

# BUT GOD INTENDED IT FOR GOOD

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Beginning in Beginnings: Genesis 49-50

February 6, 2022

*But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?  
You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good  
to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives . . . ."*  
Genesis 50:19-20

## A note about blessings

1. Jacob and Joseph continue the practice of being a blessing – and literally blessing

<sup>5</sup> Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you, <sup>6</sup> and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock."

<sup>7</sup> Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, <sup>8</sup> Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?"

<sup>9</sup> And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." <sup>10</sup> Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence.

Genesis 47

2. There is a special relationship between Jacob and Joseph

<sup>21</sup> Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers. <sup>22</sup> And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow."

Genesis 48:21-22

3. Keep your eyes on the line of Judah

<sup>8</sup> "Judah, your brothers will praise you;  
your hand will be on the neck of your enemies;  
your father's sons will bow down to you.

<sup>9</sup> You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son.

Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?

<sup>10</sup> The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

Genesis 49

## The promise is still happening in Canaan

<sup>6</sup> Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to do.”

<sup>7</sup> So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh’s officials accompanied him—the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt—<sup>8</sup> besides all the members of Joseph’s household and his brothers and those belonging to his father’s household. Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen. <sup>9</sup> Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company.

<sup>10</sup> When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. <sup>11</sup> When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning.” That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim.

<sup>12</sup> So Jacob’s sons did as he had commanded them: <sup>13</sup> They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. <sup>14</sup> After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father.

Genesis 50

1. God keeps his Old Testament peoples’ eyes focused on *ha ‘aretz* , but . . . .
2. The land is a picture of God’s promise (see Genesis 17:7-8; but remember Galatians 3:14)

## Joseph lives out the heart of God

<sup>15</sup> When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?” <sup>16</sup> So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: <sup>17</sup> ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

<sup>18</sup> His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said.

<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. <sup>21</sup> So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Genesis 50

1. Joseph wept because his brothers still did not know him – they are already forgiven! (see Luke 23:34)
2. Joseph’s Romans 8 response looks back to God’s Genesis 12, 15 and 17 promises to Abraham
3. Joseph’s provision fulfills his promise (45:11; 47:12) and anticipates Ruth 4:15 and Psalm 55:23

## Finding God's good

1. For all the tragedy, Genesis begins and ends with the good

<sup>28</sup> *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

<sup>29</sup> *Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.*

<sup>31</sup> *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.*

Genesis 1

2. Joseph's wish will wait 400 years, when God does "heard their groaning" (Exodus 2:23-25)

<sup>22</sup> *Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years <sup>23</sup> and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees.*

<sup>24</sup> *Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." <sup>25</sup> And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."*

Genesis 50:25 (see Hebrews 11:22)

3. The story of God's good plan is never complete without Jesus

<sup>18</sup> *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us . . . .*

<sup>28</sup> *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

<sup>31</sup> *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

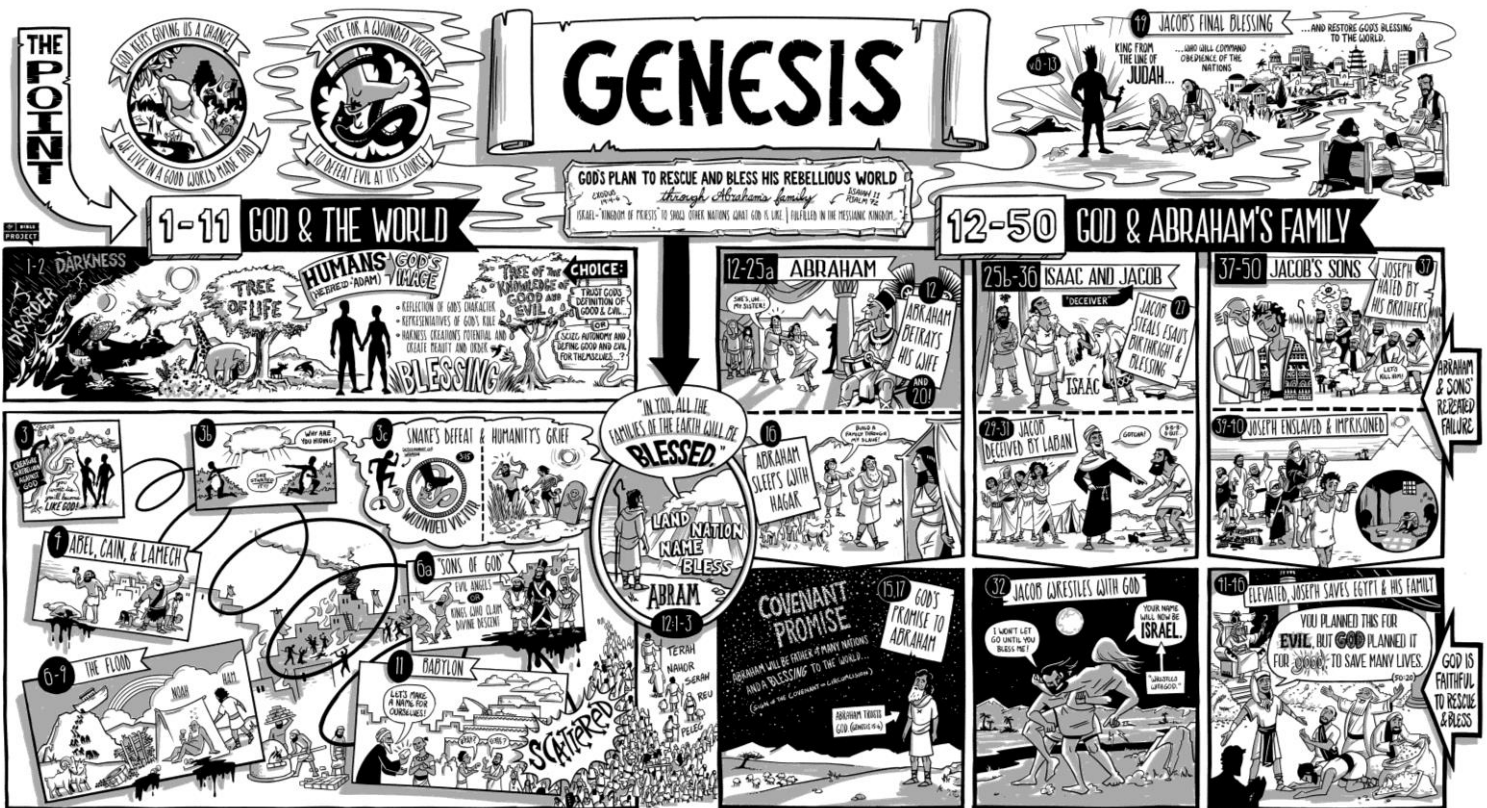
Romans 8

# The conclusion of Stedman's "The Method of Faith"

Now the last picture is Joseph -- glorification. The man loved of his father and mistreated by his brethren. While living through this earthly relationship he is suddenly lifted from the darkness of a prison house into the glory of Pharaoh's throne to reign and rule as the second person in the kingdom. Now this is the picture for us of truth for the believer: What do we look forward to as death comes upon us? Isn't it that we are translated out of the darkness of this earthly existence, from the prison house in which we have lived our years, suddenly to the very throne and presence of God himself.

It is all there, isn't it? The pattern fits so beautifully. We discover what God intended for the believer and the method by which man reaches God and appropriates all this. It is revealed in this book as the method of faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please God," Hebrews reminds us (11:6). As you believe, it all becomes true. Not as you intellectually give credence to it, but as you step out on it and act upon it, it all becomes true in experience.

The final message of Genesis is that God is absolutely necessary for the completeness of life. Without God you cannot understand the world around you. You can't understand yourself or your neighbor or God himself. You will never have any answers without God, but if you have fallen away or excluded God and found misery and heartache and darkness and futility and emptiness and boredom -- all the things that are a result of man attempting to live without him, Genesis declares that if you return on the principle of faith in God you will find help, spiritual health, and happiness, in every realm of life. God is the secret of human life. This is the first note in the Bible and it is also the last.



## Resources for the Genesis

Be sure to check the [Bible Project's poster](#) on Genesis.

[Bible.org](#) has some wonderful sermons on Genesis, especially those by Deffinbaugh and Stedman.

Stedman's "The Method of Faith" is attached. I appreciated Deffinbaugh's interesting take on the Joseph story at <https://bible.org/seriespage/8-joseph-genesis-371-5026>

John Piper has a classis Christological message on the Joseph story at

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-sale-of-joseph-and-the-son-of-god>

Riddlebarger's blog has a wonderful take on the Joseph story at <https://www.kimriddlebarger.com/the-riddleblog/josephs-faith-in-death>

Jonathan Edwards has a reflection on the Joseph story at

<https://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/temptation.htm>

Maclaren has a helpful commentary on many of these passages at

[https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/bible\\_book/genesis\\_maclaren.html](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/bible_book/genesis_maclaren.html)

Many of Spurgeon's sermons on Genesis are collected at <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/scripture-index/genesis/>

See "Joseph and his Brothers" at

<http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols43-45/chs2516.pdf>

Very Poythress has some very interesting thoughts on hermeneutics in Genesis at [www.frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/2013ChristianInterpretationsOfGenesis1.pdf](http://www.frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/2013ChristianInterpretationsOfGenesis1.pdf)

and <http://faculty.wts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/PoythressVernCorrelationsWithProvidenceInGenesis2.pdf>

Tim Keller has a wonderful sermon on the "male and female" dynamic at

<https://www.monergism.com/first-wedding-day-%E2%80%93-genesis-218-25>

# GENESIS: THE METHOD OF FAITH

by Ray C. Stedman

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This Bible is given to us to read. It is a great book, a tremendous book. Let us begin at the first of the Bible and go through it all, book by book -- from Genesis to Revelation -- and look at the setting, the message, and the relationship of each to the whole. This will be a zoom-lens view, book by book. Such a panorama is one of the most helpful ways to understand and see the divine pattern of revelation. One of the most powerful and unanswerable pieces of evidence for the truth of inspiration is to see the divine pattern that runs through the Bible. How can this be explained apart from God, that a book as diverse in its authorship, written under equally diverse conditions should have such a remarkable pattern of truth unless it comes from one divine author?

We are so familiar with the Bible that we scarcely consider what an ancient book it is. There is a Greek philosopher named Herodotus, a teacher and scholar who lived some three hundred years before Christ, who is called the father of history; he is the first historian whose writings have been preserved to us. Anyone who has studied something of ancient history knows about Herodotus. But the outstanding thing about the Bible is that Moses, who wrote the first five books of our Bible, had finished his books and was in his grave a thousand years before Herodotus saw the light of day.

