

JOSEPH - MAN CALLED JOSEPH

Genesis 30-45

INTRODUCTION. I might as well begin this Bible character study with a confession. All the time I was reading the biblical record and writing about Isaac and Jacob I kept looking ahead to Joseph. With the obvious exceptions of Enoch and Elijah, the Old Testament character who reminds me most of New Testament principles and the life every Christian should live is Joseph - and possibly Samuel. However, other names come to mind from time to time (Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc).

Now, you may be thinking of the obnoxious brat whose brothers hated him, but how many of us did things when we were children that we would like to forget today? What about the lie I told Miss Jackson in the sixth grade when she asked me if I had done something, and for the first time in my life I said, "No, Mam. I swear I didn't do it!" I had heard classmates use that expression many times, but I knew my mother would have killed me if she had heard me say that - or make me wish I was dead. I still owe Ken a dime. We were in his uncle's café where we were going to eat our lunch, which consisted of two hamburgers and a Coke, which we bought for the grand total of a quarter. He dropped a dime and I helped him look for it until we gave up. Then, I was ashamed to admit what I had been standing on his dime the whole time. I wanted to see if I could fool him - but after search for some time I was to embarrassed to tell him what I had done! My first cousin told me that her father, my mother's brother, told people that I was the meanest kid he had ever seen. That surprised me.

Before I condemn Joseph I should stop to remember a few of the obnoxious things I did when I was a child. However, I was saved at age 12, called to preach the gospel at 13, licensed at 17, and ordained at 19. I not only remember my walk with the Lord, I remember hearing my mother say that if they had not gotten me out of Mobile when they did I might have ended up in jail. I am going to remain in denial on that one.

We will not begin by condemning young Joseph for his youthful ego, arrogance, and self adoration, if that is what it was. No doubt, his father Jacob was responsible for much of the trouble between Joseph and his brothers. Jacob had grown up in a home in which his father favored his brother Esau and his mother favored him. Jacob somehow forgot all the animosity that favoritism caused between him and his brother. Jacob favored Joseph over all his ten half-brothers, which they resented deeply. Benjamin, Joseph's full brother was loved by both Joseph and his father.

So, if we can get beyond the obnoxious attitude and behavior of the youthful Joseph, we will discover a remarkable man. After reading about his distinguished ancestors, Joseph's life is something like an oasis in the desert. Actually, he was the spoiled child of a spoiled child, but the Lord had a purpose for him that no one would understand for some time. If we get beyond the stories of the obnoxious youth we will find a man of character and distinction, a man of mystery and substance, a man of brilliance and intrigue. He was a man of genuine humility and love that totally eclipses his youthful boasting, pride, and self-centeredness.

The late Bible scholar, John R. Sampey called Joseph "the most Christlike character in the Old Testament." There was a time when I would write out lists people I considered the best in their field, based of course on my "vast knowledge" of the individual or his record. I followed baseball and read all I could find on Ted Williams and Stan the Man Musial. I was a boxing fan and my all time favorite fighter was Rocky Marciano, whom I would one day see referee some Golden Glove fights in Jackson, Mississippi. In time I was forced to acknowledge my ignorance. Even in Junior High, I would often engage in intense research in certain fields. I assumed that was the reason the school scheduled "study hall" for our pleasure. For example, I was a walking encyclopedia on Boxing. I once met Pete Herman in New Orleans and my first thought was, "He was Bantam Weight Champion of the world from 1918-1922 (as I now recall!). I was addicted to all the traditional sports. Baseball: Stan Musial and Ted Williams. Football: Johnny Unitas and of course, Archie Manning. I had better stop there before I

become distracted.

I prepared lists of the world's ten greatest military leaders (I never told my late friend, Lt. General Dutch Shoffner!), the world's ten greatest explorers, America's greatest frontiersmen. Of course, there was the list of the top ten preachers. And so on. I prepared a list of Old Testament characters whose lives reminded me more of New Testament Christianity than most others.

I. JOSEPH WAS LOVED BY HIS FATHER, HATED BY BROTHERS (Gen. 30; 37-38).

A. He Was Born in Padan-aram as the Answer to His Mother's Prayer (Ch. 30).

1. Rachel cried to Jacob, "Give me sons or I die" (30:1). Rachel lived in a day in which a woman's worth, esteem, and security were tied to her husband and her children. Normally speaking, she was identified with three men throughout her life: her father, her husband, and her son. If that sounds unfair, look at the nations of the world; look at the history of the world. Centuries later, Paul found Gentile women attending worship services in a local synagogue, almost certainly because Judaism show greater respect for women than the pagan religions with which they were familiar. To make matters worse, Rachel had to look her sister Leah, Jacob's first wife, in the eye, knowing what she must have been thinking about her. After all, she was his favorite, but she had given him no son. So Rachel cried out to Jacob,

"When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she envied her sister. "Give me sons, or I will die!" she said to Jacob. Jacob became angry with Rachel and said, "Am I in God's place, who has withheld children from you?" (Gen 30:1-2, HCSB).

Rachel gave Jacob her servant Bilhah, who bore him two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Then, Leah, who could have no more children, gave her servant Zilpah to Jacob and she had two sons, Gad and Asher. After that Leah had more sons, giving her six sons in all.

I have prepared Bible studies on various men, and while I have no plans for a study on "A Woman Called Rachel," in this series, but there is a verse that captured my heart the first time I saw it:

" This is what the Lord says: A voice was heard in Ramah, a lament with bitter weeping — Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children because they are no more." Jer 31:15 (HCSB)

"Rachel weeping for her children." That verse touches my heart every time I read it. It is repeated in Matthew 2:18. Rachel's name appears some 46 times in the Book of Genesis, so maybe she would be a good subject for one of our Bible studies.

2. God blessed Rachel with a son and she named him Joseph (30:22-24).

In all Jacob had ten sons, and then the Scripture tells us, "Then God remembered Rachel. He listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my shame." She named him Joseph: "May the Lord add another son to me" (Gen 30:22-24). Rachel prayed for a son and God blessed her with a very special son. She would never live to see the day of his greatness and his special place in God's plan for His people. However, in all the Old Testament there is no greater example of New Testament Christian living than we find in Rachel's son Joseph.

3. Rachel had one other son. The Lord answered Rachel's prayer and gave her another son, but sadly, Rachel died as a result of a difficult labor and birth of a son whom she names Ben-oni ("son of my sorrow"). Jacob (Israel) changed his name to Benjamin ("son of my right hand"). As we shall see in the

Scripture, Joseph and Benjamin were very close.

If only she had lived long enough to see her sons grow to maturity. If only she had lived to discipline and teach her sons. Her husband Jacob loved his son Joseph. In fact, he loved him more than he loved his other sons and if he ever tried to hide that fact he was very unsuccessful. They knew it and hated their brother.

B. When We See Joseph Again He Is a Spoiled Youth (Gen 37).

1. He was a spoiled brat. There is no way around that, but there have been many outstanding men and women who really don't want to be reminded of their past. I am one of them. Once, when I was about six years old, my parents, my baby brother, and I were living in a house that had been built on the first farm land my father bought. My mother asked me to watch James while they worked in the field right by the house. Her sister had taken care of her when she was young, so why should she not expect her older son to take care of his little brother? As it developed, when she came back inside to check on us, she discovered that I was in the process of saving my little brother's life! There had been a "little" fire that started on the wall about four feet from the floor. There was no question as to what started the blaze, but the amazing thing was that her older son had fought the blaze courageously, and by the time she came back inside the fire was out, and while she could smell smoke and see the darkened area on the wallpaper, neither son had been burned in the fire. Over the years I would hear my mother tell about that fire and how James might have been burned. What I never heard her mention was how courageously I had fought the fire. For some reason, she seemed to think that I deserved no credit because I had started the fire. A little bit of wall paper had peeled back along a seam and when I looked at some questions came to mind - the kind of things that must come to the mind of great thinkers who look at a little strip of paper that has curled out along the seam of the wallpaper and wonder what will happen if I touch a match to it. For years to come, when that story was told it was always about how I had endangered my brother's life - never about how I saved his life.

Several years later, when my brother James was in the first or second grade, he and I had to walk a mile and a quarter every morning from our home in Tunica County to the Quitman County line to catch the school bus at Gordon's store. It could get boring when we only had each other and a gravel road full of rocks. James was six or seven and I was ten or eleven years old. One warm afternoon, we were about half way home when we started walking across a bridge over a bayou. As we reached the half way point, I noticed that a heavy plank had been knocked loose, leaving a dangerous hole in the bridge several feet ahead of us. If a car was crossing the bridge and a wheel ran off into that hole it might throw that car off into the bayou.

