

The Story of Joseph

Deeply Ingrained

Part 36 – January 13, 2013



When we left off, the 7-year famine arrived, the king who released Joseph, Senusret II, died, and Little Sen ascended to the throne. Secular scholars puzzle over why the 12th Dynasty's most prolific conqueror and his army sat idle for his first seven years. But they didn't, they were kept quite busy. Grain was stored in *every city*, (41:48) and Egypt was surrounded by starving, enemy nations. And the army was too busy guarding and distributing grain, to defend against raids on every border!

So, chapter 41 *ends* with Joseph's solution to this.

And ***all the countries*** came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world. – Genesis 41:57 NIV

This allowed *spies* into Egypt, which made everyone *spy-paranoid*. So, spies were handled hastily and harshly. And Joseph will use this to his advantage when he accuses his brothers of spying.

Because Joseph foreshadows Jesus, some commentators try to justify his actions, and they miss the whole point: we can't coast to Christlikeness. You have to fight your way there. And you know who you're fighting, right? You - the part that rebels against grace (not the receiving, but the offering). Only *one Savior was perfect*. Joseph turned his back on those who betrayed him, and proclaimed, with the name of his son, that God made him forget [*not forgive*] his father's household. (41:51)



Chapter 42 returns to the Hebrew hillbillies in progress, which once again includes son #4, Judah, who recently returned with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, and the twin sons they conceived when she pretended to be a prostitute. Get it? This family is *messed up!*

Get it? These are God's *chosen people!*

Get it? He *chooses people just like us!*

[Back in Hebron] When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, [At 128, he doesn't get out much. So, when he learns that everyone's been going to Egypt for food, he can't understand the inaction of his sons] he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" [#1 looks at #2, #2 at #3, #3 at #4, but ten out of ten won't look their father in the eyes] He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. [The word Egypt must go off like a bomb in their guilty consciences] Go down there and buy some for us, [glance, glance, glance] so that we may live [avoid, avoid, avoid] and not die." – Genesis 42:1-2 NIV

God knew that nothing short of a famine would get these guys to go to Egypt, confront their sin, repent, seek His will, and find their purpose. And all this goes for Joseph too, by the way.

[So] He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food ... – Psalm 105:16 NIV

That's a *tough verse* ... because His is a *tough love*. He'll never turn his back to you, or stop at *anything* to turn your heart to Him ... except, of course, violating your free will to choose.

God's got a story He's working in you, and a story He's working in those you're connected to, and a much bigger narrative He's using to pull the two into *His story* of grace and forgiveness. It's so important to watch for His hand in *every* bad situation, even when no one's responding. Just watching for Him orients us toward Him, and opens us to more of what He's working in *us*.

Then ten of Joseph's brothers [all except 21-year-old Benjamin, Joseph's only full brother] went down to buy grain from Egypt. – Genesis 42:3 NIV

Imagine their imaginations as they walk the same road 17-year-old Joseph had traveled, bound, enslaved, and desperately pleading. Don't ignore the complexity of the characters in this story, *or* in your life. The most evil person you know is worth every drop of Jesus' blood. And the most holy can't hold a candle to Him. The brothers are 39-45. They have teenage sons who bicker. And now the wickedness of their act, the grief they've caused their dad, and the immaturity of their motive, is weighing heavily.



All this heartache over a robe and two dreams! In the first dream, where the wheat bows down, have you ever noticed that the brothers themselves are in the dream *along with* the sheaves of wheat?

They worked in kilts. And Joseph was handsome and well built. (39:6) And, have you noticed it's *only* the half-brothers and *not* Benjamin? Flashback 21 years ...

"We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field [Benjamin was only about a year old] when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." [Their ability to harvest and provide food for their family is submitting to Joseph's] His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they [without Benjamin] hated him all the more ... – Genesis 37:7-8 NIV

The wheat bowed down in the presence of the brothers, but soon it's they who'll be bowing down in the presence of the wheat.

But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. [He thinks they killed Joseph, and says so at the end of the chapter (42:36)] – Genesis 42:4 NIV

But, he refuses to confront and fails to forgive. And because of that, he's blinded to what God's been doing in his sons (like Judah repenting and returning). To Jacob they'll *never* change. Deeply ingrained bitterness always blinds us to the work God is doing in lives of those who've deeply injured and betrayed us.

In the second dream, where the sun and the moon and 11 stars bow down, what do you picture? How do stars bow? Have you ever noticed they *travel* to earth?

4000 years ago, stars were considered much smaller and far closer. Joseph probably assumed they were about 230 miles away ... like the distance from Hebron to Egypt.



