

## Joseph – From Prisoner to Ruler in Egypt (Genesis 40-45)

### Expository Lessons from the Book of Genesis

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#### I. Background and Introduction

- a. Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and brought to Egypt. There, he serves in the house of Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh.
- b. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph. Joseph flees the temptation and is innocent, yet ends up in prison.
- c. In a prior lesson, I mentioned that for many years I had wondered, "Why is so much of the **Book of Genesis** devoted to the details of Joseph's life?"
  - i. Eleven of the 50 chapters in **Genesis** are devoted to story of Joseph: **chapters 37, 39-48, 50**
  - ii. Yet Jesus is not descended from Joseph (although he was descended from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob).
  - iii. Also, there is almost no mention of Joseph in the New Testament.
- d. I believe this lesson will provide a big surprise to most listeners; and at the end you may be able to answer the question I asked for so many years.

#### II. Joseph Cast into Prison (Read **Genesis 39:20-40:23**)

- a. Summary of the storyline
  - i. Joseph is sentenced to prison; yet God is with him there. He obtains favor in the sight of the chief prison keeper, who puts everything in the prison (including all the prisoners) under Joseph's care.
  - ii. Pharaoh then has his chief cupbearer and chief baker cast into the prison as well.
  - iii. The LXX says that the cupbearer and baker were eunuchs (similar to the description of Potiphar in **Genesis 39:1**). Note that even in the Hebrew text, while most translators render the term "official", some do render it "eunuch" here as well (examples: Young's Literal Translation and Douay-Rheims).
  - iv. The cupbearer and baker each have a dream.
  - v. Cupbearer's dream has a grapevine with three branches. In the dream, the cupbearer is pressing the grapes into Pharaoh's cup, and handing the cup to Pharaoh.

1. Joseph interprets the dream: in three days, the chief cupbearer will be restored to serve Pharaoh.
  2. Joseph requests that after this happens, the cupbearer put in a good word on his behalf to Pharaoh, to get Joseph (an innocent man) out of prison.
  3. It happens exactly as Joseph predicted, but the chief cupbearer forgets about Joseph.
- vi. The chief baker has a dream in which there are three baskets on his head. The top basket is filled with baked goods, but the birds are eating those baked goods.
1. Joseph interprets the dream: within three days the chief baker will be hanged.
  2. This also comes to pass, exactly as Joseph predicted.
- b. Joseph remains in the prison, forgotten by the chief cupbearer, for two more years.
- i. That is a long time!
  - ii. Imagine if you were in that situation. What would you have been thinking about the chief cupbearer, *and about God*, during all that time? Would you be wavering in your faith, wondering if God had forgotten you, or whether God is really a just God?

### III. Joseph Becomes a Ruler in Egypt

- a. Read **Genesis 41:1-36**.
  - i. Two years after the cupbearer had his dream in prison, Pharaoh has two disturbing dreams in one night.
    1. First dream: seven fat, healthy cows come out of the river first. They are followed by seven ugly, gaunt cows that devour the first seven.
    2. Second dream: seven plump ears of "corn" (grain) are on one stalk first. They are followed by seven thin, blighted ears of corn that devour the first seven.
  - ii. No one can interpret the dream for Pharaoh. Then the cupbearer remembers Joseph. Pharaoh has Joseph brought out of the prison, and asks Joseph if he can interpret the dream he just had.