I knew I had to do something to prevent a serious accident, but why not have a little fun while doing it? So, I lifted the heavy plank and pulled it back over the hole and let the end slide through the hole. When I had it lined up the way I wanted it I let it slide all the way to the bank beside stream below. About three to four feet of the plank, about three inch thick and 11 inches wide, stuck up above the surface of the bridge. I had no time to admire my good deed (saving a life as well as an automobile!) and amusement at the thought of a neighbor stopping to remove the plank and setting it back in place in order to cross the bridge. At that age, I never thought about who would repair it.

Before we could walk off the bridge I heard a car coming. I would be caught! I looked up and realized the car had not made it to the curve about three or four tenths of a mile ahead. At that point, the road made a ninety degree curve to the left (west). There were some bushes around the curve which kept me from seeing the car, but more importantly, it kept those in the car from seeing me! I grabbed James by the arm and led him (actually, I dragged him) under the bridge. Within a matter of seconds a car was stopping before driving onto the bridge. I made it a point to be sure James didn't make any noise as we heard two of three men walk onto the bridge, pull out the plank and place it over the hole, and walk back

to their car. Then, we waited as the car approached the bridge, pulled onto it, and drove over it, slowly, but with something of a rumble. Then a second car crossed the bridge, and a third. We had no idea what was going on, but when we got home our parents were gone. When they finally got home I discovered that I had stopped a funeral procession, and our parents were in the procession!

After they returned home, my mother asked why she didn't see us walking home from the county line store. James is still convinced that I said, "We saw you and I waved at you, and you waved back." Mother said she must have been talking with someone in the car and didn't remember waving at us, but she accepted my word for it. Surely, I would never lie! Perhaps you can remember things from your childhood that you can hardly believe you did, but you did.

Now consider this: if James had been older than I, and my pranks had gotten him into trouble, how do you think he would have felt about that. We are not told that Joseph ever pulled pranks on his brothers, but when he told his dreams they came to hate him. If only he had kept his mouth shut! However, those dreams were sent by the Lord, Who knew what He wanted for His chosen people. They were not about to leave their home, nor go to Egypt, unless circumstances forced it on them. The question we are going to need to consider is, whether or not God caused this animosity in the family to serve His purpose, or He simply permitted it to happen. What we do know is that He used it to serve His purpose.

2. Jacob's partiality toward Joseph was the source of conflict with his brothers (37:1-4).

"Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. (2) These are the family records of Jacob.

At 17 years of age, Joseph tended sheep with his brothers. The young man was working with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought a bad report about them to their father.

(3) Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age, and he made a robe of many colors for him. (4) When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him." (Gen 37:1-4, HCSB)

Such partiality may warp the personality of a young child if continued for some time. However, Joseph was 17 years old and knew he was the apple of his father's eye, and in that society the father was the absolute authority. In the first place, Jacob was partial because of his love for Rachel, Joseph's mother. To Jacob, it was love at first sight, even though He found himself married to her sister Leah because of their brother's deception. Jacob had deceived his brother Esau, but he was no match for Laban. Toward the end, Jacob deceived Laban, and as a result found himself fleeing from his brother-in-law, just as he had fled from his brother twenty years earlier.

Rachel died in child birth and while Joseph's attitude toward his older half-brothers was not good, he loved his brother Benjamin with all his heart. He was also aware of the fact that his father love him and discriminated against his older brothers because of his favoritism. Favoritism may lead to animosity, which, in turn may lead to divisions.

At this point it may be to our benefit to ask how Jacob got that way. I have a number of books written by America's number one outdoor humorist, Patrick F. McMannus. My son John and I have read Patrick McMannus for years and we can only mention a name or some experience and we both recall a great story in one of his books. I have discovered that a number of my friends, like Jim Laws, also enjoy reading Patrick McMannus. Jim and I have discovered that we have a lot in common (we both read Louis L'Amout). One of Patrick McMannys' books I have read several times over the years is, HOW I GOT THIS WAY. Now, if Jacob had only written a book that explained how he got that way it may well have

kept others from making the same mistake.

There is another possible answer that may help to explain how Jacob got that way. He lived in a land filled with pagans who worshiped gods of their own invention. Is it just possible that Satan, knowing that God created man with need to worship a higher power, just kept on supplying fallen man with false gods that reflected their own fallen nature? Is there any wonder that the first four of Ten Commandments would be directed at a total commitment to Yahweh and against false gods?

- (1) "YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME." (Ex 20:3, NKJV)
- (2) "YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FOR YOURSELF A CARVED IMAGE" (Ex 20:4, NKJV)
- (3) "YOU SHALL NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD IN VAIN." (Ex 20:7, NKJV)
- (4) 4. "REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, TO KEEP IT HOLY." (Ex 20:8, NKJV)

For comments on the Ten Commandments by this writer, see the Exodus Series posted under "Articles" on Sermon City.Com under my name.

Both Abraham and Jacob had multiple wives, and children by different women. After the giving of the Ten Commandments this would be condemned, even though some of God's chosen leaders followed pagan practices more than the Ten Commandments. Jesus set much higher standards for us, especially where marriage is concerned (see the Sermon on the Mount).

Jacob grew up in a home in which both parents chose a favorite son, and sadly, he followed their example, and in so doing he drove a wedge between his favorite son Joseph and his older brothers. When the descendants of Jacob (Israel) left Sinai they left with the highest standard of conduct the world had known since the Garden of Eden. Sadly, they often seemed more impressed with the vile practices of their pagan neighbors than with the Law which Yahweh had given them.

In Genesis 37:3, we read, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age, and he made a robe of many colors for him." While we may understand why Jacob love Joseph so much, we can see how the gift of this beautiful robe to his favorite son was like waving a red flag in the face of his older sons. Little did Jacob realize how he was setting Joseph up for what would soon happen. His brothers would, before too long, be debating whether to kill him or sell him to a Midianite caravan.

Before leaving this subject, let us consider one other question: What may we conclude that Jacob taught young Joseph? He obviously taught him lessons that his older brothers missed, possibly because they were reared by mothers who taught them without a great deal of input from Jacob for the most part. When they were old enough, he would have taught them about sheep, cattle, and trade, but with the number of children he had by Leah, her slaves, and by Rachel's slave, he may not have had the time to spent with them that he had in his old age with Joseph.

There is, in my mind, no doubt that Jacob would have taught his favorite son about the Lord and certain values He may have given Abraham when he called him and sent him to the Land of Promise. Since Abraham so emphatically insisted that Isaac must not marry a Canaanite woman, and the he must not leave Canaan to go back to Haran to find a wife, he must have been instructed by the Lord to take that stand.

There is another point to consider here. Where did the people of the day get their laws? Some have

naively insisted that Moses copied the Law from the Code of Hammurabi, but I have a better suggestion. God gave Noah His basic law before he ever built the Ark and when Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, with their wives, left the Ark, they left with the only standard for conduct in the world. If there was any copying done, Hammurabi copied the filtered down rules Noah passed on to his sons, and they passed on to their sons.

Jacob, no doubt, taught Joseph and his brothers how to work, how to work together, and how to get along with each other. He would have taught them how to be fathers to their children, and the basics that had been passed down from Abraham to Isaac, and then to Jacob (Israel).

There were many things Jacob did not know to teach his sons. For example, after the children of Israel had lived in the Land of Goshen for 430 years, Yahweh sent Moses back into Egypt to stand in the presence of the Pharaoh to deliver the Lord's demand that he let His people go. It took ten plagues to persuade Pharaoh to permit them to leave the land of Egypt. Pharaoh then pursued them to the Red Sea where God parted the waters of the sea and permitted the Israelites to walk across on dry land. When the Egyptians pursued them, the Lord caused the waters to collapse upon the chariots, the horses, and the Egyptian soldiers so that they were drowned. At times they followed Moses, but at other times they rebelled: it all depended on what was happening at the time and how it might affect them.

For more on this, see the articles by this writer posted under "Articles" on SermonCity.Com, where I discuss both the journey to Sinai and the miracles that brought them to Mt. Sinai where Yahweh provided both food and water for the two million Israelites he had delivered from Egypt. At Sinai, Yahweh revealed His glory to the people and then, with His finger, wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. During the year or so they spent at Sinai, the Lord gave Moses laws that would govern the relationship of the people to other people and to Himself. For more on this, see the commentary on Leviticus and the commentary on Galatians by my long time friend, Dr. Leon Hyatt, posted on SermonCity.Com. Dr. Hyatt honored me by asking me to read his commentary on Galatians and he invited my comments. My comments on this outstanding work were just as I anticipated: very positive. I also have a commentary of Galatians posted on SermonCity.Com, but don't ask me what I wrote! I plan to go back and read it again during the coming months. I am actually looking forward to reading it if only to see what I wrote several years ago.

