



Lesson 4: The Joseph Story

Genesis 37-50

“Are you indeed to reign over us? Or indeed are you to rule over us? So they hated him all the more for his dreams and his words.”

—Genesis 37:8

“His brothers came and fell down before him, “Behold we are your servants.” But Joseph said, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

—Genesis 50:18-20

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The Joseph Story: Chiastic Structure

A Introduction: Joseph dream of rule revealed and despised 37:2-11

B Jacob mourns “death” of Joseph 37:12-36

C Interlude: Judah signified as leader 38:1-30

D Joseph Enslavement in Egypt 39:1-23

E Joseph savior of Egypt through disfavor at Pharaoh’s Court 40:1-41:57

F Journeys of Brothers to Egypt 42:1-43:34

G Brothers pass Joseph’s test of love for brother 44:1-34

G’ Joseph gives up his power over brothers 45:1-28

F’ Migration of family to Egypt 46:1-2

E Joseph savior of family through favor with Pharaoh’s court 46:28-47:12

D’ Joseph’s enslavement of Egyptians 47:13-31

C’ Interlude: Judah blessed as ruler 48:1-49:28

B’ Joseph mourns death of Jacob 49:29-50:14

A’ Conclusion: Joseph dream of rule fulfilled and feared 50:15-26

Joseph’s dream of rule revealed and fulfilled

The initial conflict of the Joseph Story (chapter 37) is caused by two things: the human favor which Jacob shows to Joseph and the divine revelation of the plan of God for Joseph and his brothers. First, Joseph is given “a robe of many colors” and then Joseph is told in a dream that his family would one day bow down to him. The reaction of his eleven brothers was one of hatred and jealousy. The rejection of Joseph and his dream was actually a rejection of the sovereignty of YHWH. The initial conflict is resolved in chapter 50 where indeed his brothers do humbly submit to his rule and God’s.



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“You meant Evil...God meant it for Good”

Divine Providence and Predestination

God’s sovereignty is revealed in a ‘soft’ sovereignty by his invisible hand of guidance ordering, shepherding, leading, protecting and disciplining his people. God is clearly in charge, over and against the deception, pride and failings of his people.

A predetermined outcome is revealed for the 12 brothers in the form of Joseph’s pair of dreams—an outcome that will come to pass. Joseph lacks maturity in the presentation of the dream, he comes across as spoiled and bratty. The brothers in their immaturity hate and despise Joseph for this revelation, “here comes the dreamer!”. While their father Jacob initially questions the ‘hard’ word, the story tells us that he “kept the saying in mind.”

Prophets have always been questioned and despised for the prophetic word which they bear. Ultimately, humanity is rebelling against the LORD’s sovereign will, however it his messengers which bear the brunt of mankind’s wrath. “Which of the prophets did you not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered.” (Acts 7:52)

Human Accountability

Joseph interprets two more pairs of dreams when he is in Egypt. They again reveal the predestination of God. The brothers rebelled against the plan of God. In contrast, the Egyptian hearers recognize and trust the sovereignty of God revealed in the dream and therefore honor the messenger: “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God? Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all of this, there is none discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house...” They furthermore spring into action using the revelation of God’s plan to govern and shape a wise faithful response.

“for carnal persons...to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall...”

--Article 17, The 39 Articles

“What is theologically noteworthy is the way in which the strong predestination content of the speech is combined with a strong summons to action. The fact that God has determined the matter, that God hastens to bring it to pass, is precisely the reason for responsible leaders to take measures!”

—Gerhard von Rad,
Genesis, p. 376



“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat?”

—Genesis 3:11

“You were taught in Christ, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

--Ephesians 4:22-23

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The Cloak and Deception

Throughout the Joseph story runs a cloak theme. Joseph bears three garments which are used to convey or bestow honor and shame.

The Robe of Many Colors

The first cloak is the “robe of many colors”. This cloak symbolizes both the high status and love of his Father and become the object of scorn and jealousy for the brothers. As the story unfolds, he is stripped of his dignity and the cloak is used as a means of deception to “assassinate” Joseph in his father’s heart and mind.

The Garment of Shame

The second cloak is the one that was grabbed by the wife of Potiphar in chapter 39. This cloak was also stripped from Joseph in a heated moment of seduction. While Joseph shows integrity by “leaving his garment in her hand and fleeing”, the garment is then used by Potiphar’s wife to deceptively malign Joseph’s integrity and accuse him falsely to his master.

The Garment of Fine Linen

The final cloak is granted to Joseph by Pharaoh after he “wisely” interprets Pharaoh’s dream. This robe symbolized the status to which God had elevated and blessed Joseph from his humility as discarded brother, a slave, and a prisoner. While humanity, men and women alike, may by force and deception strip a person of his reputation and status. Ultimately, it is the Lord who bestows greatness and authority.

The Scepter shall not depart from Judah

Judah and Tamar

Just as the cloaks are symbols of status and disgrace for Joseph, a ring and a scepter are used to symbolize Judah’s royal status and personal disgrace. Judah ultimately is the one through whom the King of Israel will come (49:8-12). However, he must learn humility and self-control in his leadership.

