

The Life Of Joseph - From Prison To Prime Minister

1 - Background And Introduction - Genesis 32 verses 7-31

We are commencing a series of talks on the life of Joseph, a man who rose to the position of Prime Minister of Egypt, the greatest nation of that time, and he did so by way of a prison cell. As we continue these studies we will see pride and prejudice, dishonesty and deceit, family favouritism and faction, with intrigue thrown in for good measure! This week we're going to look at Joseph's father, Jacob and we will see the Presence and Protection of God; Principles & Priorities of Brothers; and Prayer & Preparation of Jacob. Joseph was one of Abraham's great-grandsons, the grandson of Isaac and son of Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Israel, which was the new name given to him in Genesis 32 verse 28 after he had wrestled with a divine visitor throughout the night. In awe and humility he had cried out "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared". It was an experience he never forgot. The lesson for us in our day is that God has not changed and He still reveals Himself to His children in powerful ways. In Proverbs 8.17 we read: "I love those who love Me, and those who seek Me find Me". When did we last hear the voice of God through his Word, and what was our response to His message?

First we will see the...

Presence And Protection Of God: Genesis 28 verses 13-15 and 31 verse 3.

There are few blessings in life so rich and fulfilling as a sense of God's presence, so when Jacob received the personal assurance of his God "I will be with you" (Genesis 31 verse 3) it was a promise well worth having. We do well to ask ourselves how much we treasure the promises which God has given to us? In Hebrews 13.5-6 we read "God has said, 'never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' so we say with confidence, 'the Lord is my Helper; I will not be afraid. what can man do to me?'. Do we have that glad assurance? Do we begin each day in the knowledge that our Lord will never leave us? Can we say with the poet "He walks with me and He talks with me and tells me I am His own"? This is the experience that God wants us to enjoy!! Not only did God graciously promise Jacob that He would be with him, but He also gave him the assurance "I will... watch over you wherever you go" (Genesis 28 verses 13-15). Jacob knew the strength and comfort which comes from the knowledge that God is with us, protecting us wherever we go. But something very important, and not particularly easy, was expected from Jacob, and that was obedience. Jacob could so easily have stayed in Haran, the home of his wives, where he had a prosperous farming business. Apart from problems with his wife's family, there was very little to worry about. But God had told him to return to the Promised Land, and he would never know God's blessing until he did! May I ask you, personally, "what is God telling you to do and what is your response?" We will look at Genesis 32 a little later on and see Jacob returning to Canaan, where he is about to meet his twin brother, Esau. When they parted 20 years earlier, Esau had said "I will kill my brother Jacob" and this was no idle threat, for he was well able to carry it out. How thankful Jacob would be that because he was returning to Canaan in obedience to God, he could claim the promise of His presence and protection. What was the difference between these two twin brothers?

Let's look at their...

Principles & Priorities Of Brothers - Genesis 36 & 37 verse 1

Note the closing words of Genesis 25. "so Esau despised his birthright". We need to ask ourselves if we are in danger of despising our spiritual birthright. What is of greater importance to us, a programme on TV or prayer? Our personal hobbies or our personal holiness? The result of our favourite football team or the furthering of God's Kingdom? These are important questions which demand an answer! The way in which Jacob secured the birthright was wrong, but the desire to have it was right! The next difference is seen in their choice of a bride in Genesis 28 verses 1-4 and 29 verse 20.

It is clear that God intended Jacob to marry within the family of Abraham, the man of faith, and he seems to have gladly responded to his mother's plan to go north to her people for his bride. Can you picture the lonely man setting out from Canaan on a 600 mile journey, leaving behind his mother and father and the home in which he had been brought up! Then, after falling in love with his cousin, Rachel, he willingly agrees to work seven years for her hand. One of the most beautiful phrases in the whole book of Genesis is found in Genesis 29 verse 20 "so Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her". That's romance at it's best! What a difference to his twin, Esau, who married Judith and Basemath, of the pagan tribe of the Hittites. Genesis 26 verse 35 tells us "they were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah". We have seen that Jacob was a prosperous farmer, but in Genesis 32 verse 3 we read "the Lord said to Jacob "Go back to the land of your father and to your relatives, and I will be with you". Within a few hours he takes to the road in obedience to his God! Is that the kind of obedience with which we respond to God's Word? God had told him to return to God's land, and that was the end of the story; there was no turning back. Little did he realise what lay before him, but he was trusting his God! What a contrast to Esau.

Finally we see the...

Prayer And Preparation Of Jacob: Genesis 32.

What worries, cares and anxieties Jacob carried just because he failed to fully trust his God. Verse 7 shows us that he was a very ordinary man, just like us, for despite God's wonderful promise of protection he was "in great fear and distress". We might well ask ourselves if Jacob had any "means of grace" which would help him in his time of need and if so, is it available to us? The first of which he took advantage was prayer. How thankful we can be that just as Jacob turned to God in prayer we, too, are invited to "cast all our anxieties upon Him, for He cares for us" (1 Peter 5 verse 7).

A study of Genesis 32 verses 9-12 reveals five points in his prayer which can be a great help to us in our prayer times:

- i. He pleaded the promises of God.
- i. He acknowledged God's past mercies and blessings.
- i. He confessed his unworthiness.
- i. He was specific.
- i. He was real before God and did not pretend a confidence he didn't feel.

After a full night of prayer and thoughtful consideration, Jacob laid his plans and the following night he had a confrontation with the living God which he never forgot! As he struggled with the Divine Visitor, pleading for his blessing, God responded in great grace by changing his name. In scripture a change of name signifies a change of character.

He asked Jacob his name in order to remind him that it meant "supplanter or cheat", then he renamed him "Israel". No longer would he be the cheat but "one who had power with God and with men and had overcome". Not just a change but a transformation! After such a momentous confrontation with God, Jacob must have known that the dreaded meeting with Esau was in God's hands and chapter 33 tells us of the wonderful reconciliation between these brothers, and the obvious way in which God had softened Esau's heart. Is there a Christian with whom you have fallen out? Have you prayed about it? Are you willing to confess your share of the blame? Will you approach that person prayerfully and humbly, yet confident that God will bring about a real and lasting reconciliation which will bring glory to his name and blessing to his children? There is a lovely touch in Genesis 35 verses 27-29 where we read of the death of Isaac, "and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him"! That would have been thought impossible a short while before and God is still in the business of performing family miracles! There are many

lessons for us, but I pray that God will challenge each one of us with the thought which runs throughout this study that we are to go all out for God's blessings rather than setting our hearts on the world's goods and acclaim?

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2 - Sweet Seventeen! Genesis 37 verses 1-11

I was driving my car in England one icy morning! It was a very slippery slope, but I was unaware of the conditions of the highway and before I knew what was happening, the car was slipping and sliding dangerously all over the road. Children who are born to dishonest parents are travelling on a slippery road; they never know where they will end up. The man whose life we are studying, Joseph of the Old Testament, was not only born to crafty parents, but to make matters worse his brothers were following their parents' bad example. When our story commences, in Genesis 37, Joseph was only seventeen years old, but he was already the butt of his brothers' hatred and the feeling was so intense that verse 4 tells us "they could not speak a kind word to him". Literally they would not "pass the time of day" with their brother! There was no greeting, no "Shalom", welcoming Joseph when he approached his brothers. You could cut the atmosphere with a knife! May I ask how well you get along with your brothers and sisters? There really is no excuse for bad relationships, either with those who are related by blood or those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. Treading such a pathway will end in disaster! To intensify the hatred of Joseph's brothers, their father, Jacob, had promoted him to a position of trust over them, giving him a long-sleeved tunic as a sign of his position of responsibility as an overseer. We might well ask ourselves if such apparent favouritism by his father was a wise move. We, as parents, should always treat all our children with respect, dignity and fairness; to do otherwise is a fore-runner of future family trouble, as many parents have discovered to their loss. Such authority for a seventeen year old youth was no small responsibility, but we soon see how conscientiously he carried it, for we read about his great...

Boldness

The strength of character of this young man is clear for all to see, as he will not be silenced about the bad behaviour of his brothers but takes back to his father "a bad report about them" (verse 2). This action was not "tale-telling", but was fulfilling the task entrusted to him. Indeed he carried it out with commendable bravery. It is a sad reflection on the church of our day that so many leaders "play the soft pedal" rather than calling sin by its real name. This does not mean that we should act in a hard and cold way, for at best we are all sinners saved by grace, but it does mean that we do not lower our standards to accommodate worldly views. A recent survey of pastors in the United Kingdom revealed that only 34% knew the ten commandments, and some commented that "they were far too negative anyway"! The psalmist could write that "the righteous are as bold as a lion" (Psalm 28 verse 1) and we can do with such men and women today! We desperately need those of whom Daniel wrote, "the people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits" (Daniel 11 verse 32).

I can imagine Joseph spending time with his grandfather, Isaac, and hearing of Abraham's great faith and accomplishments. Of the way in which he offered his son upon Mount Moriah, and then defeated the powerful King Chedorlaomer. Perhaps the old patriarch encouraged his young grandson in his walk with God! This is a great task that the older generation can do for God. May we not let them down!

Not only was Joseph brave, but he was honest. It doesn't take much imagination to picture the brothers doing their best to coerce the young man into watering down his bad report about them, so they would not be seen in a bad light by their father, but Joseph would not compromise his position! His report would not be exaggerated but it would certainly be honest. When David asked the Lord who could dwell in His sanctuary, He came back with the answer "he who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue" (Psalm 15 verse 2). How good it would be if we had such men today in positions of leadership, both in the church and in the nation! The words of Proverbs 14 verse 20 are as true today as when they were written "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people".

