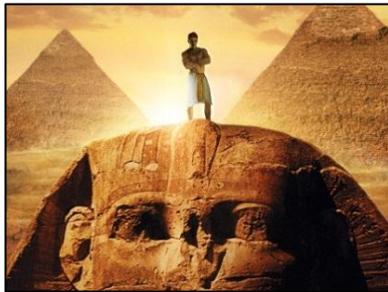


The Story of Joseph

The Harvest Years

Part 34 – December 2, 2012

Last week we saw more striking parallels between Joseph and Jesus, and we talked about how success can suffocate our faith. Joseph has reached the pinnacle of power, prestige, and prosperity!



I'm sure he *thought* he had reached it as Potiphar's Chief Steward, but *now*, from his high position, he can see that he was selling himself short! He's king of the world! Well, second-in-command to king of the world. But, *close enough!* He's got Pharaoh's ring, royal robes, and riches! And he knew he'd been blessed to be a blessing. He understood that God has created each of us with a productive purpose, and a capacity to actually join Him in His work in this hostile world.

And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt. [Assessing available resources, appointing trustworthy regional supervisors, constructing granaries, and collecting and storing the provisions] – Genesis 41:45b



And Potiphar, Captain of the Guard, would've been in charge of the elite security detail that was assigned with keeping Joseph alive! And, because Joseph is a despised Hebrew put in a position of wielding authority over the powerful officials who despise him, Potiphar likely became his personal bodyguard.

The clock is ticking! He has *just* seven years to prepare to feed the world for seven *whole* years! And if he fails ... well, everyone dies!



So, he went through the 42 nomes/provinces, teaching and proclaiming the coming calamity *as well as* the good news of God's gracious provision that would save them all.

It's a picture of just what the One Joseph foreshadows came to do.

The nomes of *northern* Egypt

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. – Matthew 9:35 NIV

And both were given the same *simple* task: save a starving world!

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ... For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life ..." – John 6:35-40a NIV cond.

How many times do you think Joseph prayed something like, “This is too much! It isn’t possible. The math just doesn’t add up!” And it doesn’t. He’s collecting 20% for seven years, to sustain a world that’ll be consuming the other 80% for those *same* seven years. He’s going to come up 60% short ... *without* God’s intervention.

Hold that thought while we remind ourselves who the Pharaoh was.



By lining up clear Biblical timespans with the near-universally accepted Egyptian chronology, we can see that Senusret II (4th king of the 12th Dynasty) is the Pharaoh who promotes Joseph. And the single greatest achievement of Senusret II is a vast, manmade, desert oasis, called Faiyum,¹ irrigated by a ten mile long, 16’ deep, hand dug canal connecting it to the Nile. That small green patch west of the Nile and south of Cairo is Faiyum, 570 miles² (364,800 acres) of fertile agricultural fields where there’d once only been a sea of sand in a desert basin.



This is one of the lakes in Faiyum (which supports about two million people)! Senusret was so proud of his oasis that he chose to be buried next to *it* rather than at his father’s pyramid complex. “This is *better* than a pyramid! This brought *life* where there was no life! Only one thing could make it better ... a pyramid *at* the oasis!” That’s it in the background (at El Lahun).



The industrious canal that made it possible (some of which is *still* in use), is known to modern Egyptians as “Bahr Yussef”.² It’s unknown how far back this name goes. But, what *is known* is that it translates as the “Canal/Waterway of Joseph”; and it’s the *only name* ever documented for this Faiyum canal in recorded history!

So, while old Senusret was building a monument to himself, young Joseph was building a monument to God!

“Bahr Yussef”, or “Joseph’s Canal”

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh’s presence and traveled throughout Egypt. [His mission: to save the world] – Genesis 41:46 NIV

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. [His mission: to save the world] He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph [the carpenter] ... – Luke 3:23a NIV

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faiyum_Oasis

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahr_Yussef

Think of the years prior, the years we know so little about, the years in which Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (John 2:52) In other words: *Jesus' "white space"*. Jesus said, he could do nothing on his *own*, but *only* what the Father *shows* him, (Jn 5:19) *teaches* him, (Jn 8:28) or *tells* him. (Jn 12:49) So, do you think He ever wondered why God would have him spend so many *years* learning to lay tile, set bricks, and sand wood?