That's how ancient Genesis is. It is the book of beginnings. It takes us back into the very dawn of human history and yet as we read it, it is as up-to-date as tomorrow morning's newspaper. That, again, is a mark of the divine afflatus behind this book, the in-breathing of God. The Bible has so much color and life about it in these revelations of early human life. Those who are familiar with archaeology know that these cylinders and slabs and potsherds from the past give us but the faintest glimpse into the bare facts of life in these ancient lands. There is little of human interest about them. There is no color, no life, no flesh. But when you open the pages of Genesis you discover here that these men come alive. Abraham is better known than some of our more distant relatives. Isaac and Joseph, with others, are familiar household names to us. We feel that they're people we use to know back where we came from. They are as close to us as that, because this book has so marvelously preserved for us the color, the depth, the flesh and the tone of life in those days.

Genesis is not only a history. Obviously it would have little significance to us if it were only that. But the book of Genesis is one with a tremendous message which can be declared in one statement. It reveals to us the inadequacy of man without God. That is the whole purpose of the book, and, as such, it strikes the keynote of all subsequent revelation of God. It reveals that man can never be complete without God, that he can never discover or fulfill the true meaning of his life without a genuine personal relationship with an indwelling God.

Now this inadequacy is revealed to us in three realms, realms in which each of us live. First it is revealed in the realm of natural relationships, through what we call the natural sciences: cosmology, the study of the universe, its origin and make-up; then geology, about the earth, all the manifold aspects of it that we think we know so much of today; and biology, the study of life itself in all its manifestations. These natural relationships circumscribe our contact with the physical world around us. The second area is the realm of human relationships. This takes in what we call sociology, psychology, psychiatry, along with all the other "psychs" that are made so much of today. And then finally, the realm of spiritual relationships -- theology, soteriology and philosophy. In all three of these vital areas, including many of the particulars

with which we are concerned, the book of Genesis reveals that man apart from God is totally inadequate. This one message echoes throughout the book like the sound of a bell.

Let me show you what I mean. The first two chapters are largely concerned with the world of nature. This book opens with the greatest material fact in our life today -- the fact that we live in a universe. We become aware of this when we step out under the stars at night and look up. Even the most ignorant of us ponders what is out there -- the unending stars, these brilliant lights in the heavens. We wonder at the movement of the heavenly bodies. Man has stood and gazed in awe and wonderment at this sight for centuries.

At last we have begun to probe out into the universe around us and have discovered that we live in a great galaxy, a diffuse body of stars and planets -- millions of them. Our own galaxy is three hundred thousand light years across and it's just the home base of us in the universe. First base is out yonder and center field is WAY out. In this great ball park, we know of over a million bases out there, galaxies like ours. Our minds begin to blow a fuse when we start thinking like that, yet Scripture opens with this -- right on that very note. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" -- and man. That is the story of the beginning -- of Genesis.

We are in a universe which is mainly mystery to us. We know very little about it and in any direction we choose to go we soon come to a place where we can go no farther. I was talking with a nuclear physicist one time and he was telling me something of the complexity of the nucleus of the atom. He says that it has become so "astronomically" complex that we simply cannot begin to grasp all that we are discovering about the fundamental elements of matter. It is right on this point that the Bible begins with the answers to questions that scientists cannot answer. What is it that keeps the universe going? Where did we come from? Who made us? Why are we here? Yet in spite of the fact that the study of the universe is the theme of science today, science hasn't found an answer to any of these questions.

Now to these questions, Genesis supplies answers, the only answers that fit. It reveals to us that the key to human life, including the material universe and the mystery of our own nature -- plus that invisible realm of spirit life we know little about -- is spiritual, not physical or material. That is why we can never know ourselves or the universe or God by studying nature. We'll never understand it that way. Ultimately we run up against a closed door. It becomes so complex we cannot grasp it. Why? Because the Bible tells us the key is in the spiritual realm. When we take this book and open it up, we discover that we are moving past all the discoveries of science today into a realm to which science has not yet come where we have answers to these questions.

It was no less a person than Albert Einstein who put his finger squarely upon the inadequacies of science when he said, "Science is like reading a mystery novel." You go down to the drug store and buy a dime novel (of course they cost more now) and take it home and you go to bed at night. Everybody else has left the house and it is dark. You get into bed, snap on the light, prop yourself up with pillows and start reading. In the first chapter there are two or three murders, with several bodies lying around. The whole of the story begins to focus on "who done it." Clues appear as you read on. In about the third chapter you've decided that the butler did it. Continuing on, the finger of guilt points more and more to the butler. But then you reach the last chapter in which suddenly all the previous evidence is upset and it wasn't the butler after all. It was the little old lady in tennis shoes who lives on the third floor. She did it. Now Einstein says science is like that. It is always struggling from hypothesis to synthesis from a few clues here and there, but it never gets the answer. And then suddenly some new light comes along that throws the first estimate all off, and all the previous answers seem of little value.

The interesting thing about Genesis is that it starts right where science leaves off. It gives answers addressed to faith, admittedly, but never faith that is a violation of human reason. Science is always facing

the past. Genesis begins where science is seeking. If we look at it this way we see that there is no essential conflict. Here is a book that is simply dealing with matters science has not wrestled with, and, indeed, cannot wrestle with -- the key to the mystery of human life.

Now in chapters three to six the realm of human relationships is seen; here you have the entrance of man into the picture. This book reveals that the basic unit of society is the family. For ten to twenty thousand years of human history there has been absolutely no variation in that pattern. The family is still the basic element of human life today. When a society forgets that fact and begins to destroy family life, the foundations of the nation crumble because a nation is an extension of the family. The nations of the world are simply great family groups. Consider for a moment the uniform reaction of Americans on the day in 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated! There never was a time when the whole American nation felt so like a family as when John Kennedy lay in death. We were all one people. A crisis disclosed that our nation is nothing more than a gigantic family. Inside the nation, inside the family revealed in the Scriptures is the single individual. But when the family crumbles, the nation begins to fall.

These chapters also reveal the failure of man in this basic relationship, because man tried to be man without God, and the result of course was the introduction of the principle of sin. Sin is the monkey wrench which has been thrown into the human machinery that makes us behave the way we do. As you read the account here you'll see how Cain rejected God and became a murderer. He went out and founded a civilization that ended in apostasy and the flood. When Lot tried to move away from God, to get away from the influence of God in his life, he wrecked his family as a result.

This life pattern in Scripture is given again and again, and though we live some thousands of years after these events, it is the same story today isn't it? Every generation has been repeating the same cycle. We see it all around us in our nation of lovely homes, new cars and gimmicks -- yet riddled with strife, violence and almost unmentionable immorality. Increasing crime rates and broken homes on every side all result from, and testify vividly to, man's failure to live successfully on the level of human relationships apart from God.

Finally then in the last part of the book, which is one large section beginning with the middle of chapter six through chapter fifty, you have the realm of spiritual relationships. It is the largest part of this book because it is the most important to man -- his spirit and its relationship with God. This is the story of five men. If you remember the lives of these five men and what they mean, you will have most of Genesis right in the palm of your hand. They are Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Genesis reveals in the story of these men what man is always seeking. Do you know what it is? We think that we are seeking after things. But we know that things aren't what we really want.

All the restlessness and rush of the age in which we live can be understood as an attempt to focus upon three goals. First, righteousness, the sense of being right. This is why we are always attempting to justify ourselves. When anyone accuses you of something, what happens? You start justifying yourself. You want to be right. Man is forever seeking righteousness. The second is peace. We want a sense of well-being inside. A chrome-plated economy based on "education" leading to "high standards of living" is surely a cheap substitute. How often the word peace is flung at us in these days, leaving only a hunger for the real thing. Man is ever seeking peace. And the third thing is joy. He wants a sense of gladness, of happiness out of life. Those three are the unseen, almost unconscious, goals of life -- righteousness, peace and joy. Where are they found? Romans fourteen says "The kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17) Only God imparts these things to men, and this is the story of this book.

Now it reveals how men who did not believe or obey God sought these things in vain. Jacob for a time, as you know, refuses to obey God and insists on doing things on his own. Out he goes and becomes a



wanderer and a hired servant of his uncle. He ends up being not only a deceiver but deceived, and life falls apart at the seams for him. Even Abraham falters occasionally -- he goes down to Egypt and falls into lying and adultery, and again, life falls apart.

But if this book, Genesis, reveals the inadequacies of man without God, it also reveals the adequacy of man with God. That is the great message. In natural relationships you see that man with God is sovereign. If I had only known Adam back in the days before the fall! What a rich character he must have been. What tremendous power and knowledge he must have had of the secrets of nature. When we look at the New Testament and read of the miracles of the Lord Jesus walking upon the water, changing the water into wine, stilling the storm with a word, we say to ourselves, "That is God at work." But the Old Testament says, "No; that isn't God, that is man. That is what man was intended to be -- the sovereign, the king of the world."

You find it reflected in the eighth Psalm. David says as he is looking into the heavens, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" And then he answers his question, "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." (Ps. 8:4,6) You only see that in Jesus. That is why the writer of Hebrews says, "We do not yet see every thing in subjection to him. But we see Jesus..." (Heb. 2:8,9) who as a man is the fulfillment of God's intention for man to be sovereign of the earth. In the garden before Adam fell, you see him as the lord of creation. He knew its mysteries, he controlled its activities. Man cannot do that any longer today. We have the urge to do so, but we can do it no longer.

In the realm of human relationships, the book of Genesis reveals that man with God is seen as living at peace and in harmony with other men. One of the most beautiful stories in this book is of Abraham dwelling under the oaks of Mamre with the Canaanites all around him, the men who had for many years been his enemies. But God so worked in the life of that man Abraham that even his enemies were made to be at peace with him. The story of Abraham closes with the Canaanite tribes coming to him and saying, "Thou art a prince among us" {cf, Gen 23:6 KJV}. So it is fulfilled what God says elsewhere that when a man's ways please the Lord he makes even his enemies be at peace with him {cf, Prov 16:}. This is the key. This is the secret of life in all our relationships.

Then in the spiritual relationship, Genesis declares that man in fellowship with God begins to know supreme happiness -- the righteousness, peace, and joy that men always crave. Realization comes only as he discovers that the indwelling God is the answer to all his needs.

This is revealed in the lives of five men. Let us quickly review these. Noah is a picture to us of regeneration. Noah is a man who went through death in a figure. He was on both sides of the flood. He was preserved in the ark through the waters of judgment, through the waters of death, to come out into a new world and a new life. The imaginative writers of our day are always trying to write a book to depict what would happen after an atomic holocaust had completely wiped life off the face of the earth and what it would be like for a new couple to start out in such a world. Yet none of them seem to realize that is exactly what happened in the story of Noah and the flood. None of them seem ever to have caught the romance of Noah and his family starting afresh in a new earth. Nevertheless, they are a picture of regeneration. The beginning of life as a Christian is the passing from death into life (in Christ) just as Noah did in the flood.