Next we read of two fascinating dreams given to Joseph. The first was sheaves of corn bowing down to his sheaf. Note the words "we were binding sheaves", which tell us that Joseph was doing his share of the work, even if he had been promoted over them! That is a challenging thought to those of us who are in positions of leadership. This was followed by a second dream; sun, moon and 11 stars bowing down to him! We are not given any clue in the story as to whether he was being arrogant and proud, or simply relating the story as he saw it, but later events proved that they were a revelation from God. No doubt he had heard from his father about the wonderful dream God had given him at Bethel, so he would know that God was speaking to him in a special way, telling him that God had a special work for him to do. And he was not afraid to take God at His word and spread the news! It is a sad reflection on us, in our day, that we have the most wonderful revelation of all time, yet we fail to spread the good news! The world around us is perishing, yet we talk about the weather, clothes, sport, health, and everything except the good news of salvation in Christ! As Jacob shared the news he was soon aware of a...

Bitterness

There are few, if any, emotions which cause family upsets as often as bitterness, and this is probably the greatest cause of discord and division in our churches today! If we are guilty of such emotions we do well to take Paul's words to heart "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander...be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4 verse 31). Many years later Jacob was giving his blessing to his family and he said "Joseph is a fruitful vine...near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed supple, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel" (Genesis 49 verse 22) What a testimony! Even at that early age of seventeen he was in a right relationship with God. The strange thing is that we don't read of the mothers of Joseph's half-brothers being jealous, but it is written that Rachel, Joseph's own mother, became jealous of her sister Leah, when she had children and Rachel was barren. A blazing family row followed that event! Later in Israel's history King Saul's jealousy of David was a constant source of bitterness, leading to several attempts at murder. Sadly, we can even be jealous of brothers and sisters in Christ who have been gifted by the Holy Spirit in a way which we have not. Paul told the Christians in Rome "not to behave with jealousy but to clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13 verse 13). He also took the church at Corinth to task for their jealousy and quarrelling (1 Corinthians 3 verse 3) and when he penned his second letter to them the position was no better, for he wrote "I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be ... I fear that there may be quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder". (2 Corinthians 12 verse 20) What a sad state of affairs for a Christian church that boasted about its spiritual gifts!

It wasn't long before the envy and jealousy of Joseph's brothers led them to downright hatred. Let us be warned, for the downward spiral has not changed. Three times in five verses we read of the hatred of the brothers for Joseph. What started as a spark in their hearts was now a blazing fire! Or to change the picture, the small seeds had now become large, prickly thorns. The Bible is full of such instances of hatred, so we must constantly be on our guard. There are, of course, some things we should hate, such as sin (Psalm 36 verse 2) and evil (Amos 5 15), but John's first epistle says that "he who hates his brother is a murderer" and "if any says 'I love God' yet hates his brother, he is a liar"!

These Are Lessons We Do Well To Learn!

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3 - Sold Into Slavery Genesis 37:12-36

We have already been introduced to the character we are studying, Joseph of the Old Testament, and have seen the bitterness and hatred shown to him by his ten brothers. We have reminded ourselves of the large and ugly weeds that can grow from small seeds, and we will soon discover that this was the experience of the brothers of Joseph, the children of Israel. It happened like this; Joseph's brothers had taken their father's flocks near to Shechem for grazing, and Jacob was getting concerned about their welfare, so asked Joseph to go and bring back news of them. We immediately see the young man, in his mid-teens, acting with...

Obedience

This was before the Ten Commandments had been given, with their pointed reminder "honour your father and mother". Here, without any specific command from God, Joseph responds to his father's request with prompt obedience. So we see the young man setting out on his lonely trail to the town of Shechem, some 50 miles distance, doubtless with the threat of wild animals and possibly marauding robbers. When he reaches his destination there is no trace of his brothers, but rather than turn back toward home he asks a local resident whether he has seen ten men with their sheep. The man immediately told him that he had indeed seen his brothers, and they had indicated that they were going to Dothan, about 15 miles north of Shechem. The diligence and integrity of this young man is clearly seen as he searches for his brothers at considerable personal inconvenience. No doubt they would be delighted to see him, bringing news from home...but no! Rather than showing pleasure, the brothers saw him in the distance and the record tells us that "before he reached them they plotted to kill him" (Genesis 37:18). This is a case of the seeds of jealousy and bitterness developing into plans of murder. Let us always be on our guard, for if we harbour unkind thoughts of other people, they can so easily turn into bitterness, which can bring forth the evil fruit of murder. The Lord Jesus was very forthright when challenging the people of His day about the requirements of the law. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago 'Do not murder..but I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment". (Matt.7 verse 21). We do well to think about it!

Once the circumstances became clear to the brothers they saw it as a wonderful...

Opportunity

As we go through our lives we are all presented with opportunities. Indeed, rarely a day passes without us being given the choice between good and evil, an action which will either bring blessing and encouragement to others, or leave them worse off than before. Do we approach each day with a prayer in our hearts that God will give us the wisdom and strength to take the right and helpful course, or do we allow our fallen, human nature to take over? These brothers were still holding a bitter grudge in their hearts, and they saw the opportunity as an opening for evil! "Let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him" (Genesis 37 verse 20). They had it all worked out, and in the process were quite prepared to deceive their old father into thinking that his favourite son had been killed by wild animals. This is so often the case. One sin leads to another; in this case bitterness was leading to murder, which in turn was taking them into a lifetime of lies and deceit. Thankfully God had other plans, and He would not forsake the young man who was prepared to trust Him, although Joseph had a hard, uphill road ahead before such plans would come to pass.

So we see, over and above the wicked plans of man, God's...

Over-Ruling

Centuries later the Apostle Paul was able to confirm that "in all things God works for the

good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Rom.8 28). For the believer this is a wonderful promise of assurance upon which we can rest with complete confidence. Perhaps you are passing through difficult circumstances; you don't know which way to turn. Rather like Joseph, you are facing an unknown future, which looks extremely black. If you are in a right relationship with God through His Son, the Lord Jesus, you can rest in the sure and certain hope that He is in control. "God is faithful: He will not let you be tempted (or tested) beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1Cor.10 verse 13). These words were not written at the time of Joseph, but he would live to prove the truth of them!

So we see the young man taken roughly by his brothers, stripped of his robe, and thrown into an empty cistern. The record tells us that "there was no water in it". No doubt in that hot climate Joseph could well have wished that it were half-full of water! Judah, one of Joseph's older brothers, then took the lead, for a caravan of merchantmen was passing by, and he hit upon the idea of selling their brother as a slave, thus providing them with some ready cash. Everything went according to plan, and the twenty pieces of silver that changed hands would give two pieces to each brother! No doubt they thought they had done a good day's work, for they had got rid of their over-bearing brother and had lined their pockets with silver into the bargain. Little did they realise where their cruel and hard-hearted act would lead, but as the story unfolds you will discover that God was on the throne controlling the events, even though Joseph may very well have felt that God had let him down.

When the brothers returned home with Joseph's coat, suitably covered with animal blood, their father Jacob was...

Overwrought

The blatant hypocrisy of his sons is almost unbelievable. It was bad enough to deceive their father into thinking that a wild animal had killed their brother, but to pretend to comfort him in his bereavement, knowing that they had last seen the young lad alive and well, on his way to Egypt, was hypocrisy at its' worst. We wonder how they could stand by and hear the old man cry from his heart "In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son" (Genesis 37 verse 35) without telling him the truth and confessing their sin. Did they think that God would allow such a thing to happen without bringing them to account? If not down here, then certainly in a coming judgment day. Yet we can be all too ready to point the finger at others, and not realise that we are not the men and women God wants us to be. We may not have descended to such depths as Jacob's sons, but we can all be guilty of "living a lie". Many people, every day, are putting on a front, pretending to be walking with the Lord, when their hearts are not right with Him. How thankful we should be that the chorus expresses a real biblical truth when it says "There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, There's a door that is open and we may go in, At Calvary's cross is where we begin, When we come as a sinner to Jesus". Perhaps I'm speaking to someone who has never come to the Lord Jesus for salvation. The way is open for you to come to Him in repentance, acknowledging your need of a Saviour, and receiving His forgiveness and cleansing. If you are a Christian who has failed your Lord, the way is also open for you. Again we must confess our sin, knowing that "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1 verse 9).

If only the brothers had taken such a step, what a different story we would have had to tell. As it is, we have a grieving father, a young man being sold into slavery in a foreign land, and ten brothers who have deceived their aged parent and will no doubt find it difficult to look him in the face. The lesson is clear for each one of us, deceit and lying will never pay. Although the immediate outcome may look favourable, God will ensure that truth and righteousness will triumph in the end. In the Day of Judgment all wrongdoing will be revealed. Let's make sure that we learn the lesson now, before it is too late!

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4 - On Guard! Genesis 39 verses 1-10

In our studies of the Life of Joseph we have already seen that there are many lessons for the day in which we live and today's episode is as up-to-date as tomorrow's newspaper! There are few experiences in life more difficult to handle than being put under pressure to do something wrong by someone who is holding a position of authority and trust over us. If, as in the case of Joseph, our whole future depends upon the decision we make, the situation is almost impossible to manage. This is the record of a young God-fearing man, miles away from home, who stood up for truth and righteousness in the face of almost over-whelming odds. We will look at the first ten verses of Genesis chapter 39 under three headings, Prosperity, Pressure and Perplexity.

Prosperity: Verses 1-6

We can picture Joseph standing in the slave market, perhaps with hundreds of other men, as the buyers tested their muscles, asking them to do exercises, and generally treating them like animals. Joseph could have been sold to one of a thousand different masters, many of whom would doubtless have given him a hard time. In the goodness of God he found himself in a well-run household, in the home of an apparently well respected Egyptian officer, who was prepared to give Joseph every opportunity to use his talents and gifts. Joseph gave his master long and faithful service (verses 2-6).

