

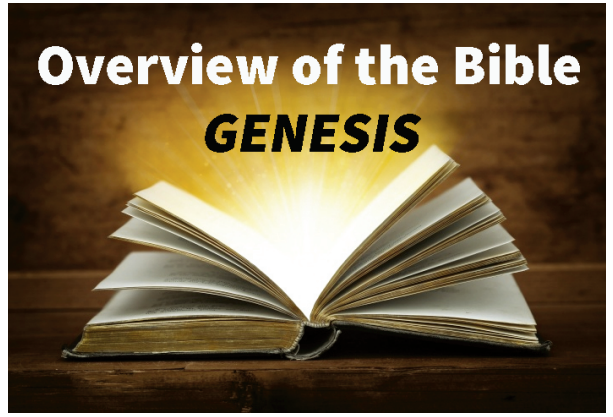
Joseph – Part 2

Genesis 41 - 50 – Lesson 10

Wednesday, April 15, 2020

Overview of the Bible

GENESIS



Chapters 41-50

Last week we left off with Joseph in prison, Genesis 40. In prison Joseph befriends two of Pharaoh's employees who have fallen out of favor with the king, the chief butler and the baker. He also interprets their dreams for them. His one request for assistance is directed to the butler: please tell Pharaoh that I am here unjustly and want my release (vv. 14-15). However, "the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him" (v.23). And for two more years (41:1) Joseph remained incarcerated. Where is God in all of this?

Genesis 41. Pharaoh's dual dreams, unsettling to say the least, provide the opportunity for Joseph's release from prison. As in the case of the dreams of the chief butler and the baker (40:8), Joseph is quick to disclaim any innate gift for the interpretation of dreams (41:16).

After interpreting the dream, Joseph counsels Pharaoh to appoint someone to oversee the stockpiling of food for the lean years ahead. Forewarned is forearmed. Joseph is Pharaoh's choice (v. 41) for this office.

We now have followed Joseph from the age of seventeen (37:2) to the age of thirty (41:46). What began as something exhilarating for Joseph turned into a nightmare that was to last thirteen years.

But light is now beginning to dawn. If Joseph had to endure thirteen years of bewilderment, it was only half of what his great-grandfather had to suffer through. Abraham received God's promise of a child at the age of seventy-five, but he had to wait until he was one hundred before he became the father of the child of promise.

The sense that Joseph's fortunes are about to change for the better emerges from his fruitful marriage to the Egyptian Asenath (v.45). From this marriage comes two sons, whom Joseph names Manasseh and Ephraim (vv.51-52). The first son's name is a reminder that God is helping Joseph forget the hurts of the past -what some today might call "the healing of the memories," or in the words of Phil. 3:13, "Forgetting what is behind." The second son's name is a reminder that God will make Joseph a fruitful servant even in a land of torment, uncertainty, and disappointment. Forgetfulness and fruitfulness are among God's choicest blessings to anybody enduring the likes of Joseph's odyssey.

In All Things God Works for Good (42-50)

The remaining chapters of Genesis describe the trips between Egypt and Canaan by Joseph's brothers in an attempt to procure grain. These trips climax in Joseph's self-disclosure to his brothers, reconciliation with them, and a final chance to be with his father. It has been at least twenty years since Joseph has seen his brothers: thirteen years in Egypt, followed by the seven good years. In ch. 37 he went to see his brothers. In ch.42 his brothers come to see him.

What will Joseph's response be? Will he meet them with open arms? Will he let bygones be bygones? Joseph's greeting may surprise us. He first accuses his brothers of being spies, which they were not (42:9). Second, he puts them in prison, and he offers release only if one will return to Canaan and bring back the youngest brother (42:15-17). Third, Simeon is put in jail, while the other brothers return to fetch Benjamin. Meanwhile, Joseph loads

their sacks with grain and also put their money back inside the sacks. Not only spies, but thieves too (42:18-25)? Fourth, with Benjamin present, Joseph sends his brothers back to Canaan again, secretly putting his own valuable silver cup into Benjamin's sack (44:1-13). Judah begs Joseph to take him as a slave instead of Benjamin (44:14-34).

In the context of the biblical story, however, how should the reader judge Joseph at this point? Is he ruthless, merciless? Is he toying with his brothers? Is Joseph acting in the same way that Jacob once did? Does he want to get even with his brothers and make them suffer? Will he play god with them? There have been weeping scenes throughout the Bible, but Joseph weeps more often than anyone else put together in Genesis 12-50 (42:24; 43:30; 45:2, 14-15; 46:29; 50:1). That the text so often draws attention to Joseph's tears must be a way of informing the reader that Joseph is not being vindictive and that his motives, however mysterious, cannot be as sinister as they might appear.

We must admit that the language is rough and the tactics forceful (42:7). But may not such measures ultimately be redemptive? Joseph did speak to his brothers roughly, but no more roughly than God spoke to Adam and Eve in Eden. And God's ultimate design in Eden is to restore these two. Rough words are redemptive words.

Joseph's refusal to accept adulation from his brothers, as the story concludes, is indicated by the words "Fear not, for am I in the place of God?" (50:19). B. Dahlberg, in attempting to link themes of the narrative about Joseph with similar ones in Genesis 1-11, contrasts this word of Joseph with the word of the serpent in the Garden, "You will be like God." He also contrasts the words of Joseph, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (50:20), with the serpent's, "knowing good and evil." Such comparisons illustrate the literary artistry that runs throughout this first book of the Bible. The Hebrew word behind the English 'meant' in 50:20 may also be rendered 'planned': "You 'planned' evil against me, but God 'planned' it for good." The same word in noun form appeared in 6:5: "The Lord saw... that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." Genesis begins and ends with those who plan evil. But the closest parallel to God planning something good for somebody is Jer. 29:11, again in the context of adversity - a promise to those in exile.

How does Joseph overcome the temptations? He simply related all his life experiences, good and bad alike, to the sovereign plan of God for his life. "God sent me before you to preserve life.... it was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:5-8). Or again, "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (50:20). Already the sentiment expressed much later in Rom. 8:28 is expressed.

Here in the Joseph narrative we see God preserving life. Primarily, this is a reference to the chosen people of God. We have observed many instances in Genesis in which God's people have been threatened with extinction. And if the family that bears the covenant promise is annihilated, does this mean that all the promises of God evaporate into thin air?

In an exhibition of tangible, spiritual maturity, Joseph sees himself and his experiences in Egypt as the divinely appointed means of perpetuating the promises of God for the people of God. The Joseph narrative is linked not only with Genesis 1-11, but also more importantly with the theme of divine promise that begins with Abraham. The story also links Genesis with Exodus, as both this story and the opening chapters of Exodus highlight the same theme: potential threats to the divine promise.

There is no reservation, however in Joseph's mind about whether the divine plan will succeed. About its implementation he is totally convinced. God will indeed "visit" Joseph's brothers (50:24-25).

The Joseph story is a powerful illustration of God's control over human history. In addition, it poignantly demonstrates that evil can beget more evil, but also that evil does not always produce more evil. From evil, good can come.