

# The Story of Joseph

*Never Say Die*

Part 49 – June 9, 2013



Joseph has been testing his brothers, *not* to see if they're *worthy of his acceptance*, but, if they're capable of *receiving* his love and all he longs to offer – *to see if they'll accept him*. The Good News is *this*:

**We don't need perfect righteousness, just repentant helplessness.**



This is what Joseph is hoping to see when his self-sufficient brothers return with Benjamin and throw themselves before **Zaphenath-Paneah**. This is the name Pharaoh gave to Joseph, and it most likely means either, "**the Salvation of the World**" or "**the Food of Life**".

And, Judah, the lion, risked being beheaded when he boldly approached Joseph's throne in a display of helpless desperation.



Then Judah went up to him and said: "Please, my lord, let your servant speak ... Do not be angry with your servant ... Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. ... please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy ..." – Genesis 44:18-33 NIV *condensed*



Judah puts his hope in Zaphenath-Paneah, the way you'd put your hope in a branch that looks incapable of supporting you, protruding from a cliff, as you slide toward certain death.

It's not that Judah thinks this "branch" will save him, it's that **he's absolutely sure it's his one and only hope**; and **he's done relying on his own absolutely inadequate abilities**.

This is *Mustard Seed faith*. (Mat 17:20) It's so small and weak it doesn't even *look* like faith, but *that's* the point. **It's not the size or strength of your faith that saves you; it's the Object.**

How big and strong does your faith need to be in the branch for the branch to hold you? **It doesn't matter how you *feel* about the branch; all that matters is the branch.** And Jesus is the branch.

"... I am going to bring my servant, the Branch." – Zechariah 3:8b NIV

"Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. **[That's you]** ... he will be clothed with majesty ... And he will be a priest on his throne." – Zechariah 6:12-13 NIV *condensed*



The Hebrew word for **Branch**, (Strong's H6780, *tsemach*) in these verses, (also Isaiah 4:2 and Jeremiah 23:5) means **Sprout, Shoot, or Twig**. Judah reaches out in desperation and, on behalf of his brothers, grabs onto **the seemingly weakest, but secretly strongest, branch in all Egypt**: the branch of their own family tree, which finds its foreshadowed fulfillment in the Lion of Judah, Jesus, *the Branch*, inconceivably, shockingly, firm and fixed and true.

Both the one who makes men holy [Jesus, the Twig] and those who are made holy [who take hold in hope] are of the same family [tree]. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. – Hebrews 2:11 NIV

In that leap of faith, when the brothers throw themselves on Joseph's floor, and Judah throws 'em on his mercy, they transform, in the twinkling of Joseph's teary eyes, from betrayers to brothers.



**Those who refuse to give up on their own devices and grab the Branch never discover its strength.** But, for those who grab on and take hold, well, that's when everything is *revealed!*

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, [in Egyptian] "Have everyone leave my presence!" [Including his interpreter] So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known<sup>1</sup> [not his *identity*, but his *actions*] to his [baffled] brothers. ["I put the cup in Benji's bag! It's not even magic! I returned your silver! I knew you weren't spies! I falsely accused you, unfairly imprisoned you! I was going to kill you! God stopped me! I've been testing you!"] And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians [who had feared leaving him alone with foreign thugs] heard him, [and ran in alarm to their superiors, who immediately reported it to their superiors] and Pharaoh's household heard about it. [And, in between his heaving, gasping, nose-running sobs] Joseph said [In perfect Hebrew – and *not just* their native tongue, but their regional accent, their local dialect, and even their family inflections!] to his brothers, ["Ah-NEE YoSEF!"] "I am Joseph! [And they looked at each other, petrified, with eyes that said, "This pagan Egyptian Magician is ... *channeling our dead brother!*"] [uh'OAT uh'VEE high!"] Is my father still living?" [Now things get weird!] But his brothers were not able to answer him, [Young Jesus would've heard the rabbis laughingly say, that at this moment, their souls shot out of their bodies, and God had to catch 'em, and shove 'em back in!] because they were terrified at his presence. [Yet, *still* not convinced! "This Seer sees *all*, he's tormenting us."] Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." [Spatially *and* relationally; thus commencing the longest shortest journey in Hebrew history] When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, [And, under the running eyeliner, the face of the brother they betrayed began to materialize. "*Our brother? Rachel's son? Father's favorite?*"] the one you sold into Egypt!" – Genesis 45:1-4 NIV

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew, *hitvada'*, 'he made himself known', is homonymous with *hitvadah*, 'he confessed (his sin)'.

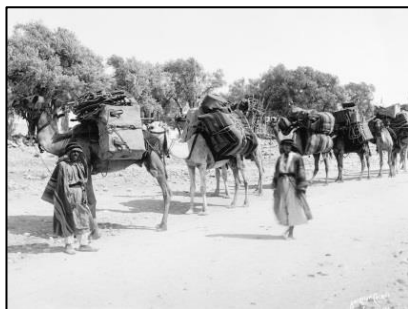
And Reuben's legs became straw, the knees of the 10 men rattled, and Judah, the lion, dashed down the hall and dove through a window ... *not really* ... but, no doubt they are in awes. Reuben thought Joseph had been murdered: "But, they *killed* you." And Benjamin thought he'd been devoured: "How have you returned from the grave? Wait. What do you mean *they* killed him?!"