Jacob did not have the benefit of the Mosaic Law, but he had some basic laws handed down by Abraham and Isaac to him. He would have had the benefit of some of the training Abraham received growing up in Ur of the Chaldees. However, there were many things not covered by those rules and regulations which the Lord gave to Moses at Sinai. We should be thankful today that we have the teachings of Jesus, plus the entire New Testament which provide a commentary on the Law, plus new regulations and freedoms provided by the Savior.

It would also be interesting to note what Jacob did not teach Joseph or his other sons. He did not teach his sons the Golden Rule. He did not teach them the danger inherent in jealousy, covetousness, and greed. He did not teach the principles set forth in the Beatitudes. He did not teach them forgiveness. Jacob did not teach those things, and they obviously they did not pick it up on their own. Not only did Jacob not teach Joseph those principles, he did not practice them himself. Jacob favored Rachel over his other wives. That was no doubt a factor in the favoritism he showed toward Joseph, whom he loved more than his ten older brothers. His love for Rachel was obviously a factor in his partiality toward Jacob.

3. Joseph "brought a bad report" to his father against his brothers (37:2).

(1) "Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. (2) These are the family records of Jacob. At 17 years of age, Joseph tended sheep with his brothers. The young man was

working with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought a bad report about them to their father."

Joseph's brothers were grown men, trusted by their father to care for his sheep. The older sons of Jacob knew how to care for the sheep, and they were prepared to protect them, and to move them from one place to another so they would not over-graze any area. They knew how to care for their sheep and they, like other shepherds of the day, were prepared to put their life on the line for the sheep. David understood the responsibilities of the faithful shepherd and in the best known psalm ever written, praised the Lord for assuming the role of the Good Shepherd over him. David, in Psalm 23, praises the Lord for giving him the care he gave his father's sheep. David recognized the fact that God, our faithful Shepherd committed Himself to David (to establish and maintain a relationship with him). David had a personal relationship with the Lord, and from that relationship he received both provisions and protection. These are the things for which David acknowledges his Good Shepherd.

(1)The LORD is my shepherd (relationship); I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters (provisions). (3) He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me (protection). (5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever (blessings from that relationship)." (Ps. 23:1-6, KJV)

Young Joseph must have seen that his brothers were failing to be good shepherds. We are not told in what area (relationship, protection, or provisions) his brothers were failing to give their father's sheep proper care. He was obviously an intelligent person and knew when shepherds were not giving his father's sheep the care they needed. So, he told his father on his brothers and they hated him for it.

(3) Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son [born to him] in his old age, and he made a robe of many colors for him. (4) When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him. (Bold added for emphasis)

The colorful robe given Joseph by his father clearly expressed a difference in Jacob's relationship with Joseph than the relationship with his brothers. They knew it and they hated him for it.

4. Joseph's dreams led his brothers to hate him and plot against him (37:5-11).

a) First, Joseph dreamed that his brothers' sheaves bowed before his, suggesting that he would have authority over them (37:5-8).

(5) Then Joseph had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. (6) He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: (7) There we were, binding sheaves of grain in the field. Suddenly my sheaf stood up, and your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf."

(8) "Are you really going to reign over us?" his brothers asked him. "Are you really going to rule us?" So they hated him even more because of his dream and what he had said. (37:5-8, HCSB)

When Joseph told his brothers and his father about his dream they hated him even more than when their father gave him the beautiful robe. Surely, I am not the only one who is intrigued by the fact that Joseph was naive enough to tell his brothers about this dream. He had to know they were jealous of him, and that the telling of this dream would not improve their relationship to him. Then, why did he tell it? Is it possible that the Lord was influencing Joseph to tell his father and brothers about this dream? Still, one

wonders what motivated him to tell this dream? If he had been seven instead of seventeen years old we might understand it. But, is it just possible that the Lord sent the dream and the desire to tell it? But, why? How did this serve his purpose? The Lord had promised Abraham the land of Canaan, which is also known as the Land of Promise.

“Know this for certain: Your offspring will be foreigners in a land that does not belong to them; they will be enslaved and oppressed 400 years. (14) However, I will judge the nation they serve, and afterward they will go out with many possessions.” (Gen 15:13-14, HCSB)

How did his brothers respond to his dream? They demanded to know, “Are you really going to reign over us?” his brothers asked him. “Are you really going to rule us?” So they hated him even more because of his dream and what he had said.” (Gen 37:8) How could Joseph, who was obviously a bright young man of 17 at the time, have been so naive as to tell his brothers this dream? Or, maybe we should ask, Why would the Lord impress upon him the desire to tell his brothers, if He in fact did that? Is it just possible that he simply did not stop to think how they would respond to his dream when he told it? The Lord wanted a man in Egypt when the time came to provide a place for the family of Jacob (Israel). He would have that man in Joseph.

b) In the second dream the sun and stars bowed before him. “Look,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun, moon, and 11 stars were bowing down to me.” (Gen 37:9) What was their response to this dream? Who rebuked him this time?

“He told his father and brothers, but his father rebuked him. “What kind of dream is this that you have had?” he said. “Are your mother and brothers and I going to come and bow down to the ground before you?” (Gen 37:10)

c) His brothers hated him all the more. “His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.” (Gen 37:11) No doubt, Joseph would recall the telling of his dreams many times, and with deep regrets, over the next few years, but in time he would realize that the Lord had him in Egypt for a purpose, and that purpose was to fulfill his promise to Abraham that his descendants would live in a foreign country for 400 years before they possessed the land. Why would the Lord require that? A logical answer would be that Jacob and his sons would have been wiped out by the pagan people around them if they had even hinted at the conquest of Canaan. For more on the Exodus, see the lessons by this writer posted on SermonCity.Com under “Articles”.

When a severe famine forced Jacob and his eleven sons to look elsewhere for food, where did they go? With whom did they have to deal? Joseph, the one ten of his brothers had so cruelly thrown into the pit with plans to kill later, but when the opportunity arose, sold into slavery. What they did for an evil purpose, God designed for His purpose. They went down into Egypt seventy in number, but they came out 430 years later some two million in number, including 600, 000 men who could bear the sword. So, is it not possible that the Lord - since He had told Abraham that his descendants would spend 400 years in a foreign country before taking possession of Canaan - gave Joseph those dreams to provoke his brothers so they would sell him to the Midianite caravan who would sell him to Potiphar? Who but Yahweh could have come up with a plan like that, and who but Yahweh could make it happen over a period of hundreds of years?

d) Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and ended up in Egypt (37:12-36). His ten older brothers had gone to a place called Shechem in the north central part of Canaan, and “Israel said to Joseph, “Your brothers, you know, are pasturing the flocks at Shechem. Get ready. I’m sending you to them.” Joseph’s response was, “I’m ready,” (vs. 13).

Joseph went to Shechem and discovered that his brothers had moved on to the Valley of Hebron (37:14). He searched and found them in Dothan (vs. 17). They saw Joseph coming. How could they miss him when he was wearing the colorful robe? As they were talking about him, hatred for him filled their minds and hearts and they agreed, "Here comes that dreamer! (20) Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We can say that a vicious animal ate him. Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!" (37:14-20)

Joseph's life was saved that day by a brother of whom their father would one day declare was "unstable as water" (Gen. 49:4). Because of his past behavior Reuben was passed over when Israel blessed his sons. However, at this time it was Reuben whom the Lord used to save Joseph's life:

(21) When Reuben heard this, he tried to save him from them. He said, "Let's not take his life." (22) Reuben also said to them, "Don't shed blood. Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him" – intending to rescue him from their hands and return him to his father.

While Reuben's intentions were honorable, those of his brothers did not rise to that level. "When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped off his robe, the robe of many colors that he had on. (24) Then they took him and threw him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it." (Gen. 37:24) Is it not interesting how the Scripture often answers questions and stops fruitless debates with an historical note: "The pit was empty." Joseph's brothers, with no feelings for their brother, "sat down to eat a meal. They looked up, and there was a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were carrying aromatic gum, balsam, and resin, going down to Egypt." (Gen. 37:25)

"They are called "Midianites" (37:28), and in Hebrew, "Medanites" (37:36), being a traveling caravan composed of a mixed association of Arabs. Apparently Abraham's descendants through Ishmael and the sons of Keturah (25:1-4) had formed a tribal league (cf. Judg. 8:22-24). Those tribes of northern Arabia had already engaged in caravaneering and commerce." [New Commentary on the Whole Bible, OT - after this, NCWB].

