

Pentwater Bible Church

*Joseph's Brothers Come to Egypt
Genesis Message Seventy-Eight
Genesis 42: 1-25*



'Joseph, and His Brothers' Franz Anton Maulbertsch 1724-1796

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Genesis Message Seventy-Eight

Joseph Receives His Brothers

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Review:

PHARAOH APPOINTS JOSEPH PRIME MINISTER

Genesis 41: 37-44

Pharaoh listened to Joseph telling him the nature of his dreams and the plan that must be implemented in order to save the nation of Egypt from the coming famine. He agreed with Joseph that his plan had merit. He then turned to his advisers who recognized that the dreams were correct asking, “*Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the spirit of God is?*” The text does not show any comments coming from the advisers. They perhaps thought they would be chosen to implement this grand fourteen-year plan to save Egypt. If so their silence indicates their disappointment in not getting chosen.

Pharaoh’s mention of a man in which the Spirit of God resides is actually as spirit of the gods. **אֱלֹהִים** The term gods here is Eloheem, which can mean The Godhead, or it can refer to the pagan gods or even to our Father Jehovah if His name YHWH is coupled with Eloheem. This context suggests that it is a reference to some generic gods. Context governs how we translate this word. Its translation in various English texts lets us know the personal preference of the translator. Pharaoh did not know Jehovah and saw a supernatural interpretation of his dream by Joseph and therefore attributed it to “some god” as its source was clearly beyond all natural reason. This is the first reference within the biblical text of one so endowed. Pharaoh then goes on to repeat Joseph’s own words of a person so “discerning and wise.”

Pharaoh did not waste any time in selecting Joseph for this task as he saw that he had supernatural guidance and could perform the task as outlined by Joseph. Joseph is now getting an appointment to the office of Prime Minister of the greatest nation on earth at that time. He came from a seven-year term in prison to an appointment of high office in control of all of Egypt’s economic affairs. Pharaoh would retain supreme rulership but Joseph had all other control over this country. He could make treaties and direct trade policy with other nations. This was now the fourth time Joseph had been elevated to be an overseer. This was his highest elevation. As seen in other elevations in the past Joseph’s temperament was not that of a heady prideful man. He stayed humble giving credit to God for the dream interpretations and insight he received. With the selection of Joseph Pharaoh immediately gave him his signet ring, which was used to validate the authenticity of the throne on legal documents. All would know that when Joseph entered into a legal issue that he *was* the authority. Pharaoh then gave him a fine linen robe and a golden chain for his neck. A royal procession was then organized to display Joseph to the citizens of Egypt.

As the royal parade was taking place Joseph was given the second chariot of Pharaoh to ride in. This is the first mention of a chariot in the Bible. The Hyksos

introduced chariots into Egypt. With Pharaoh being a Hyksos this was a sign of the Hyksos being in charge and letting the population realize that Joseph, the Hebrew was given *visible* high authority. He needed this to succeed in his assignment. The population had to obey him if Egypt was going to survive the difficulties, which lay ahead. Additionally Pharaoh had runners going before Joseph in the procession as heralds, loudly exclaiming the new person elevated to high office. The citizens were also required to bow their knees to Joseph in obedience as Prime Minister or Grand Viceroy of Egypt. Finally, Pharaoh exclaims to all that Joseph has total control over Egypt and no one can do anything without Joseph's approval. The economic future of Egypt depended upon them precisely obeying all that Joseph would command them to do.

PHARAOH RENAMES JOSEPH

Genesis 41: 45-46

Because of the fact that Joseph was not an Egyptian he would nevertheless be hindered in the performance of his duties. The people would resist a non-Egyptian as their governor so Pharaoh renamed him *Zaphenath-paneah*. The exact meaning of this name is somewhat obscure but it essentially refers to "God having spoken and is living." As an additional token to bring him in to Egyptian high society he gave him a wife who was the daughter of a prominent priest called Potiphera. He is not to be confused with the chief executioner who purchased Joseph thirteen years earlier from the band of Ishmaelites. Joseph was now connected to a prominent elite Egyptian family, which advanced his integration in their society. This strategic move would cause him to be more effective in carrying out his master economic plan. Joseph was now thirty years of age and started his tenure as Prime Minister of the greatest nation on the earth at that time. It has been thirteen years since he came to Egypt as a slave. Joseph began his role as overseer of the Granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt with a personal survey of the entire country to prepare for this tasks which lay ahead. This particular role within his office of Prime Minister was the equivalent to a modern minister of agriculture.

SEVEN GOOD YEARS

Genesis 41: 47-49

Just as Joseph had predicted the land of Egypt produced a bumper crop. He had the twenty percent crop tax stored in government facilities distributed around the country in its various cities. After seven years the storage facilities could hardly hold the amounts being collected. In fact the collectors could not even count the volumes because they were so plentiful. God was blessing the land of Egypt.