Then comes Abraham. And what does Abraham teach us? Justification by faith. Here was a man who lived by faith. Everything that he did was given to him -- not by any merit of his own, not by any effort of his own. But as God led him along and Abraham stepped out on the promises, he found that God's promise was true. Eight times that man's faith was dramatically tried. If you are ever in a trial of faith,

read the life of Abraham. You will find in his life similar circumstances to the ones you are going through. Abraham teaches us what it means to be justified, to be the friend of God by faith.

Then comes Isaac. Isaac is a beautiful picture of sonship, what it means to be a son of God. If there ever was a boy that was spoiled, pampered and petted by his father, it was Isaac. He was the son, pre-eminently so. In the glimpse this book gives of him you see what it means to be the darling of a father's heart. And I think there is no message more needed in this day than that which is so beautifully exemplified in Isaac, how God looks at us and calls us the darling of his heart. "Beloved, we are God's children now," says John; "it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him." (1 John 3:2) -- We shall be like Christ.

The story of Jacob follows. Jacob was the rascal, the schemer, the man who thought he could live on his own, by his wits and by his own efforts. He went out trying to deceive everybody and ended up being deceived. Jacob is a beautiful picture of sanctification, that marvelous work of God in which we in our folly, attempting to live life in the energy of the flesh, are led into the very situations that drive us into a corner where at last, like Jacob wrestling with the angel, we discover God speaking to us and we give up. And when we give up our trying, we begin to live. That is what Jacob did when he gave up at the Brook of Peniel {Gen 32:22-32}, knowing Esau was waiting with a band of armed men ready to take his life. He wrestled with the angel of God at the brook; it was there that God broke Jacob. And as a broken man, limping the rest of his life, he became Israel, prince of God. What a lesson that is. Some of us are going through this very experience right now. What an encouragement to us!

Now the last picture is Joseph -- glorification. The man loved of his father and mistreated by his brethren. While living through this earthly relationship he is suddenly lifted from the darkness of a prison house into the glory of Pharaoh's throne to reign and rule as the second person in the kingdom. Now this is the picture for us of truth for the believer: What do we look forward to as death comes upon us? Isn't it that we are translated out of the darkness of this earthly existence, from the prison house in which we have lived our years, suddenly to the very throne and presence of God himself.

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### *Prayer*

Our Father, we pray that you will give us the urge and the motive to give ourselves to the writings before us. How many difficulties and troubles we could avoid, how many heartaches we could pass by if we only knew what you intended us to know in this book. May our hearts be open with a readiness to seek and to search and to find and know that we are in a universe -- not silent, not mechanical, not empty in which there is no echo to our cry -- but a universe uniquely disposed by a Father, with a father's heart. As we

believe this and learn to walk by faith, you fill life for us to the full. We ask that this may be our experience in Jesus' name. Amen.

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## Joseph (Genesis 37:1-50:26)

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### Introduction

For several years, I was actively involved in prison ministry, teaching in-prison seminars for Prison Fellowship in a few prisons around the country. I knew that in some prisons a number of the inmates had lower than average reading skills; some did not even speak English.<sup>88</sup> I was told that because of this the attention span of some inmates was limited to just a few minutes, and thus I would need to continually interject activities to hold the attention of those who attended. It occurred to me that the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis might be a better way to communicate with the seminar participants, and so I would work my way from [Genesis 37](#) to [Genesis 45](#), all in one weekend. What I found was amazing. This story so captured their interest and attention that they listened intently for more than an hour at a time, if necessary.

I also noticed a marked change that took place during the course of the seminar. In the beginning, everyone tended to identify with Joseph, the innocent victim who was betrayed by his brothers. Even those who were guilty of their crimes tended to identify someone who was responsible for their incarceration and to focus their anger towards them. When Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt and Joseph dealt harshly with them, there was a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction: "Yes, Joseph was getting even with them, and they deserved it!" But as the story of Joseph approached its conclusion, my audience came to see that Joseph's dealings with his brothers were not motivated by revenge, but by love. They began to

grasp the key role that Judah played in this drama, and some began to identify more with him than with Joseph. As the men witnessed Joseph's attitude toward his incarceration, they were intrigued. As they observed his recognition of the sovereignty of God, they were fascinated. As they read of his forgiveness of his brothers, who had unjustly sold him into bondage, they were amazed. This story has a powerful message that speaks not only to prisoners, but also to every single one of us.

The story of Joseph is one of the great dramas of the Bible. A young man is favored by his father and is consequently hated by his brothers. The brothers conspire to rid themselves of Joseph, and sell him as a slave to a caravan of Ishmaelites, headed for Egypt. Doing right by his Egyptian master wins Joseph Potiphar's favor, which makes Joseph the most powerful man under his authority. Remaining faithful to his master by rejecting his wife's advances angers her, and causes Joseph to be imprisoned on false charges. Eventually, Joseph is elevated to the second highest position in the land, and then God uses a famine to bring his brothers to Egypt. He has the perfect opportunity to get revenge, but he does not do so. Joseph's dealings with his brothers will eventually bring them to repentance, and thus they will be reconciled as a family. Joseph plays a very key role in the history of the nation Israel, and his example has much to teach us as well.

## Betrayed

### [Genesis 37](#)

Actually, the story of Joseph begins before [Genesis 37](#). The twelve sons of Jacob were the offspring of four mothers. The rivalry between Jacob's two wives and two concubines caused much dissension within the family. Joseph, along with his younger brother Benjamin, were the only children of Rachel, Jacob's favored wife. Eight of Joseph's siblings were the sons of Jacob's unloved wife, Leah, and her handmaid, Zilpah (see [Genesis 34:22b-26](#)). It was all too apparent to these older brothers that Jacob loved Joseph — the “**son of his old age**” — more than all of them combined (37:3, 4), and for this reason they hated Joseph.

There were other contributing factors, which fueled the hatred of these older brothers for Joseph. Jacob (Israel) unwisely used this 17-year-old boy to spy on his other sons and had Joseph report to him privately (37:2. 13-14). His father also gave Joseph a multi-colored tunic, which was a symbol of his power and precedence over his brothers (37:3). In addition to this, Joseph was unwise in the way he related to his brothers. This may have been due to the naivety of youth, but his brothers were greatly angered by his reports of his two dreams, both of which symbolized his authority over them, and even over their parents. Eventually, Joseph's brothers could not speak to him in a civil manner (37:4).

For some reason, Joseph was kept at home when his brothers took their father's flock to graze near Shechem. Israel became somewhat uneasy about how things were going in Shechem, and his fears were not ill-founded. This is where Jacob had purchased some land (33:19). It is also the place where Jacob's two sons, Simeon and Levi, killed Shechem (who had raped their sister, Dinah) and the men of the city, taking the women, children, and cattle of Shechem as spoil ([Genesis 34](#)). It could certainly be a dangerous place for these sons of Jacob to remain, and so Israel sent Joseph to Shechem to check on his brothers.

As it turns out, Joseph's brothers had moved on to Dothan, nearly 20 miles further to the north and thus that much more distant from Jacob's watchful eye.<sup>89</sup> Providentially, a man saw Joseph wandering about in the fields around Shechem. He just happened to overhear Joseph's brothers saying that they were moving on to Dothan, so Joseph set out to find them. When his brothers looked up and saw someone approaching from a distance, there was no question who it was. That distinctive multi-colored tunic, with sleeves, gave Joseph away. They had plenty of time to agree among themselves that this was their golden opportunity to be rid of him. At least some of the brothers wanted to kill Joseph and end it then and there.

Reuben did not agree with this plan. He wanted to spare Joseph's life, but it would seem that his motives were self-serving. He, after all, was the eldest of Israel's sons, and he would be held responsible for not looking after Joseph. Because of this, he sought to spare Joseph's life. He convinced his brothers to throw Joseph into a nearby cistern, thinking that he would return and free the lad later on. Providentially, the cistern was dry so that Joseph did not drown.

Reuben was gone – perhaps taking his turn watching the flock – when his brothers sat down to eat, somewhere near the cistern, probably well within hearing distance, so that as they ate they could hear his cries for help.<sup>90</sup> Dothan was on the trading route to Egypt, and it “just so happened” that as they were eating, they looked up to see a caravan of Ishmaelites drawing near. Their camels were carrying spices, balm, and myrrh, a detail that will be taken up later.

It was at this point Judah proposed a more profitable solution to their problem. Rather than killing Joseph, why not sell him as a slave? They would be rid of him, yet they would not be guilty of shedding his blood. And, to make this an even more tempting opportunity, they could make a little money for themselves at the same time. This seemed to accomplish all of their objectives better than killing Joseph. Since Reuben was not there to object, Judah's suggestion was adopted. They pulled Joseph out of the cistern and handed him over to the Ishmaelites, who paid them twenty pieces of silver (37:28). Some time later, Reuben returned to the cistern to release Joseph, only to find that he was gone. Reuben reported this to his brothers, and we are not told that they confessed what they had done. They all tore up Joseph's tunic and dipped it in goat's blood, to make it look as though Joseph had been killed and eaten by a wild animal.

Coldly, the brothers thrust the blood-drenched tunic into their father's hands, asking him if it was Joseph's garment. They let their father draw his own false conclusion – that Joseph had been killed and devoured by a wild animal. I wonder if there was a certain satisfaction for these sons of Israel when they saw their father mourning the loss of his favorite son. They attempted to console him, but he was unwilling to be comforted.

## **Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch**

### **[Genesis 38](#)**

[Genesis 38](#) may seem somewhat out of place at first glance, but this is far from the case. Why does Moses change the focus from Joseph in chapter 37 to Judah in chapter 38, only to return once again to Joseph in chapters 39 and following? *First*, we must bear in mind that Jacob will soon announce that the promised Messiah will come through the line of Judah ([Genesis 49:8-12](#)). *Second*, we should recall that it was Judah who proposed that the brothers sell Joseph into slavery, rather than to kill him (37:26-27). *Third*, Judah's immorality in chapter 38 will serve as a backdrop, against which the moral purity of Joseph will be contrasted in [Genesis 39](#). *Fourth*, chapter 38 sets the scene for Joseph's reunion with his brothers in chapters 42 and following. It is approximately 22 years from the time Joseph is sold into slavery to the time his brothers arrive in Egypt, seeking grain.<sup>91</sup> Chapter 38 covers this same period of time, but focuses on Judah and his conduct in the land of Canaan. During this same time frame of 22 years (approximately), Judah leaves home, marries a Canaanite woman, and has three sons, two of whom are old enough to marry, and are so wicked that God takes their lives.