And how much notice do you think God gave Jesus when it was time?

[At the wedding in Cana] When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." [And then he promptly turns water into wine] – John 2:3-5 NIV

So, when he said his time hadn't come, was He lying? No. That's sin. Did he do the miracle *against* God's timing? No. *That's* sin. I think we're seeing the moment God said to Jesus, "Now *is* the time! This *is* your moment! The harvest is here! And not one second of your prior life will be wasted!" We're failing to picture the expression on Jesus' face that conveyed this to His mother. "My time has not yet come." Pause. Squint. Cocked head. Wide eyes! Look at mom. "Do whatever he tells you!" Have you ever had one of those moments where God says, "This is your moment"? If not, why not?



Maybe it's the *Peter Pan syndrome*: you refuse to grow up, take on the mantle of maturity, and accept responsibilities and commitments. In Peter Pan, they're called *the lost boys!*



Maybe it's the *opposite*: you see the success you've achieved as an excuse to take life easy and just kind'a coast to the grave. Whatever God gives, He expects us to invest. Don't mistake the harvest years for *leisure* years! You've been blessed to be a blessing and to invest yourself like never before!



Maybe your excuse is, "I work; I'm busy; I'm tired." Yeah? Do you watch the clock? Just waiting to get off work and get out of the workplace? If so, you're squandering a third of your life!

Remember: a day *is* coming when God will look at *His clock* and say, "You don't know it yet, but you're getting off in just a few minutes!"

Can't you hear that clock ticking?! Don't miss your moment. Open your eyes before it's too late. Life is way too short to waste!

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." – John 4:34-35 NIV

Too young. Too old. Too busy. Too tired. Lies. All designed to deceive you into complacency and defraud you of your moment. Whatever your corner in His kingdom, work from the overflow of the abundance of your grateful adoration ... work as worship!



During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it.

– Genesis 41:47-48 NIV

And he most likely oversaw the digging of a canal to a basin of sand that God would bless in a way nobody could've anticipated!

Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; [Initially he and his assistants organized a comprehensive program of conservation, keeping detailed records of the amounts amassed in each storehouse, but there came such an unexpected, overwhelming surplus, his crew just couldn't keep up! Things got *KUH-RAZY!*] it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. – Genesis 41:49 NIV

This isn't figurative! Joseph's labor bore so much fruit, his own numbering system and comprehension of volumes simply gave out. You want a definition of success? Joseph worked so hard, out of a heart of gratitude, to glorify God and to serve others, that he couldn't even keep track of God's blessing ... and he was *trying!*

[Jesus said] "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." – John 15:8 NIV

[And talk about bearing much fruit] Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph [The man was *anything* but idle!] by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh [To Forget] and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." – Genesis 41:50-51 NIV

That's not literal. It's not even possible. If God had actually made him forget his trouble, he couldn't have named his son God-has-made-me-forget-all-my-trouble ... 'cause he wouldn't remember. It's not helpful to forget. It'd mean the loss of hard-earned perspective. And God is nowhere *near* finished with his family! That's another moment, and more work, to come for Joseph. Ironically, every time he called his son's name, he was reminded of all the trouble of his father's household he supposedly forgot. But, the idea is that God had removed the bitter sting of it all.

The second son he named Ephraim [Doubly Fruitful] and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." [I think God's power and glory are never more obvious than when we do the hard work it takes to allow Him to bring a harvest in the 'land' as our suffering] – Genesis 41:52 NIV

No doubt these Hebrew names raised some penciled eyebrows in Egypt where Hebrews were despised. And, no doubt people asked their meaning. And, no doubt Joseph honored God with his answer. Joseph most certainly thought his position in the palace was *for sure* the pinnacle; but, he's selling himself short once again!

All those family troubles, and all his triumphs in the land of his suffering, have simply set the stage for ... next time. And this is where we have to close God's story for today.