SONS ARE BORN TO JOSEPH

Genesis 41: 50-53

During the seven years of plenty Asenath gave birth to two sons for Joseph. Joseph gave them Hebrew names. This is an indication that he did not give in to the polytheistic paganism in which Asenath had been born and raised. The first-born was Manasseh meaning "Forgetting" and Ephraim, which means "Doubly Fruitful." It is

apparent that Joseph was designating his sons with his attitude related to his experiences coming to Egypt. Manasseh named for Joseph forgetting all the bad things that happened to him and Ephraim thanking God for the blessings that came his way. The lesson here is for us to forget whatever evil we have experienced and move on with our lives. To live in the past and nurture old pain causes it to remain alive and Satan then derails us in our sanctification. This truth is given in the New Testament in II Timothy 2: 11-12a and Romans 8: 18.

THE FAMINE BEGINS

Genesis 41: 54-57

Just as Joseph had predicted, the seven years of plenty had come to an end. They now entered the period of drought and famine. The Nile flooding ceased due to the sirocco winds from the Sahara or Arabia and caused a grievous famine. The country had come to expect the high standard of living they had for the previous seven years and now would experience a severe famine. The famine was in other countries as well as Egypt. The text says it was over the entire earth. This story can have an ominous import for us too. We should never let high living stop us from saving and becoming debt free. If we give our time and resources to God's work we will be rewarded (Luke 6: 38). Hard times will come. We must take this story to heart and prepare.

The first reaction of the people was to complain to Pharaoh. They reasoned that the government should provide for them. It might be politically expedient for government officials to claim to be able to provide but they have no genuine control of the economy, the weather, or in this case the flooding of the Nile. Generally if the government does the economy any good it is through low taxation and low borrowing. Too much government indebtedness crowds out private investment and therefore economic growth.

Joseph did not just give the people welfare. They were warned that this was coming and they should have saved themselves. He waited as long as possible then opened the granaries and sold them grain. He maintained strict control over the inventory to prevent looting and waste. This stored food had to last for seven years. Other countries came to Egypt to buy food. Pharaoh was realizing just what a good move it was to listen to the God of Joseph. Egypt had plenty and was profiting from the famine when they could have been suffering.

Today's Message:

JACOB SENDS HIS SONS TO EGYPT

Genesis 42: 1-5

¹ Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? ² And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die. ³ And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴ But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, Lest peradventure harm befall him. ⁵ And the sons of Israel came to buy among those that came: for the famine was in the land of

Canaan.

The time frame here back in Canaan is twenty years since the brothers sold Joseph into slavery. Benjamin was now about twenty-three years old. The text does not say exactly how Jacob knew that there was food in Egypt. But because of the extent of the famine the word was out so to speak. Interestingly he looks at his eleven sons and essentially asks them to get moving and do something to secure food for the family by going down to Egypt for it. They are obviously reticent about this and simply look at one another as though stunned. They knew what they had done to Joseph twenty years ago and where he most likely ended up. They did not want to go there where they might see him or learn of his fate as a slave. Even after twenty years they still had guilt over this. However, the need for food and their father's command to go caused them to overcome their unresponsiveness. They went to Egypt to secure food. In a famine people will do anything to secure food. Jeremiah even tells us about the famine caused by the war with Babylon in 586 B.C., which caused mothers to eat their children (Lamentations 2: 20). If humans have little experience with this it is hard to identify. But it was the motive that caused the eleven sons of Israel to overcome their guilt and inhibitions about going to Egypt. Jacob was surely a very wealthy man by this time and it is important to observe that money will not give us all we need. It is helpful to be sure but it can't buy food when there is none! So the ten sons of Israel assembled a caravan and proceeded to leave. Benjamin was left behind. Jacob did not want to take a chance on losing his only remaining son from his beloved wife Rachel. It was difficult enough to lose Joseph. He wanted to protect Benjamin from harm on the long and uncertain trip. He had no idea what was going to unfold from this famine and trip to Egypt.

JOSEPH MEETS HIS BROTHERS AFTER TWENTY YEARS

Genesis 42: 6-9

⁶And Joseph was the governor over the land; he it was that sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves to him with their faces to the earth.⁷And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly with them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. ⁸And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him. ⁹And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come (ASC 1901).