It's not hard to understand why Judah would leave home. It must have been pure misery to watch Jacob pining away in sorrow, refusing to be comforted (37:35). Abraham was very careful to obtain a non-Canaanite wife for his son, Isaac (chapter 24). Isaac and Rebekah were not as careful, but God providentially provided two wives for Jacob from Rebekah's brother Laban, in Paddan Aram ([Genesis 29](#)). Judah promptly leaves home and marries a Canaanite woman (38:1-2).<sup>92</sup> She has three sons. When the firstborn son was old enough, Judah acquired a Canaanite wife for him named Tamar. Judah's first

son, Er, was evil in God's sight and the Lord took his life (38:7). Judah instructed his second son, Onan, to take Tamar and raise up a descendant for his deceased brother, but he prevented Tamar from producing a child. Judah was afraid of losing his youngest son Shelah, so he asked Tamar to live at home until this boy was older.

After the passing of a considerable period of time, Judah's wife died and Tamar realized that Judah would never give her to Shelah, his only surviving son. She seems to have known Judah all too well, because she disguised herself as a prostitute and stationed herself along the route she knew Judah would be taking to Timnah, along with his friend Hirah. Tamar's expectations were fulfilled by Judah, who hired her as a prostitute, and left some of his possessions as a guarantee of payment. Tamar had concealed her identity by the use of a veil, and so Judah never knew the identity of his companion that night. Some time later Judah was told that his daughter-in-law had become pregnant, and Judah was indignant. He insisted that she be put to death for her immorality. It was then that Tamar produced Judah's cylinder seal (the ancient counterpart of a driver's license or Social Security card today), his cord, and his staff – all items that were as good as fingerprints. Judah confessed that Tamar was more righteous than he. She was the one who sought to preserve his line. She bore twins to Judah, and Perez would be the one through whom the Messianic line would be continued, no thanks to Judah (see [Genesis 46:12](#); [Ruth 4:12](#)).

Why would Moses include this rather sordid story here in the midst of the account of Joseph's betrayal? The reason is both clear and compelling: If Israel had remained in the land of Canaan, and if they had behaved like Judah, there would have been no distinct nation of Israel left to possess the Promised Land. The Israelites would very shortly have been completely assimilated into the Canaanite culture and race. This is why God took the Israelites down to Egypt. The Egyptians loathed the Hebrews and wanted nothing to do with them. With but one rare exception (Mrs. Potiphar), they were not willing to engage in intimate relationships with the Hebrews. Even if Judah and his brothers were willing to be immoral, the Egyptians were not willing – to be immoral with Hebrews, at least. The story of Judah and Tamar explains why God quarantined the Israelites in Egypt for 400 years.

## The Price of Purity

### [Genesis 39:1-20](#)

[Genesis 39](#) is a refreshing example of sexual purity. Joseph was purchased from the Ishmaelites by Potiphar, a powerful and prosperous man. Potiphar was a servant of Pharaoh. He owned what appears to be a large and lucrative ranch. Initially, Joseph was probably acquired to work with the flocks. Over a period of time, it became apparent to Potiphar that God's hand was on Joseph – everything he touched seemed to turn to gold. Before long, Potiphar had put everything under Joseph's authority. The only decisions Potiphar made concerned what he would have for dinner (39:6).

The problem was that Mrs. Potiphar (a woman whose name is never given – she is only referred to as Potiphar's wife) began to take note of Joseph. She tried in various ways to seduce him, but Joseph purposed to avoid her. One day she managed to trap Joseph in the house alone, where she once again sought to seduce him. He found it necessary to flee, leaving his outer garment in her grasp (notice how Joseph's coats always seemed to get him into trouble). She then accused Joseph of attacking her, and Potiphar, her husband, had Joseph thrown into prison.<sup>93</sup> Joseph did not have far to go from the "executive suite" to the prison, because they were all in the same house. In those days prisons were really dungeons, under the house of an official like Potiphar. Potiphar was, in fact, the "**captain of the guard**" (39:1; 40:3). In prison, as in the executive suite, God's hand of blessing continued to be upon Joseph.



## From the Prison to the Palace

### [Genesis 39:21—41:57](#)

In prison, it would have been very easy for Joseph to wallow in self-pity. He could well have said to himself, “What’s the good of trusting God and doing what is right? So far, it has only gotten me into trouble.” Instead, Joseph set out to minister to others, and before long, the hand of God was once again evident in Joseph’s life. The warden gave Joseph a free hand, putting him in charge of all the prisoners. He virtually ran the prison (39:21-23). It was during this time that two prisoners were added to those under Joseph’s care. One was Pharaoh’s butler (literally, his cup bearer), and the other his baker. Both were paying the price for offending their master. Moses makes a very interesting comment about Joseph’s relationship to these men:

The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be their attendant and he served them ([Genesis 40:4](#), emphasis mine).

The NASB renders, “**And the captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them.**” The important thing to see here is that Joseph really did “serve” or “minister to” these two men, *who were under his authority*. I believe this is where Joseph had earlier failed in his relationship with his brothers. His father had given him authority over his brothers, but he did not use his leadership role as an occasion to serve them.

How easy it is in prison to overlook the suffering of others, especially if you are suffering. Joseph noted that both the butler and the baker were despondent one morning, and he asked them what was troubling them. They informed Joseph they both had different dreams in the night, but no one could tell them what they meant. Joseph reminded them that interpretations belong to God, and encouraged them to tell him their dreams. (Surely this suggests that they were well aware of Joseph’s relationship with God.) The butler went first, and Joseph told him that God was about to restore him to favor with Pharaoh. Joseph then asked the butler to remember his unjust treatment and to speak kindly for him with Pharaoh, but the butler forgot all about him for two full years. The baker’s dream was different, as was its outcome. His dream indicated that Pharaoh would execute him. Needless to say, Joseph didn’t ask this fellow to remember him before Pharaoh.

It was a full two years before the butler brought Joseph’s name before Pharaoh. The Pharaoh had two dreams that troubled him greatly. The first dream was of seven fat cows, which were eaten by seven very skinny and ugly cows. The second dream was of seven healthy heads of grain that were swallowed up by seven thin heads of grain. None of Pharaoh’s diviners were able to interpret the meaning of these dreams, but the butler remembered the young Hebrew who had interpreted his dream, along with that of the baker,<sup>94</sup> while both were in prison. Pharaoh called for Joseph, who made it clear it was God who gave the interpretation of dreams.

Joseph’s words were of great comfort and encouragement to Pharaoh, who must have sensed something ominous about his dreams. The dreams referred to the same events. There would be seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of severe famine. The years of famine would consume the abundance of the years of plenty. The fact that there were two dreams confirmed that this would most surely come to pass.<sup>95</sup> Joseph now goes beyond the interpretation of these dreams to recommend a solution to the problem they predicted. Here we can see Joseph’s administrative gifts in action. The king should appoint someone to prepare for this disaster, before the years of famine came upon the land of Egypt. Let this person store up grain from the bountiful years, and then distribute it during the lean years.

I do not believe Joseph submitted this plan to Pharaoh, along with his business card, hoping to be hired for this task. I don't think Joseph ever imagined he would be chosen for such a task. Once again, Joseph was simply trying to serve his king. Neither did Joseph seek to bargain with Pharaoh for his release: "Well, Pharaoh, I know that I can interpret your dreams, but you're going to have to help me out as well... ." Joseph sought to represent His God by the way he served those in authority over him. Pharaoh could see that Joseph was right and that his wisdom was divine in origin:

37 This advice made sense to Pharaoh and all his officials. 38 So Pharaoh asked his officials, "Can we find a man like Joseph, one in whom the Spirit of God is present?" 39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Because God has enabled you to know all this, there is no one as wise and discerning as you are! 40 You will oversee my household and all my people will submit to your commands. Only I, the king, will be greater than you" ([Genesis 41:37-40](#)).

These verses toward the end of chapter 41 are very important to our understanding of what will happen when Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt, seeking grain for their families:

50 Two sons were born to Joseph before the famine came. Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, was their mother. 51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, saying, "Certainly God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's house." 52 He named the second child Ephraim, saying, "Certainly God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering" ([Genesis 41:50-52](#)).

Joseph named his oldest son Manasseh, which means, "making to forget." God had caused Joseph to forget all his sufferings at the hand of his brothers (verse 51). The younger son Joseph named Ephraim, which means "fruitfulness." God had caused Joseph to be fruitful in the land of his affliction. Joseph had no anger toward God or toward his brothers. This meant that when they arrived in Egypt, he could deal with them in love, and not in revenge.

When the famine struck, Egypt was ready for it, thanks to Joseph. Not only did the Egyptians come to Joseph for grain, but also those from other lands, including Canaan. One morning, when the last of the grain was gone, Jacob speaks harshly to his sons:

1 When Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why are you looking at each other?" 2 He then said, "Look, I hear that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy grain for us, so that we may live and not die" ([Genesis 42:1-2](#)).

Jacob seems to display irritation and impatience toward his sons. Was this because they also knew that there was grain in Egypt, but were unwilling to go there? Was their guilt and fear due to the way they had treated their brother? I would be inclined to think so.

All the sons of Jacob make their way to Egypt, minus Benjamin. Jacob had lost one of Rachel's sons while he was out of his sight and in the care of his brothers; he is not willing to run the risk of losing another. When the ten sons of Jacob come before Joseph, the "**ruler of the country**" (42:6), they fall down before him, unwittingly fulfilling the prophecy of Joseph's earlier dreams (37:5-11).

Many are tempted to see Joseph's response as pure revenge. His harshness is thought to be his way of making his brothers pay for their previous sins against them. This view simply cannot be accepted, because the text is just too clear on this matter. *First*, if Joseph really wanted to make his brothers suffer, he would have immediately made his identity known to them. If Joseph had wanted to terrify his brothers, he would have let them know that it was he who was the ruler of Egypt, and then he would have made them suffer. *Second*, we are told that while his brothers did not recognize Joseph, he recognized them, and he remembered his dreams (42:7, 9). I understand this to mean Joseph not only realized God had made



him the leader of his family, but that this leadership should seek the best interests of the family. It was not revenge Joseph sought, but repentance. *Third*, we are told his harsh treatment of his brothers was a disguise:

When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; but he pretended<sup>96</sup> to be a stranger to them and spoke to them harshly. He asked, “Where do you come from?” They answered, “From the land of Canaan to buy grain for food” ([Genesis 42:7](#)).

*Fourth*, on several occasions, we find Joseph’s true feelings toward his brothers revealed. Twice Joseph had to go aside to weep privately (42:24; 43:30). *Fifth*, Joseph’s actions toward his brothers were not vindictive, but gracious. Twice he sent them home with the grain they purchased and with their money refunded in their sacks. The meal he prepared for them was another gift of grace. Even the suffering he caused his brothers was benevolent in its goal of bringing his brothers to repentance, so they could be reconciled.

Joseph’s actions toward his brothers, in their first and second visits to Egypt, are very carefully planned and orchestrated to bring about his intended result. When Joseph accused his brothers of being spies, they were terrified and blurted out information about Joseph’s father and younger brother he yearned to know, yet without his brothers realizing who he really was. Joseph could carefully interrogate his brothers about “family” matters, under the guise of protecting the land of Egypt from spies.