And, with the sea of emotions washing over his brothers, comes grace upon grace, and mercy upon mercy, as **Joseph radiates God's sovereign love, displayed in His Son, Jesus' heroic sacrifice.**

"And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." – Genesis 45:5 NIV

This is a landmark statement regarding how **God's sovereign plan, for our eternal best, takes into account our sinful actions.** Joseph doesn't *minimize* their sin. **What they did was bad, but God overruled it for good.** And, because they've confessed and repented, **Joseph is freeing them from their guilt and shame.** I am Joseph, you are my brothers, reminds me of, "I am the vine; *you* are the branches." (John 15:5) **Now you can reach out to those who are falling.** "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you **[and you ahead of them]**".

"For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth **[Out of Abraham's eight+ sons<sup>2</sup> and who-knows-how-many grandsons, only his grandson, Jacob and his dysfunctional family has remained faithful to God's covenant with Abraham]** and to save your lives by a great deliverance. **[It was only a matter of time, back in Canaan, before they would've been annihilated or assimilated by the surrounding, idol-worshipping pagans]** So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God." – Genesis 45:6-8a NIV



It's difficult to see where God is sending us, especially when we're sliding down a cliff! It's easier to later see how and why God *sent* us. **God is quite clear in the rearview mirror.** So, **when you're having a hard time seeing the Lord through the windshield, just give it time, and He'll appear in your mirror.** Just remember, **Joseph was a victim of men, but because he was also a servant of God, all his sorrows found their purpose.** He saw that *God* ruled his life, not men or circumstances, good *or* evil.

"He **[God]** made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.<sup>3</sup> **[Zaphenath-Paneah had money and power, all that Egypt could offer and more - anything he wanted! But all he wanted was his father; but, protecting the grain, and providing for the world, prevented him from leaving. So, he said]** 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 shall live in the region of Goshen **[the grazing land he passed through, in chains, when he was brought into Egypt]** ...

<sup>2</sup> Ishmael, by Hagar (Gen 16:15), Isaac, by Sarah (Gen 21:3), and Zimram, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah, by Keturah (Gen 25:1-2). Abraham also had an unknown number of children by his concubines (Gen 25:6).

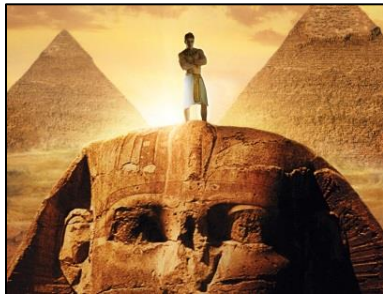
<sup>3</sup> We covered this mysterious Biblical detail (regarding Senusret III), in the sermon, "**Lord of the Feast**" (12/16/12)

... and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, [reassuring them once again that his goal is not revenge, but reconciliation and protection and provision] because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.” – Genesis 45:6-11 NIV

Joseph’s depth of loving kindness and forgiveness is so foreign to his brothers that it actually compounds their *disbelief!*

The rabbis taught that they couldn’t believe this Prime Minister, Royal Vizier, Advisor to Pharaoh, could be *their* brother; so, he hoisted his kilt and showed ‘em the sign of the covenant!

“You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, [who wasn’t old enough when Joseph left to recall what he looked like] that it is really I who am speaking to you. [And he said to Benjamin] Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.” [Only Benjamin will be able to share his news with joy and wonder; the brothers will be too distracted, confessing their sins] Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. [Oh, the things he sees in that rearview mirror! If they wouldn’t have sold him, he would’ve been like ‘em, and wouldn’t have all he has, or be who he is! He could just kiss each and every one of ‘em! So he does!] And he kissed all his brothers [He’s so happy, he could cry! So he does that too!] and wept over them. [And they finally believed] – Genesis 45:13-15a NIV



**Our faith grows as the Lord reveals Himself.** That’s *His gift* to us. When the Branch holds, we know its strength. **Yet, we must humble ourselves, embrace Him completely, and refuse to let go.** That’s *our gift* to Him. And it makes Him weep.

Afterward his brothers talked with him. – Genesis 45:15b NIV

For the first time ... *ever*, as *true brothers*.

**“Grandpa Isaac died about nine years ago.” “Nine years ago? That’s right when Pharaoh promoted me. Grandpa must’ve been pulling some strings!” “You have so many nieces and nephews to meet!” “I have two sons of my own.” “Simeon’s boys wanted to try and rescue him!” “I’d expect nothing less.”**

**“What’d you all think when I had you brought to my house for the banquet?” “We thought you wanted to steal our donkeys!” “That is so funny! Are you serious?” “Yeah. Hey, how we gonna break this to dad?” “Maybe just say, ‘the good news is: Joseph is alive! And, the bad news is ...’ next week.**