



05 Joseph Part One – God is Sovereign

We started our journey to the Promised Land with a sort of survey of the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and then I talked about Joseph. Let's go back now and look at a couple of pieces of scripture that encompass Joseph's life. There is a whole lot in the story of Joseph. We learn that as parents we can really do a lot of damage to the whole family by having favorites. It is a way of creating insecurity and jealousy among siblings. We also learn that we can get into horrible circumstances at no fault of our own. And, we're taught how to act when we're in the midsts of those circumstances.

When we end up in terrible circumstances at no fault of our own, we should thank God for each day anyway and then we should focus on just doing the right thing. It is hard because instead we want to feel sorry for ourselves and we get focused on the thing that put us in our predicament. The "thing" can be either people or circumstances. Joseph never gave up. He just kept on doing the right thing. We too should not give up, but it's easier said than done. Also, Joseph never sought vengeance for the wrong that his brothers had committed against him. Instead he showed mercy. (Micah 6:8)

I think more than anything, the story of Joseph reminds us that God is sovereign in our lives. Things may happen that are out of our control, but God is in control. This doesn't mean that we just sit back and let terrible things happen to us. We need to do anything we can to ameliorate the situation. Joseph managed Potifer's house well. He even looked out for Potifer's wife. He managed Potifer's business affairs. He then was a model prisoner when he was thrown into the dungeon. He managed the prison so well he was made a trustee and ran it all. Then, he graciously told the truth to the butler and baker about their dreams. He then waited patiently until the butler remembered that he had interpreted the dream. And in the end, he interpreted Pharaoh's dream and he ended up as the Prime Minister of Egypt. He then saved his family from the famine and forgave them for all that they had done to him. Then in faith, he knew that his people would leave Egypt and made them promise to take his bonee when they left.

Let's look tonight again at the jealousy problem.

²Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their

father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

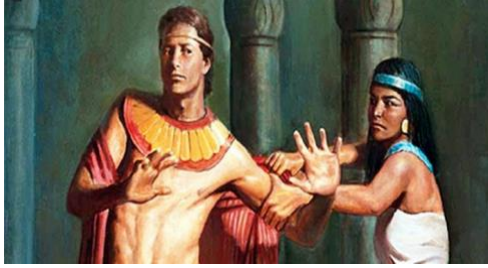
In verses 5-11, the text tells us of two dreams that Joseph had. In the first, he dreamed that he and his brothers were in the field shocking wheat (putting it in bundles), and their shocks came and bowed down to his shock. In the second dream, he dreamed that the sun, the moon, and 11 stars came and bowed down to him. Needless to say, the whole family (especially the brothers) were outraged at the nerve of Joseph telling them that they would be his servants and/or slaves. Even his dad tried to hush him up saying, *“Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?”* ¹¹ *And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. (ESV)*

There are so many lessons to be learned in this passage, but I am only teaching it as background to getting to the Promised Land. So, we can remember what happened. First off, it tells us that perhaps we should guard carefully the things that God might put into our hearts and minds. Sometimes you have the feeling that this or that might happen, and whether or not it is from God, only time will tell. Remember, when the angel had spoken to Mary, scripture tells us *“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. – Luke 2:19.* It appears she didn’t go out and blab the intimate things of God to everyone around her.

I would add that many believers have had supernatural experiences (ie. angel sightings, dreams, etc); and, it is best to guard those experiences in your heart unless you specifically feel led to share them with another believer. I don’t think I’ve ever shared such experiences that I have had with an unbeliever because they don’t have the spiritual capacity to even begin to believe what they might hear. Joseph should have taken a similar path. It would have done him well to guard his mouth, and guard those treasures in his heart. Instead, he announced that he would be ruler over all the members of the family. I imagine Joseph announcing this at the dinner table while it was followed by awkward silence. So how did they react? They reacted as anyone would who wasn’t a recipient of the dream. They were out to get him. They resented the things that he said and it was a vehicle for creating animus in their hearts. His brothers acted on this and other emotions of the flesh.

His brothers took an animal and killed it, and put the blood on the coat of many colors that Jacob had given Joseph. They did this to trick their old dad into thinking that Joseph had been killed. Then at Judah’s suggestion, they sold Joseph into slavery to a passing band of Ishmaelite traders (the sons/descendants of Ishmael (Joseph’s second cousins) that came and purchased Joseph for 20 pieces of silver, and they took him off to sell him down in Egypt.