Having learned that both Jacob and Benjamin were alive, Joseph set out to accomplish the next phase of his plan – bringing Benjamin down to Egypt. The purpose for this will soon be evident. Joseph’s brothers had insisted they were ten brothers, and not spies, and they had yet another brother at home. Joseph caused it to appear he was merely putting the truthfulness of their words to the test. They said they had a younger brother, so let them prove it by bringing him with them the next time they came. And to assure they did return, he would keep one brother prisoner. Initially, Joseph threatened to keep all of the brothers in prison and to send back just one brother. He knew this would not allow them to transport a sufficient quantity of grain, and so he eventually reduced the number of prisoners held to one – Simeon (42:24).<sup>97</sup>

The response of Joseph’s brothers to their incarceration and to Joseph’s words is most important to the story:

21 They said to one other, “Surely we’re being punished because of our brother, because we saw how distressed he was when he cried to us for mercy, but we refused to listen. That is why this distress has come on us!” 22 Reuben said to them, “Didn’t I say to you, ‘Don’t sin against the boy’, but you wouldn’t listen? So now we must pay for shedding his blood” ([Genesis 42:21-22](#)).

More than 20 years after they had sinned against their brother Joseph, the events of that day were vivid in their minds. They recalled his pleading with them and their total lack of mercy. They understood this was a kind of “day of reckoning” for their sin. I would submit they were genuinely sorry for what they had done, but they were not yet fully repentant. This would come in time.

Joseph was standing nearby and heard their words, but they had no idea that he could understand what they were saying. He was deeply touched by their words and had to leave their presence so that he could cry (42:23-24). Joseph bound Simeon before their eyes to impress them with his resolve about seeing Benjamin when they returned. He then ordered for their sacks to be filled with grain and for provisions to be supplied for their journey.

The brothers then set out on their journey, no doubt discussing what they would tell their father. One of the brothers opened his sack of grain when they stopped for the evening and was shocked to find his

money in his sack of grain. You would think that any son of Jacob would have rejoiced. It would be like putting money into a vending machine, getting what you had selected, and then finding your money in the coin return. But the brothers were greatly dismayed. Looking at one another, they said, **“What in the world has God done to us?”** (42:28). They completely failed to see the kindness of Joseph in this and saw only the judgmental hand of God. God had not done something *for* them; He had done something terrible *to* them.

They returned home and told their father all that had happened to them in Egypt. Jacob had certainly noticed that Simeon was not with them, and they explained why the ruler of Egypt had kept him prisoner. This discussion took place as the bags of grain were being unloaded. When the bags were opened, the brothers discover that every one of them had their money in their sacks, and they were most distressed. Jacob could only think of himself:

Their father Jacob said to them, “You are making me childless! Joseph is gone. Simeon is gone. And now you want to take Benjamin! Everything is against me” ([Genesis 42:36](#)).

Jacob could not have been more mistaken. His appraisal of the situation was precisely the opposite of reality. He was not concerned about Simeon as much as he was himself. He blames his sons for his loss of Joseph, and now, of Simeon, and he blames them for also wanting to take away his youngest son, Benjamin. His sons were “causing all things to work together against him,” or so he supposed.

Ruben now comes through with these comforting words of assurance:

“You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my care and I will bring him back to you” (42:37).

There was nothing more to be said regarding this matter at the moment, because Jacob flatly refused to allow them to take Benjamin with them. In Jacob’s mind, there would be no more discussion of this matter.

The famine lingered on, and the supply of grain continued to diminish. Finally, the grain they had purchased in Egypt ran out. Jacob’s response to this crisis revealed his complete failure as a spiritual leader. I am going to borrow something from my earlier series on Genesis here, because it shows what a poor leader Jacob was at this point in his life.

## **Jacob’s Seven Laws of Leadership**

*Procrastinate: Whatever problems arise today are best dealt with tomorrow.* Jacob delayed acting decisively on the issue of sending Benjamin to Egypt until the situation reached crisis proportions.

*Minimize: No problem can possibly be as bad as it seems.* If the first principle betrays a “manana mentality,” the second attempts to minimize the problem to the point where it is hardly worth thinking about. If a problem is not serious, then it can be put off indefinitely.

*Lie: In a crisis, honesty is often not the best policy.* Jacob still had a lot of the old deceiver in him. He believed that good communication only causes problems. He thought that the less others knew about him, the better off he and his family would be. Jacob’s sons were thus rebuked for telling Joseph any facts about the family.

*Always look out for number one.* Jacob's leadership was focused on seeking his own interests. It was Judah who urged his father to think of others rather than himself (cf. verse 3).

*Pass the buck: As much as is possible, see to it that others receive the blame for your mistakes.* Jacob sought to place the responsibility for his troubles on Judah and his brothers, because they told the truth (43:6). A good leader is one who is willing to accept responsibility for his mistakes.

*Bribe: If our efforts to solve a problem fail, add money.* Jacob hoped that his presents, along with a double payment, would help achieve his desired ends.

*Get religion: Call on God for help, but don't get your hopes up.* It is no accident that Jacob mentions God last. It never seemed to occur to him (as it did to Joseph) that God was actively involved in all of his troubles. His wish that God would be with his sons is only a last ditch effort, when it should have been his first line of defense. "Foxhole religion" is not new, nor is it a thing of the past. Jacob's words, "**As for me, if I lose my children I lose them**" (43:14), is not an expression of great faith, but sounds much more like fatalism.

Jacob's response to this family crisis is pathetic. He does everything possible to avoid facing the problem. He attempts to send his sons to do an impossible task, therefore putting them at great risk. His great concern is for himself and his own well-being. He has to be forced to act. Jacob is no hero in these chapters. Joseph certainly is, exemplifying godly leadership. But there is another leader who begins to emerge in chapter 43 – Judah, the brother who earlier suggested they sell Joseph into slavery, the man who married a Canaanite wife, and unwittingly fathered his own grandson (as it were) through Tamar.

Jacob is pathetic as he whines about the way his sons have mistreated him by telling "the ruler of Egypt" about Benjamin. Judah now stands tall, taking charge of the situation and gently rebuking his father:

3 But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, 'You will not see my face unless your brother is with you.' 4 If you send our brother with us, we'll go down and buy food for you. 5 But if you will not send him, we won't go down there, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face unless your brother is with you.'" 6 Israel said, "Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had one more brother?" 7 They replied, "The man questioned us thoroughly about ourselves and our family, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?' So we answered him in this way. How could we possibly know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'" 8 Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy with me and we will go immediately. Then we will live and not die—we and you and our little ones. 9 I myself pledge security for him; you may hold me liable. If I do not bring him back to you and place him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. 10 But if we had not delayed, we could have traveled there and back twice by now" ([Genesis 43:3-10](#)).

Judah and his brothers had certainly sinned in selling Joseph into slavery, but they were not the ones putting their families at risk at the moment. They had only told "the ruler of Egypt" the truth when he pressed them hard about specific details concerning their family. It was Jacob who had refused to face up to the situation, and who refused to release his youngest son. He had waited far too long to act. And now he wanted his sons to face "the ruler of Egypt" without complying with his demand to bring their youngest brother with them. This was nonsense, and Judah made it clear that they were not going back to Egypt without Benjamin. Judah himself became surety for Benjamin's safe return.

Jacob had no other choice than to do as Judah said. If he did not send Benjamin with the others when they returned to Egypt, they would all die. This was a sacrifice Jacob was forced to make. And so he instructed his sons to take double their money with them, along with the finest gifts they had at hand: a little balm

and honey, spices and myrrh, pistachios and almonds (43:11-12). Off the sons of Jacob went, to Egypt, including Benjamin.

Joseph saw them coming, this time with Benjamin. He instructed his servant to bring the men to his home and to prepare a fine meal for them to eat. The brothers could only imagine the worst possible outcome:

But the men were afraid when they were brought to Joseph's house. They said, "We are being brought in because of the money that was returned in our sacks last time. He wants to capture us, make us slaves, and take our donkeys!" (43:18).

Their sense of guilt overwhelmed them. They could not imagine this "ruler of Egypt" doing anything benevolent for them. They feared they would be punished by the same fate they had brought upon their brother Joseph.

The brothers were quick to explain about the money they had found in their sacks, and the servant carefully chose his words to speak the truth, yet without disclosing Joseph's identity or his plans for them:

19 So they approached the man who was in charge of Joseph's household and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. 20 They said, "My lord, we did indeed come down the first time to buy food. 21 But when we came to the place where we spent the night, we opened our sacks and each of us found his money—the full amount—in the mouth of his sack. So we have returned it. 22 We have brought additional money with us to buy food. We do not know who put the money in our sacks." 23 "Everything is fine," the man in charge of Joseph's household told them. "Don't be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks. I had<sup>98</sup> your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them ([Genesis 43:19-23](#)).

The servant did everything he could to extend hospitality to Joseph's brothers. First, he brought Simeon out to them, and then he brought them all into Joseph's house, where they were given water to drink, and their feet were washed. Their donkeys were also fed (43:24). The brothers braced themselves for the appearance of the "ruler of Egypt." They must have given great attention to the presentation of the "gift" their father had sent with them. I can see them laying all of these things out very carefully, as one would arrange a display in the window of large department store. They wanted everything to be perfect. They hoped that Joseph would look at their gift and say something like this: "Oh, pistachio nuts! You shouldn't have. Why I haven't tasted a pistachio nut for years. And smell those spices! You men are just too kind."

Here is something that they completely missed. The gifts that they brought did not serve their purpose at all. Joseph was not pleased by their gift; their gift was, in fact, a reminder of their sins against him.

They **got their gifts ready** for Joseph's arrival at noon, for they had heard that they were to have a meal there (43:25, emphasis mine).

Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and take a gift down to the man—a little **balm** and a little honey, **spices** and **myrrh**, pistachios and almonds (43:11, emphasis mine).

When they sat down to eat their food, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were carrying **spices**, **balm**, and **myrrh** down to Egypt (37:25, emphasis mine).

It has taken me a long time to see this, but when you look carefully at the three passages above you realize that the "gifts" they brought to impress Joseph with their kindness were actually reminders of their cruelty to them. Several of the items that Joseph's brothers brought him from the land of Canaan were the same

things the Ishmaelite traders carried with them down to Egypt, along with Joseph. The smell of those spices that accompanied him to Egypt must have been burned into Joseph's memory. The very odors that Joseph may have come to despise, because of the associations they had with his slavery, were now the odors that greeted Joseph as he walked into his house. Did his brothers think their gift would win this ruler over? This scheme was very true to the character of Jacob, who suggested it, but in reality, it would have been counter-productive had Joseph allowed it to sway his emotions.

