

JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE (18)

Patriarchal Period (7)

Joseph in Egypt

We have been continuing our journey through the Bible. We have been studying the period of the patriarchs (the 4th of 17) noting Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We now come to the life of Joseph as we continue our studies.

I. Joseph – in Egypt

- a. A point of interest is found in Genesis 37:2, “this is the history of Jacob”. While we have been introduced to Joseph, the text is identified with Jacob. As we have noted, he was one of the “three” patriarchs that defined this period. Joseph, as introduced, is an accounting of one of his sons. We find toward the end of Genesis that Jacob is still alive and thus what is recorded about Joseph is about preserving the patriarchal covenant given to Jacob. We have noted many events related to Jacob’s sons that show their failings including: Simeon and Levi killing the Midianites, Reuben’s fornication with Bilhah (Jacob’s concubine), Judah will sin with Tamar (Genesis 38), and Joseph’s evil report of the 4 sons of Bilhah and Zilpah – what they did is not specified. Perhaps this factors into his favoritism of Joseph (hopeful for a more godly son).
- b. Previously – In our last lesson we were introduced to Joseph as Jacob’s young child by Rachel. We noted Jacob’s favoritism as he provided a “tunic of many colors” and Joseph’s dreams of his family bowing down to him which caused further hatred. We concluded our study with Joseph being sold to Midianite traders (Genesis 37:12-36) and dipped his coat in animal to take to Jacob to deceive him. He is 17 years old (37:2).
- c. Joseph sold as a slave in Egypt. Genesis 37:12-36 records his being sold. He is sold for 20 shekels of silver. Note under the LOM, a servant that was killed by another’s animal brought a price of 30 shekels of silver (the same price Jesus was betrayed for). This lower price shows the brother’s contempt for Joseph.
- d. Genesis 39 records Joseph in Potiphar’s house. God is with him and he prospers. So much that Potiphar puts him in charge of his possessions. BUT, his wife desires Joseph and tries to entice him to commit adultery. Joseph did not give in. But one day she found him in the house alone and caught him asking him to lie with her. She grabbed his garment, but Joseph ran away. Potiphar’s wife accused him of trying to molest her. Potiphar, in anger, has Joseph put into prison. NOTE: Some wonder if Potiphar thought his wife was totally innocent consider what he did to Joseph. Rather than having him executed, he is placed in the king’s prison (39:20).
- e. Genesis 39:21-23 – Joseph, conducts himself honorably and is again protected by the LORD. He rises in prominence in the prison.
- f. Genesis 40, while in prison, 2 of Pharaoh’s officers are put in the prison because he was offended. Both have dreams and are grieved because they could not interpret them. The butler has a dream of a vine with 3 branches. It blossoms and brings forth clusters of grapes. The grapes are pressed into Pharaoh’s cup. Joseph interprets the dream that in 3 days he would be restored to his post. The baker dreams of 3 baskets on his head with all types of breads. But the birds eat the bread. Joseph interprets that he would be hanged in 3 days. As Joseph interpreted, it happened. As the butler is restored Joseph told him to remember him because he was innocent. But the butler forgot about Joseph.
- g. Genesis 41 – After 2 full years pass, Pharaoh has 2 dreams. In one of them he is by the river (likely the Nile), he sees 7 healthy cows and then 7 ugly gaunt cows that consumed the healthy cows. Also he

