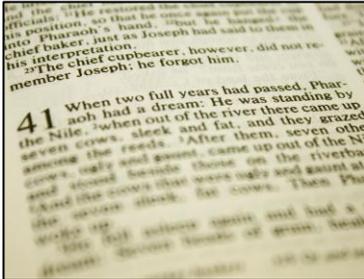


The Story of Joseph

The Black Space

Part 38 – January 27, 2013



Joseph is in a very dark place, turning his back on his God-given dreams, and betraying, falsely accusing, and jailing his brothers.

Remember the white space, when God put Joseph on hold, in prison, for two extra years, while God worked silently in the blank space? This is the polar opposite of *that!*

This is the *black space*.



Instead of the blank space *between* the words, the black space *is* the words! God *is* speaking *and* directing, but Joseph is putting the *Lord* on hold, because he doesn't want to do what he knows God wants him to do.

The 10 brothers are in Egypt to buy grain, because of the famine. And they bowed, unaware, to the brother they sold into slavery.



And as Joseph indicts his oblivious brothers, he recalls a forgotten, 21-year-old dream: Wheat! Ten brothers bowing! Wheat! Their ability to provide subject to *his!* And *wheat!* Fulfilled before his eyes! God is not only speaking, He's interrupting!



And, with the second dream, God is *undoubtedly directing*: 17-year-old Joseph, staring up at space – black space – filled with stars. And then, the sun, moon, and 11 stars (his father, mother, and all 11 brothers) travel a great distance to come to bow to him. (37:9)

But, 38-year-old Joseph is resisting.



“Send one of your number to get your brother; the [9] rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!” And he put them all in custody for three days. – Genesis 42:16-17 NIV

He assumes the brothers will battle over who goes free. But, the real 3-day wrestling match is between *Joseph* and God's revealed will!



Ever wonder why *all* ten brothers went to Egypt?

Well, in a famine, grain is gold, and in a foreign land, protection is paramount. The one returning solo will have to go home with no food, or risk running a 350 mile, Mad Max, grain gauntlet!

And if he dies, and doesn't return, the nine will die as well.

Do you think Joseph realizes he's embodying the *worst* sins of the *worst* sinners of the story: false charges à la Mrs. Potiphar, unjust imprisoning à la Potiphar, and murderous brotherly betrayal?

This is what happens when we *choose* to leave the light and walk disobediently in the dark, leaning on our limited understanding even while knowing we're violating God's ways and God's Word. So, how do you get back to the light of joyful, grateful obedience? Well, it all begins with fear. Good fear. Godly fear.

The fear of the Lord is the **beginning of wisdom** ... – Proverbs 9:10a NIV

Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who **hardens his heart** falls into trouble. – Proverbs 28:14 NIV

Good fear has to do with softening our heart and smartening our brain. It's the distress of disrupting our intimate connection with our Heavenly Father whose wisdom we cannot begin to fathom. It used to be a compliment to be called 'God fearing'. But we've kind of turned Father God into Uncle God. And where there's no fear of defying Him, there's no fear of the consequences of sin.

Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. – Isaiah 50:10 NIV

It's only this reverent fear that leads Joseph out of his three dark days of defiance, and back into the light of reliance.

On the third day, Joseph said to them, ["It's opposite day"] "Do *this* and you will *live*, for I fear God: [singular] If you *are* honest men, ["which I can't imagine; but then, I couldn't have imagined most of what God has done for me. So ..."] let *one* of your brothers stay here in prison, while *the rest* of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But ["this part hasn't changed"] you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die." – Genesis 42:18-20a NIV



To fear God is to *revere* God; to respect God's will and wisdom *so decidedly*, that disobedience can be seen for what it is: *deadly*.

It's like confronting a lion with a trusted guide.

Your natural desire is to turn and run! But, if the guide says, "Stand perfectly still," your fear of the *consequences of defying him* will rightly overrule your own limited impulses.

In fact, if he says, “Raise your hands above your head,” you may not know why; but, you’ll trust and obey ... ‘cause you’re on the buffet!

To fear God is to trust God, above self, with all your heart, and, when the enemy prowls like a lion, (1 Pet 5:8) to lean not on your own limited understanding and natural desires. (Prov 3:5)

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death. -
Proverbs 14:27 NIV

So, during those three defiant days in the black space, what was Joseph resisting? The sudden realization of why God had depicted his creepy, kowtowing, brothers, as stars, in the second dream. He immediately connects *that* imagery and *this* moment, because just about every prophetic promise God had given his grandpa Isaac and great grandpa Abraham had included those stars!

Like when God promised descendants to great grandpa, Abraham.

He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ... Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own.” – Genesis 15:5, 13 NIV

Or when God confirms the promise to Joseph’s grandpa, Isaac ...

Now there was a famine in the land [Why does that sound so familiar?] ... The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, “Do not go down to Egypt ... I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed ...” [Maybe it’s a coincidence that Isaac’s offspring, that *is to go down* to Egypt, is Joseph’s dad, Jacob, the one depicted traveling in Joseph’s dream!] – Genesis 26:1-4 NIV

Oh! Powerslam! Followed by a piledriver! Oh! Powerslam! Followed by a piledriver! How much longer will this kid wrestle with God before admitting he’s just no match?! Here comes the family story he would’ve heard most and known best: when Great Grandpa Abraham was asked to sacrifice *his* son, foreshadowing *God’s* Son. Brilliant! This move should end it!

Look what’s said to Abraham just after God stops the sacrifice.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” ... “because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky ... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” – Genesis 22:12, 16-18 NIV

The Lord said, “Now I know that you fear God ...” And when Joseph goes into the pit in obedience to God, he says, “Do *this* and you will live, for *I* fear God.”

God made a conditional promise to Joseph's family: if they stood firm, they'd become a great nation, in the Promised Land, and He'd ultimately bless the entire world through the seed of Abraham.

"If you destroy your brothers, you'll sacrifice the stars, and cancel the covenant."

All this, concealed in the second dream, to empower Joseph when he'd be *most tempted* to turn his back on the Lion of Judah, and run to his own destruction.

Reverent fear is a blend of amazement and adrenalin (like watching a whale leap next to your rowboat), a fervent aversion to sin, and a passion to protect your most precious relationship. Without Godly fear, we'll sacrifice eternal for temporal, highest good for immediate good, and glorification for gratification.

The Lord also said, "... because you have not withheld from me your son."

"Joseph, what did you name your firstborn son?" "Manasseh." "Meaning?" "To Forget." "To forget who, or what?" "All my trouble ..." "And?" "And all my father's household." (Gen 41:51) "Are you willing to sacrifice what your son represents; and *un-Manasseh* your family?"

When his brothers get home, they'll find their money hidden in their bags of grain. Know why? It was *unthinkable* in Joseph's culture to charge your *own family* for food!



Joseph is facing and embracing his father's estranged household. He's reestablished the severed relationship, making reconciliation now possible on an individual basis. It's nice to see Joseph foreshadowing Jesus again! But, did he stop?

Though Jesus was sinless, He embodied the worst sins, of the worst sinners. For three dark days He became our sin *and* substitute.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. – 2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV

Even in Joseph's disobedience in the black space, he reveals so much about the One he was destined to unknowingly illustrate! For three days, he took on the sin of those who'd sinned against him; but on the third day, in obedience to God, He set the captives free, and refused to let them purchase their salvation.

And by releasing his brothers, he releases God to do His work; and immediately #1 son, Reuben, releases a statement that releases Joseph's heaviest burden, unexpectedly releasing his tears.

And this is where we have to close God's story for today.