When Joseph arrived, his brothers bowed before him, once again fulfilling the dreams he had years earlier ([Genesis 37:5-11](#)). Joseph seems not to have even noticed their gift, so carefully arranged to capture his attention and win his approval. Joseph only had eyes for his younger brother, Benjamin. Joseph was so touched by the sight of his brother, he had to leave the room to weep in private. He then washed his face and returned, giving the order, "**Set out the food**" (43:31). The servants set out three separate tables: One for Joseph, one for his brothers, and one for the Egyptians who ate with Joseph. Joseph seated his brothers according to their birth order, which must have both amazed and puzzled them: "How could he know?" It was a royal feast, and I'm sure that Joseph's brothers (who had run out of grain some time earlier) would have appreciated it. I'm also certain they had all they could eat. But Joseph did something that was most unusual – he made Benjamin's portions five times greater than those of his other brothers. In preparation for the test ahead, Joseph was not going to minimize the fact that Benjamin was the favorite son of Jacob; indeed, he wanted to emphasize this fact. By the time the meal was over, they had their fill of both food and drink. I have a feeling this was to give his brothers an artificial sense of confidence and to dull their senses for the moment.<sup>99</sup>

Joseph then gave very careful instructions to his servant. He had him fill his brothers' sacks with grain, once again placing their money in each man's sack. This time, however, one more item was included – Joseph's "**silver cup**." This cup was to be placed in Benjamin's sack, along with his money. After the men were sent on their way, Joseph's servant was to pursue and overtake the brothers as they were leaving Egypt. They were to be accused of stealing Joseph's cup, the one that he "**used for divination**" (44:4-5).

There is no need to be distressed over what we read here. Joseph did not actually use this cup for divination. This was part of the servant's "script," which Joseph instructed him to say. It was a part of Joseph's disguise. When Joseph instructed his servant to hide this cup in Benjamin's sack, he simply referred to it as "**his silver cup**" (44:2). But for the sake of his brothers, his servant was to call it the cup that his master used for divination. Joseph wanted to continue the masquerade a little while longer, and this line helped maintain his disguise.

When Joseph's servant overtook the brothers, he did just as his master had instructed him – he accused these men of returning evil for good by stealing his master's divining cup. The brothers were shocked that they would be accused of such a crime. They were confident that none of them had stolen this cup, and so they overreacted to these charges. They prescribed the punishment for themselves, should any one of them have stolen this cup:

"If one of us has it, he will die, and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves" (44:9).

Joseph's servant then responded to this statement, prescribing what the punishment would be for stealing the cup:

He replied, "You have suggested your own punishment. The one who has it will become my slave, but the rest of you will go free" (44:10).

I'm sure that each of these men was extremely confident as he lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. What a shock it must have been for each man to find his money in the mouth of his sack, just as they had before. It would be something like being pulled over by a policeman, and having him search your trunk for money that was stolen in a bank robbery. Confident you did not have the money in your car, you pop open the trunk, to see it filled with automatic weapons. I would imagine fear began to grip the heart of each of these men as they discovered their money in their sacks.

The worst was yet to come. When Benjamin's sack was opened, not only was his money found, but also Joseph's silver cup. These brothers tore their clothes in anguish, loaded their animals, and made their way back to face the music before "the ruler of Egypt." When they arrived, Joseph continued his disguise:

"What did you think you were doing? Don't you know that a man like me can find out things like this by divination?" (44:15).

Joseph wanted these men to think that there was nothing about them he did not know, or could not find out. (After all, he had already arranged their seating according to their birth order.) And now he had a silver divining cup, by which he could discern the truth (or so he claimed). The message was clear: It would do them no good to lie.

Judah assumes the leadership, and speaks on his brothers' behalf:

16 Judah replied, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves? God has exposed the sin of your servants. We are now my lord's slaves, we and the one in whose possession the cup was found." 17 But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do this! The man in whose hand the cup was found will become my slave, but the rest of you may go back to your father in peace" (44:16-17).

Judah's answer is most interesting and most encouraging. I am convinced that Judah knew that Benjamin had not stolen this cup, just as each of them had not stolen the money they had paid for their grain. Judah rightly discerned that this was God's way of dealing with them. Thus he says, "**God has exposed the sin of your servants**" (verse 16). I don't think Judah meant to say, "We stole the money, and we stole the silver cup; God knows it, and He has exposed our sin." I think Judah's words really mean: "We sold our brother into slavery (something you would not know about or appreciate, ruler of Egypt, so I won't go into this in detail), and God is now bringing about our punishment for that sin. We didn't do what you are accusing us of doing, but we did something far worse, and so we will plead guilty." Thus, Judah both confesses for all of his brothers and submits to the penalty of slavery for all.

This is real progress for Joseph's brothers, but they have not yet fully manifested true repentance. And so Joseph declines Judah's offer. Joseph's response can be roughly paraphrased in this way: "Oh no, it would not be fair to punish all of you for the crime one of you has committed. The punishment must be that the one in whose sack the cup was found shall be my slave, and the rest of you are free to go home to your families."

Here was the greatest test of their lives. They could seize upon Joseph's words, denounce Benjamin for stealing, and go home to Canaan free men, leaving Benjamin as one of Pharaoh's slaves. In effect, they could do to Benjamin exactly what they had done to Joseph. How easy it would have been to simply walk away and leave Benjamin, just as they had forsaken Joseph.

This is truly Judah's finest hour. He is the one who made himself surety for Benjamin (42:9). Now, he fulfills his promise to his aged father. Judah steps forward and asks to speak to the "ruler of Egypt." Judah explained how it had come about that they had told him about their younger brother, Benjamin. Since his older brother is dead, Benjamin is now the only remaining son of their father's wife, Rachel. Because he



insisted that they bring this younger brother to Egypt, they did so, but in spite of their father's strong protests. The boy's father is now elderly, and if this son does not return, it will kill their father. Judah told "the ruler of Egypt" that he had become surety for the lad with his father, and thus he begged him to allow the boy to return to his father, and to take him as his slave. Judah begged to take the place of Benjamin, in order to spare his brother's life, as well as the life of their father. Judah, the one who cast the blood-drenched tunic at his father's feet so many years ago,<sup>100</sup> now pleads with Joseph to have compassion on their father, as he does.

It was too much for Joseph. He could restrain himself no longer. Indeed, he need not restrain himself any longer. He could reveal his true identity because his brothers had finally demonstrated true repentance. Joseph ordered everyone to leave the room, except for his brothers. He wept loudly and told them he was Joseph, their brother. He asked if his father was still alive. The brothers were in shock. They could not believe what he was telling them. He asked them to come closer, and they did. He repeated that he was the brother they had sold into slavery in Egypt. He quickly encouraged them not to be upset or angry with themselves, because God had used their sin to bring about good, not only for Joseph, but for all of Jacob's family. This was God's way of providing for the children of Israel during this time of famine.

Joseph then sent his brothers back home to bring their father and their families down to Egypt, informing them that there were yet five more years of famine ahead. The story goes on to describe the arrival of Jacob and his family in Egypt. God provided for them to have a place of their own in the land of Egypt – the land of Goshen – where they could keep their flocks. Eventually, they would purchase property there and prosper. In this way, God brought Israel (all 70 of them) to Egypt.

In his final days, Jacob begins to manifest the fruits of faith.<sup>101</sup> When standing before Pharaoh, Jacob admitted that his life had been shorter and more unpleasant than that of his predecessors:

7 Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and presented him before Pharaoh. Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How long have you lived?" 9 Jacob said to Pharaoh, "All the years of my travels are one hundred and thirty. All the years of my life have been few and painful; the years of my travels are not as long as those of my ancestors." 10 Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence ([Genesis 47:7-10](#)).

I believe that by saying this, Jacob admitted to having lived out most of his life in the flesh, striving with God and with men. It took him all this time to see that his striving was not a life of faith, and it did not produce peace.

The second thing Jacob did in his last days was to bless Joseph's two sons:

1 After these things Joseph was told, "Your father is weakening." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him. 2 When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has just come to you," Israel regained strength and sat up on his bed. 3 Jacob said to Joseph, "The Sovereign God appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me. 4 He said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and will multiply you. I will make you into a group of nations and I will give this land to your descendants as an everlasting possession.' 5 "Now, as for your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, they will be mine. Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine just as Reuben and Simeon are. 6 Any children that you father after them will be yours; they will be listed under the names of their brothers in their inheritance. 7 But as for me, when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died—to my sorrow—in the land of Canaan. It happened along the way, some distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there on the way to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem). 8 When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he asked, "Who are these?" 9 Joseph said to his father, "They are the sons God has given me in this place." His father said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them." 10 Now Israel's eyes were failing because of his age; he was not able to see

well. So Joseph brought his sons near to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them. 11 Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see you again, but now God has allowed me to see your children too.” 12 So Joseph moved them from Israel’s knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. 13 Joseph positioned them; he put Ephraim on his right hand across from Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh on his left hand across from Israel’s right hand. Then Joseph brought them closer to his father. 14 Israel stretched out his right hand and placed it on Ephraim’s head, although he was the younger. Crossing his hands, he put his left hand on Manasseh’s head, for Manasseh was the firstborn.

15 Then he blessed Joseph and said,  
“May the God before whom my fathers  
Abraham and Isaac walked—  
the God who has been my shepherd  
all my life long to this day—  
16 the Angel who has protected me  
from all harm—  
bless these boys.  
May my name be named in them,  
and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac.  
May they grow into a multitude on the earth.”

17 When Joseph saw that his father placed his right hand on Ephraim’s head, it displeased him. So he took his father’s hand to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. 18 Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this is the firstborn. Put your right hand on his head.” 19 But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He too will become a nation and he too will become great. In spite of this, his younger brother will be even greater and his descendants will become a multitude of nations.” 20 So he blessed them that day, saying,

“By you will Israel bless, saying,  
‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’”  
So he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

21 Then Israel said to Joseph, “I am about to die; but God will be with you and will bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22 As one who is above your brothers, I give to you the mountain slope, which I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow” ([Genesis 48:1-22](#)).

One can hardly miss the similarity of this blessing of Joseph’s two sons to Isaac’s blessings of his sons in his old age. Both Isaac and Jacob were old, and their sight was poor. In the case of Isaac, Jacob sought to obtain his father’s blessing under false pretenses, just as Isaac wished to bless the oldest son, in spite of God’s indication to the contrary. In this case, Joseph places his two sons before his father in such a way that he will not be confused as to which is the older son. Knowing that his oldest grandson was placed under his right hand, Jacob removed his hands and crossed them, purposely giving the younger of the two lads the rights of the firstborn. Joseph was initially irritated and tried to correct his father, until he realized that this was a very deliberate action. By this act, Jacob seems to have symbolized the truth that is stated in [Romans 9](#):

6 It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel, 7 nor are all the children Abraham’s true descendants; rather **“through Isaac will your descendants be traced.”** 8 This means it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God; rather, the children of promise are counted as descendants. 9 For this is what the promise declared: **“About a year from now I will return and Sarah will have a son.”** 10 Not only that, but when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our ancestor Isaac— 11 even before they were born or had done anything good or



bad (so that God’s purpose in election would stand, not by works but by his calling) — 12 it was said to her, *“The older will serve the younger,”* 13 just as it is written: *“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated”* ([Romans 9:6-13](#)).

