

Genesis – Lesson 28

Joseph Reunited With His Brothers

Read Genesis 41.

1. (a) How *long* was it before the events of chapter 41 transpired? What do you think Joseph was *feeling* during that time? *Why* was it important?

Verse 1 indicates the Joseph languished in prison for two (2) more years before Pharaoh had his dreams and called for him. Clearly, Joseph was feeling *abandoned*; the cupbearer had forgotten him (and the baker was dead!), and he was left without being thanked or remembered for what he had done. This was important, because it *completed* the humiliation of Joseph and finished the *preparation* that Joseph would need to rise to power in Egypt and become a *wise* man in dealing with the issues ahead.

- (b) Detail the two dreams that Pharaoh is given. What is the significance of the *elements* in them?

In the first dream, Pharaoh sees seven healthy cows come up out of the Nile, followed by seven thin and ugly cows who consume the healthy ones. In the second dream, Pharaoh sees seven healthy ears of grain on one stalk, followed by seven blighted ears who swallow up the healthy ones. The elements are *food items*: grain and cows are staple items. The appearance of these elements in the dreams *link* them to the interpretation that Joseph will give; since Joseph predicts a time of *famine* from the dreams, the elements of the dream help confirm to Pharaoh that Joseph is telling the truth.

2. (a) What kind of *attitude* does Joseph display before Pharaoh (see v. 14)? Why is this *important*?

Joseph displays an attitude of *submission* to Pharaoh: he cleans himself up (including shaving himself, something *uncommon* to Semites, but normal to Egyptians) and puts on new clothes. When he comes before Pharaoh, such actions show that Joseph does not come with arrogance or haughtiness, but with a willingness to place himself at the *service* of Pharaoh. Such an attitude becomes the *basis* for why Pharaoh exalts him; Joseph's willingness to give Pharaoh such *deference* leads Pharaoh to recognize him as worthy of the responsibility.

- (b) Compare v. 32 with Genesis 37:5-10. What might Joseph now believe about his *own* destiny?

Joseph tells Pharaoh that, because he had *two* (2) dreams, the thing indicated in them is "*fixed by God*"; it will happen because God has made this very clear *twice*. Joseph *may* have remembered (again!) the fact that *he also* had had two dreams, and that the dual-nature of those dreams (as revealed in this statement) implies that it *too* is fixed by God. In other words, that statement coming out of Joseph's mouth may have been enough for Joseph to *now* realize what God was going to do, and that all of the previous years of enslavement and imprisonment were *leading up to this time*.

- (c) From vv. 33-36, what *five* things was Pharaoh told to do? Why did he decide to *do* them?

Joseph told Pharaoh to do the following things: 1) select a wise man to take leadership over the nation to deal with this time of plenty followed by a time of famine; 2) select various overseers to work under this leader throughout the land; 3) take 1/5 of everything grown during the seven plentiful years and store it away; 4) store the food collected throughout the land (i.e. in the "cities"); and 5) use this food *only* as a reserve for use during the years of famine. Pharaoh decided to do these things because he saw them as "*wise*" and he recognized the wisdom in Joseph to lead this endeavor. Obviously, God (again!) was "*with*" Joseph in giving him the ability to rise to such stature, as he had done twice before.

3. How do Philippians 4:11-13 and Hebrews 13:5-6 apply to the *life* of Joseph? How do we implement such an attitude in our lives today?

In Philippians 4, Paul describes a life of *contentment*, the ability to enjoy life regardless of the prosperity or poverty that attends it. In Hebrews 13, the writer does the same, commanding the believers to keep themselves free from any greed (i.e. love of money) and being content in whatever the current situation is, knowing that the Lord is the ultimate helper. Joseph *appears* to have learned this lesson; he does not come off as petty or angry, but seems to be willing to accept whatever the circumstances and trust the Lord through it. We are to do *precisely* the same: to accept the lot we have been given, trusting in the Lord as our ultimate helper, and to find *contentment*. Such is difficult, given the *constant* temptation from our culture to be dissatisfied, especially materially. But Christians are called to look *beyond* the circumstances of this life (either good or bad) to their *ultimate* reward with Christ, and to “settle in” to whatever God ordains here.

Read Genesis 42-45.

4. (a) Detail the various ways that Joseph *tests* his brothers. What was his *motive*? His *goal*?