- dreams of 7 plump and good heads of grain which are consumed by 7 gaunt heads of grain. The next morning no one could interpret his dreams. Then the butler remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh. He sends for Joseph who is cleaned up and shaven. Joseph appears before Pharaoh, hears the dreams and give the interpretation. Both are the same, 7 years of plenty would be followed by 7 years of severe famine. Then in 41:34-36 Joseph gives advice as to what he should do – take the people 1/5 of all grain and store it for the lean years. Pharaoh accepted the advice and appointed Joseph second greatest in the land of Egypt (only Pharaoh was ahead of him). All peoples would have to carry transactions through Joseph. Thus Joseph rises to great prominence. Joseph is successful in carrying out this plan as they gather so much grain during the 7 years of plenty they quick taking inventory.
- h. Joseph is also given a wife and she bears him 2 sons – Manasseh (“God has made me forget) and Ephraim (God has caused me to be fruitful).
 - i. **Chronology** – Genesis 41:46 tells us that Joseph was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh. Recall, he was 17 years old when sold into Egypt. Thus far he had been in Egypt for about 13 years, likely about 10 of those in Potiphar’s house and 3 years in the king’s prison (forgotten by the butler for 2 years).
 - j. Genesis 42 – as the famine begins, it is over the hole earth and Joseph begins to sell grain to other nations. Jacob hears there is grain in Egypt and sends his sons to buy grain there. The 10 oldest sons go to Egypt with money. When they arrive they appear before and BOW to Joseph, not recognizing him (42:6). He recognizes them and treats them roughly accusing them of being spies. He inquires of them and finds out that Jacob is alive and that Benjamin is with him. After 3 days in prison (42:17), he offers to let one stay behind and the rest to retrieve Benjamin and come back. Vs. 21-22 – they reminded each other of their guilt in what they had done to Joseph, not knowing he understood them. Reuben rebukes them letting them know that they did not listen to him. Joseph weeks and takes Simeon (2nd oldest) to stay behind. WHY NOT Reuben? Possibly, he had just heard that he was not complicit in selling Joseph.
 - k. Genesis 43 - He sends them away returning their money with the grain he gave them. As they return to Jacob, they tell what happened. He refuses to let them take Benjamin back with them (accepting the loss of Simeon). Reuben offers his sons in place of Benjamin if he does not bring Benjamin back home. Jacob still refuses until they run out of grain again. Then Judah offers to protect him. Jacob agrees (it is really the only choice he has).
 - l. When they return to Egypt, Joseph welcomes them with a feast and returns Simeon to them. He sees Benjamin and weeps (43:30). He seats them at a time in their birth order. Each is given a serving but Benjamin is given 5x as much. They are perplexed (how did he know?).
 - m. As they return home, Joseph schemed for a way to have Benjamin brought back to him. This could be a test to see if they had truly repented of what they had done (would they just let Benjamin go or plead their case). Joseph has his cup put in Benjamin’s sack. When they are stopped they deny doing wrong and declare if the cup is found, whoever has it shall die, and the rest would return and be slaves. Joseph’s servant said that all that was necessary was the one with whom the cup was found. When it is found in Benjamin’s sack, they ALL return to Egypt. Judah speaks and concedes that they would all be his slaves, but when Joseph only wants Benjamin. Judah intercedes (44:18ff) and offers to take Benjamin’s place.
 - n. 45:1ff – Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and tells them to go and get Jacob and his family and bring them to Egypt because there are still 5 years of famine left. He offers to put them in the land of Goshen where they would raise their herds and flocks. NOTE: This is calculated and will serve to isolate them from the rest of the Egyptians so that they could continue to worship God.
 - o. 45:25-28 – they return to Jacob and tell him that Joseph is still alive. Jacob’s spirit is revived, and he makes plans to go to Egypt to see him.
 - p. Genesis 46-50 finds Jacob travelling to and dwelling in Egypt the rest of his life. There are other events that unfold that are worthy of consideration. We will address these in our next lesson.

II. Lessons from Joseph

- a. **A lesson in providence.** While there are many lessons to glean from the life of Joseph, the providence of God is one of the most impactful lessons as far as God's plan for man's redemption is concerned. The idea of providence is God working THROUGH natural processes and life. The point: God can work His will regardless of the circumstances. It does not require miracles, though they were used when necessary (Joseph interpreted dreams which would be a miracle). We can take great confidence in what God can do providentially. Paul told the Philippians, *"I can do all things through Christ through Christ who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:13) He wrote in Romans 8:28 says, *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called "according to His purpose"*. In our next lesson, after we summarize the remainder of Genesis, I want to examine in greater detail the providence of God as it unfolded in Joseph's life.
- b. **Always conduct yourself with high integrity.** Especially in the difficult and trying times. Joseph, had every reason to bitter, and it is possible he was for awhile. But he trusted in God, even as a slave in Potiphar's house, and as a wrongfully accused prisoner. He did this for about 12 years. How often are we reminded that life so that others have no cause to accuse – 1 Peter 2:11-16.
- c. **"Flee youthful lusts"** – so Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22. Often when we quote or study this verse, Joseph becomes the default example of what this means. He was in a situation where if he had given in, he would likely have escaped problems. But he knew better – he RAN AWAY from the problem, even at a tremendous cost. What steps will we take to avoid temptations? Recall what Jesus said about lust and adultery in the heart! Matthew 5:27-30. What did He mean by "pluck out your eye" and "cut off your right hand"? It was not about self-mutilation, but taking WHATEVER measures are necessary to avoid circumstances of temptation.
- d. **How can I sin against God?** Genesis 39:9. As Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, he not only reminded her of his integrity and the trust her husband had put in him, but he said, *"How can I thus do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"* We must realize that when we sin, yes it might involve others, but it is FIRST and foremost against God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 51:4, as David mourned his sin understood this, *Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.* 1 John 3:9 reminds us, *Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.*
- e. **Keep your faith, again regardless of how difficult and trying times are.** In spite of how Joseph was mistreated over and over, he never abandoned God. We have at least 3 occasions in his life to consider: 1) Betrayed by his brothers; 2) Potiphar's wife; 3) Forgotten for 2 years by the butler. Yet in all this he kept the faith and trusted God. God could still use him and did (both in interpreting dreams and providing safe haven for God's chosen family). 1 Peter 4:19, after dealing with sufferings as a Christian Peter concludes, *Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.*
- f. **There are consequences to sins** – of course we understand that there are consequences associated with sin. But sometimes they involve mental anguish and guilt. Joseph's brothers for 22 years knew what they had done to Joseph and seemingly regretted it. God has given us a conscience to convict us and keep us going where we need to God. Unless we damage that conscience, it can bring us to Him.

And thus we can see the life of Joseph as he was in Egypt. There are many lessons we can learn from each of these characters, both how we ought to act and how not to act. What have you learned from Joseph?