The text again states the Joseph was ruler over Egypt. The Hebrew text says his title/name, which is translated, as governor is *hashaleet* הַשְּׁלִיט. It is the only time it is in Scripture and it really means the one who is in charge or the one having mastery. He had control over the land and it was his job to oversee the dispensing of food to the citizens of Egypt during the famine and authorizing it to be given to foreign purchasers as well. In perfect conformity to his first two dreams of the sheaves and the stars his

brothers approach his throne and bow down to him. This must have shocked him to see this as he surely and clearly remembered the details of the dreams, his brother's envy and resulting attempts by them to dispose of him. He realizes who they are but they do not know him. His reaction is one we would expect from one hurt badly; he attempts to conceal his identity and speaks harshly to them. He is still suffering from the pain they caused him and lashed out at them asking where they came from. In a natural progression from the pain they caused him he accused them of being spies and were looking for the unfortified parts of the kingdom so as to gain illegal access to the food themselves.

JOSEPH BEGINS TO TEST HIS BROTHERS

Genesis 42: 10-17

¹⁰And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. ¹¹We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies. ¹²And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. ¹³And they said, We thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not. ¹⁴And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies: ¹⁵hereby ye shall be proved: by the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. ¹⁶Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be bound, that your words may be proved, whether there be truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies. ¹⁷And he put them all together into ward three days (ASV 1901).

They fearfully respond to the charge by restating that they are just here to purchase food not steal it. In order to affirm their honesty they say they are all belonging to one man as if to say not a foreign power intent on thievery. A foreign power in their reasoning would not send ten brothers of one family. They assert they are subservient to him and are not spies' intent upon mischief. So Joseph responds again by asserting that they are spies. Perhaps he thought it necessary to test them or he was just expressing his anger and hurt over the amount of pain they caused him. They sensing the necessity to further describe their family situation said that they are of a family of twelve brothers and the youngest is with their father and one of them is not. This means that he does not exist.

The Hebrew word is *aanachnoo* אֲנַחְנוּ; and is also found in Genesis 5: 24 speaking of the rapture of Enoch. He was no more. They were careful to not say he was dead because they did not know for sure. Undaunted by their pleas Joseph again says that they are spies and shall undergo a test to validate their claims. He is not saying that there is no chance they are innocent of his charges, just that he will give them an opportunity to prove their claims. Joseph is now going to give them some time to fret over this as they earn his forgiveness. He tells them that they will be held captive except for one of them who will go back to Canaan and fetch the youngest brother. This puts them into a major dilemma. On the one hand if they send one of them back home they are putting their families at risk. Jacob might not agree with this scheme and refuse to send Benjamin. On the other hand if they refuse they could be tried as spies and killed while there families die of

starvation. In order to allow them make the choice of which will go, he puts them in custody for three days to mull the choice over.

THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 42: 18-23

¹⁸And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live: for I fear God: ¹⁹if ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in your prison-house; but go ye, carry grain for the famine of your houses: ²⁰and bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so. ²¹And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. ²²And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore also, behold, his blood is required. ²³And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for there was an interpreter between them.

After the three days were up Joseph said to them as if taking some pressure off them that he is a God fearing man. He uses the generic name *eloheem* without naming the specific name of the supreme God of all and of the Bible as well as the Israelites *Jehovah Eloheem*. He was not yet revealing that he knew their God and that he was a Hebrew. Therefore Joseph is in essence saying that he will not imprison them on a matter for which there is no clear evidence. He will not punish these strangers upon mere suspicion. Then he changes his mind to them and says, "I'll keep one of you here and send the rest back with the caravan of food." If they are honest then they should bring their youngest brother back and they shall not die.

The brothers then begin to speak amongst themselves not realizing that Joseph understands their native language. He had been using an interpreter up to this point and they start to quarrel about the cause of all these problems. They attribute all this to the incident with Joseph when they had him in the well twenty years ago and he cried out to them to be released. Ruben then interjects and says I told you so but you would not listen to me. So Ruben is agreeing with them that the blood of Joseph is essentially crying out in divine retribution over their sins.

JOSEPH'S RESPONSE

Genesis 42: 24-26

²⁴And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and he returned to them, and spake to them, and took Simeon from among them, and bound him before their eyes. ²⁵Then Joseph commanded to fill their vessels with grain, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provisions for the way: and thus was it done unto them. ²⁶And they laded their asses with their grain, and departed thence (ASV 1901).

Joseph was overcome with emotion and turned away from them some distance and openly wept. He probably sensed some comfort in knowing that they realized the origin of their fate and guilt over what they had done to him. Once he was relieved of his stress he returned to them with instructions for them to follow. Next he had Simeon the second oldest bound in front of them. Some speculate that Simeon was chosen due to his role in the sale of Joseph and his advocacy of killing him as well as his cruel nature. He was after all the chief perpetrator of the incident with Shechem and Hamor in retribution for Dina's rape. Finally, their request to purchase grain was honored and the other brothers were released to return home. Joseph wanted to provide additional motive for them to convince Jacob they should return. He also wanted to begin the restoration process with them. Without their knowledge he placed the money they used to buy the grain back in the sacks hidden until they opened them.

NEXT WEEK: JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS PART II

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