Joseph tests his brothers in a number of ways: 1) imprisoning them briefly (42:17); 2) demanding that they bring their youngest brother with them when they return (42:20); 3) keeping Simeon in prison until they returned (42:24); 4) returning their money as they returned home the first time (42:25); 4) making them to dine with him (which they believed was to condemn them; 43:18); 5) returning their money (and his personal cup in Benjamin’s sack) as they returned home the second time (44:2); and 6) threatening to punish Benjamin for his “theft” (44:17). Joseph’s motive was probably a mixture of *revenge* and *relief*; certainly his brothers needed to suffer for their wrongdoing to him, but Joseph (undoubtedly) was happy to see them and know that his father was still alive and that he could be reunited with them all. However, his *goal* was to illicit a *confession* and *repentance* from them for what they had done, to cause them to admit their guilt and to be forgiven. In 42:21-22, the brothers *admit* that they are guilty for what they did to Joseph (not knowing that it was him before them) and Judah’s speech in 44:27 contains a good amount of remorse and a hope to prevent such a thing from happening again.

- (b) Which verses in these chapters show that Joseph’s tests were *successful*? Why is their success so important to the *outcome* of the story?

In 42:21-22, the brothers *admit* that they are guilty for what they did to Joseph (not knowing that it was him before them) and Judah’s speech in 44:27 contains a good amount of remorse and a hope to prevent such a thing from happening again. Their repentance is essential for them to find the respite that they are longing for; from the constant “trouble” they are getting from Joseph, and from the famine and distress their family is enduring. By confessing their guilt, they open the door to *restoration*, which is precisely what is essential in our relationship to God: without confession there can be no restoration or reconciliation.

- (c) What did Judah offer to do in *place* of his brother Benjamin (see 44:30-34)? How is this *symbolic* of what Christ has done for us?

Judah offers to *take Benjamin’s place*; instead of leaving Benjamin to bear *his own punishment*, Judah offers to take that punishment upon himself. This is a *direct* symbolism of what Jesus Christ does for believers: he *substitutes* for them as he bears the wrath of God upon himself *in their place*. Instead of us suffering for what we *rightly deserve* as sinners (Benjamin was actually innocent!), Jesus takes our place and suffers for us. This is what Judah offered to do. Interestingly, it is Judah through which the Christ eventually comes; this speech and attitude appears to be a key reason why this blessing comes through him.

5. (a) According to 45:5-8, what was the *purpose* of everything that Joseph experienced? What should we learn from it in our own circumstances?

Joseph experienced all of his enslavement and imprisonment so that *God* could preserve his family through the great famine. In his *sovereignty*, God used Joseph to save Jacob's family, by forcing him to Egypt and raising him up to a position of power. The obvious application is: *all* of the circumstances of our lives, both good and bad, are *designed* by God to accomplish *his* purposes in and through us. We should be *eager* to 1) acknowledge that God is sovereign over everything in our lives and 2) rest assured that, regardless of whether life is good or bad, God is in control and we can trust him along the way. We should also learn that God does not always use "good" circumstances to produce good outcomes; he can (and does!) use difficult situations to bring about good, especially when it comes to growing our faith and trust in him.

(b) What is the value of this narrative to the *original* recipients of the book? How does this confirm the value of the *New Testament* to us?

The Israelites, reading this book from the hand of Moses while wandering in the wilderness before taking their promised land, are reminded from the life of Joseph that their difficulties are part of the greater purpose of God in them. They have been enslaved for 400 years, but God has *used* that great evil to form them into a nation and then deliver them to their own land, free from the entanglements of Egypt. That great time of slavery might not *appear* to be "good," but (from God's perspective) it is just what they needed and just what he would use on their behalf. So, as they read this account, they *can be* convinced of this truth. The same application applies to us as we read about the difficulties of *those who went before us*. As we read about the struggles of those who contended for the faith from the pages of the N.T., and we see how the ultimate evils perpetrated against Jesus are used for our good, it is a reminder to us of these facts. We, then (hopefully) respond in assurance in our situation and look there for greater inspiration and hope.

6. List the seven *steps* of Christ outlined in Philippians 2:1-11? For each one, how did Joseph manifest this step in *his* circumstances?

Christ 1) did not count equality with God something to be held onto (i.e. grasped); 2) he emptied himself of the visible nature of his divinity; 3) he took the form of a servant (or created being); 4) he was born as a human male; 5) he humbled himself in submission and obedience to others; 6) he gave himself to death on a cross; and 7) he was exalted by God and granted the highest position and power over all things. Joseph manifested these downward steps of humiliation: 1) he was exalted by his father as greater than his brothers; 2) he was emptied of his position by being thrown into a well and sold into slavery; 3) he became a servant to Potiphar and the jail keeper; 4) he lost all sense of power when he was unjustly imprisoned; 5) he continued to work in submission to others even after being imprisoned; 6) he was forgotten and left to rot in prison; but 7) he was exalted to a position of authority, even over the ones who began this against him by selling him off.