When he first arrived, life must have been very hard for a 17 year old youth, forced into slavery, far from home, grappling with a foreign language, a strange religion and a different culture. Martin Luther suggests that he must have been the first one out of bed each morning as he acquired the knowledge and skills to enable him to do his work conscientiously and well. This, surely, is a challenge to us in our day. Are we as diligent and vigilant as Joseph? He also experienced the presence of God in his daily service. What a different world we would have if men and women of today sought both the favour of God and man as they performed their daily tasks. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul challenges us to be obedient to our masters with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ, not with eye-service, as men pleasers, but doing the will of God from the heart. How delightful is the comment in the gospels which tells us that the Lord Jesus "grew up in favour with God and men" (Luke 2 verse 52). Like Enoch before him, Joseph walked with God! This was no "flash in the pan" - it carried on for about 10 years. This was followed by God's blessing and man's good testimony (verses 3-5). Although we are not guaranteed material prosperity, there are many modern day instances of godly men and women who put God first in all their business dealings, and were prospered by God as they took their stand for him! Not only did Potiphar's household experience God's blessing, but he was quick to recognise the source of the prosperity. Joseph was the right kind of missionary who was clearly anxious that his God should have the honour and glory for the blessing which they were experiencing. This is a lesson we all need to learn! Potiphar didn't take everything from his servant and give nothing back. He was fair and generous. He noticed Joseph, accepted him, trusted him, and promoted him. Another important lesson for us is that the devil is never far away when God's blessing is being enjoyed, and prosperity was quickly followed by...

Pressure

Mrs. Potiphar was not a nice woman to know! She was a covetous, shameless, persistent, scheming woman who was not used to taking no for an answer! And the butt of her seduction was a young slave from a foreign country with no rights of his own! What hope did he have of standing up to such a test? Only God could give him the courage he needed! As you are listening to this programme, you may well think that you are in an impossible situation. You feel you don't have the strength to resist the pressure of temptation which you are facing. God has clearly stated in His Word that He will not allow His children to be tempted beyond what they are able to endure (1Corinthians 10 verse 13). What an encouragement! The temptation which Joseph faced was one to which men

have been subjected since time began; it was natural...it was strong...it was made by an important woman... and just at a time when Joseph had been given an exciting promotion! The temptation was persuasive (verse 7), it was persistent (verse 10), and it was passionate (verse 12). It was directed at a young man who was miles away from home and was very vulnerable. He really needed God's wisdom to see where this could lead him, if he gave way to it (Proverbs 2 verses 1-8 and 16-19; 5 verses 3-6). He also needed God's strength to resist it. But it was not only a temptation; it was also an opportunity! Can you picture the attack of the evil one, as the pressure is put on Joseph! He would be putting thoughts into Joseph's head "The wife of the boss has set her heart on me! Everybody's doing it but not everybody has an opportunity like this; I mustn't let this one pass me by! I'd be a fool to resist! I've everything to lose!" Have you ever noticed how Satan seems to know when we are at our most vulnerable point? Just how is this young man going to handle such a strong temptation? For him it is a great time of...

Perplexity

He has been faithful to his God, and seemed to be enjoying His blessing. A temptation of this kind was the last thing he expected! Perhaps you are in the same situation today; you feel let down by God, just when you need Him most! We can gain great comfort from the way in which God enabled Joseph to resist the temptations of his master's wife, even though he knew it would bring down her wrath upon him. It will help us to note carefully the attitude and actions of Joseph; first he recognised his...

Responsibility to his Master! We can just imagine him thinking "this woman's husband has given me responsibility; he is the man who has been kind to me; he has given me this promotion". We are told in verse 9 that he says to Mrs. Potiphar "he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife" (even if you are trying to be unfaithful to him!). Joseph was a man of integrity! Some of the saddest stories of adultery are those involving best friends and even brothers! If people would only stop to think of the outcome of such sin it would never take place! Of even greater importance to Joseph, however, was his...

Responsibility to God. It was almost as though he had read David's Psalm 51 (written many years later!), when he fell into sexual sin and cried out to God "Against You, You only have I sinned and done this evil". Joseph was determined that this would not happen; he bravely faced his master's wife; "How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (verse 9). It was almost as though he knew Prov.6.27-29, which was written many years later "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished". This holy attitude could only result in a...

Refusal to Sin. Day after day the tempter used her seductions, but without avail. Joseph not only refused to sin, but made strenuous efforts to keep away from the source of the temptation. We should take this to heart!

There are many powerful lessons in this passage which are applicable to our day. Let us make sure that we heed them!

First of all we should be constantly aware of the biblical truth that it is tribulation or affliction that works patience (Romans 5 verse 3) and sometimes God allows it so that we will grow spiritually in Christ. Then, as Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 6 verse 5, we should work for our earthly masters as though we were doing it for Christ. Also, if we are masters we, too, we have an obligation to "give our servants what is just and fair, knowing that we have a Master in heaven" (Colossians 4 verse 1).

Finally, let us never forget the very important lesson, that all sin is against God. Purity of heart and integrity of character are what count for God in today's world!

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5 - Misunderstood! Genesis 39 verses 11-23

Suffering and trial is a real problem, and is nearly as old as man himself! Perhaps you are looking for answers and you haven't found them. Why should hospital wards be full of suffering men, women and children? Why should there be battered wives, abused children, widows, orphans and under-privileged people? Why should millions of people have more than enough to eat whilst many more millions are starving? The Bible does not detail the answer, but it does give us glimpses of truth enabling us to piece together something of the jig-saw of life. In the story of Joseph we have just one piece. In today's episode we will see Fleshly Sin Resisted, False Story Reported and Faithful Service Rewarded. First we will consider:

Fleshly Sin Resisted: Genesis 39 verses 11-12

This young man was many miles from home, working as a slave in his master's home, when he was seduced by his master's wife. He resisted the temptation, despite the fact that he knew she could make life very difficult for him.

Let's set the scene. Joseph was steward for his master, and as he was busily engaged on his duties, Mrs. Potiphar caught hold of his cloak and again tried to get him to go to bed with her. Joseph knew that there was only one sensible course of action; he took it, as he ran from the house. May I pause to say that this is sometimes the wisest action for us to take, when we are faced with temptation that seems too strong to handle. In the process of running out of the room, however, Joseph left his cloak in her hand. He knew how this wicked, scheming woman, could use the evidence of the coat and the next scene is the:

False Story Reported: Genesis 39 verses 13-20

It didn't take long for her to put her evil plan into action. As soon as Mrs. Potiphar realised that the young man was not going to commit adultery with her, she called her household servants and, showing them Joseph's cloak, she said "Look this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house". When her husband returned to the house she repeated the same lies to him, and we read that "he burned with anger".

Joseph must have been deeply hurt by the way in which he was misunderstood. He had done what was right yet was accused of doing what was wrong! He had given his master faithful service, yet was being falsely charged with having an affair with his master's wife. You, too, may be misunderstood. The very people who you thought would believe you, are the ones who are doubting your word and your motives. Be encouraged; we will see how God brought Joseph through this bitter experience, and He will bring you through, too, if you will only trust Him.

It has been said that Captain Potiphar may have suspected his wife of unfaithfulness, because in normal circumstances, a slave in Egypt, caught trying to have an affair with his master's wife, would not simply end up in prison, but on the gallows! Perhaps he has had his doubts about his wife for some time. We don't know, but what we do know is that in the providence of God, Joseph ended up in prison rather than in the hands of his executioner. We are also told that the prison to which Joseph was committed was "the place where the king's prisoners were confined" (verse 20). God's hand was obviously upon the whole situation, and He was going to bring good out of an apparent tragedy. Nevertheless, we must not picture the prison like some of the modern ones of Western civilisation. It would not be airy, well-lit, and run like a well-ordered establishment. The Hebrew word describing it suggests "a miserable hole". Two or three little rooms, crowded with prisoners, foul-smelling, and generally dark and wretched. We can well imagine Joseph asking God what he has done to deserve such treatment. He had served

his master well, had refused to give in to the temptations of his master's wife, and had conducted himself in a God-fearing manner.

We do well to recall that when Jesus gathered His disciples around Him in the Upper Room, He told them "in the world you will have trouble" (John 16 verse 33). Perhaps you are suffering because of your witness, and you are wondering if God has deserted you. You feel persecuted and oppressed; even forsaken. Well, remember the words which Jesus added. Having told His followers that they would have trouble in the world He then went on to assure them "Take heart! I have overcome the world". We have a Lord who really cares for us and is powerful enough to deliver us, when the time is right. God has perfect timing and Joseph was going to experience His deliverance, but he still had a little time to wait. We should try to make sure, under God's hand, that we learn the lesson of patience as we await for God to work out His perfect plan. Finally we will see...

Faithful Service Rewarded: Genesis 39 verse 21-23.

The next step in the story reveals some improvement in Joseph's circumstances, because the prison warder recognised that the Lord was with him. He "showed him kindness and granted him favour" (Genesis 39 verse 21). Joseph may not have been released from prison, but at least those who were in charge were more kindly disposed towards him. It may well have been that Joseph didn't see God's providential care at the time, for this can often only be traced afterwards. Nevertheless, the fact that it is recorded for us should give encouragement to those who are passing through times of testing and are wondering if God really cares. You may remember the experience of Job, who was tested and tried almost beyond endurance, yet could say "He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23 verse 10). This seems to be the kind of confident trust shown by Joseph, and we would do well to follow his example. Although he must often have been perplexed, even bewildered, there is no record of him complaining to God or questioning His will. It is by us adopting the same uncomplaining attitude that we will ultimately bring glory to God and blessing to us. In return for the trust that the prison warder placed in Joseph and, no doubt, the trust which Joseph had in God, the Lord continued to bless him. We read some remarkable words about that Egyptian prison, for Genesis 39 verse 23 tells us "The warder paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did". What a testimony to the faithful service of Joseph, and the faithfulness of God. Here is a foreign slave, imprisoned for apparently taking liberties with his master's wife, yet the prison warder is conscious that his God is with him, prospering him in everything he does. I wonder if our masters are able to give such a word of witness and testimony about us? Do they recognise God's good hand upon us because of our conscientious work and godly attitude? There are no guarantees that our human masters will reward us in any way, but we can be sure that if we take our stand faithfully for our Lord Jesus Christ, both in our work and home situations, we shall hear Him say "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25 verse 21).