Jacob has thereby acknowledged that the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant are passed on to the one of God’s choosing. It is a matter of election, based upon sovereign grace; it is not determined by good works (present or future), and it is not determined by scheming or manipulation. It was God’s choice of him, rather than Esau, that made him the heir of the Abrahamic Covenant. It was God who had watched over him and blessed him throughout his life, not due to his merit or schemes, but because God had chosen him to be the heir of the promised blessings to Abraham.

Jacob was not just blessing these two sons of Joseph; he was adopting them (48:5-6). His oldest son, Reuben, had sinned against his father by sleeping with one of his concubines (35:22; 49:3-4), and thus was deprived of his rights as the firstborn. By adopting Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob was giving the right of the firstborn to Joseph, because he would now receive a double inheritance through his two sons.

The third and final act of Jacob (so far as the biblical account is concerned) was the blessing he pronounced on each of his sons, as recorded in [Genesis 49](#). These “blessings” are really prophecies concerning the future of each of his sons and their offspring. The most significant of these blessings was that of Judah:

8 “Judah, your brothers will praise you.  
your hand will be on the neck of your enemies,  
your father’s sons will bow down before you.  
9 You are a lion’s cub, Judah,  
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.  
He crouches and lies down like a lion;  
like a lioness—who will rouse him?  
10 The scepter will not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
until he comes to whom it belongs;  
the nations will obey him.  
11 Binding his foal to the vine,  
and his colt to the choicest vine,  
he will wash his garments in wine,  
his robes in the blood of grapes.  
12 His eyes will be dark from wine,  
and his teeth white from milk” ([Genesis 49:8-12](#)).

This blessing upon Judah reveals the fact that the covenant promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and himself would now be passed on through Judah. Abraham and Sarah had been told that a line of kings would proceed from them ([Genesis 17:6, 16](#)). We now see that these kings will come through the tribe of Judah. In the future, God will reveal that this line of kings will come through the seed of David ([2 Samuel 7:14](#)). What we see here in [Genesis 29:10-12](#) is that the **“King of Kings”** will come from the line of Judah. The traditional rendering **“until Shiloh comes”** (49:10) is probably better understood to mean, **“until he comes to whom it belongs,”** as can be seen in the translation of the NET Bible above. David’s descendants will rule until the final and ultimate **“Lion of the tribe of Judah,”** the **“Son of David”** comes:

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, a descendant of David, and the

virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled by his words and began to wonder about the meaning of this greeting. 30 So the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 Listen: you will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, **and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David**. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end" ([Luke 1:26-33](#), emphasis mine).

## Conclusion

The lives of Jacob, Judah, and Joseph teach us many important truths and also have much to say to us by way of application. I shall conclude by pointing out some of the things we can learn from our text.

Nearly everything we learn from Jacob is negative. Jacob would now tell us, if he could, "Don't do as I did." Jacob was a man who wrestled with God and man most all of his life, and for this, he paid a high price. As he told Pharaoh, his life was shorter and more painful than that of his forefathers ([Genesis 47:9](#)). Abraham willingly obeyed God, to the point of sacrificing his son, if necessary ([Genesis 22](#)), but Jacob clung to his favored sons (first Joseph, and then Benjamin), who had to be snatched from his grasp. Almost every good thing that God did in Jacob's life was in spite of him. It did not happen through his active obedience, but providentially, in spite of his resistance. Because of this, he did not experience the joy of walking in obedience to God.

There is both good news and bad news to be discerned from the life of Jacob. On the one hand we can be encouraged by the fact that God's purposes and promises will be fulfilled, even if it is in spite of our sins. The bad news is that resisting God comes at a very high price. Jacob's relationships were pathetic. His wives battled for his affections. Laban and his sons came to resent Jacob because he sought to gain at their expense. Jacob's sons not only disliked each other, they resented their father's preferential affections. It seemed they almost enjoyed leading him to the conclusion that Joseph had been torn to pieces by a wild animal. For a number of years, Jacob lived with the false assumption that his son Joseph was dead. He faced the trials of life with fear, and not with faith. He cared far too much about himself and far too little about others. His was not the "good life."

In all of this, Jacob (Israel) was the perfect prototype of the nation Israel. Like their forefather, the Israelites often relied upon fleshly effort. Much of the time they opposed God and trusted in their own devices. Many were the times when God spared them from destruction and brought about their good providentially – in spite of their sins. Jacob did not begin to comprehend or to enjoy the grace of God until very late in his life; the nation Israel has yet to fully enjoy it. It will only be after great trials and tribulation that they will submit to Jesus Christ, the promised "**seed of Abraham**" (see [Galatians 3:15-16](#)), as Savior and Lord.

We see the providential hand in Judah's life as well. Judah abandoned his family and began to live among the Canaanites, taking a Canaanite wife for himself, and for his sons. It was not due to Judah's faithfulness that his line was preserved, but in spite of his disobedience. It was Judah who proposed selling his brother Joseph as a slave. But unlike Jacob, Judah came to see his sin and to repent of it. He admitted that his Gentile daughter-in-law, Tamar, was more righteous than he ([Genesis 38:26](#)). When his father Jacob refused to assume the spiritual leadership of his family, Judah stepped forward. He took personal responsibility for Benjamin's well being. And when Joseph orchestrated a virtual replay of Dothan, it was Judah who offered himself in Benjamin's place. From one who cared little about his father ([Genesis 37:29-35](#)), he had compassion on his aging father, knowing that the loss of Benjamin would

destroy him ([Genesis 44:14-34](#)). This all took place before Judah had any knowledge that God would pass on the Abrahamic Covenant blessings through him (49:8-12).

From Judah especially, but also from his other brothers, we learn the difference between mere sorrow for sin and genuine repentance. When Joseph's brothers were incarcerated in an Egyptian prison, they expressed sorrow for the way they had treated their brother (42:21-22). But true repentance is more than mere sorrow – being sorry you did the wrong thing – it is a complete change of heart and mind, so that when given the opportunity to repeat the sin, we will turn from it.

This kind of repentance is what Joseph was working to accomplish in the lives of his brothers when they came to Egypt for grain. He had already come to terms with any bitterness and anger toward his brothers, as we see in the naming of his sons ([Genesis 41:46-52](#)). Also, he had come to understand the meaning of his dreams, given early in his life. It was not just to announce that he had power over his brothers, but that he was to exercise spiritual leadership for the benefit of his brothers. Contrary to first appearances, Joseph was not seeking to make his brothers pay for their sin against him, but was seeking to bring them to repentance. That involved suffering, just as it did much later when Paul found it necessary to correct the Corinthians:

8 For even if I made you sad by my letter, I do not regret having written it (even though I did regret it, for I see that my letter made you sad, though only for a short time). 9 Now I rejoice, not because you were made sad, but because you were made sad to the point of repentance. For you were made sad as God intended, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. 10 For sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret, but worldly sadness brings about death. 11 For see what this very thing, this sadness as God intended, has produced in you: what eagerness, what defense of yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what deep concern, what punishment! In everything you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter ([2 Corinthians 7:8-11](#)).

Joseph did cause his brothers pain, but not for the sake of revenge. It is clear that causing his brothers to suffer was also painful to Joseph. Even in the midst of Joseph's severity, there was a depth of mercy. He sent them subtle hints that should have proven encouraging. For example, he told them that he, too, feared God (42:18). In the midst of apparent severity, there was kindness. Both times they returned home with grain from Egypt, Joseph had their money placed in their sacks. He also treated his brothers to a magnificent meal. The irony of all this is that the guilt his brothers bore was so great, they were incapable of recognizing grace, let alone enjoy it. *Our sin dims our eyes to the grace of God.* Like Jacob, we think that our circumstances are destroying us, when they have been skillfully woven together by God to save us.

If Jacob is an example of impotent spiritual leadership, Joseph is a model of spiritual leadership. Some years ago, J. Oswald Sanders spoke on spiritual leadership at a conference in Fort Worth. I attended and was greatly blessed by the teaching and example of this godly old man. As I recall, he had three major points on the subject of spiritual leadership: suffering, servanthood, and the sovereignty of God. He believed that suffering shapes spiritual leaders, and that true leaders are those who practice true servanthood. He also shared that when God placed him in a position of spiritual leadership, it was clearly His sovereignly determined place of ministry.

As I look at the life of Joseph, I see all three of Sanders' main points illustrated, plus a couple more (which, coincidentally, begin with the letter "s"):

*God prepared Joseph for leadership by the suffering he endured.* None of Joseph's suffering was wasted time or energy. During the time of Joseph's slavery and imprisonment, he learned the language and the culture of Egypt, something he would need in the years to come, but this was not apparent at the time of

his suffering. God allowed Joseph to be falsely accused by Mrs. Potiphar, and thus to be cast into prison. But this was a prison for political prisoners. Therefore, men like the king's "butler" and the "baker" were placed under Joseph's care. This was the perfect opportunity for Joseph to learn the proper protocol for a high level government official, as he was soon to be. No suffering of Joseph (or of any saint) is ever wasted.

*The second element of leadership is servanthood.* I fear that in his youth Joseph was not the servant to his brothers he should have been. He seems to have been unwise in the way he used his authority. I don't think that one could say Joseph was truly serving his brothers at this point in his life. Joseph must have reflected on the anger his brothers displayed toward him. He must have perceived it was the way he exercised his authority over them that enraged them. The first thing they did was to strip his robe from him. They must have taunted him about his dreams.<sup>102</sup> Joseph came to understand that a position of power and authority is a place of service, not of status. Thus, having learned the lesson of servanthood,<sup>103</sup> when Joseph was put in charge of the butler and the baker in prison he used his position to minister to them, not to lord it over them.

*The third element of spiritual leadership is that of sovereignty.* Through his suffering, Joseph came to a much fuller understanding of the sovereignty of God. Even before his brothers arrived in Egypt, he recognized that God had sovereignly employed his adversity to bring him blessing (41:51-52). He told his brothers this when they feared that he would retaliate for all the evils that had been done to him:

7 "God sent me ahead of you to preserve you on the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 So now, it is not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me an adviser to Pharaoh, lord over all his household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt" ([Genesis 45:7-8](#)).

20 "As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day. 21 So now, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your little children." Then he consoled them and spoke kindly to them ([Genesis 50:20-21](#)).

