive into the story of Joseph. It's amazing how one story can like spark so many conversations. We've explored the historical context, you know, debated the Hyksos thing, and we've even analyzed the characters like they're in a book club.

It really shows how much these ancient stories, you know, they still resonate with us today. There's always something new to discover, even in stories we think we know. Absolutely.

And speaking of discoveries, you left us with a really interesting question last time. You asked, what broader lessons can we learn about the intersection of faith and history? I've been thinking about that, and I'm really curious to hear your perspective. It's a question that goes beyond just Joseph's story, right? It gets to how we look at what we believe in light of like historical evidence and the other way around.

Exactly. So how does a story like Joseph's with all the drama and twists and turns, how does it help us understand that relationship between faith and history? Well, for me, one of the most interesting things about it is how it shows this interplay between, you know, human choices and what we might call divine providence. Hmm.

OK, let's break that down a bit. What do you mean by human choices and divine providence when you're talking about this story? OK, think about Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery. That was a terrible thing, right? Totally motivated by jealousy, resentment, all that.

It was a human choice, plain and simple, but it had awful consequences. Right. But then those consequences, even though they weren't intended, you know, they led to Joseph having all this power and eventually saving his family in the famine.

It's like this chain reaction, bad decisions leading to a good outcome. Yeah, that's a great way to think about it. It's a classic example of how, like, from a faith perspective, God can work through even the worst situations, the most painful things, to make his purposes happen.

Redemption, unexpected outcomes. You see those threads all through the story. It's like that saying, God writes straight with crooked lines.

We don't always understand the path, but there's a bigger picture. Right. And I think that's really key for anyone who's, you know, thinking about how faith and history connect.

We might not always get the why behind things, but if you're coming from a place of faith, you can trust that there's a bigger purpose, even when things are messy or don't seem fair. So how does all of that connect to faith and history? Are you saying history isn't just like a random series of events? I think from a faith perspective, there's this sense that history isn't just random; there's a bigger story going on, a divine purpose working through time, even with all the chaos and stuff we don't understand. And faith, then, is about believing in that bigger story, even when we don't have all the historical details figured out.

Yes. Faith isn't about ignoring the evidence or anything like that. It's more about being OK with the idea that there might be more to reality than what we can see and prove scientifically and being open to the possibility of, you know, a guiding force in the universe.

So it's about holding on to that belief in a divine plan, even when the historical stuff is unclear or incomplete, almost like faith gives you a way to understand history, even when you don't have all the answers. Yeah, that's a good way to put it. And Joseph's story is a perfect example, right? We may never know for sure if he got to Egypt when the Hyksos were in charge or if it was during some native Egyptian pharaoh.

But not knowing those details doesn't take away from the power of the story itself. It reminds us that faith isn't about having every historical detail all neat and tidy. The core of the story- those themes of forgiveness and redemption and God's faithfulness- those things go beyond the specific historical setting.

I completely agree. The story's power is that it can speak to everyone about human experiences and spiritual truths that are timeless, no matter what the historical context is. So basically what you're saying is that while historical research can add to our understanding of these Bible stories, it's not the basis of faith.

Right. Faith is grounded in something much deeper, something that goes beyond what's in historical records. It's about having a connection to something bigger than ourselves, believing in a plan that we may not ever fully understand.

And the story of Joseph, with all its historical and literary layers, it points us towards that bigger truth. It makes us think about faith, about purpose, about what it means to be human. Well said.

It reminds us that these old stories still have so much to teach us, even in a world that feels so different from the world of the Bible. This whole deep dive has been amazing. We started by trying to figure out Joseph's place in Egyptian history.

And now we're talking about faith and history in general. It's incredible what can come out of just one story. It's been a great journey.

And it makes you wonder what other stories in the Bible could give us new insights if we looked at them through these same lenses. You know, history, literature, personal reflection. And here's a final thought to ponder.

What other stories from the Bible might speak to you in a new way if you explore them through those lenses? History, literature, personal reflection. What's waiting to be discovered? That's a great question. Keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep looking for those deeper meanings.

Thanks for joining us on this deep dive. Until next time, happy diving.