

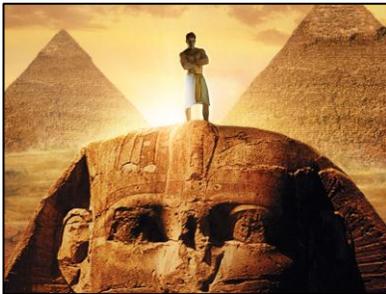
# The Story of Joseph

## *Primed Minister*

Part 33 – November 25, 2012



Previously, we looked at the Old Testament as Jesus' boyhood Bible, and we pondered how the One who had "emptied Himself" (Phil 2:7) must've poured through it as He "grew in wisdom and favor with God". (Luke 2:52) And how the Holy Spirit would've primed Him with the story of Joseph, the great foreshadow of the Christ, because it reveals volumes regarding His identity. He's sent by his father, out of concern for his children, the sons of Israel, who reject him, abuse him, betray him, and try to cover their sin with goat's blood to offer to the father.



He's sold for silver, stripped of glory, and made a servant. Mistreated, tempted, falsely accused, and sentenced to suffer for sins he didn't commit. He finds himself between two criminals, one he saves, and one he cannot. Though abandoned and forgotten, He is raised up, restored, and exalted on high, to offer salvation and life to a starving world. If we dismiss this as a fairytale, or something to rush through on the way to the New Testament, we *miss all this* and more!

We're right where the story sounds *most* like a fairytale: a despised, Hebrew prisoner interprets the king's dreams, and though it'll take 7 years to confirm, he's promptly made Prime Minister.

[After consulting with his officials, Pharaoh declares to Joseph] "You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you." – Genesis 41:40 NIV

It is an unreal moment to be sure! Imagine Joseph trying to comprehend something so unexpected and unimaginable: "I'm in charge of *what?* The *palace* and all the *people?*! Second only to *Pharaoh?* Potiphar ... am I *dreaming?*!" But, this *isn't* a fairytale, and Pharaoh *isn't* an idiot; God is sovereign! He has orchestrated every event, primed every person, and perfectly timed this moment, so that something so *seemingly outlandish* suddenly becomes so incredibly, obviously *right*.



Tomb of Maiherpri



Senusret I



Famine Stela at Aswan

Let's sum up several sermons to see how this happened: Joseph clarified Pharaoh's dreams in a way that rang true, in part because of a recent famine under his grandpa, and a legendary, nationwide, 7-year drought.

The king's closest confidant, the cupbearer, provides concrete proof of Joseph's prophetic superiority. (41:12-13)

The captain of the king's bodyguard can testify to 13 years of unparalleled stewardship and administrative skills, as well as his honesty, integrity, and humility, and also how the God of Joseph has *blessed everything* Joseph has put his hands to! (39:5) Joseph has not only labored in Potiphar's fields with grain production, but he's also headed up the management side. (39:3)



Field workers: Tomb of Menna, c. 1400 BC; Granary model: Tomb of Meketre, 1981-1975 BC

And his wisdom is on full display when his uninvited advice to Pharaoh reflexively flows out: "You'll need a trusted man in charge of the whole land, commissioners to collect a 7-year, emergency grain tax, and government grain reserves in every city. Uh ... is it okay I said all that? I was just thinking out loud." (41:33-36)



The nomes of northern Egypt

And it's clear that Joseph wouldn't be corrupted by the power, having corrected and discouraged Pharaoh's praise of him. (41:15-16) Pharaoh can see for himself the unique blend of confidence, authority, and people skills that would be critical to sell such a plan to the 42 Nomarchs (Nobel provincial governors) who share Pharaoh's power. And lest we forget, Joseph *himself* is a (kidnapped) Nobel Prince, of the province of Israel, in the land of Canaan.

And serving the VIPs in the royal holding pen, over the past few years, has made Joseph well known and well regarded among the Nobel class. Joseph has been primed for this moment of greatness, but now God must remove His hands to allow free will. So, what'll Joseph do? What would *you* do ... glorify God or serve yourself? Nothing can suffocate our faith like earthly success! Yes, Joseph has gained the whole world, but will he forfeit his soul?

So [the word, "so", designates a change of venue. Pharaoh has privately appointed Joseph; now he publically installs and rewards him] Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." – Genesis 41:41 NIV

This, and what follows, seems like more *bibbidi-bobbidi-boo*; but every last bit became a political and strategic necessity the moment Pharaoh told his officials he was appointing Joseph: "Okay, okay. He's gonna need authority to carry this out ... a *lot* of authority! We got'a give him *greatness*! He'll have to be, like ... *2nd in command* ... and he's a *Hebrew*! Wow. He'll need, um, *freedom*. Potiphar? Done? And he can't wear *that*! He needs royal robes, titles, an honorary Egyptian name, and an Egyptian *wife*! My personal high priest at On has a daughter; there's no religious figure more respected. Okay, a public ceremony: I can give him my signet ring, the gold of valor ... we'll parade him in my second chariot; let's do it big: runners, horns, presenters. Is somebody making a *list*?!"