- iii. Joseph says he personally cannot interpret dreams, but God can and will give Pharaoh the interpretation. What does that tell us about Joseph?
1. He is a humble man, who points to God instead of to himself.
  2. Joseph's response reminds me of Daniel's attitude in **Daniel chapter 2**, when the king of Babylon is killing all the wise men who are unable to *tell and* interpret his dream of a 4-part statue that gets smashed.
    - a. Daniel and his three friends first petition God to reveal the mystery.
    - b. After God reveals it to Daniel in a night vision, Daniel prays and blesses God as the one who raises up kings, reveals mysteries and gives wisdom.
    - c. The king of Babylon asks Daniel, "Can you tell me the dream I saw and its interpretation?" Daniel answered before the king and said, "The mystery which the king demanded to be told to the king cannot be revealed by wise men, magicians, enchanter, and diviners. But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what must come to pass in the last days." (from **Daniel 2:26-28**. LXX, OSB)
  3. In an extremely practical letter to Christians, James calls us to the same attitude of humility.
    - a. Asking God, the source of all wisdom, to give us wisdom.
      - i. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind." (**James 1:5-6**, NKJV)
    - b. Acknowledging, in what we say, that we may have the intention, but the events are actually in God's control (not ours).
      - i. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.

For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."  
**(James 4:13-16, NKJV)**

- iv. Joseph tells Pharaoh that both dreams pertain to the same thing; told twice because this is a matter that has been fixed by God. God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do: seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.
- v. Joseph then advises Pharaoh to appoint "a sensible and intelligent man" over the land of Egypt, to oversee collecting and storing 1/5 of the harvest over the next seven (plentiful) years. That food will be a reserve for the time of famine.

b. Read **Genesis 41:37-57**

i. Summary of the storyline

1. Pharaoh sees Spirit of God in Joseph, and wisdom, as in no other man.
2. He appoints Joseph as ruler with all Pharaoh's authority over the land.
3. He gives Joseph a wife, daughter of a priest, and has two sons: Ephraim and Manasseh.
4. Joseph is 30 years old at this point.
5. Seven years of plenty are followed by a great famine, just as prophesied. Joseph stores up vast quantities of grain. The famine strikes all the nations, not just Egypt.
6. Pharaoh tells the people during the famine. "Go to Joseph and do whatever he says."

**IV. Famine Hits Canaan – Joseph's Brothers Travel to Egypt for Food (Genesis 42-44)**

a. Summary of the storyline

i. Read **Genesis 42:1-13**

1. Famine hits all the countries, including Canaan, where Jacob and his sons were. Jacob sends his sons (except his youngest, Benjamin, who is also Joseph's only full-brother) to Egypt to purchase grain.

2. Ten of Joseph's brothers come to Joseph in Egypt. They do not recognize him, and bow down before him. He recognizes them and remembers the dreams he had dreamed many years before regarding them (of sheaves bowing down, and the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him; see **Genesis 37:5-11**).
3. Joseph pretends to be distrustful and suspicious of them, and asks questions about his father and his brother.
  - ii. Joseph gives them grain under the condition that Simeon is bound and kept in Egypt, under the condition that they bring their youngest brother (Benjamin) with them next time.
  - iii. Joseph arranges to return all the money for the grain in the grain sacks of the brothers.
  - iv. When the brothers return to their father, he is perplexed and afraid for Benjamin to make the next trip. Reuben offers his own sons as a pledge for safekeeping for Benjamin.
  - v. (**Chapter 43**) Famine continues. Jacob sends his sons back to Egypt, to get more food. This time they take Benjamin, and double the money.
  - vi. When the brothers arrive, Simeon is brought out. All eleven brothers are gathered together to meet Joseph for a meal. They bow down to him when he arrives. Joseph weeps when he sees his younger brother Benjamin. Benjamin's portion at the meal is 5x that of the other brothers. Still, Joseph does not reveal his identity.
  - vii. (**Chapter 44**) Joseph's brothers are sent back with grain. Joseph has someone place his special silver cup in the bag of Benjamin before they depart. After his brothers depart the city, Joseph sends out a group to chase them down and find out who "stole" his cup. It is found in Benjamin's sack, and all the brothers are brought back to Joseph's house.
  - viii. Joseph pretends that he will take Benjamin as a servant for this offense. Judah realizes that the loss of Benjamin would destroy his father Jacob, so Judah offers himself as servant.