When we stand before our Lord at His Judgement Seat, He will not judge us for our success, but for our faithfulness. How are we likely to measure up on the Judgement Day?

So we leave Joseph in prison, no doubt still wondering when God would fully vindicate him for the righteous stand he had taken, yet beginning to glimpse the over-ruling of God in his life. In the very same prison as Joseph were two of Pharaoh's former chief officers, one of whom was to play a significant part in his life. Let us never forget that God is still on the throne of the universe. He is Sovereign and through His servant, Paul, He has told us that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8 verse 28). Let us hold fast to that promise.

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6 - Fascinating Dreams! Genesis 40 verses 1-23

As we study the life of Joseph we will notice that chapter 40 of Genesis commences with the words "Some time later", so we have to go back to the previous chapter to discover what had happened. Joseph, as a young 17 year old lad, had been sold into slavery by his brothers, who had pretended to their father that he had been killed by wild animals. God's good hand had been upon him, however, and he had been bought by Captain Potiphar of the Egyptian army. Although Joseph served his master faithfully, Mrs. Potiphar had falsely accused him of attempted rape, and he had landed up in the state prison where the king's prisoners were also kept. Because of his diligence, the prison warden had promoted him, and as our chapter opens Joseph is basically in charge of all of the prisoners. Two of the men under his command were the former Chief Butler and Chief Baker of the King of Egypt. They had both been imprisoned for upsetting their master and were doubtless fearful about their future. We will look at the story under the headings of Dreams, Dread and Drama.

Dreams. We need to understand that in those days dreams were thought to be a method used by God to convey His plan and purpose for the future to those who were prepared to receive it. Indeed, this often was the case. Earlier in our story we saw how God visited Joseph with two special dreams, and he shared them with his family in the belief that they indicated God's will for their lives. Now, some years later, these two former court officials, each receive a special dream, but are very concerned because they have no power to interpret it.

In his dream, the Chief Butler was back in the palace gardens again, standing in front of a vine. There were three branches in the vine, with fine clusters of ripe grapes. Then he saw Pharaoh's cup in his hand, and in the dream he pressed the grapes into the cup in order to produce the wine, before he placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

The Chief Baker's dream followed a somewhat similar pattern, for he was back in the palace bakery again, with three white baskets on his head. In the top basket there were all sorts of delicious baked cakes, but the birds came and took them out of the basket and ate them. We will see next that these dreams caused the two men a real measure of...

Dread. As Joseph entered the main prison-cell that morning he particularly noticed that the butler and baker looked sad, so he asked them the reason for their distress. There is a very important lesson for us in this little episode. Here was Joseph, placed in a position of responsibility, in charge of a number of prisoners, yet not only noticing the sad expressions on the faces of these two men, but also taking the time to inquire what was the trouble. There is a marvellous ministry of encouragement available to Christian men and women today if we are sensitive to the needs of others. As we study the life of the Lord Jesus we are constantly impressed with His care and concern for needy people. Whether it was lepers, those who were blind, paralysed or deformed, or people who were discouraged and downcast, Jesus always had time for them. There are some Christians known to me who never board a bus or a train without a prayer that the Lord would guide them to someone needing a word from Him. All sorts of opportunities have come their way as God has led them to hurting people, some clearly prepared for their ministry. Jesus told us that we are to be salt and light in a very needy world, which means being available for Him to use at all times.

To return to the story, the dark clouds of doubt and even dread were forming over the heads of the former Chief Butler and Chief Baker. Their dreams seemed to spell trouble, and their faces showed their deep concern. Were these dreams sinister? Would this mean execution? Or was there just a possibility that release from prison was coming their way? They just did not know, so were understandably fearful. There are many people today who are similarly fearful. Some await the result of tests from hospitals, others are experiencing family uncertainty, whilst for others the future is unsettled because of

impending unemployment. Whatever the needs may be, our Christian witness and testimony can be just what the Lord is going to use to speak right into their situations. The question is whether or not we are going to be available for Him to use? Perhaps that very morning Joseph had asked the Lord to lead him to someone whom he could help. We do not know, but we do know that Joseph was concerned about these men, and he showed it. May we be quick to follow that good example.

Finally, after the Dreams and the Dread, there came the...

Drama. When Joseph heard the dreams he wasn't quick to claim the ability to interpret them. No praise or glory must come his way. He was quite content to be God's instrument for Him to use in His own way. Gladly he responded to these former court officials "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (verse 8). There is a very relevant word here for all of us who desire to be used by God. We must at all times be ready to acknowledge that He is the only one who can give a message to meet the needs of the people. He alone can unravel the mysteries of life. Like Joseph, we must always be content to give Him all the praise and all the glory, whenever He is pleased to use us in His service. As the butler's dream was unfolded to Joseph, his eyes brightened, and he was able to give a real word of encouragement to the troubled man; "within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position" (verse 13). How good it is to be the bearer of such hopeful news. We, like Joseph, have good news to convey to a world which is very short of such news. We can tell them of a God who loves them, and sent His Son to die for them, so that they could be released from the prison of sin and selfishness. Let us not be slow to bear this news to others.

Sadly, that was not the end of the story, for when the baker heard the butler's good news he immediately told Joseph the details of his dream. I am sure that Joseph's face fell as the implications became clear to him. Death awaited the baker. There was to be no deliverance for him. His days were numbered. We might well ask how Joseph was going to handle this problem. Would he evade the issue? Or perhaps simply suggest that the news for the baker didn't appear to be as good as it had been for the butler? No! Here was a man of great personal honour and integrity. Whatever the cost he would tell the truth. At least it would give the butler a warning of impending death and judgment. He could make sure that he was prepared to meet his God. So, no doubt with a heavy heart, Joseph broke the news to this second court official "within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree" (verse 19), This is a great challenge to me, personally, and I'm sure to you as well. Whilst we may be ready and willing to tell the people around us that there is a God who loves them, and is ready to save them, we may not be quite as willing to tell them that judgment awaits all who refuse God's offer of salvation. The scripture is very clear "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 6 verse 23). We should be as ready to warn of the bad news, as we are to share the good news. Both are equally important parts of the Gospel message.

The drama was not quite finished, for three days' after the dreams, Pharaoh had a birthday which he celebrated by throwing a great feast for all his officials. Then, in accordance with Joseph's interpretations of the dreams, he reinstated the Chief Butler to his position of power and responsibility, so that "he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand, but he hanged the Chief Baker, just as Joseph had said" (verses 21-22).

God's clear forecast of the future will always hold good. When He tells us that judgment awaits the unrepentant sinner, He means exactly what He says. Ours is the task of warning men and women that there will be no escape for those who "neglect so great salvation" (Hebrews 2 verse 3). May we take these lessons to heart!

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7 - God's Delays Are Not God's Denials! Genesis 41 Verses 1-36

We all experience high and low points in our daily lives. There are peak times and there are troughs. There are good times and there are bad times. Times when the sun is shining and the skies are blue, and others when the dark thunder clouds seem to lie heavily over our heads. There are days when the adrenalin flows, and other times when we have no "Get Up and Go"! If you experience such times, then you can identify with Joseph. One day he is a seventeen year old lad with his father's smile always on him; he could do nothing wrong - the next, he's in a pit awaiting a knife in his back. Then he's sold to traders and marketed as a slave. Just a little while later the sun shone again and he was his master's favourite; the work had been hard and the road rough, but he'd been recognised and it was all worthwhile. He was in charge of everything in the household. Then disaster struck, his master's wife cast her eyes upon him and he had to take a firm stand to avoid real trouble; at least he'd come through it! But no! She wasn't finished with him yet, and when his master returned, he was falsely accused of attempted rape and sent to prison. The clouds really were dark and the future was bleak. Again he was determined not to give in and by working hard and long he was at last recognised by the Prison Governor and promoted to a position of responsibility. The sun was shining once more, and to improve matters God gave him the opportunity of interpreting the dream given to the former Chief Butler of Pharaoh. We can imagine him saying to the court official, as he returned to his position of responsibility, "put in a good word for me". "Of course, I won't forget" - he was on a high! But the days lengthened into weeks, then months, now over two years had passed and there was no hope of an early release! This may well have been Joseph's darkest hour. The skies were black once again. The picture was one of...

Distress. Verses 1-8.

Joseph was totally innocent of any crime, and was only in prison because of the fury of a malicious woman. We can easily picture his distress, which may well have been turning into despair. Has the chief butler completely forgotten him? Or did he speak to Pharaoh and the request fell on deaf ears? Has Potiphar's wife been up to her tricks again? Worse still has God forgotten him? Would he ever see his father and the old homestead again or was he to serve a "life sentence"? What had become of the dreams which he was so sure had come from God? No doubt these and many other thoughts would sweep over the young man filling his heart with distress and despair! Perhaps he wondered if his prayers would ever be answered! You, too, may have similar feelings of distress and even despair; your heart is breaking and you don't know which way to turn! You wonder if the sun will ever shine again. You feel just like Joseph! You can identify with the psalmist, when he cried "Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire where there is no foothold" (Ps.69.1-2). Knowing Joseph as well as we do, it may well be that his was the prayer of David in Psalm 101 "I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk...with a perfect heart". Or, perhaps, he was praying as the writer of Psalm 102 "Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto You...I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I lie awake and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top." Be encouraged, God knows the closing chapters of the book of your life, even though He hasn't revealed them to you yet. Just think for a moment of the dreadful loss to Egypt, Israel and Joseph himself if the butler had arranged his release immediately. A famine in Egypt with the loss of thousands of lives; no hope for Jacob and his family and the whole salvation of the world in disarray. Ultimately there would have been no Moses as a man of God for a great work for God. This was Joseph's darkest hour and he didn't know that it was just before the dawn! Is this your darkest hour; remember that the dawn of every day is in God's hands! He is still in control. He was still on His throne just when Joseph stood in the greatest need, and his long wait was to end shortly. This was actually going to involve the distress of Pharaoh. Two dreams had been given by the Sovereign Lord, both having two pairs of sevens, cows and grain. The amazing thing is that Pharaoh's courtiers were dumbfounded. This really was most remarkable, for the magicians belonged to a guild expert in handling the books of magic and priestcraft. There was no-one in the whole of Egypt who was in touch with God; no-one who could bring a message from Him. This

world is not looking for better preachers, but it is desperately looking for people who are really in touch with the living God! Are we amongst their number? God's hand was clearly upon the situation! The little war-time chorus holds good today "God is still on the Throne, and He will remember His own, His promise is true, He will not forget you, God is still on the Throne". God was working His purpose out. If you're feeling distressed and even distraught, God has not forgotten you. He is just the same today as in Joseph's day, and He is still the "worker of miracles, large and small"! God had His plan, and although no-one could foresee what would happen, He knew! Very soon there would be a divine...