Well, most of us know how the story goes. Joseph was placed in an official named Potiphar’s house. Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, and when he resisted, she ended up claiming that he had violated her.



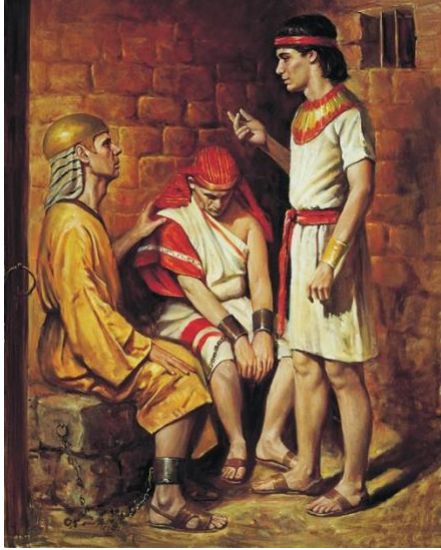
Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷ It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. ⁹ There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"

Note that Joseph did the right thing even if it got him into trouble. Like Joseph, we're also to do the right thing even if it "gets us into trouble". This includes doing the right thing even if it results in us losing money, losing position, losing status or whatever. Joseph was sentenced to prison, but he didn't fret. He obviously believed in the sovereignty of God. He just started helping out and doing whatever needed to be done in the prison. In time, he was such a good administrator that the officials gave him custodial duties in the prison.

Chapter 40 then tells us that the King's butler and baker offended the King and they too ended up in prison. Joseph was put in charge of the butler and baker. We read.

⁴ The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time. ⁵ Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation. (Genesis 40)

In the text both the butler and the baker tell Joseph their dreams and Joseph speaks the truth in love. He told the butler that he would be restored to his service with the King, but he had to tell the baker that he would be put to death. What a horrible message to have to give to someone. Joseph gave the message as graciously as he was able to do. Joseph was careful to let them know that it was God who did the interpreting of dreams, not him. Can we learn a lesson from this? YES. It is always important that we give God the glory for ANYTHING that we can do that helps or blesses another. James the brother of Jesus tells us that, "¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17 KJV)



Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please.”

The text then tells us that what came to pass was just as the dreams had foretold, ²⁰ *Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.* ²¹ *He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand;* ²² *but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.* ²³ *Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.*

There are several observations here. Notice that the baker forgot all about Joseph when he was released from prison.

It helps us to remember that people will often make promises to you when they are in some sort of extremis, and then when they are out of their jam, they forget about those promises. A guy called me less than a year ago that was going through an operation that scared him. He called me and wanted me to pray for him. I counseled him and comforted him. He told me that if he made it through the operation, he wanted to sit down with me and help set up a benevolence fund here at our church. He made it through the operation, and I never received a call from him. Joseph didn’t worry about it. He just kept doing what he was supposed to be doing. In time the butler DID remember Joseph when the King had a dream that plagued his mind. He couldn’t figure it out and he called all of the magicians and sorcerers of Egypt together to figure it out. Then the butler remembered Joseph.

⁹ *Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, “I would make mention today of my own offenses.* ¹⁰ *Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, both me and the chief baker.* ¹¹ *We had a dream on the same night he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream.* ¹² *Now a Hebrew youth was with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related them to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his own dream.* ¹³ *And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him.” (Genesis 41)*

Joseph spent time in prison for crimes he never committed, and then through a series of events he got out of prison and slowly God elevated him from being a zero to being a hero in Egypt. He became what today we would know as the Prime Minister. He interpreted dreams of Pharaoh that came true, and through divine guidance he devised a scheme to store grain which resulted in the Egyptian people being saved from starvation due to a famine that struck the entire Middle East. When the famine became so severe up in Canaan, his brothers came down to Egypt looking for grain to buy. Joseph’s actions ended up saving the Jewish people as well.

Joseph could have taken retribution against his brothers for all the harm that they had done to him, but instead he forgave them and told them, "What you meant for evil God used for good."

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20 NIV)

If we could grasp hold of what Joseph is saying, it could change our lives. We would see negative events differently if we realized that God causes *"all things to work together for good for those who love God for those who are called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28 my paraphrase). God works it out. People may do things to harm us or hurt us, but God can and does turn it right back around in His time.

The writer of Hebrews tells us how important faith is in the life of the believer. In Hebrews 11 we read,

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and the one who had received the promises was offering up his only son; ¹⁸ it was he to whom it was said, "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE NAMED." ¹⁹ He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. ²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. ²¹ By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

Let us pray.