Then Pharaoh [Most likely Sensusret II, 4th Pharaoh of the 12th Dynasty] took his signet ring [the 'platinum charge card' that granted his full authority] from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. [Making Joseph the Royal Seal Bearer, a position held only by the Prime Minister] – Genesis 41:42a NIV



Scarab Ring of Sithathoryunet, c. 1887–1813 BC

This is not only the *type* of ring he would've used, this one was worn in the palace of Senusret II! Joseph's ring would've been so modern and high-tech and cool: the jeweled scarab rotates to reveal the hieroglyphic engraving used to make an impression! Limitless authority. No budget. Go anywhere. Point. Have it! Do you see *why* God *had to do* what He had to do to prime Joseph to be given *this* and yet use it to glorify God and to serve others?

[Jesus was given the absolute power and authority of God] Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? [Emphasis on "more than"! But, He used it *only* to glorify God and to serve and to save] – Matthew 26:53 NIV

Do you use *your* greatness to glorify God and serve others? "I don't have *greatness*." Ah, but you *do*. To deny it, denounce it, or disregard it, is *great wickedness*. In Jesus' parable, what does He call the one who buries his one talent? "You wicked, lazy servant!" (Mat 25:26) What experiences, tragic and triumphant, stand out in *your* backstory? They've primed you for your authority and ministry. What would it look like if you used 'em to glorify God and serve others? Don't ignore 'em. Don't waste 'em. Don't bury 'em.

He [Pharaoh] dressed him [Joseph] in robes of fine linen ... [And this is *Egyptian* linen, the thread count is off the charts!] – Genesis 41:42b NIV



Linen Tunics from the Tomb of Kha, c. 1428-1351 BC

These Egyptian, linen tunics are 3,400 years old! Even in Joseph's clothing, God reveals the identity of the Savior Joseph foreshadows:

He's given the coat of a beloved son, (37:3) and because of this the sons of Israel take it from him.

He's given the garment of a suffering servant which is seized and stripped from him. (39:12) Then he descends into prison clothes, yet even here, in the dungeon, he's given authority! (39:22) Then he changes into pure white to go before the king. (41:14) And now, he is clothed in full view in the royal robes of ruler-ship.

... and [he] put a gold chain around his neck. [This is known as the Gold of Valor. It's a fairly common, ancient Egyptian reward, but what's *strange*, is that it's awarded to those who've conquered the enemy!] He [Pharaoh] had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command ... – Genesis 41:42c-43a NIV



This is King Tut's chariot, the *Lamborghini* of the day! Imagine that new chariot smell! This wouldn't have been a war chariot (they weren't introduced yet). It was more like a traveling throne. That's why it again refers to Joseph being "second-in-command". Pharaoh said "Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you." Have you noticed how each significant garment marks Joseph as being second-in-command? Second to his father, Jacob. Second to Potiphar. Second to the warden. And now, second to the king.

This is the *penultimate position*; it's what Jesus was called to.



As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

– Matthew 3:16-4:1 NIV

We're called to this very same God-first, *penultimate position*.

You are all sons [i.e. children] of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. – Galatians 3:26-27 NIV

But *this* is where the struggle lies. *This* is where the battle comes: to clothe myself as second-in-command and use my greatness and success and authority to glorify God and to serve others, when I don't *feel* like a son of God ... often just the opposite! Look how the devil came to tempt Jesus in the desert ...



After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." [You see, this temptation isn't about bread as much as it's about validating himself as the Son of God] Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" – Matthew 4:2-4 NIV

And what words had just come from the mouth of God? "This *is* my Son, whom I love; with him I'm well pleased"! The devil comes along and says, "If *you're* God's Son, prove it!" which is pretty much impossible because, as he well knows, my actions often attest to the opposite! But, Jesus stands right up to him and says, "It's not about *proving* it. It's about believing it, receiving it, and embracing it, because the Father has spoken it!"

... and men shouted before him, "Make way!" [Which doesn't mean 'get out of the way', but 'prepare the way' by 'bowing the knee' or 'prostrating yourself'] Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah [ZAF-ee-nath pan-EE-uh] [It might mean "Savior of the world", or "abundance of life"), we don't know for sure. But, we do know the significance: it's a highly exalted, Egyptian name] and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. [He's given a 'holy' bride who abandons her idols for the One True God of Joseph; and his children are half Hebrew and half gentile. Remind you of anyone?] – Genesis 41:43b-45a NIV

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:9-11 NIV

The One who knows you at your most secret and intimate level has spoken! He has said, "You are my child, whom I love; with whom I'm well pleased." So, get going! You've been given greatness, primed for ministry, and called to glorify God and serve others in the exalted name of Jesus!