## V. Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers (Genesis 45)

### a. Read **Genesis 45:1-8**

- i. Joseph at last reveals himself to his brothers; understandably, they are stunned. Imagine how you would have felt, after all that happened. If I were one of the brothers involved in selling him into slavery and covering up the crime, I would feel terrible and would be thinking, "He probably wants to kill us, and I can't blame him!"

- ii. Joseph's attitude toward them is amazing, and there is much to learn from it. He is concerned that his brothers not be angry with themselves for the way that they had sinned against him!
1. After being sold into slavery, and spending two years in prison, Joseph has no bitterness toward his brothers. Why not?
  2. He sees that all that happened worked for a greater good, to save many lives in the end. "God sent me before you to save life...to preserve a remnant on the earth, and to sustain you as a great remnant."
  3. He sees that God was the one behind it all. He tells them, "It was not you who sent me here, but God."
  4. To those who have been mistreated by family members or by spiritual family, in churches where leaders did things to you that they should not have done, I have a few questions:
    - a. Were you treated worse than Joseph? Did people literally sell you into slavery? Did people conspire to kill you? Did they lie about you and claim you were dead?
    - b. Were you so righteous that you did not feel sorry for yourself and give in to the sinful desires of your flesh when tempted during your time of trial?
    - c. Did you spend two years languishing as captive in a prison from which it was impossible to escape? Forgotten and ignored by someone who could have helped you get out?
    - d. Did you give in to bitterness toward God or toward others in your family or church? Or did you see the sovereign hand of God working through the sins of others, ultimately to refine your character and to lead to the salvation of many more people, several years down the road? Do you credit your enemies with putting you into bad situations, or do you see the sovereign hand of God using even the sins of others to bring about a glorious, hidden plan?
    - e. Do you see that in reality *it was God* who sent you into and through that time of extreme trial?
    - f. Christians who have been badly mistreated in the church or in your families: Do you have the same heart as Joseph (later demonstrated by Jesus)?

- b. Joseph then has his brothers bring their father and their families down from Canaan, to Egypt. (Summary of **Genesis 45:9-28**)
  - i. Pharaoh hears and wants to take great care of Joseph's brothers, giving them the best land in Egypt.
  - ii. The brothers tell their father Jacob that his son, presumed dead for several years, is still alive and is ruler over Egypt. Jacob is stunned, and agrees to go down to Egypt so that he can see his son Joseph again, before he dies.

## VI. Is There Something More in The Story of Joseph?

- a. Several years ago (2001-2002) I was living in Albania, travelling in Eastern Europe teaching through the Old Testament. I was in Romania, preparing to teach a lesson out of Genesis the next day, and thought "Let me read the story of Joseph one more time." I was still perplexed, as I had been for years, regarding why almost  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the **Book of Genesis** was centered around Joseph's story.
  - i. I came to the end of **Genesis 39** and the beginning of **chapter 40** and mulled over in my mind, "Joseph was put in *prison*...he is in *prison*...he is in *prison*." While there, he reveals the future to two other men. Then suddenly it hit me: "Wait, isn't there something in the New Testament about Jesus being '*in prison*' and *preaching to others who are in there*?"
  - ii. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison," (**1 Peter 3:18-19**, NKJV)
  - iii. I knew that this passage in **1 Peter 3** referred to Christ's descent into Hades.
    1. As discussed in prior lessons in this series, when we die our spirits go to Hades (Greek) or Sheol (Hebrews), the place where the spirits of the dead go awaiting the final Day of Judgment.
    2. Jesus speaks of Hades in **Luke 16:19-31** (Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus). Peter confirms that is where Jesus went when he died, for the three days until his resurrection, in **Acts 2:24-31**, where Peter is quoting from **Psalms 16:8-11**, "you will not leave my soul in Hades...".
    3. Therefore, in **1 Peter 3**, the word 'prison' is being used by Peter as a euphemism for Hades, where the spirits of the dead are, to whom Jesus preached.

