

Lessons from Joseph pt2 11-4-01

Genesis 42-50

Last week we followed the incredible but true story of Joseph's journey to second in power over the greatest nation on earth at the time. It is not a route we would be likely to choose, but it is the one that God in His wisdom chose. I'd like to first trace out what followed as God worked in this family that was to become the nation of Israel. Then we'll look at a few the spiritual pictures represented, God gave us as examples.

Once Joseph was given his position, he went right to work surveying the nation and planning the storage of the seven years of plenty. In the process, the Pharaoh legitimized Joseph's position in society's eyes by giving him a wife, Asenath, the daughter of the priest of Heliopolis (On). Over the seven years of plenty, grain pours into his storage facilities in such quantities that they give up counting. During this time he has two sons. The first he names Manasseh. It appears to be derived from the Hebrew word 'forget'. God had helped him put his difficulties behind him. The second was Ephraim, which means 'fruitful'. He declared that it was God that had made him fruitful in the land of his suffering.

At the end of the seven years of plenty, a severe famine plagued the entire region. The Pharaoh told everyone to go to Joseph and "do what he tells you." So everyone came and bought food from the granaries Joseph had prepared. Canaan was experiencing the same famine. The family of Israel was running out of food, and so, Israel sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. He kept Benjamin at home and sent the ten brothers. Israel still is clinging to the son of Rachel.

I can imagine these shepherds walking into the wonder and culture of Egypt, staring up at the buildings and paintings, wondering at the advanced culture and dress. When they stood before Joseph to buy grain, it is no wonder they did not recognize him. He is now 37 years old. The last time they saw him he was 17. He is probably dressed in elaborate priestly garments. Suddenly, they are quivering in fear as he tells them through an interpreter that he thinks they are spies. They quickly tell their story, and through it, Joseph learns his brother Benjamin is alive.

Gen 42:17-24 (NIV)¹⁷ *And he put them all in custody for three days.*

¹⁸ *On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God:¹⁹ If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households.²⁰ But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die." This they proceeded to do.²¹ They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed*

he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."²² Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood."²³ They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.²⁴ He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

Joseph has them thrown in jail until they chose one man to go retrieve Benjamin to prove their story, or so he says. The three days in jail gave them just a taste of what he endured. They realize they are receiving justice from God for their refusal to hear Joseph's pleas when they sold him. No one volunteers to go for Benjamin. I think everyone is afraid to face Dad, even though most of these boys are older than Joseph. Finally Joseph holds Simeon in jail and sends them all back to get Benjamin. Joseph does an interesting thing to test them. He binds Simeon in front of their eyes. Will they hurry back to alleviate his pain or are they still so self-centered they care nothing for each other? Have the years changed his brothers like they have changed him?

After all the grain they purchased is consumed, they start trying to talk Israel into letting Benjamin go with them, back to Egypt. No one seems concerned for poor Simeon. It looks like they have written him off. Finally under threat of them all starving, and with Judah putting his life on the line if anything happens to Benjamin, Israel lets him go. Since they found their last payment in their grain bags, they take double the payment. Let's read together what happened next. Read this exciting drama in Genesis 43:16 to 45:15 and 50:15-20. (Take the time to read this story so you will understand what follows.) What a story! Now let's take a look at some of the spiritual parallels happening here.

Joseph is clearly a shadow of Christ. He is a savior of the world at that time. All the world must come to him for bread. His own brothers betrayed him. When Christ came into the world, John said, "his own received him not." In fact, it was you and I that (like Joseph's brothers and Judas) sold Him to the chief priest and elders to be crucified. Peter, speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit said to the crowd gathered at Pentecost, "Jesus, whom you crucified". Those people had nothing to do with His crucifixion physically, but we are all responsible, as we are sinners, rebels against God. We are responsible for His being sold for the price of a slave.

God prepared Joseph for a position of power through the sufferings he endured. Jesus was made our perfect Redeemer through His sufferings. It was God who made Joseph and Jesus fruitful in the land of their suffering. Both Joseph and Jesus went from obscurity to the place of power and authority. Every knee that

approached Joseph bowed. One day every knee will bow before Jesus and confess He is Lord.