Disclosure. Verses 9-32.

Note carefully the opening word of verse 9 "Then". God had been working in the minds of many different people in many different ways in order to achieve His purpose. First of all I believe that he had caused the Butler to forget Joseph's request; then He filled Pharaoh's mind with the dreams; He then caused the wise men's minds to be filled with confusion, and finally He prodded the memory of the chief butler! Is there someone who is waiting for us to acknowledge our failure? Will we do it today or let them remain in the prison from which we should be delivering them? God had done His perfect work and His timing was perfect. God's delays are not His denials! Joseph, with typical humility, wanted no credit for himself, "I can't interpret dreams but God will" (v.16). Joseph realised that God had given him a special gift but he only wanted to use it for His glory!" God desires messengers who will be like that today...no glory or even credit for themselves but all the glory for God. With perfect clarity and simplicity the dreams were interpreted, and so wise and humble was Joseph's demeanour that Pharaoh and his court accepted the interpretation immediately. This gave Joseph the opening which God had planned, and in the following verses we see his...

Discernment. Verses 33-36.

Joseph told Pharaoh to look for "a discerning and wise man" and as he gave him the "Job Description" it was almost as though he was describing himself. God's plans for the ultimate good of His people Israel were beginning to take real shape and form. His will would not be thwarted. His purposes must come to pass. Pharaoh immediately responded "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" There are clear lessons in this story for us today:

When our family and friends fail us, and the road is rough, we must never forget that "God has said 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13.5). He is looking for our confident trust; we can safely leave our future with Him. Then, when we serve God, it is of the utmost importance that we seek His glory, not our own. He will always honour and bless His humble servants. Finally, we must be careful to share God's Word clearly, simply and honestly. We can then safely leave the results with Him. If you're feeling down, may you know that underneath you are God's everlasting arms. He will never fail His own.

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8 - Real Promotion At Last! Genesis 41 verses 37-57

About a hundred years ago Arthur Ainger wrote his very telling hymn "God is working His purpose out, as year succeeds to year". This was as true in the day of Joseph, nearly four thousand years ago, as it is today. Yet, just as we often fail to see God's hand working behind the scenes, so Joseph had to experience periods of real darkness and possibly despair, before he could enjoy the good times which God had planned. You may recall that he was sold by his brothers to slave-traders when he was only 17 years of age, and passed through a variety of very difficult circumstances during the next 13 years before he had the wonderful opportunity of interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, telling of seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine. He had then suggested to Pharaoh, King of Egypt, that he should find a wise and discerning man who could so ration the produce during the plentiful years, that there would be sufficient food during the years of famine. Pharaoh had immediately responded that Joseph must surely be that "wise and discerning man".

So we see this mature man, who left Canaan as a young, seventeen year lad, now promoted to the highest position in the land under Pharaoh. Truly "God was working His purpose out". Whilst there can be no guarantees that God is going to bless you materially if you trust Him, the whole Bible is full of teaching and of promises assuring us that He can and will "work for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8 verse 28). Job was able to say "Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him" (Job 13 verse 15). Joseph's brothers thought that they were totally in control when they sold him into slavery, but "God was working His purpose out", so that some years later Joseph was able to tell his brothers "it was not you who sent me, but God" (Genesis 45 verse 8). When your day is dark and your pathway is hidden, lift your eyes to the Lord who is on the throne, and trust Him to see you through! We will look at Genesis 41 verses 37 to 57 under three headings, Power, Prosperity and Provision.

Power: Verses 37-45.

I'm sure that Joseph could hardly believe his ears when Pharaoh told him "there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people will submit to your orders." (Genesis 41 verses 39-40). This is the man who was in Pharaoh's prison only a few hours earlier. How true are the words of the psalmist "No-one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another." Provided we are obedient to His word, we can leave the matter of promotion safely in His hands. Joseph was completely dependent upon God, and the Lord was able to trust him with this special power that Pharaoh had given to him. The Lord knew that he would use it wisely and well. Perhaps you are in a position of responsibility; if so, make sure that you use it for the good of man and for the glory of God. Joseph now had the responsible task of looking after the country's food supplies in such a way that when the famine came, there would be enough food for all. He knew that he could depend upon the Lord to give him the wisdom he needed, and he was not disappointed. What James wrote to the Christians of his day is also applicable to us: "If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1 verse 5).

If God could give a young man "up from the country" sufficient wisdom to control all the food supplies of a great nation, don't you think He can supply you with the wisdom you need to accomplish His purposes? In a world which is more and more geared to selfish aims and ambitions, our day and generation is crying out for godly men and women who will take a lead for truth and righteousness.

Prosperity: Verses 46-52.

For Egypt it was a time of great prosperity. Through Pharaoh's dream which Joseph had interpreted, God had warned the people that this would be followed by seven years of

great famine. In good times people are often forget the possibility of bad times ahead, and Joseph had to exercise all the skill and wisdom which God had given to him to ensure that the bountiful supply of food was not wasted. This is a lesson to us, for when we have more than enough we should not only provide for our own future times of need, but also be willing to help those who are in need of support right now. There are millions of people with more than enough of this world's goods, whilst there are millions more who don't know where their next meal is coming from. The Lord Jesus had some challenging words to say on this subject, which are directed to us in our day: "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me" (Matthew 25 verses 42-43).

These are words we all need to take to heart. Prosperity was followed by...

Provision: Verses 53-57.

When the hard times which had been foretold by Joseph came upon the land of Egypt, his wise and prudent management of the country's food supplies ensured that there was sufficient for everyone. We read that "There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole of Egypt there was food" (Genesis 41 verse 54). As the shortage of food began to affect the area, Pharaoh told all the people to go to Joseph and do whatever he told them. There was great power vested in this young man from the land of Canaan. God had His man in the right place at the right time! Thank God that this is the story of the ages. Throughout Scripture we can trace instance after instance where God raised up His servants to meet the need of the hour. It is often said that God is never without His witnesses. When He wanted to form a nation to bear His name there was an Abraham; when His people were in slavery under their taskmasters in Egypt He provided a Moses; when they needed a leader to take them into the promised land there was a Joshua, and when He wanted a "man after His own heart" to rule His earthly people, Israel, He took the shepherd lad, David, and made him a king. God had His men available to meet the needs of the hour, and He still does. Whilst these were outstanding characters, there is a sense in which we can all be God's men and women to meet the needs of the day in which we live. There is a little chorus we used to sing as children, which is still true today "There's a work for Jesus none but you can do". You may well think that you are not an outstanding person like Joseph. Indeed you may feel that you are unimportant, but the truth is that if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour He has a work for you to do for Him which is specially provided by Him to meet the very gifts which He has given to you. It is sometimes said that God's call is His enabling. If He calls you into His service, however insignificant the service may seem to be, He will equip you to do it, and obedience to His call is never unimportant to Him.

As we close this week's study we will see that Joseph married a wife in the land of Egypt, and the two sons who were born to him give us a good indication of His close walk with God. His first son he called Manasseh, which means "making forgetful", and Joseph explained his choice of the name by saying "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house" (Genesis 41 verse 51). When his second son arrived he named him Ephraim, meaning "fruitfulness", and Joseph made the comment "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction". After all the persecution he had endured and the opposition he had faced, he was able to give testimony to the fact that God had been faithful. Is that your experience today? If not, take courage from this story of Joseph, for God is still faithful towards all who put their trust in Him.

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9 - Problems To Be Faced! Genesis 42 verses 1-32

The story is told of a young man who was fed up with his strict upbringing so he emigrated to Australia. On his last Sunday in England he attended church in order to please his parents, and the pastor preached on Matthew 12.30 "He that is not with Me is against Me". On board ship, with little to pass his time, he attended a church service, when another preacher spoke on the same text. Some time later, in the city of Melbourne, he dropped in to a church-service and you can imagine his surprise when the preacher in that church again took the text "He that is not with Me is against Me". He realised that God had been following him, and he trusted Christ as his Saviour. Perhaps you have prayed for the conversion of loved ones or friends and wondered if or when God would hear and answer your prayer? Be careful, for He may allow all kinds of problems and difficulties to come into their lives in order to convict their consciences. As Joseph spent long years in prison he must surely have asked God to convict his brothers of their sin. They had "hated him without cause" and planned to kill him! Little did he realise that the day was dawning when their future would lie in his hands and their very lives would depend upon his grace! Let's refresh our memories with the story of Joseph and then look at the relevance of Genesis 42 to us. Joseph was the next to youngest son of Jacob, and quite a favourite of his father. He had been sold into slavery by his older brothers, and after many difficulties and disappointments had ended up in the Egyptian prison along with Pharaoh's former Chief Butler and Chief Baker. He had accurately foretold the meaning of their dreams and when Pharaoh could not find an interpreter for his dreams, the Chief Butler, now re-instated, had remembered Joseph in prison. As a result of this, Joseph had been able to tell the Egyptian ruler the meaning of his dream. There would be seven years of agricultural plenty followed by seven years of famine. He then recommended the ruler to appoint a wise man who could manage the economy in such a way that there would be food available when the days of famine came. Under God's gracious over-ruling Joseph was then appointed as the powerful food-controller, and promoted to the highest position in the land of Egypt, under Pharaoh. Jacob, in Canaan, heard that food was available in Egypt, and sent Joseph's brothers to him to obtain supplies. Joseph immediately recognised his brothers but, because of the lapse of time and change of circumstances, they did not recognise him. In Genesis 42 we will see the Problems Faced, many of which we will find relevant to the day in which we live.