His staff is his glory and his downfall. Judah’s own sin led him to bestow the signet ring and the staff of his rule as surety for his pledge



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Judah says of Tamar:

“She is more righteous than I...”

--Genesis 38:26

of a goat for a “prostitute”, his daughter-in-law, Tamar (38). Later, Judah would pledge his own life as surety for his brother, Benjamin and show the maturity of a true leader. (44) But not before the symbols of his integrity and authority became the honor of Tamar’s sons and Judah’s disgrace.

Tamar would become the matriarch of the one to whom the “obedience of the nations” belongs. (Genesis 49:10). The Scepter of Judah will be given Him. In Matthew 1:2-3 Judah, Tamar and their son Perez are mentioned prominently in the line of Jesus, the Messiah.

Egypt, Famine and Slavery

The center element of the Joseph Narrative, Genesis 42:1 – 46:2 is the place of character development and reversals. Joseph is given absolute power over his brother’s lives and yet his heart is moved to compassion, love and service of them. The jealousy and hatred of the brothers toward Joseph is reversed to humility and servitude.

Conversion and reconciliation

The turning point of the entire narrative is Judah’s pledge to sacrifice his own life in exchange for that of his brother Benjamin. In that very moment, Joseph “could not control himself.” His emotions flooded in tears for love and forgiveness for his family. The family is reconciled and Judah shows the character of the families true King: one who will lay down his life for his people.

Bondage

The brothers become servants to Joseph and slaves to Egypt in their desperation. Joseph is given pre-eminence over Israel and Egypt for his wisdom and response to the vision of God. Eventually, all of Egypt will sell their freedom and inheritance to Joseph and Pharaoh in order to have their daily bread. While such an exchange is temporarily a blessing, it will prove to be a cruel bondage for the people of Egypt and the Israelites.



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Two Kingdoms

God's promise of the great nation that will ultimately bless all the nations of the world (Gen 12), occurs in the wider context of the universal kingdom of the world. God looks after both his special kingdom and the global kingdom. He speaks and reveals his sovereign will to Joseph and to Pharaoh in dreams. God's universal dominion over the entire world provides food for the preservation of his special unique kingdom. On the other hand, the special kingdom offers to the universal the prophetic voice of God and the mediation of the covenant blessings of God.

Without Egypt, Israel would have starved from a famine of food. Without Israel, Egypt would have starved from a famine of God's revealed word.

Joseph, like Daniel and others who will come later in the story of redemptive history, must learn how to be in the world but not of it—to integrate with and serve the universal kingdom without compromise to it. God can and will continue to preserve and bless the faithful remnant of his people even in the midst of Exile.

Faltering Faith and True Greatness

Matt. 13:54-18:35

Faltering Faith and True Greatness

- Narrative: Resisting Faith in Jesus (13:54 – 17:27)
- Discourse: Ecclesial Sermon: True Greatness within Kingdom Family Life (18:1-35)

Resisting Faith in Jesus

- People of Nazareth: 13:54-58
- Herod and John the Baptist: 14:1-12
- Feeding Five Thousand: 14:13-21
- Walking on Water: 14:22-36
- Dispute with Pharisees: 15:1-20
- Canaanite Woman 15:21-28
- Four Thousand: 15:29-39
- Pharisees and Sadducees: 16:1-12
- Peter's Confession: 16:13-20
- Peter's Rejection: 16:21-27
- Jesus' Transfiguration: 17:1-13
- Young Demoniac: 17:14-23
- Temple Tax: 17:24-27



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All thirteen episodes share the major theme of faith in Jesus. The focus is primarily on the faith of the disciples in particular who consistently falter in having strong faith. Their lack of faith is in direct contrast with the Canaanite woman who is commended, "O woman, great is your faith."

In the first two stories, Jesus is completely rejected. In his home town of Nazareth, Jesus was recognized as one of "wisdom and mighty works" and yet the still took offence at him. "Jesus did not do many mighty works there, because they lacked faith." (13:58)

In the second story, Herod does not dispute Jesus "fame" in doing mighty works. Rather, is under judgment for murdering God's prophet John the Baptist.

The next three episodes focus on the disciples need to grow in their faith. With the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus challenges the faith of the disciples, "You give them something to eat." But they replied, "We only have five loaves and two fish."

Jesus would send them out on the lake and come to them walking on water. Peter demonstrates a measure of faith but then doubts, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (14:31)

Jesus gets into a conflict with the Pharisees over internal and external righteousness. When Peter asks for a simple clarification about Jesus teaching, he is questioned: "Are you still without understanding?" (14:16)

And so it continues....the Canaanite Woman is commended for having "great faith". The disciples continue to show a lack of it, with another feeding of the 4000 and the same doubts. In 16:8 he says his disciples have "little faith".

Peter expresses tremendous faith in his bold confession of Jesus as the Christ and then immediately is rebuked as "Satan" and "Not having in mind the things of God, but men" for his denial of the cross.

He sees the Glory of Jesus on the mount of transfiguration and yet mistakenly wants to set up a shrine to Jesus on the mountain.

In 17:14-23, Jesus explains the reason why the disciples could not exercise the young demoniac, "You have too little faith."