It was Judah who came up with the idea of selling their brother to the Midianites (and Ishmaelites). So, they "pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for 20 pieces of silver to the Midianites, who took Joseph to Egypt." (Gen. 37:28) Please note that some people who commit really serious sins at one point in life may turn around at a later date and prove that they have had a change of heart and a change of mind. Who was it who spoke so courageously for Benjamin when Joseph demanded that they bring him to Egypt? Who was chosen by Jacob to receive the blessing? Judah, of course. Jacob passed over three older sons and named Judah as the tribe to lead the people, and it was the tribe of Judah through which the Messianic Covenant would be fulfilled. Judah could hardly have stooped any lower than when he suggested that they sell Joseph as a slave and then kill an animal and spread blood over the Joseph's beautiful robe and convince their father that an animal had killed Joseph.

I had the great blessing of leading Timmy and Jack (not their real names) to the Lord in the Hinds County Jail in Jackson, Mississippi. Timmy had committed second degree murder when in a drunken rage he decided that, even though he had told the young woman who moved in with him that he could deal with the fact that the baby she was expecting was fathered by another man. In a drunken rage he beat her and strangled her to death. He was convicted of second degree murder. I visited with him and exchanged letters with him for some time before he was sentenced to life in the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. What a joy it was to visit with him after having preached in camp 4 at Parchman. He told me he wanted to serve God when he got out of prison and I urged him to begin where he was, where his witness would be needed most.

I also had the opportunity to lead Jack, a cold blooded killer, to faith in Jesus in the same jail cell in Jackson. I cannot express the joy I experienced when that man came to me in a line with others (also at

camp 4 at Parchman), and with a big smile on his face, he stopped and ask, "Were you in Jackson last May?" He showed me the New Testament I had given him. According to his brother, Jack remained faithful to the Lord. In the Hinds County Jail, I had been able to see Timmy when I talked with him, but I had to speak to Jack through a screen. He said, "I remember your voice." I would have felt perfectly comfortable visiting with either Timmy or Jack after they were released - or if they had been released that day. That is a testimony to the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord would do a mighty work with Judah in the years ahead. It would be some 1800 years, but the Lord fulfilled His promise. Jesus was indeed the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

Reuben seemed to have been the stronger brother at the time, as we see in the following verses:

(29) When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. (30) He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone! What am I going to do?" (31) So they took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a young goat, and dipped the robe in its blood. (32) They sent the robe of many colors to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it. Is it your son's robe or not?" (Gen. 37:29-32)

Their cruelty in binding Joseph and selling him to the Midianites continues to raise its ugly head when they took the robe home to show it to their father:

(33) His father recognized it. "It is my son's robe," he said. "A vicious animal has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces!" (34) Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth around his waist, and mourned for his son many days. (35) All his sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said. "I will go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." And his father wept for him."

Man's inhumanity to man has often shocked those who saw or heard about it, but this is incredible. Obviously, Jacob's favoritism had overridden everything he must have taught his sons about the Lord who had delivered them from Laban, protected them from Esau, and blessed them in the Land of Promise. To continue: "... the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guard." (Gen 37:36)

By way of review:

- (1). Jacobs gave Joseph a coat of many colors which antagonized his half-brothers.
- (2). Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers and they saw him and plotted to kill him.
- (3). Reuben saved his life, only to find that when left and then returned his back his other brothers they had sold Joseph to some Ishmaelites, who in turn sold him to Potiphar in Egypt.
- (4). They shredded Joseph's coat and soaked it in blood and took it to Jacob to convince him that he had been killed by a wild animal (Israel grieve for Joseph for many years).

II. JOSEPH WAS A CHOSEN VESSEL FOR GOD AND ISRAEL (Gen. 39-41).

A. His Deep Faith in God Prepared Him for the Challenge (Gen. 39).

Joseph had been stripped of his beautiful robe, a symbol of wealth, love, and respect. He was sold to a caravan of Midianites for 20 pieces of silver, sold to serve Potiphar as a slave. We may assume the Midianites made a profit on the deal, but wouldn't it be something if we discovered that Potiphar paid 30 pieces of silver for him?! We are not told that, of course. Joseph rose to great heights in Potiphar's home, apparently in a brief period of time. However, before too long Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. When Joseph was tempted he ran from the house. Joseph, though young and inexperienced, chose the three

things necessary in resisting certain temptations: fright, fight, and flight. He resisted temptation until Potiphar's wife became more aggressive and when he realized how dangerous the situation now was he fled. Some temptations you may fight, but when there is one like this, fright may lead to flight, which is what Joseph did. First, he resisted her advances, but when she became bolder in her efforts to seduce him he panicked and fled from her presence.

Joseph showed character, reverence of God, and respect for Potiphar. He also showed wisdom which he must have gained while sitting at the feet of the man whose name God had changed his name from Jacob, one who follows after another to trip him up, to Israel, a prince with God. His only problem was that Potiphar's wife grabbed his robe and, twisting to get rid of it, he fled, leaving it in her hands. She took advantage of the robe to accuse Joseph of trying to molest her and Potiphar was enraged and had Joseph thrown into prison.

B. Potiphar's Wife Lied and Potiphar Had Joseph Thrown into Prison.

The charges against Joseph were false but then a lie has often been used by an evil woman to try to destroy a man. The fact that her charges were lies a lie is often a tool for evil people. Charges made by the wife of a powerful man like Potiphar, as shocking and vile as they were, would have been hard to refute by a slave.

A very good friend of mine once went with a mutual friend to visit his girlfriend. A sister to his friend's girl friend walked out to speak to my friend, and in a very flirtatious manner told him she might accuse him of something if he didn't come to see her. He was a few years older than the girl, who must have been in her late teens. My friend told me he looked her in the eye and said, "I may spend the rest of my life in the penitentiary, but I WILL NOT spend the rest of my life with a woman I don't love." That made an impression on me, but that older friend often offered words of guidance to young people in our community.

My friend smoked, as did many young men at the time. One evening, before going into our church building, he started to throw down a cigarette he had just lighted. He would have ground it out with the toe of his shoe, but a teenager a couple of years younger than I stepped up and asked him for the cigarette. My friend, who was three or four years older than I, looked him in the eye and said, "Son, if I give it to you your daddy is going to be mad at me. If I don't, you are going to be mad at me." He looked off to the side and flipped it onto some green grass and then walked on inside. The younger friend picked up the cigarette and left the grounds for a neighbor's outhouse - or so I assumed. A friend and I waited briefly and then followed in the dark out behind the neighbor's house, just to make the younger friend think he had been caught. I stepped up and slapped my hand on the door and yelled, assuming I would have created a state of panic in our younger friend. The scream coming from that darkened outhouse, was not the scream we anticipated. We would have known the scream from that terrified lady anywhere! My friend and I were the ones who experienced fright and then launched into a flight!

Young people will learn how to deal with temptations through the Word of God, and they may depend on the Holy Spirit to guide them. It is important to have parents who prepare their children at an early age to resist temptations. It also helps to have godly friends who set a good example for teenagers.

Joseph was then imprisoned, but protected; humiliated but blessed, oppressed, yet empowered. He was eventually, by the intervention of the Lord, delivered from prison and raised to a great position of authority under Pharaoh. Ever wonder what Mr. and Mrs. Potiphar thought about that? Did they have to bow before Joseph? Joseph was given great responsibility, influence, and finally, an opportunity to deliver his family from a famine and give them a new home in the land of Goshen.

Here is a question: Where did Joseph learn that it would have been a serious sin to have yielded to the

temptation by Potiphar's wife? While we only read about how Jacob spoiled his son, is it not possible that Jacob was teaching his son the ways of the Lord? Those values would not have been written down for another four hundred years fifty years, but the Lord did communicate with those old patriarchs. No doubt the laws governing the nations of that whole region would have condemned this kind of behavior.

C. Joseph Was Sent to Prison on False Charges (40:1-23).

1. Joseph was the victim of an evil woman. It may seem incredible to some that a man who was chosen by God for such a great purpose would be subjected to such a cruel injustice as this. What had he ever done to deserve this treatment? (For that matter, what had Jesus done to deserve the treatment to which He was subjected?) Wasn't it enough that Joseph had been sold into slavery by his own brothers? Could God not have prevented all these things that might have threatened the very purpose God had for this young man? Of course, God could have prevented all the bad things that happened to Joseph, but our sovereign God knows when to deliver us, when to test us, when to develop us, and when to invest us in His kingdom's work. James was inspired to write that the trials of life may produce endurance, maturity, and strength (James 1:1ff). The Scripture shows us that God never forgot Joseph.