The first problem Joseph's family faced could be called "An Act of God". From the closing verse of Genesis 41 we see that Jacob and his sons, and their families, were facing starvation. These were "God's people" to whom He had promised a special land and through whom the Saviour would come; yet famine had hit them and they didn't know which way to turn. It may be that you are facing bereavement, illness, or separation from loved ones, and you wonder why God has allowed it! Remember that God is not caught by surprise, and this very problem in the lives of Jacob and his family would ultimately result in great blessing. The important point for us to be certain about is that we are in the centre of God's will, for this will ensure God working His purposes out in our lives.

The second problem was guilty memories. Although the news of food in Egypt was wonderful, that was the last place the brothers wanted to visit! They had sold their brother, Joseph, to merchants on their way to Egypt and he could be one of the slaves helping distribute the food! Jacob was perplexed; he had given his sons "a life line", yet all they could do was stand and look at each other (verse 1). At long last, in grace and mercy, God was starting His work of conviction! We must always remember that when we sin, we can deceive others but we cannot deceive God! In Numbers 32 verse 23 Moses told the descendants of some of Joseph's brothers that if they disobeyed the LORD "be sure your sin will find you out". It is a lesson we all need to learn.

The third problem was how Joseph could best handle family differences. When Joseph's brothers stood before him asking for food, he must have wondered just how he would

handle such a difficult situation. He knew them, but they didn't recognise him! What a problem! It seems clear to us that God's hand was upon this man. Joseph's desire to make himself known and freely forgive must take second place to God's will to bring these men to repentance. His brothers thought they had got away with their hatred of him, and their wickedness to their father, but God was beginning to convict them in His own way! The poet wrote "The mills of God grind slowly but they grind exceeding small"! If you are facing family differences, there is no better plan than to humbly put yourself in God's hand and seek His guidance and help!).

The fourth problem was false accusations. Joseph accused his brothers of spying and there seemed to be no way in which they could convince him otherwise. One writer pictures the brothers accusing him of spying when, as a 17 year old youth he found them at Dothan, and now he is "prompting their memories"! It's an interesting suggestion particularly as David was accused of meddling and interfering when his father sent him to visit his brothers on the battlefield!! Perhaps someone I am speaking to today has been falsely accused and you can't handle it. Follow the advice of the hymn-writer and "Take it to the Lord in prayer". Before you feel too sorry for these men, read their reply in verse 11! Joseph's brothers, Simeon & Levi had murdered the whole family of Hamon the Hivite; Judah's son Er was so wicked that God "put him to death" and then Judah had the barefaced effrontery to accuse his daughter-in-law of being the guilty party, after he had committed adultery with her. The whole bunch of them had planned to kill Joseph and then finally had sold him as a slave and deceived their father. Now they call themselves HONEST MEN!! Let us never forget that God knows all about our past lives, and we can never fool Him. What an encouragement it is to add that because the Lord Jesus died upon the cross for sinners, He is ready and willing to pardon and cleanse all who will come to Him in repentance and faith. Our guilty past can be totally blotted out, for Hebrews 10 verse 17 tells us "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more".

The fifth problem was personal suffering. For three days these men were in prison, and at last their consciences were being pricked (verses 17-23). They had no idea that this Governor, who spoke through an interpreter, could understand every word they spoke! God sometimes has to bring us to a place of solitude in order to speak more powerfully to us! The writer to the Hebrews advises us "not to despise the chastening of the Lord nor be discouraged when we are rebuked by Him" (Hebrews 12 verse 5).

The sixth problem was a family break-up. Simeon was bound before their eyes and would stay in prison until they returned with Benjamin. The brothers wondered just how they could explain this to their father. He had already lost Joseph, and it would appear that he was going to lose another son! If that's where you are today, take it in prayer to the God who really cares!

The seventh problem was fraud or theft. For the first time God's name was mentioned as they discovered the money in their sacks. In fear they cried out "What is this that God has done to us?" (verse 28). Conviction of sin was coming at long last!

The eighth problem was Jacob's dilemma! His heart had been broken by the loss of Joseph, and now he feared he had lost a second son, Simeon, and was in danger of losing his youngest, Benjamin. How forlorn he must have looked as he cried "Everything is against me" (verse 36)! No doubt I am speaking to someone who feels just like that today. Well be assured that God isn't against you. He is the One who gave His Son to die for you, and He longs to be your Saviour and Friend. Will you turn to Him today?

The Life Of Joseph - From Prison To Prime Minister

10 - Passing The Test! Genesis 42 verse 33, and 44 verse 16

As we have looked at the life of Joseph, we have seen him trusting God in almost impossible situations and finally, by God's providence, he had been promoted to the position of Prime Minister of Egypt, the greatest nation of the day. Famine had hit the entire area, and his brothers, who sold him into slavery many years earlier, had returned

to their father, Jacob, in Canaan, with the generous supplies of food provided by Joseph, but also with some startling news. They are faced with...

A problem. The brothers explained to their father that this powerful courtier, whom they had not recognised as their long-lost brother, had kept Simeon as an hostage until they returned with their youngest brother, Benjamin. Jacob was distraught, confidently assuring them that there was no way he would allow them to take his youngest son back to Egypt. Such bold talking was all very well as long as they had supplies of food, but as they began to run out, the brothers again put pressure on Jacob, saying "The man warned us solemnly 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you'" (Genesis 43 verse 3). What a lesson this is for us! Many years before, Jacob had deceived his brother, Esau, and his father, Isaac, now he is reaping a little of the wild oats he had sown. God was testing him to see if he had learnt his lesson. Perhaps you have hurt someone close to you, and you think you have got away with it. It seems that there is no possibility of your sin ever catching up with you. We must never forget that God is the One with whom we all have to do! Even if our sin is not revealed during our earthly life, the Word of God assures us that ultimately we will all have to give an account to God. If we do not know Him as a personal Saviour and Friend, we will stand before the Great White Throne of God and, as Revelation 20 verse 12 tells us, the dead will be "judged according to what they have done as recorded in the books". Even if we are true believers, "Each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Roman 14 verse 12) at The Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5 verse 10). This is not to judge us for our sins, but to determine the nature of our reward.

To return to our story, we will see next...

A proposition. It is to the credit of Judah, Jacob's fourth eldest son, that he manfully undertook responsibility for Benjamin's safety, saying "I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him" (Genesis 43 verse 9). At long last the brothers were beginning to "stand up and be counted". As you listen to this programme, may I ask you a personal question? How do you respond when "the chips are down"? When the pressure is on, and the road is uphill and rough, do you stand up for truth and righteousness, or do you simply follow the crowd? Finally, after a great deal of persuading by his sons, Jacob agreed to let Benjamin return to Egypt with them, as they went again in search of more food supplies.

As the brothers set off for Egypt, they not only took money for the food but also presents for Joseph. When the travellers arrived at Egypt they were given special treatment, being shown into Joseph's house, where a sumptuous meal was prepared for them. You can imagine their consternation! They said, one to another, "He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys" (Genesis 43 verse 18). These were, of course, the very men who had dealt so treacherously with Joseph, their brother, selling him into slavery. Now, like their father, they were being given a stern lesson which they would never forget. Sometimes we, as Christians, need to be disciplined. God's Word reminds us that fathers discipline their sons in order to teach them lessons, then it proceeds to say that in the same way "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness" (Hebrews 12 verse 10). When we feel God's hand upon us in discipline, we should always endeavour to discover what He is trying to teach us. God was really working in the lives of these tough men, and they were quick to approach Joseph's steward to inform him that although they had paid for the food supplied on their previous visit, their money was discovered in their sacks on the homeward journey. The

Egyptian steward then gave a quite remarkable testimony: "It's all right, don't be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver". Then he brought their brother, Simeon, out to them, and to their amazement, he took them into Joseph's own house, giving them water to wash their feet and food for their donkeys.

Eventually Joseph came into the room. It was a very touching scene as he saw his younger brother, Benjamin, and he hurried into a side room in order to weep. Here was the Prime Minister of Egypt, with major international responsibilities, yet he was deeply moved as he saw the youngest member of his family. Here, too, is a challenge for us. There are times when we become so ambitious and materialistic, that family matters come a long way down our list of priorities. There are many husbands who neglect their wives and families in order to succeed materially, and many family members who couldn't care less what happens to their brothers and sisters. We must remember that it is God who has established the family unit, and we will always lose out if we allow our relationships to be weakened.

Finally we see...

A plot. There were to be more tests for the brothers, however, before Joseph would be satisfied that they had learnt their lesson.

First of all, to their amazement, he sat them down in order of aGenesis The Bible record says "They were astonished". Then, as the food was being served, Joseph instructed his servants to place special portions before his younger brother, Benjamin. No doubt he remembered that it was the way in which his father had favoured him as a young lad, that had fuelled his brothers' jealousy. This act of giving Benjamin special treatment was to lead up to the final test! Thankfully they appear to have stood up well to this examination, for there is no record of any dissension.