“I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your [step] mother and I and your brothers [The second dream adds Benjamin, as one of the 11 stars] actually come [i.e. travel] and bow down to the ground before you?” [As the objects in his dream had] – Genesis 37:9b-10 NIV

The Hebrew begins with and repeats a key word: “*Coming*, will we *come* to bow ...?” The emphasis of the second dream is on the *extensive traveling* Jacob’s family will undertake in order to bow!

So Israel’s sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. [Jewish oral tradition teaches that some of the brothers decided to search for Joseph. And this is very interesting, because:] Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. – Genesis 42:5-6b NIV



Joseph would’ve had his headquarters, and managed the national program, from the nation’s capital, Itjtawy, [Itch-towie] the same city where Joseph was sold, imprisoned, and promoted.

This means the brothers passed the much closer distribution city of On (in Greek, Heliopolis) (where Joseph’s wife was from), to buy grain in the capital where, coincidentally, Canaanite slaves were sold.

When we caricature people, we miss out on so much of what the Lord is doing in our midst! We tend to *always* see ourselves as *the good guy*, which makes *anyone* who ever offends us, in any way, *the bad guy*. And that allows us to justify violating the obviously revealed will of God. Something someone like Joseph would never do ... *right*?

So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, [surrounded by mountains of grain, men shoveling grain, bagging grain, grain dust everywhere] they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as [the beardless, eye-lined, royal-robed, wigged, headdressed, and blinged-out] Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them ... [Cold sweat. Adrenaline] – Genesis 42:6b-7a NIV

“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” – Abraham Lincoln

So, let the testing begin! In *this corner*: ten pitiful brothers whose lives have become the punishment for their choices. And in *this corner*: the omnipotent Zaphenath-Paneah (the name Pharaoh gave to Joseph in 41:45) who holds life and death in his hand.

... but he pretended to be a stranger [After all he’s done to gain respect, the last thing he wants is to be publically associated with detestable, Hebrew, hillbillies (43:32)] and [Joseph] spoke harshly to them. – Genesis 42:7b NIV

The gentle, faithful, Joseph jumps up and begins heartlessly, mercilessly shouting! Potiphar's Palace Guard, tripping over themselves trying to react to whatever's happening. And the brothers' shock turns to terror when they can't understand a single word of the man who can have 'em killed with a single word!

"Where do you come from?" he asked. [How is this harsh? And why does he ask what he already knows?] "From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food." [You see] Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. [Or understand his devious plan] – Genesis 42:7c-8 NIV

He knew they ventured past the grain city closest to their border. And that's what *spies* do. He's using this to accuse and exterminate what he sees as ten personifications of pure evil. That's harsh, and dishonest, and *brilliant!* And when they're kneeling before ten chopping blocks, he can excuse everyone, slip on a specifically tailored, colorful robe, and say, "My name is Zaphenath-Paneah, you killed your brother, prepare to die!"

But, God interrupts him, mid-accusation ... and stops him cold.

Then he remembered his dreams about them ... – Genesis 42:9a NIV

He wasn't *waiting* for God to fulfill 'em, or *helping* God to fulfill 'em, because he didn't even *remember* having 'em! In all his success, he'd forgotten, repressed, or dismissed his *dreams!* The first has been fulfilled in front of his eyes; so, he *knows* God's plan hasn't changed. And the second reveals what God wants: the rest of Joseph's family to travel to Egypt and join the ten.

And those who justify Joseph, by ignoring the placement of this verse, miss the most defining moment in the entire story! And here it comes ...

Then he remembered his dreams about them [And ... ?!] and said to them, "**You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.**" [Just because we know what's right, doesn't mean we'll do what's right] – Genesis 42:9 NIV

Just like his dad, Joseph's deeply ingrained bitterness blinds him. He could've deduced why they'd bypassed On, and wondered what God was doing. But, he can only see an opportunity to hurt the *bad guys* who hurt him.

To pass *so* many tests *so* successfully *so* far, and throw it away *so* quickly, *so* you can momentarily indulge the flesh, and in so doing, *so* miss, *so* much, of *so* significant a moment, is *so* sad. That's what we do when we caricature. And then, when we take advantage of having the upper hand, we lose even when we win. Instead, you should try to view others the way they'll be talked about at their funeral. And try to live up to the way *you'll* be.

Joseph is about to face the fight of his life, a death match between vengeance and benevolence; because, sweet little Joe, the faithful foreshadow of Jesus, is now hell-bent on revenge. *And because*, 21 years earlier God planted a *secret weapon* in the second dream, and He set it to go off when the brothers arrived. And the incredible scriptural proof of *all this*, is ... *next* Sunday.