2. He remained faithful to the Lord while in prison. His faithfulness and wisdom soon caught the eye of the prison officials and he was given authority over the other prisoners. At every turn, or so it would seem, people discovered the brilliance and wisdom of Joseph.

The Scripture reveals what happened briefly and succinctly:

(21) But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. (22) The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph's authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there. (23) The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph's authority, because the Lord was with him, and the Lord made everything that he did successful." (Gen 39:21-23, HCSB)

Joseph did not do it all on his own. The Lord lifted him up and put him in a position that moved him another step closer to the ultimate position through which the young man would serve his purpose, and an important purpose it was. He had promised Abraham that his descendants would possess the Land of Canaan, but not until after he had lived in another country 400 years. The question was, How was He going to get them into that foreign country. Joseph was the key and the Lord was not about to drop the ball here.

3. He interpreted a dream for Pharaoh's cupbearer and chief baker (Gen. 40). These were ranking officials at Pharaoh's court, so the Joseph was appointed to take care of them. They both had a dream and the Lord gave Joseph the gift of interpretation. First there was the dream of the cup bearer: So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph: "In my dream there was a vine in front of me. "On the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and its clusters ripened into grapes. (11) Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." (Gen 40:9-11) Joseph assure the officials that the interpretation of dreams belong to God (vs. 8).

(12) "This is its interpretation," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three days. (13) In just three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position. You will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand the way you used to when you were his cupbearer. (14) But when all goes well for you, remember that I was with you. Please show kindness to me by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this prison." (Gen 40:12-14)

Incredibly, the chief cup bearer was restored to his position, but he forgot the request Joseph had

made. He did not tell Pharaoh, but not to worry - God did not forget.

4. He interpreted a dream for Pharaoh's chief baker.

"When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was positive, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream. Three baskets of white bread were on my head. (17) In the top basket were all sorts of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."

(18) "This is its interpretation," Joseph replied. "The three baskets are three days. (19) In just three days Pharaoh will lift up your head – from off you – and hang you on a tree. Then the birds will eat the flesh from your body." (Gen 40:16-19)

The interpretation for the chief cup bearer must have been more exciting than we can imagine. However, this must have been a shocking revelation for the chief baker. The Scripture reveals that both interpretations were exactly right and they were fulfilled on the third day.

5. The cupbearer forgot Joseph when he was restored to his position. Joseph would have to continue to supervise other prisoners in the Egyptian prison for two more years. How could the chief cup bearer have forgotten to tell Pharaoh that Joseph had interpreted his dream? Is it possible that he was intimidated when he was in the presence of the king? Or perhaps he decided that Joseph's interpretation was just a lucky guess.

D. Joseph Interpreted a Dream for Pharaoh (41:1-36).

1. Pharaoh had a very disturbing dream and could find no interpretation. Two years after the release of Pharaoh's cup bearer, Pharaoh had two very disturbing dreams. We may wonder why things happened the way they did. However, if Yahweh wanted Joseph in Egypt to make arrangement for His chosen people to live in Egypt for 430 years, and Joseph did not know that, and his family did not know it, He may well have permitted his brothers to treat Joseph so horribly in order to get him established in Egypt before he sent the famine came. It was, of course, that famine that caused Jacob and his family to move to Egypt, and not only to move there, but to be settled in the fertile land of Goshen where they flourished for generations before a new Pharaoh came to power who knew nothing about the agreement with Joseph which permitted his people to live in Goshen. That is when Pharaoh imposed a very cruel form of slavery on the Israelites. If it had not been for that oppressive form of slavery designed to reduce the male population. They may never have been motivated to call on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to deliver them on their own. But we can be sure the Lord never lost control of the situation. For more on this see the Articles posted by this writer on SermonCity.Com under the title, Exodus Teaching (Series). Now, let's see what happened next.

(1) Two years later Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing beside the Nile, (2) when seven healthy-looking, well-fed cows came up from the Nile and began to graze among the reeds. (3) After them, seven other cows, sickly and thin, came up from the Nile and stood beside those cows along the bank of the Nile. (4). Then Pharaoh woke up. (5) He fell asleep and dreamed a second time: Seven heads of grain, plump and ripe, came up on one stalk. (6) After them, seven heads of grain, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up. (7) The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven plump, ripe ones. Then Pharaoh woke up, and it was only a dream.

(8) When morning came, he was troubled, so he summoned all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him." (Gen 41:1-8)

Why was Pharaoh so disturbed by these two strange dreams? Had he never had a weird dream before this? So, was it simply time for the Lord to make the next move to get His chosen people into that other

country he had mentioned to Abraham? We are not told this specifically, but when we view against the back drop of so many incredible things He did to accomplish His purpose, can we doubt that He either caused the dream or stood ready to take advantage of it to accomplish His purpose? If His chosen people, the descendants of Abraham were going to spend 400 years in a foreign country, what better place for them to live than the land of Goshen in Egypt? Furthermore, if God sent those dreams is there any wonder that those pagan “wise men” could not interpret them?

It makes sense to me.

2. The cupbearer remembered Joseph, who had interpreted his dream.

(9) Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I remember my faults. (10) Pharaoh had been angry with his servants, and he put me and the chief baker in the custody of the captain of the guard. (11) He and I had dreams on the same night; each dream had its own meaning. (12) Now a young Hebrew, a slave of the captain of the guards, was with us there. We told him our dreams, he interpreted our dreams for us, and each had its own interpretation. (13) It turned out just the way he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged.” (Gen 41:9-13)

3. Pharaoh sent for Joseph. He was desperate for an interpretation of his dreams, as any pagan king might have been. So, as soon as his chief cupbearer told him about Joseph he sent for him (Gen. 41:14). It had been two years, but while the chief cupbearer had forgotten Joseph, the Lord had not forgotten, and He knew how to bring Joseph to the attention of Pharaoh.

E. Joseph Was Given Authority Prepare for the Famine (41:37-57).

1. Pharaoh related his dream to Joseph. He was looking to Joseph to interpret it: “I have had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said about you that you can hear a dream and interpret it.” Joseph, however assured Pharaoh that “I am not able to,” Joseph answered Pharaoh. “It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”

The Lord revealed both the dreams and their meaning to Joseph, who in turn revealed the meaning to Pharaoh. The dream in which “sickly, thin cows ate the healthy, well-fed cows” was a promise of seven years of abundant harvests, followed by seven years of famine. The dream about the heads of grain meant the same thing. Everything that was happening here was directed and controlled by the very One who had called Abraham and sent him from his home in Ur of the Chaldees to the Promised Land so many years before. He had renewed his promise to Isaac and Jacob. He had forgotten nothing. He never does.

Pharaoh, no doubt, related his dream to Joseph with a sense of urgency. The most powerful man in the world at the time related his dream to the newly released prisoner, the former slave of Potiphar. He told Joseph what he had told his servants, and by now there was a sense of urgency in relating his dream. He told him about the thin, half-starved cow that ate the healthy, well-fed cows, just as he revealed his dream about the thin, withered heads of grain that ate the full heads.

(25) Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams mean the same thing. God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. (26) The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven ripe heads are seven years. The dreams mean the same thing. (27) The seven thin, ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven worthless, scorched heads of grain are seven years of famine. (41:25-27)

2. Joseph then explained Pharaoh’s dreams and the significance of them. (41:28ff) There is obviously no doubt in the mind of Joseph that this dream was from the Lord:

(28) “It is just as I told Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. (29) Seven years of

great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt. (30) After them, seven years of famine will take place, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The famine will devastate the land. (31) The abundance in the land will not be remembered because of the famine that follows it, for the famine will be very severe. (32) Since the dream was given twice to Pharaoh, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and He will carry it out soon. (41:28-32)

Joseph then gave Pharaoh some practical advice, which tells us that he took this dream as being from the Lord, and he never questioned Him. He advised:

(41:34) Let Pharaoh do this: Let him appoint overseers over the land and take a fifth [of the harvest] of the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. (35) Let them gather all the [excess] food during these good years that are coming. Under Pharaoh's authority, store the grain in the cities, so they may preserve [it] as food. (36) The food will be a reserve for the land during the seven years of famine that will take place in the land of Egypt. Then the country will not be wiped out by the famine."

3. Pharaoh gave Joseph the position and authority to prepare for the famine. He announced that he was exalting him to a position of authority over all that was coming.