There was a great famine in the world just as there was in this story. Amos 8:11-12 (NIV)¹¹ *"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land-- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.¹² Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.* The four hundred years before Christ had experienced no prophetic voice. People were desperately seeking a word from God, starving spiritually for lack of it. God sent His great supply of bread from heaven in the Lord Jesus. Just as the world gave everything to Pharaoh for bread that keeps them alive, so we come and give our all to him for the Bread of Life that is ours freely in Christ Jesus.

But some come for a small supply, enough to get by for a time, like the sons of Israel. When they come again, they know they must bring what they have withheld, for He requires it of us. Are we rebel spies against His Kingdom or is He our Lord? We must submit that thing we have held back, to verify that we place our allegiance to Him. We hold off until we are starving. We have arguments, like they did with Israel, about the need to surrender what is dearest. Finally we grudgingly come to the conclusion there is no other way. We will give up what is dear to us. Israel said, "if I am bereaved then I am bereaved." Oh well, what else can I do? If God takes away this thing I love I will have to bear it. Poor Israel. Poor you and me.

And so we come. We bring our best gifts, and He invites us to His table to dine with Him! What? What is this? Oh no! Maybe He will demand more. He is going to make us His slaves! Then we declare how innocent we are – we brought the silver back! But we find out He is being generous. We get another supply of food and start back thinking maybe we wont have to make this trip again. Then suddenly, that thing we hold dearest is demanded of us. We are brought back into His presence. Our sins come back to haunt us. Conviction sets in and we brace ourselves for judgement. Will He just chop off our heads or will we be made to serve hard labor? And then we see tears in His eyes? "I am Joseph, your brother." "I am Jesus, your brother." How could He call us brother when we sold Him? Why are His arms open to receive me? We weep with joy as we embrace. Gen 45:7-8 (NIV)⁷ *But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.⁸ "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. You mean, I'm forgiven? That's not the half of it!*

We talk together of the past, and we talk of the future. He supplies the means for us to move out of the world and into His Kingdom. Then He tells us, Gen

45:11(NIV)¹¹ *I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.* How could we make it through this life if He did not provide for us, give us a place in Himself and His life in us? He is Jehovah Jirah and provides our needs abundantly in His own person. Without Him, we too, would be destitute! Living without Jesus in this world is to be destitute. Then Pharaoh (figuratively God, see the equality in Genesis 44:18) tells us, Gen 45:20 (NIV)²⁰ *Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.* "I brought a few good works (almonds and dates, the best of Canaan) and He turns around and gives me the best of the Kingdom. In fact, He says it is all mine! Love! Joy! Peace! Righteousness! Don't worry about all those physical things. "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there you may be also."

I go to tell my family and they cannot believe it. But when they see the fruits of the Spirit in my life, God's provision for us, they believe. Jesus is alive! Together we move into the Kingdom of God, into the best of the land. We find all our need is met in Him. While the world is experiencing famine, we have plenty. It will not always be easy here, but God has promised to bring us out and lead us to the Promised Land.

We are so much like the Children of Israel in this story. Down the road when some calamity strikes (death of Israel), we start to hear the Accuser's condemning voice. "Jesus will not forgive. He will judge you! Your sin is too great. Now you're going to get it. You are not worthy of all his goodness." And like Joseph's brothers we fear, and come trembling, only to find out, as His tears flow, that He removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. This plan of redemption has helped us see the Sovereignty of God and the greatness of His grace and mercy. We now see the abundance of His provision. We realize His love is greater than our sins. We sold Him once, but now that we know His forgiveness and love, we could never do it again.

How true this picture is to our lives! I'm in awe that God could orchestrate this event three and half millenniums ago to show us all He has done for us today. Maybe you have never considered this picture and your place in it. I encourage you to take some time to do so. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor 10:11 (NIV),¹¹ *"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."* "Them" is referring to the Children of Israel. It is not just a story with a few good lessons. It is about our lives today. Reread the story and find yourself in it.