Then followed the crunch line. This was to be the final trial to see how well they had passed the tests! As Joseph's servants filled the sacks of his brothers with food, they returned their silver payments in the mouth of each sack, and then placed Joseph's special silver cup in Benjamin's sack. As soon as the new day dawned the men were sent on their homeward journey, and they hadn't gone far when Joseph's steward caught up with them and accused them of stealing his master's silver cup. The brothers were indignant in their denials, but as the sacks were searched, and the cup was found in Benjamin's, their distress knew no limits. When they faced Joseph, who doubtless looked very stern, they threw themselves on the ground before him as Judah remarked "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves - we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup" (Genesis 44 verse 16). They are beginning to pass this test with flying colours, although we will have to wait until our next study in order to see the final outcome! No doubt Joseph, knowing that his brothers were really innocent, was thrilled to hear them back their young brother so wholeheartedly. What a different group of men this was from the one which had plotted and schemed to kill him as he visited them in the fields of Dothan. God had worked in their hearts in an amazing way, and so far they had passed all the tests put to them by Joseph.

What an encouragement it is for those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, to read the words of 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but...He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it". These words were not only written for the Christians living at that time, but are a promise we can claim with complete confidence. God is faithful; He will give you the strength to resist temptation, if you will depend upon Him totally.

The Life Of Joseph - From Prison To Prime Minister

11 - Courage Surfaces! Genesis 44 verses 17-34

The study of the life of Joseph has been fascinating. We have seen him betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery; falsely imprisoned for a charge of which he was totally innocent; forgotten by a man he had befriended; but finally promoted to the position of Prime Minister of Egypt. Meanwhile a famine had hit the area and the same brothers who treated him so badly had come to him for food. The brothers didn't know it, but the ruler before whom they stood was the same brother they had sold to the merchantmen some 22 years earlier. They didn't know him, but he recognised them; they're a bit older and they've lost some of their hardness, but he would know their voices anywhere. The last time he heard them they were laughing at him; they'd put him in the pit; now it's his chance to get even. Thankfully, that's not what was in Joseph's mind, but he did need to know if these men had learnt their lesson. So he set a plot in motion by putting his silver cup in Benjamin's sack, where it was discovered by his steward. There was one certain way of discovering the real state of his brothers' hearts; would they save their own skins and hand Benjamin over to the same fate to which they had subjected him or had there been a real change of heart? Time alone would tell, but the plan was being carefully formulated as Joseph told his steward exactly what to do. Jewish tradition says that this steward was Manasseh, Joseph's firstborn son, and if so he must have really entered into the plan with his father as he faithfully followed his instructions. Just picture the scene, as eleven tough men spoke to Joseph through an interpreter, not realising that he understood every word they said!

He told them that Benjamin, their younger brother, in whose possession the "planted" cup had been found, must stay behind as they returned home to their father with the food. Was Joseph being vindictive when he subjected his brothers to the harsh treatment of false accusation, imprisonment and the threat of slavery, or did he have a clear objective in mind? As this story unfolds we begin to see the workings of Joseph's mind and it is clear that he wanted to thoroughly test his brothers to see if they had genuinely repented.

Our study this week will concentrate on Judah, one of Joseph's older brothers, and we will see his Courtesy, Courage and Commitment.

COURTESY. Perhaps for one of the first times in his life, Judah now stood up for truth and righteousness. He faced a powerful diplomat of the Egyptian court and with Eastern courtesy asked for permission to speak. He then

acknowledged that he was equal to Pharaoh himself, using such words and phrases as "Please" and "...don't let my lord be angry". He reminded him of their aged father back home who had already lost one son, and whose only other son by that marriage was the one he proposed to keep in the court. He stressed that if Benjamin was detained, it would kill their aged father. It was a speech of great courtesy; a model for those of us who claim to be Christians and sometimes have to address people in authority over us. Judah's speech has been called "the most moving address in all the word of God" and "one of the masterpieces of Hebrew composition". We are reminded of the Apostle Paul, who told his readers to "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4 verse 6). When writing to the Ephesian Christians he said "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs." (Ephesians 4 verse 29). We have probably all met Christians who have so encouraged us by the words they have spoken, that our spirits have been lifted, and our step quickened. Then, sadly, there have been others who have caused us discouragement, and have made the Christian life just that much harder to live. May we take a leaf out of Judah's book, as he spoke so well to the ruler, Joseph. Next we will see his...

COURAGENESIS This was not reckoned to be a time of fair trials. If a ruler took a dislike to a foreign visitor or to a servant, execution awaited them. You will remember that we

have already seen the Chief Baker executed on Pharaoh's birthday. The reason is not given, but it could well have been as small a matter as the burning of some cakes! Judah and his brothers probably knew the way in which they could be treated if they overstepped the mark, yet with superb courage this man stood in front of Joseph and pleaded for his young brother. It must have warmed Joseph's heart to see the total change that had come over his brother, Judah, since the day when he had suggested that they sold him to the Ishmaelite merchants, as they travelled through the desert. Joseph could probably still hear Judah's voice ringing in his ears, even as he stood before him "What will we gain if we kill our brother...let's sell him to the Ishmaelites..." (Genesis 37 verse 27). There was no desire then to stand up and be counted. There was no thought of resisting the wishes of the other brothers, and pleading for Joseph at that time. It would seem that the discipline of these last few months of famine had worked wonders in the man's heart. Can I ask you a personal question? Do you really believe that God can change you, or have you given up? When the hard times come into your life do you complain bitterly, or try to learn patience, sympathy and understanding? When writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul could say "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5 verses 3-4).

COMMITMENT.

Now, the five parts of Judah's speech reveal something of his changed character...

...His Humility. Verse 18. Notice how courteous Judah was in his approach to Joseph, and how humble in his attitude. There was no bravado; no "heroics"; no excuses; just an acknowledgment that God had uncovered their guilt. Let us pause and ask ourselves if we are more ready to defend ourselves than to accept our wrong-doing? We also need to offer the prayer penned by a godly man some years ago "Forbid that I should fail to show to those nearest to me the sympathy and consideration which Thy grace enables me to show to others with whom I have to do". This calls for real humility! Next we see...

...His Psychology. Verses 19-23. In a most straightforward way Judah then recounted the previous conversation of Joseph. Very gently, but powerfully he told the mighty Governor that all this had happened because they had followed his instructions and brought their young brother to Egypt. Jesus told his disciples to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves and this is a lesson which we all need to learn. He then revealed...

...His Honesty. Verses 24-29. Everything was detailed, just as it had occurred. Joseph must have been impressed by the careful and honest way in which this previously devious brother recounted the events. Paul could say "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man", and when he wrote to the Corinthians he said "We do not use deception". But as the speech of Judah proceeds we see...

...His Quandary. Verses 30-31. By the time Judah told Joseph that the holding of Benjamin would "bring the grey head of their father down to the grave in sorrow" he must have been very close to tears, and Joseph himself must have been near to breaking his heart. This was the father whom he hadn't seen for over 20 years; the one who had given him the special coat, and who had loved his mother so dearly. There seemed to be no way out; but God knew the end from the beginning. Judah then made his final plea, and shining through all the other characteristics we see...

...His Bravery. Verses 32-34. Willingly and courageously he placed himself in Joseph's hands, pleading with him to take him and let Benjamin go free. And remember that Judah only saw this stern figure in front of him as the Prime Minister of Egypt, with almost unlimited power! This truly was sacrificial love but it is nothing compared with the love of the Lord Jesus, who gave Himself for His enemies!

We can never reach the perfect standard of Jesus, but how well do we measure up to this remarkable example of Judah? We are commanded to love one another, and that love must be shown in practical ways.

The Life Of Joseph - From Prison To Prime Minister

12 - Joseph Reveals Himself! Genesis 45 verse 1 and 46 verse 34

In our last study we saw the fear of Joseph's brothers as they faced up to the challenge of leaving their young brother Benjamin behind, whilst they returned home. They had passed the test with flying colours, as with courage and faith Judah offered to take his place, as a willing substitute. Little did they know that a far greater One of the tribe of Judah would become the substitute for sinners upon the cross of Calvary many centuries later.

As we study Genesis chapters 45 and 46 we will discover a Revelation, a Realisation and a Reunion...

A REVELATION

We can picture the scene as Joseph decided that the time had come when he could safely reveal his identity to his brothers. He was the Prime Minister of the great nation of Egypt, and his brothers were still shepherds from a distant land. He was the one they sold into slavery and he was the one who had them at his mercy. They were in desperate need of food in a time of famine, and he was the one who would decide whether or not they received it. Now we see this powerful ruler telling all his servants and courtiers to leave the room whilst, in mercy and grace, he revealed himself to his brothers. We enter into the pathos of the situation as Joseph wept aloud, and the civil servants outside his room listened in wonder. He told his brothers to come near to him and tenderly revealed himself: "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" We read that his brothers were terrified at his presence. No doubt they thought that their end had come as their brother took revenge for all the ill-treatment they had given to him so many years ago. Yet all Joseph could think about was his father's health, and the welfare of his family. What a beautiful picture this presents of the Lord Jesus, who was abused by so many people, mocked, scourged, spat upon, and finally rejected and hung upon a cross. Did he seek revenge? No! We read that he prayed for his persecutors "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23 verse 34). This was matchless grace. Love which we can never really understand. Yet the message comes through to us in our day, for although we did not physically abuse and crucify the Lord Jesus, it was for our sins that He suffered upon the cross. He had our welfare at heart. He was seeking our forgiveness. As Peter puts it, so graphically, "He Himself

bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2 verse 24). Have you repented of your sin, and thanked Him for taking your punishment. That is the only way for you to experience God's forgiveness and blessing.