(37) The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. (38) Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone like this, a man who has God's spirit in him?" (39) So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as intelligent and wise as you are. (40) You will be over my house, and all my people will obey your commands. Only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." (41) Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "See, I am placing you over all the land of Egypt." (41:37-41)

F. Pharaoh Makes It Official.

Joseph Took Over Pharaoh's House. (Gen. 41:40)

"Thou shalt be over my house – This sudden change in the condition of a man who had just been taken out of prison could well take place in Egypt. Between the nineteenth and twentieth Dynasties in Egypt (c. 1200 b.c.), a Syrian official named Bay, who had worked his way up through the ranks to become Chancellor, actually ruled during a period of dynastic vacuum. The special providence of God had determined to make Joseph governor of Egypt, and the way was paved for it by the deep and universal conviction, produced in the minds both of the king and his counselors, that a divine spirit animated his mind and had given him such extraordinary knowledge. according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled – This refers to the edict granting official power to Joseph; all who should receive that order would kiss it, according to the usual Eastern mode of acknowledging obedience and respect for the sovereign" (Wilkinson). [New commentary on the Whole Bible, OT; QuickVerse Electronic Library - After this, NCWB]

1. Pharaoh removed his signet ring... and put it on Joseph's hand..." (42) Joseph would have the power and authority to do whatever was necessary to prepare for the famine.

2. He "clothed him with fine linen garments. If he had authority over Pharaoh's house he had to look like he belonged in his house. So, he dressed him as he would dress his own son.

3. He placed a gold chain around his neck." All the outward symbols of authority were given to Joseph for the job that would be his over the next fourteen years, and more.

4. "He had Joseph ride in his second chariot..." (41:43a) He was second only to Pharaoh in power and he would ride the second chariot, which apparently everyone would recognize as such. If only his brothers could see him now! They would.

5. He had all his servants to call out before him, "Abrek!" (41:43b) Some think this word means, "attention," while others think it meant, kneel. Might it not imply both? When the man who ranked second to the Pharaoh came into any town they would have come to attention and bow. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible carries the meaning, "bow the knee" [NCWB]. When people saw Joseph coming into their town or building they would cry, "Bow the knee." We get the general idea from all of this. I wonder what Potipher and Mrs. Potiphar thought when they had to bow before Joseph.

6. He placed Joseph over all the land of Egypt. (41:43) This would have been a position of awe and respect if it had been given to a member of the royal family, but to a former slave and prisoner, it is mind boggling. God had raised him up from the pit and made him the second most powerful man in that part of the world. Pharaoh clearly defined his position and power: "So he placed him over all the land of Egypt. (44) Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but no one will be able to raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt without your permission." (41:43b-44)

7. Pharaoh had one more step in mind. "Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah and gave him a wife, Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest at On. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt. (41:45) "His naturalization was completed by this alliance with a family of high distinction" [NCWB].

"As a token of Joseph's new status, Pharaoh gave him a wife, Asenath, from the priestly family of On (a city which was a center of sun worship seven miles north of Cairo and also known as Heliopolis). He also gave Joseph an Egyptian name, Zaphenath-Paneah (the meaning of which is unknown). Joseph was 30 at the time of his installment, 13 years after he was sold by his brothers (cf. 37:2). Joseph's position gave him opportunity to travel extensively across Egypt. (Ps. 105:16-22 speaks of Joseph's imprisonment, release, and rise to power.) [Bible Knowledge Commentary, OT - after this, BKC]

The Scripture tells us that "Joseph was 30 years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (41:46). He was 17 when he was sold into slavery by his brothers, so he had been in Egypt 13 years. No doubt, he had learned the language and customs of the land.

The Lord blessed Joseph with two sons before the famine hit. Manasseh means, "God has made me forget all my hardship in my father's house." The second son was named Ephraim, meaning, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." (See 41:50ff). These two names take the place of Joseph and Levi as names of two of the twelve tribes of Israel, taking the place of Levi and Joseph (a double blessing for Joseph).

III. JOSEPH BROUGHT HIS FAMILY TO EGYPT.

A. The Famine Was Widespread.

For seven years, the grain harvest was been abundant. When I was working summers for the ASCS (USDA) back when I was in college and for some time while I was in seminary, we were told never to refer to a "surplus" - instead, say "we have an abundant supply." Don't ask me why, they never explained it. Egypt had an abundant supply for seven years and Joseph managed the production, harvest, and storage of grain with a wisdom from his Lord. The land produced far more than the people needed each year and Joseph supervised the building of storage facilities and the hauling and storage of the grain. When the seven years of "abundant supply" were over the famine hit, and "Extreme hunger came to all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 41:55). When the people cried out to Pharaoh, he told them to "Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you."

"Because the famine had spread across the whole country, Joseph opened up [all the storehouses] and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. (57) Every nation came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, for the famine was severe in every land." (Gen 41:56-57)

The famine was wide spread throughout the region, which means that it spread to the land of Canaan, where Joseph's family lived. Word spread that there was grain in Egypt and people from all over the region traveled to Egypt looking for grain. Joseph had planned well, and under the direction of the Lord they were prepared to sell grain to those who came from other countries. Before long, the famine hit Canaan with such intensity that Jacob sent his ten older sons to Egypt to buy grain. He kept Joseph's younger brother Benjamin with him. He had lost one of Rachel's sons - he didn't want to lose another.

Little did those brothers realize they would be bowing before the brother they had sold to a band of Midianites. But they did. They hated him when he told them dreams that could only imply that they were to bow before him. The story about how Joseph's ten brothers came to stand before Joseph to ask to buy grain is well known to boys and girls in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. Christian videos have informed countless numbers of children and adults of the journey of Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy grain. We tend to think, "They are getting what they have had coming to them for twenty years." The ten sons of Jacob stood before Joseph and bowed to the ground before him, but didn't recognize him. He, however, did recognize them.

Why do you suppose they did not recognize their brother? It had been twenty years since they sold him into slavery, after throwing him into a pit, with plans to kill him. In the first place, they did not expect to see their younger brother, whom they despised. In the second place, they would not have expected their brother to be the second most powerful man in Egypt, and throughout the whole region. But, there was another reason. The Israelites all wore long beards and long hair. Joseph, according to the custom of Egypt, was clean shaven. When they took Joseph out prison, and "He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to Pharaoh." (Gen 41:14) He would never have gone into the presence of Pharaoh unshaven, or in old or soiled clothes.

B. Joseph's Brothers Bowed Before Him.

This was a new experience for Jacob's ten older sons, bowing before a high ranking Egyptian official. Perhaps they saw others bowing before Joseph, or they may have been instructed to do so. One can only imagine the memories this brought back to Joseph. His own brothers had decided to kill him and if it had not been for Reuben they would have done so. However, when they saw the caravan of Midianites and Ishmaelites they approached them and sold Joseph to them. Now, they bow before the brother they had sold 20 years earlier.

"When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked. "From the land of Canaan to buy food," they replied. (8) Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. (9) Joseph remembered his dreams about them and said to them, "You are spies. You have come to see the weakness of the land." (42:7-9)

Joseph remembered his dreams about these brothers, but they did not recognize him. They denied being spies, but Joseph continued to accuse them: "No," he said to them. "You have come to see the weakness of the land." (42:12) Now, they revealed a little more about their family: "But they replied, "We, your servants, were 12 brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no longer living." (Vs. 13) Can you imagine Joseph's emotions, hearing his brothers say he was dead? He accused them again and then said:

"This is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. (16) Send one from among you to get your brother. The rest of you will be imprisoned so that your words can be tested to see if they are true. If they are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!" (17) So Joseph imprisoned them together for three days." (42:15-17)

On the third day, when Joseph had his brothers returned to him he said, "I fear God." The word translated "fear" here means a lot more than to be afraid, but no one word conveys the deeper meaning, which had to do with reverential awe, worshipful submission to the God of Israel. It would be interesting to know if his brothers realized that he spoke of the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They may have assumed that he meant some Egyptian god.

Joseph then permitted all but one to return to their home. The one he kept in the guard house would be freed when the others returned with Benjamin, his younger brother. If they return with Benjamin, he said, "you won't die." The brothers then had an interesting conversation in the presence of this high ranking Egyptian official, not knowing he would understand their language:

(21) Then they said to each other, "Obviously, we are being punished for what we did to our brother. We saw his deep distress when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this trouble has come to us." (22) But Reuben replied: "Didn't I tell you not to harm the boy? But you wouldn't listen. Now we must account for his blood!" (42:21-22)

When Joseph heard this, "He turned away from them and wept." He did not hate his brothers as some might. He loved them. It reminds us that Jesus loved those who hated Him, condemned Him, framed Him with their lies, and caused Him to be crucified. He still loved them, and every one of them who believed in Him received eternal life.