God had sovereignly appointed Joseph over his brothers. God gave Joseph the gifts and skills that commended him to Potiphar and to Pharaoh. Joseph could not take pride in what God had sovereignly given him,<sup>104</sup> and now he knew it.

*The fourth element of spiritual leadership is that of stewardship.*<sup>105</sup> A steward does not own the things that are under his control. The clearest expression of his "steward" mindset is found in Joseph's response to Mrs. Potiphar, who urged Joseph to "possess" her:

8 But he refused, saying to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not give any thought to his household with me here, and everything that he owns he has put into my care. 9 There is no one greater in this household than I am. He has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. So how could I do such a great evil, and sin against God?" ([Genesis 39:8-9](#))

Joseph did not own what he controlled. I wonder, however, if his brothers felt as though he acted that way towards them in his youth. But when in Potiphar's house, even though Joseph was in control of everything (except Mrs. Potiphar), he did not own any of it. The same was true in the prison and when serving Pharaoh. Joseph was a steward. He did not lay claim to that which he did not own.<sup>106</sup>

*The fifth element of spiritual leadership is what I wish to call "secular savvy."* Often there is a false distinction drawn between spiritual and secular leadership. Joseph was a skilled spiritual leader in whatever situation he was placed. He was a "spiritual leader" in the home of Potiphar, because Potiphar saw that the hand of God was upon him:

2 The Lord was with Joseph. He was successful and lived in the household of his Egyptian master. 3 His master observed that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made everything he was doing successful ([Genesis 39:2-3](#)).

When Joseph declined the proposition of Mrs. Potiphar, he explained his actions in spiritual terms (39:9). When Joseph ministered to the butler and the baker in the prison, he did so in spiritual terms:

7 So he asked Pharaoh's officials, who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why do you look so sad today?" 8 They told him, "We both had dreams, but there is no one to interpret them." Joseph responded, "Don't interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me" ([Genesis 40:7-8](#)).

The same was true in his ministry to Pharaoh. The butler very carefully avoided any spiritual reference to Joseph's ministry to him (41:9-13), but when Joseph ministered to Pharaoh, he repeatedly gave all the glory to God:

Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "It is not within my power, but God will speak concerning the welfare of Pharaoh" ([Genesis 41:16](#)).

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Both dreams of Pharaoh have the same meaning. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do" ([Genesis 41:25](#)).

"This is just what I told Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do" (41:28).

Joseph was a spiritual leader, doing a secular task. All too often Christians suppose that spiritual leadership requires a spiritual environment. They feel that "full-time Christian work" is superior to "mere secular work." I think this text (and many others) prove this thinking to be wrong. Joseph had a great spiritual impact on those with whom he came in contact through his secular employment. Think also of men like Daniel.

This leads me to conclude that unless one can demonstrate spiritual leadership in the secular world of employment, I seriously doubt that he can exercise spiritual leadership in the church. Is this not what Paul was saying when he set down the qualifications for elders?

2 The overseer then must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, 3 not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not contentious, free from the love of money. 4 He must manage his own household well and keep his children in control without losing his dignity. 5 But if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for the church of God? 6 He must not be a recent convert or he may become arrogant and fall into the punishment that the devil will exact. 7 And he must be well thought of by those outside the faith, so that he may not fall into disgrace and be caught by the devil's trap ([1 Timothy 3:2-7](#)).

If I had my way, no one would go into full-time Christian ministry until they had obtained secular employment skills, and then proven themselves to be wise in some form of "secular" employment. The Book of Proverbs, as I understand it, is written to those who would rule, those who would exercise spiritual leadership in the nation Israel. As you read through this great book, notice how often these proverbs deal with the real world of work, family, friends, and so on. Joseph was a man who knew how to work in a way that benefited his master, and that glorified his God. He was a spiritual leader whose ministry was in the secular world of work.



Our text has a great deal to say about sexual purity. Some years ago, my friend Craig Nelson and I were ministering in Asia. We were team-teaching from the Book of Genesis, starting at chapter 37. One of the men in the church objected that there was “too much talk of sex” in our teaching. We pointed out that while we sought to be tasteful in what we taught, these chapters in Genesis had a lot to say about sexual purity. It is safe to say that sexual purity is a very important thing, especially for leaders. Many Americans seem willing to look the other way when those in positions of political power rather openly engage in sexual immorality. Judah jeopardized his own leadership, and the well being of his family, by his immorality. Joseph was a model of sexual purity and integrity. We need many more Joseph’s today.

Joseph is a prototype of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the object of his father’s affections, just as our Lord Jesus was the beloved Son of God the Father. As Joseph’s brothers resented his authority and sought to be rid of him, so the Jewish religious leaders resented Jesus’ authority and sought to put him to death on a cruel cross. It was through much suffering at the hands of his brothers – who rejected him as their leader – that Joseph became their deliverer. It was through the suffering of our Lord Jesus, at the hand of His “**brethren,**” that He became the way of salvation for all who believe in Him.

I would be remiss if I did not point out something that my friend, Marvin Ball, reminded me of this past week. Our text is a dramatic illustration of the truth of [Romans 8:28](#):

28 And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose, 29 because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified ([Romans 8:28-30](#)).

God always fulfills His purposes and His promises. He is not limited to using the willing acts of obedience of His saints. He is able to employ the rebellious acts of unbelievers and the sins of the saints to accomplish His purposes. To be sovereign is to be in full control. God is fully in control, in spite of the sin and rebellion that is rampant in His world.

Our text illustrates how God sovereignly orchestrated and overruled in the affairs of men, so that his promises would be fulfilled. Through his dreams, God revealed to Joseph that he would rule over his family. It certainly appeared that the sin of his brothers nullified the prophecy of those dreams, but in truth, their actions merely set the stage for their fulfillment. It looked as though the sins of Judah would jeopardize the promise of God regarding the promised “**seed**” of Abraham, but God sovereignly caused “**all things**” to work together for the fulfillment of His promise. Both Jacob and his sons looked at their circumstances and concluded that God had brought about their destruction, but by the end of Genesis, we see that God used all these things to bring about their deliverance.

Nearly 25 years ago, my friend Bill McRae and his family left Dallas to commence a fruitful ministry in Canada. Virtually the first week he served as a teacher and elder in a local church, a tragic accident took the lives of several members of one family in the church. I shall never forget the message Bill preached at that funeral.<sup>107</sup> He used our text to show how, at one point in time, Jacob mistakenly assumed that all of his circumstances were meant for his destruction, only to see from hindsight that God had intended this tragedy in his life for ultimate triumph.

I wonder, my friend, if your life looks something like Jacob’s life, when he was forced to give up his beloved son, Benjamin? Do you think “**all these things are against me**” ([Genesis 42:36](#))? If you are a part of God’s family, they are not for your destruction, but for your deliverance; they are not meant to be a tragedy, but to be triumph. I pray that each of you who read this can experience the assurance, through faith in Christ, that God is working for your good, and His glory:

31 What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is the one who will condemn? Christ is the one who died (and more than that, he was raised), who is at the right hand of God, and who also is interceding for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, “*For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*” 37 No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord ([Romans 8:31-39](#)).

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<sup>87</sup>This is the edited manuscript of a message delivered by Robert L. Deffinbaugh, teacher and elder at Community Bible Chapel, on December 17, 2000.

<sup>88</sup>In such cases, someone nearby would often whisper a translation to such folks as I spoke.

<sup>89</sup>If Israel is still living in Hebron (35:27), Shechem would have been approximately 50 miles away. Add to this another 20 miles to Dothan, and you have the sons of Jacob some 70 miles from their father – far enough, they supposed, to get away with murder.

<sup>90</sup>This may not be altogether hypothetical, as can be seen when we look at 42:21.

<sup>91</sup>Joseph is 17 when he is sold into slavery (37:2), and he is 30 at the time he stood before Pharaoh (41:46). Then the 7 years of plenty pass, and they are 2 years into the famine (see 45:6). This adds up to approximately 22 years.

<sup>92</sup>It is interesting to note (from the NASB) that just as Shechem “**saw**” Dinah, “**took her,**” and “**lay with her**” (34:2), Judah “**saw**” a Canaanite woman, “**took her,**” and “**went in to her**” (38:2). In both passages, the first two verbs are the same; only the third is different.

<sup>93</sup>One cannot know whether or not Potiphar had his doubts about the charges his wife brought against Joseph. It is interesting that he did not execute Joseph, and that he was promoted within the prison system.

<sup>94</sup>I would imagine that hearing of these two, very different, interpretations would have impressed Pharaoh. It is one thing to predict “good things” that will happen to someone; it is quite another to predict disaster. Joseph must have been a man who would “tell it like it is.”

<sup>95</sup>This must have backhandedly comforted and encouraged Joseph, as he recalled that he had two dreams regarding his gaining authority over his brothers.

<sup>96</sup>The NASB renders, “**When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly.**” His feigned severity was a disguise.

<sup>97</sup>It is interesting that Simeon was chosen to stay behind in Egypt. Ruben was the firstborn son, but he was not present when the brothers chose to sell Joseph into slavery (see chapter 37). Simeon was the second-born son, and he would have been the ranking brother at the time Joseph was sold. It was Judah who suggested that they sell Joseph, but Simeon would have been the one in charge, it would seem.

<sup>98</sup> Joseph's servant could not say, "I have your money, because he had given it back to them." But he was completely correct in saying, "I *had* your money." This subtlety passed over their heads unnoticed.

<sup>99</sup> My guess is that, after their experience on their first trip to Egypt and back, Joseph's brothers would have checked their sacks before they left for home. Having drunk their fill of wine, I don't think this came to mind, thus setting the scene for their great test.

<sup>100</sup> We don't really know who handed the bloody tunic to Jacob, but we do know that this plot was proposed by Judah.

<sup>101</sup> One should note that while the writer to the Hebrews speaks of Abraham's faith in terms of incidents early in his life (see [Hebrews 11:8](#)), he does not speak of Jacob's faith until the final days of his life, when he is literally on his death bed (see [Hebrews 11:21](#)).

<sup>102</sup> See 37:19-20. These verses record the conversation that Joseph's brothers had among themselves, before Joseph arrived, but these same words could have been repeated to Joseph as a taunt.

<sup>103</sup> Based upon [Philippians 2:1-11](#), I believe that humility is foundational to servanthood. Surely Joseph had been placed in the most humbling of circumstances in Egypt.

<sup>104</sup> See [1 Corinthians 4:7](#).

<sup>105</sup> To be perfectly honest, I cannot recall whether J. Oswald Sanders included this point or not, but I think it should be included. The fifth element was not included by Sanders.

<sup>106</sup> The antithesis to this is Satan, who claims to own everything ([Luke 4:5-6](#)). His fall is the supreme example of the abuse of a stewardship (see [Isaiah 14:13-14](#)).

<sup>107</sup> I did not actually attend that funeral, but I did read the message, which was entitled, "*From Tragedy to Triumph*."