- a. This also is referred to in the Apostles Creed, where it says he descended into the “lowermost parts”; some translations say he descended into Hades.
  - b. (For more on this subject, I refer you to two audio lessons by David Bercot, *What the Early Christians Believed about Life After Death*, and *Christ’s Descent into Hades*. Both lessons are available through Scroll Publishing)
4. When Peter quotes from the Old Testament, like most of the New Testament writers he generally follows the Septuagint. (Example: **1 Peter 5:5** where he quotes **Proverbs 3:34** word-for-word from the LXX, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”) I find it interesting that word ‘prison’ that Peter uses in **1 Peter 3** *first appears* in the Old Testament (LXX) in the story of Joseph.
    - iv. It struck me that *if* Joseph’s time in prison foreshadowed Christ “preaching to the spirits in prison” (in Hades), then I should *reconsider the entire story of Joseph’s life*.
      1. Then the elements of the story started to come back to me, in a different light:
        - a. his brothers hating him and conspiring to kill him
        - b. the dreams he had about them bowing down to him
        - c. the special robe,
        - d. ending up as ruler over the kingdom
        - e. etc.
      2. *Could it be that the life of Joseph provides a detailed foreshadowing of the life of Christ?* I present the evidence for your consideration.
- b. Parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus Christ
    - i. His brothers hated him and wanted to kill him, for three reasons (**Genesis 37:1-11**):
      1. His brothers are jealous that he is the most beloved son of his father. (**Luke 20:9-19**)
      2. He exposes the sin of his brothers, giving a bad report of them to their father. (**John 7:7**)



3. His brothers did not want him to rule over them, as was prophesied. (**Luke 19:12-27**)
  - ii. He was the good shepherd over his father's sheep. His brothers were bad shepherds. (**Genesis 37:1-2, Ezekiel 34:1-24, John 10:1-16**)
  - iii. He was the firstborn son of his mother, a woman who was highly favored by his father. (**Genesis 29:30, Luke 1:28, 1:42**)
  - iv. His mother is closely associated with the town of Bethlehem, and events there involving both birth and death. (**Genesis 35:16-20, Matthew 2:1-18**)
  - v. He is given a special robe to wear.
    1. **Genesis 37:3** says Joseph was given "a tunic of *many colors*", "a tunic of colors" (LXX); or "a coat of many colors" (KJV). His brothers stripped the robe off of him at the start of his ordeal (**Genesis 37:23**) and later dipped that tunic in blood. (**Genesis 37:31**)
    2. Jesus was clothed with a special robe before he was crucified.
      - a. In **Luke 23:11** it says Herod "arrayed him in a *gorgeous* robe."
      - b. In **Mark 15:17-20** and **John 19:2** say the soldiers clothed him with a *purple* robe.
      - c. Yet **Matthew 27:28** it says it was "a *scarlet* robe".
      - d. In **Revelation 19:13**, a vision of Jesus leading the armies of heaven, it says, "He was clothed with a *robe dipped in blood*, and His name is called The Word of God."
    3. His brothers conspired with foreigners to get rid of him. He was sold to the foreigners for money.
      - a. Joseph was sold for 20 coins (**Genesis 37:28**)
      - b. Jesus was betrayed by Judas, one of the twelve, for 30 pieces of silver (**Matthew 26:15**)
  - vi. His body is cast into a dry pit or cave.
    1. Joseph was cast into the dry cistern (**Genesis 37:22-24**)
    2. Jesus' body was put into a rock tomb (**Matthew 27:59-60**)