Joseph chose Simeon as the one to be bound and imprisoned. He then sent the others on their way with their donkeys loaded with grain. At their first stop they discovered the money they had paid for the grain in their grain sacks, which almost caused a panic. What was the Egyptian trying to do to them? He might well have them killed for such an offence. Would he ever believe they were innocent of such theft?

When they arrived at home they reported to their father Jacob on their trip, and the fact that Simeon was imprisoned in Egypt to be sure they would take Benjamin back with them the next time. Jacob resisted the request to take Benjamin back with them to Egypt. He had already lost one son and he might now lose another. And both were children of Rachel the one he loved so deeply. Reuben, who had tried to save Joseph said to his father: "You can kill my two sons if I don't bring him back to you. Put him in my care, and I will return him to you." (38) But Jacob answered, "My son will not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If anything happens to him on your journey, you will bring my gray hairs down to Sheol in sorrow." (Gen 42:37-38)

When they ran out of grain again it was Judah who went to his father with an urgent appeal: "Send the boy with me." (Gen 43:8) Judah knew they could not wait much longer or some of them would begin to die. He also promised, "I will be responsible for him. You can hold me personally accountable!" (Gen 43:9) Jacob relented and sent them back with twice the money they had taken before, so they could return the money they found in their sack. He also sent other gifts.

When they arrived back in Egypt they were soon shown into the presence of Joseph. When Joseph saw his brothers he told his servants to take them to his house. When they arrived there they were joined by their brother Simeon and then they were fed, with Joseph eating separately and his servants eating in a different place - because eating with Hebrews was abhorrent to them.

"They were seated before him in order by age, from the firstborn to the youngest. The men looked at each other in astonishment. 34 Portions were served to them from Joseph's table, and Benjamin's portion was five times larger than any of theirs." (Gen 43:33-34)

“In Egypt, as in other Oriental countries, there were, and are, two modes of paying attention to a guest whom the host wishes to honor -- either by giving a choice piece from his own hand, or ordering it to be taken to the stranger. The degree of respect shown consists in the quantity, and while the ordinary rule of distinction is a double mess, it must have appeared a very distinguished mark of favor bestowed on Benjamin to have no less than five times any of his brethren.” [Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary]

C. Joseph Had One Final Test (Gen. 44).

When his brothers were preparing to depart, Joseph asked a servant to secretly put his silver cup in Benjamin’s sack. Then he had them overtake his brothers, search the sacks and discover the silver cup. This gave them ground for taking them all back to stand before Joseph. Judah made a strong appeal for his younger brother, knowing what it would mean to their father, remembering the promise he had personally made to Jacob (Ch. 44).

Joseph’s brothers were brought into the presence of the second most powerful man in Egypt, which may have been the most powerful nation in the world at that time. He had the power of life or death in his hands. So, what did Joseph do, pay them back for what they had done to him, or show mercy?

“Joseph could no longer keep his composure in front of all his attendants, so he called out, “Send everyone away from me!” No one was with him when he revealed his identity to his brothers. (2) But he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and also Pharaoh’s household heard it. (3) Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were too terrified to answer him.

This is Joseph?! They had to wonder, “Will he kill us?” After he composed himself he identified himself to them again: “Please, come near me,” and they came near. “I am Joseph, your brother,” he said, “the one you sold into Egypt.” (Vs. 5). Seeing the fear and confusion in their behavior, Joseph reassured his brothers: “And now don’t be worried or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me ahead of you to preserve life.” Can you imagine how challenging it must have been for his brothers to believe (1) they were standing before the brother they had sold into slavery; (2) and that their brother had the power of life or death in his hands, or (3) that this is the one they had hated when he revealed his dreams that they would all bow before him some day. Does this not remind us of the coming of Jesus Christ, and His forgiving those who hated Him, plotted His death, and persuaded the Roman governor to crucify Him? Is the life of Joseph not, in some subtle ways, prophetic of the life of Jesus, some 2800 years before His coming to pay the price for all people? Furthermore, what is everyone going to do on that great judgment day when they stand before Him. They will bow. No matter how arrogantly they may have denied Him, they will bow!

Joseph then told his brothers that there would be five more years of this famine. There would be no crops, so there would be no harvest in their homeland. Joseph then reassured his brothers: “God sent me ahead of you to establish you as a remnant within the land and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.” (45:7) Joseph continue to reassure his brothers:

(8) Therefore it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (9) “Return quickly to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: “God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me without delay. (10) You can settle in the land of Goshen and be near me – you, your children, and grandchildren, your sheep, cattle, and all you have. (11) There I will sustain you, for there will be five more years of famine. Otherwise, you, your household, and everything you have will become destitute.”’ (12) Look! Your eyes and my brother Benjamin’s eyes can see that it is I |, Joseph,| who am speaking to you. (13) Tell my father about all my glory in Egypt and about all you have seen. And bring my father here quickly.” (45:8-13)

Joseph had a reunion with his brothers. "Then Joseph threw his arms around Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept on his shoulder. Joseph kissed each of his brothers as he wept, and afterward his brothers talked with him." (45:14-15) Joseph received his brothers and did not punish them for two reasons: (1) he had forgiven them for what they had done to him, and (2) he understood that what had happened enabled him to be exactly where the Lord wanted him in order to save His chosen people, as few as there were at the time. Joseph was a key player in God's Covenant with Abraham and continued through Isaac and Jacob (Israel). Men betrayed and killed Jesus by having Him killed on a cruel Roman cross. He arose on the third day and revealed Himself eleven or twelve times, appearing to over 500 at the time of His Ascension. He is still saving people who have rebelled against Him. Once again, we see something that is prophetic of the love of Jesus for all of us. He came into a hostile world to suffer, bleed, and die for each and every one of us. What a powerful parallel we have here between the life of Joseph and the life, ministry, and death of Jesus for our sins. In fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, Jesus would come some day and pay the price for our freedom. Joseph here sets his brothers free, just as Jesus would one day die on a cruel Roman cross to set us free.

D. Joseph Arranged for His Family to Live in the Land of Goshen.

Joseph's instructions to his brothers invites volumes of commentary. Or, his words can stand on their own. We will let them do just that here:

"Return quickly to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: "God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me without delay. (10) You can settle in the land of Goshen and be near me—you, your children, and grandchildren, your sheep, cattle, and all you have. (11) There I will sustain you, for there will be five more years of famine. Otherwise, you, your household, and everything you have will become destitute.'" (12) Look! Your eyes and my brother Benjamin's eyes can see that it is I [Joseph,] who am speaking to you. (13) Tell my father about all my glory in Egypt and about all you have seen. And bring my father here quickly.'" (45:9-13)

The sons of Israel did as Joseph instructed. Pharaoh provided wagons for the journey back to Canaan so that they could move the entire clan to the land of Goshen. They entered Goshen seventy in number and 430 years later the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel numbered an estimated two million, with around 600,000 men able to carry a sword into battle. Joseph gave his brothers changes of clothes and sent his father grain, food, and provisions for the journey to Goshen. Then, as they were leaving Egypt to go back to move their father and all the members of their families to Egypt, Joseph gave them an order: "Don't argue on the way." Imagine that. Of course, Joseph had the authority to command that, but we would like to think that he said this in love for his brothers.

What was Israel's response when he heard the report from his sons? They reported that Joseph was alive and that he had requested of Pharaoh a place for them to live. "Then Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go to see him before I die."

Wow! Is that amazing or what? His family would live in the Land of Goshen for 430 years and after that time Yahweh would send a man to deliver them and lead them back to a place that could only be called the Land of Promise. They would then conquer "the land flowing with milk and honey."

D. Joseph Was a Genuine Historical Figure.

This is significant, especially in light of all the claims that major Bible personalities were made up at a much later date to inspire a sense of nationalism or even super-nationalism among the Israelites. However, as my good friend, Dr. Bill Cooper, has discovered and recorded, those lies have

been exposed over a period of time. His Authenticity series (six volumes and counting) have revealed the errors of those who profess a belief in the God of the Bible, yet seek to destroy the testimony of the Bible. In *The Authenticity of the Book of Genesis*, he corrects a lot of errors and exposes a number of deliberate challenges to the authenticity of the Scripture. I might add that Dr. Cooper included Dr. Gene Jeffries, Dr. Jim Johnson, and this writer in his "Acknowledgments" in each volume. His last three volumes were each dedicated to one of the three of us. He offers a very impressive reason for dedicating a volume to both Dr. Jeffries and Dr. Johnson. However, he may have had one too many cups of tea before he typed in my name!