A REALISATION

At last the brothers grasped the wonderful truth that this really was Joseph, whom they thought to be dead. He was not seeking revenge, but genuinely wanted to forgive them, and be the means of blessing to them and their families. He explained to them that this had all been part of God's plan, so that through being promoted to the position of Prime Minister, he could provide them with food. Although the way he was sold into slavery was harsh and brutal, he had to take that rough and stony path, so that in being exalted to a position of power in Egypt he could be the one who would ensure that God's purpose for Jacob and his sons was realised. He had been sent before them in order to be their saviour. They recognised that this was the one they had rejected, and he was welcoming them back into fellowship with him. This reminds us of a great New Testament truth. The One whom we have rejected, and whose fellowship we have spurned, is the One who has given Himself for us in sacrificial love. He took the hard and rough path to Calvary's cross in order to become our Saviour.

The next words of Joseph must have sent a chill into the hearts of the brothers: "Now hurry back 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; don't delay ...you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come.'" It must suddenly have occurred to Joseph's brothers that the lie they had been living with for so many years was now over. Their father still believed the tale they had told him that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal, now they would have to confess to their deception. With a brother like Joseph, and in such a powerful position, he would insist upon them telling the truth. They must have had some very uncomfortable moments on that homeward journey. All they could hope for was that the good news of Joseph still being alive might take away the shock their father would experience when he realised that his own sons had deceived him so cruelly. Perhaps I am speaking to someone today who has been living a lie. You've been deceiving someone very close to you; your father or mother, husband or wife, or your parents or children. Now God is speaking to you, telling you to confess your sin. May I encourage you with the words of 1 John 1 verse 9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Such confession must not only be to God, but also to the people we have sinned against. When the Biblical instructions are followed, God's forgiveness will be freely given.

A REUNION

After a time of weeping together with Joseph, the brothers took their leave, and we next see them in their home surroundings, breaking the news to their father. At first he just would not believe them, but when he saw the food and presents Joseph had sent, carried by no less than twenty donkeys, his spirit revived and he said to them "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

Just in case there were still lingering doubts in the mind of Jacob, God appeared to him in a dream, giving him all the assurance he needed that this journey was the right one to take. God again gave him the promise that He would make him a great nation and would bring him back to the land again.

As soon as the party arrived in Goshen, which had been allotted to them by Pharaoh, Joseph prepared his chariot and went down to meet the father he hadn't seen for so many years. It was a touching reunion, as Joseph, the powerful courtier met his father. The record tells us "As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time" (Genesis 46 verse 29).

Joseph then left no stone unturned to ensure that his father and brothers settled into their new homeland quickly and happily. He told them that he would spell out the position to Pharaoh, explaining that his family followed the trade of shepherds, which was a detestable occupation to the Egyptians. Knowing his brothers as well as he did, he told them that when they were officially asked what their occupation was, they had to make it clear that they were shepherds. He also told them that this was going to ensure that they were left alone in the area of Goshen, for once the Egyptians knew that it was occupied by shepherds they would give it a wide berth.

Here we see again God's gracious provision, for had Jacob's sons followed a trade acceptable to the Egyptians there would almost certainly have been inter-marriage, and their faith in the One True God would have soon been watered down. Only by remaining a separate people could the Lord fulfil His purpose of forming from them a nation for Himself.

There are clear lessons in this study for us at the beginning of a new millennium. We need to search our hearts to ensure that we have no unconfessed sin; we should also make sure that we have no unresolved family conflict. If we have, it needs to be settled as a matter of urgency. Then, finally, we see from God's over-ruling in the life of Joseph, that if we are walking in line with God's will, we can safely leave the outcome of our lives to Him. He will never fail those who completely trust Him.

The Life Of Joseph - From Prison To Prime Minister

13 - Salvation Calls For Service Genesis 47 verses 13-31

He was born in 1879 in the small town of Rangpur in Pakistan, and had a distinguished academic career, being educated at Oxford University, and was Master of University College Oxford from 1937-44. But his memory is honoured by millions of people, whose lives have been changed and enhanced, not by his academic career, but by his short term as a Liberal Member of Parliament from 1944 when he introduced the Beveridge Plan, a blueprint for social security and the welfare state. Great Britain would surely have been the poorer were it not for the great work of William Henry Beveridge who was created Baron Beveridge of Tuggal in 1946 for his outstanding contribution to the welfare of this nation. Nearly 4000 years ago Egypt was a major world power, with an unequalled record in its culture, literature, the arts, mathematics and military prowess, yet it was facing total extinction. Famine had hit it as never before and had it not been for God's gracious provision in raising up Joseph, the history books would have had to be re-written. Millions of people owed their lives to this outstanding man, who was known as their saviour. The nation was facing...

Starvation - Verses 13 -15

... No Food! Verse 13 tells us that "There was no food in the whole region because the famine was severe". Joseph was their only hope and if he got things wrong they were on their way out! We are also told in verse 13 that...

... Countries Wasted Away! Both Egypt and Canaan were really up against it; they had their backs to the wall! What a picture of civilisation today. There is a spiritual and moral famine in the nations of the world like a threatening cloud. We have seen national leaders accused of bribery and corruption, and even in the so-called Christian country of England there has been a decline of moral standards which has been frightening. Immorality and sexual abuse is widespread with paedophiles being found in positions of authority and responsibility. The suicide rate of the under 24's has doubled in the past 10 years and news that would have hit the headlines of the national press only 20 years ago is now treated as normal. Members of the British Cabinet are reported as saying that they want all children to be taught that homosexual relationships are as normal as heterosexual! Today marriage is generally regarded as an outdated institution; it is called a meaningless ceremony with an equally meaningless bit of paper! Before we criticise the politicians, we need to ask ourselves what kind of example do we, as Christians, give to the world? Do we commend Christian marriage, or is there constant bickering and quarrelling. These are questions which demand an answer!. In Old Testament days, at the end of the period of the judges, it was recorded that "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21.25) and shortly afterwards we read that "the Word of God was rare in those days" (1 Sam.3.1). There was no "spiritual food" to strengthen their moral fibre, no God-given word to guide and correct them and today is an echo of that scene. Too often the Church is weak, even impotent, offering no solutions to the problems of life and having no influence in the world at large. Many people see it as a total irrelevance. The Bishop of Edinburgh has said "God knew when He made us that He has given us a built-in sex drive to go out and sow our seeds. He has given us promiscuous genes. I think it would be wrong for the church to condemn people who have followed their instincts". With such a lead it is small wonder that according to Newsweek magazine, in the USA sexually transmitted diseases strike 3 million teenagers every year.

In the land of Egypt at the time of Joseph the prospect was bleak and starvation threatened the people....

... Death was Imminent. But let us make no mistake about it, there is a far more serious threat than physical death. Eternity is as real today as it was when Jesus warned his hearers to "flee from the coming wrath". We might well ask "is there no hope?" Is

there no spiritual food to feed the starving multitudes? Thank God that when Egypt faced death and even extinction, in a desperate situation He had provided a Saviour and...

... They Came to Joseph! He was their only hope. Would he let them down? Would he make impossible demands upon them or even refuse them because of their poverty? Their very lives hung on the answer to such questions. How could he handle such an impossible situation? There had to be...

Surrender - Verses 16-26

... Joseph Brought Salvation. Thankfully Joseph was God's deliverer to meet the needs of the hour. We, too, can thank God that He has not left us without hope. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Unchangeable One. Do you and I really take advantage of the free and full salvation available in Christ? New political leaders may bring relief to some, but only Christ is the real answer! Joseph appointed commissioners to help him, and in a similar way we are called to spread the news of salvation in Christ.! In verses 18 and 19 we see that...

... They Came to an End of Themselves. There was no pretence, no offers to pay if they were given time. They were destitute and they knew it. Spiritually this is man's greatest need; we must realise that we are lost without Christ; that He alone can satisfy the deep hunger of our hearts; that only Christ can quench the thirst of our souls! If you don't know Christ as your Saviour then this is your greatest need. We can no more provide for our spiritual needs than could the people of Egypt provide food for their bodies! Joseph alone could meet the physical needs of the people of Egypt, and when he had done this he told them...

... I Have Bought You. He had saved them, so their lives now belonged to Pharaoh, whom he represented and served. This is a powerful picture of the way in which Paul reminded his readers that they were "not their own; they were bought with a price", therefore they should honour God with their bodies which belonged to Him. When writing to the Christians in Rome Paul challenged them to "offer their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God".

These are important issues which we should all take to heart, for they apply to Christians of our day as much as to those to whom they were originally written! Finally we see...

Sadness - Verses 27-31

... Seventeen Wonderful Years. It is remarkable that Jacob enjoyed Joseph for the first 17 years of the boy's life and finally for the last 17 years of his own life! His son had cared for him and provided for him. In the midst of a terrible national famine Joseph had made sure that his father and brothers had everything they needed (verse 27) and as well as Joseph being Prime Minister, he had five sons in Government service (Genesis 47 verses 1-6)! Now the time has come for Jacob to leave this pleasant scene, and he has important business to transact! So he calls for Joseph, as his executor, and tells him...

... Israel Must Die. The wording of verse 29 in the Hebrew is strong, with an emphasis on Israel MUST die. This is a timely reminder to us that "it is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgement (Hebrews 9.27)". We should all live our lives in view of the Judgement Seat of Christ, so that, as John says, "we may not be ashamed before Him" (1 Jn.2.28)). The Bible is a book of life and rarely deals at length with deathbed scenes. Abraham's death is described in a few verses, Isaac's death is told briefly; so is the death of Joseph. In the New Testament the deaths of most of the chief characters are not even mentioned. In the light of this it is somewhat surprising to find that the death of Jacob occupies 73 verses, covering part of four chapters.

... "When I Rest with my Fathers". This was a clear witness to his faith in a life to come. He knew his life did not end at death. There was a glorious future awaiting him! He was going to be re-united with his father, Isaac, and his grandfather, Abraham.

... "Bury Me Where They are Buried". He wanted his body to be "in the Promised Land" to which he knew Israel was going to return! He relied on the promises of God - Hebrews 11 counts him as one of the men of faith!

We need to determine by God's grace to stand up and be counted. To be His representatives in a desperately needy world!