- vii. From that pit, he departs bound on a journey to a foreign land, surrounded by myrrh and spices.
  - 1. Joseph taken by spice traders with camels “bearing spices, balm and myrrh.”
  - 2. “And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.” (**John 19:39-40**, NKJV)
- viii. Later his senior brother returns to the pit, but finds the pit empty (no body there) and he is puzzled.
  - 1. Reuben returns to the pit looking for Joseph but is surprised to find it empty. He is distressed and says, “The lad is not there; and I, where shall I go?” (**Genesis 37:30**, LXX, OSB)
  - 2. “But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.” (**Luke 24:12**, NKJV)
- ix. The brothers circulate a false report surrounding the death. (**Genesis 37:31-33**, **Matthew 28:11-15**)
- x. He ultimately ends up ‘in prison’, even though he has done nothing wrong and has resisted every temptation. (**Genesis 39:20**)
- xi. Because he is an innocent man, the Lord is with him even ‘in prison’, and he ends up being placed in charge of the prison. (**Genesis 39:20-23**)
- xii. He speaks to those in prison regarding their future condition, the judgment to come. (**Genesis 40**, **1 Peter 3:18-20**)
- xiii. Ultimately, after a time, he is delivered from the prison
  - 1. After two years (Joseph, **Genesis 41:1**)
  - 2. After two days; “on the third day” (Jesus, **1 Corinthians 15:3-5**)
- xiv. After being released from the ‘prison’, he is given full authority from the ultimate ruler, and is made ruler over all (**Genesis 41:40-44**, **Matthew 28:18**, **1 Corinthians 15:24-25**)
- xv. He rises to this position as a young man in his early 30’s.

1. Joseph at age 30 (**Genesis 41:46**)
  2. Jesus begins his ministry at “at about 30 years of age” (**Luke 3:23**)
- xvi. Made ruler because the Spirit of God is found in him and because he is found wiser than any man (**Genesis 41:38-39, Matthew 12:42, John 3:34, 1 Corinthians 1:22-24**).
  - xvii. In the famine that grips the world, all nations must come to him for food and for life. He alone has the keys to the bread of life. The ruler tells all the people, “Go to him, and you must do whatever he says.” (**Genesis 41:53-57, John 6, Luke 9:34-36, Deuteronomy 18:15-19**)
  - xviii. His brothers at first do not recognize him. (**Genesis 42:6-8, Luke 24:13-16**)
  - xix. Ultimately, they all bow down before him and call him their Lord, as had been prophesied. (**Genesis 37:5-11, 42:6-9, 43:26, 50:18; Matthew 28:17, Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10**)
  - xx. He paid the debt owed by his brothers, and gave them the food for free. (**Genesis 42:25-28, 44:1; Romans 5:15**)
  - xxi. He first he appeared to 10 of his 11 brothers, then to all 11. (**Genesis 42-45, John 20:19-29**)
  - xxii. He was willing to suffer so that many lives could be saved by God, and was willing to forgive his brothers who sinned against him. (**Genesis 45:4-8, 50:18-21; Isaiah 53:4-12, Luke 23:34, 1 Peter 2:21-25**)
- c. Is this just a coincidence? Or is it a clear foreshadowing, designed by the Holy Spirit, telling the life, death, descent into Hades, resurrection and reign of Jesus, in detail, over 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem?
  - d. If this is true, why no mention of it or reference to it in the New Testament? Or is there?
    - i. Joseph is mentioned prominently in Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin in **Acts 7**. His famous conclusion to that speech:
    - ii. “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” (**Acts 7:51-53, NKJV**)
    - iii. Stephen’s case:

1. They are just like their forefathers, who resisted the Holy Spirit and persecuted the righteous.
2. Three episodes where their forefathers did this:
  - a. Joseph (**Acts 7:9-16**). The patriarchs were envious and sold Joseph into slavery, yet God was using him to save them.
  - b. Moses Round 1 (**Acts 7:23-29**). At about the age of 40, Moses tried to help his fellow Israelites, including trying to reconcile two Hebrew men who were fighting. However, he was rejected with the taunt, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?"
  - c. Moses Round 2 (**Acts 7:37-41**). Moses at age of 80+, when the people of Israel rejected him and God, and worshipped the golden calf at Sinai.
3. Therefore, Stephen saw in Joseph and in Moses the same pattern fulfilled in the rejection of God and his Prophet.