In spite of all that, I will now share something very significant that Dr. Cooper reveals about Joseph. Please pay close attention to these notes from a liberal "expert" in a Bible commentary:

"On the factual level it [the story of Joseph] may be compared to the stories in the first part of the book of Daniel. It is generally recognized that the historical setting of the stories of Daniel and his three companions at the court of Nebuchadrezzar and Darius is entirely imaginary. Similarly, the setting of the adventures of Joseph in Egypt at the court of an Egyptian monarch is not based on any knowledge of the contemporary Egyptian scene." [Peake's Commentary, p. 200] (bold added by this writer) [[Cooper, Bill, *The Authenticity of the Book of Genesis*, Creation Science Movement, p. 121]

Can you believe that? I would not want to stand before my Lord some day and explain why I made such a statement. Dr. Cooper, in his first volume in the Authenticity series, offers the following commentary:

"We could wish that those who aspire to comment adversely on the last fourteen chapters of the Book of Genesis would at least do us the honour of reading their history books. There could hardly be a less accurate statement than that which is contained in the above passage, that the story of Joseph "...is not based on any knowledge of the contemporary Egyptian scene." This arbitrary, not to say most unscholarly dismissal of the last fourteen chapters of the Book of Genesis as being nothing more than a work of imagination is disappointing enough when read in the newspapers or seen in a dumbed-down television documentary. But to be read in the pages of a Bible commentary which aspires to educate college and university students the world over on the Bible's historical narratives, well, words fail me." [Cooper, Bill, *Authenticity of Genesis*, p. 121]

Dr. Cooper is not giving up yet:

"If the children of Jacob were never slaves in Egypt in the first place, then how comes it that there lies in the Brooklyn Museum a papyrus conventionally dated to around 1700 BC, which lists a number of Hebrew slaves, slaves who possessed such familiar names as Shiphrah and Menahem? Shiphrah is of considerable interest to us, for that is the name of one of the Hebrew midwives mentioned in Exodus 1:15. Is it one and the same person? Who knows? However, not only the slaves' names, but their offices and duties are also listed - 'chief over the house' (the very same office, that of 'mer-per', which Joseph held under Potiphar), 'house servant' and so on. Out of 95 slaves listed for this particular household, 37 no less are Hebrew. [Cooper, p. 124]

"And what shall we say of the common assertion amongst modernists that no Egyptian monument exists which bears the name of Joseph? Well, we can always point out the fact that about 80 miles south of Cairo, there lies the still-flourishing town of Medinet-el-Faiyum. It is a lush and fertile area, famed for its 'gardens, oranges, mandarins, peaches, olives, pomegranates and grapes'. It has been like this for well over 3,000 years, and owes its lush fertility to a 200 mile-long canal flow. It is an astonishing feat of engineering which to this day is known throughout Egypt as the 'Bahr Yusuf - the Joseph Canal. This has always been its name. Moreover, the people of Egypt are perfectly happy to tell you that it was built by the Joseph of the Bible who once was Pharaoh's 'Grand Vizier'." [Cooper, p. 124- 125]

“Now it is known by all that there exists little love for the Jews or their Scriptures amongst most Arabs, so it is astonishing that this canal still bears the name of Joseph. It would have been entirely natural if the invading Moslems of the early 7th century CE had renamed the canal either for Mohammed or some Islamic saint or hero. Yet here, from ancient Egypt, is a lasting monument to the Joseph of the Bible; not something that is six foot high, inert and which gathers dust in a museum somewhere, but one that is 200 miles long and is still in daily use, having provided the people of the area with life-giving water for nigh on 4,000 years. Now, that’s what we may call a monument! Moreover, and to the chagrin of ‘higher critics’ everywhere, it does indeed bear the name of Joseph, just as it always has. No wonder they forget to mention it in their commentaries... [Cooper, Bill, p. 125].

What an amazing testimony this is to the faithfulness of Joseph, the saintly son of Jacob, whose name had been changed to Israel (prince with God). More than that, what a testimony this is to the providence, sovereignty, and power of Almighty God! The story of Joseph is a great one for children to learn about how the Lord can use people for His purpose. However, children may listen to Bible stories and love them without getting the broader picture. When I was on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, I served on the Broadman and Holman Committee. My first vote a vote on the translation and publication of the Holman Christian Standard Bible. During my two terms on the board, I was given numerous Bibles as soon as they were published. I received Children’s Bibles, Bible stories, and Bible games. I gave some of those to my granddaughter Abigail.

One day, we visited Abigail (age seven) and her family, and when my wife Rebecca was busy with her little brother Jacob, Abigail asked, “Papaw, do you want to go to my room?” She knew I did! She picked up her Children’s Bible and asked me, “Do you know my favorite person in the Bible?” I asked her who and she said, “David.” Immediately, she began looking in her Bible for a story about David. I said, “Look in First Samuel.” She ignored me and kept thumbing through the first half of the Old Testament. Again, I said, “Look in First Samuel.” And again, she ignored me and kept looking. I said, “First Samuel.” She turned back to the index and took her little index finger and began running it down the list. I said, “First Samuel.”

Abigail slammed the cover closed and said, “I don’t have to do this!” I was shocked, but I didn’t want to overreact. She laid her Bible down and as I trying to decide whether to talk with her about her Bible or not, she walked over to her book shelf and picked up a game and turned around and pressed a button. We listened to the story of David and Goliath together. Believe me, I was relieved.

An eight year old child may learn a lot about God through Bible stories. He or she learns that God loves us, protects us, and provides for us. As we grow older we should be able to see the broader picture. When the Lord called Abraham to leave the Ur of the Chaldees and go to the Promised Land, He told him He would give his descendants the land to which He led him, but before they would take possession of the land they would go into another country for a period of four hundred years. This was an incubation period for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel).

Joseph was the pivotal figure of this period. The Lord has always had a man, or woman on hand to accomplish His purpose, and Joseph was the man He would use to fulfill His covenant with Abraham. The road was a rather bumpy at times, but God saw Joseph through the trials of youth, rescued him from the evil plot of his brothers, delivered him from false charges, freed him from prison and elevated him to great power in Egypt. He also put Joseph in a position to prepare a place for the Children of Israel to live for 430 years.

When we first read, or hear the story of Joseph we may wonder how the Lord could let such things happen to such a remarkable young man. Then, as we study the Scripture we must see that it was the Lord who delivered Joseph from trouble time after time. He gave him a victory over all obstacles and placed him in a position to save his family, the Chosen People.

CONCLUSION. The man called Joseph was a real man. He lived in a real time, a real place, under real, even though under extraordinary circumstances. Rather than summarize the events in the life of Joseph here, I would like to do something else. As I have often said, there are a number of people in the Old Testament who live a life that reminds us of the picture of a godly life as we see it in the New Testament. Joseph is one of the great examples of love, forgiveness, morality, godly character and work ethic, as we find in the Old Testament. Joseph was a great example of the godly personal behavior and the responsibility of which we read in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, Joseph's life reminds us on many ways of the life of Jesus.

JESUS was sent into a fallen world to deliver man from slavery to sin: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16, NKJV) He was sent to earth, stripped of His heavenly glory, wealth, power, and authority. His birth was announced by angels, by shepherds, and wise men.

JOSEPH was sent into a strange land to provide for God's chosen people. He was sold into slavery by his brothers, to a caravan who then sold him to Potiphar in Egypt.

JESUS was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

JOSEPH was tempted by Potiphar's wife, and he fled from temptation.

JESUS was delivered from Herod.

JOSEPH was delivered from prison.

JESUS persecuted, sold for 30 pieces of silver, and crucified.

JOSEPH was sold by his brothers for 20 pieces of silver to the Midianites, who sold him to Potiphar (wouldn't it be interesting if we discovered that Potiphar paid 30 pieces of silver for Joseph?).

JOSEPH was used of God to honor His covenant and keep it alive.

JESUS fulfilled the covenant!

JOSEPH gave his family an opportunity for a new life in Goshen.

JESUS gives eternal life to all who believe in Him. John 10:28-30

There are two basic themes we may follow throughout the New Testament. The first is how the lost are saved, and the second is how the saved should live. If you do not know Jesus Christ as your Savior, I would like to invite you to trust Him and profess him as the Lord over your life. If you already know Him, will you not make a fresh commitment today to be faithful to the Lord, and to serve him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?