

Joseph  
levels of the story

We can get deeper and you're used to things getting deep in here (bull sound)

- primary - what happened
- secondary - how it links or shows connections to the rest of the story
- third - what we're not told but may reasonably infer
- fourth - what we can learn about our own walk
- fifth - typology and prophecy - can we find Jesus in this account

story changes here - instead of a loose connection of stories or events such as Abraham or brief accounts such as lives of the earlier generations the skim through thousands of years, we're getting a tightly knit chronological story that's longer than what we've had before and that just sounds different. We're given a lot of details but don't forget that we've been given lots of details and incidentals through out the book that we've concluded revealed eye-witness accounts. Also remember that Moses wrote this account using four sources: family stories, some type of earlier written accounts that the family had preserved, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 4. We're also told that God spoke to him face to face and sometimes told him what to write. I will propose to you that we consider the possibility that one of Moses' sources for these final chapters was an account that Joseph himself had written some 400 years before.

You're familiar with the story: Joseph gets down to Egypt where he's sold to Potiphar. Potiphar is soon impressed with Joseph and he puts him charge of running his household and the household prospers.

You'll recall that this is part of the Abrahamic blessing that he will be a blessing to the nations and to those who bless him - wherever he is prospers just as Laban said about Jacob, Abimilech said about Isaac and God said about Abraham.

This should remind us of the ongoing covenant with Abraham - to make his descendants a great nation that will suffer in Egypt and then inherit the land, to bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him, to make him a blessing both to those around him and to all the nations with more descendants than can be counted.

So Joseph is doing well in Egypt, better than some of his family as we saw in chapter 38. But once again his clothes are about to get him into trouble.

Remember when his mother Rachel was introduced to us way back in chapter 29 we were told that she was "beautiful in form and appearance." In other words, she was hot and she caught Jacob's eye.

We're not often given physical descriptions of people other than Rachel, Esau and Leah.

But here we're told that Joseph took after Rachel as Joseph is described as "handsome in form and appearance." In other words, he was a hunk and he caught Potiphar's wife's eye.

Jethro Bodine had the same trouble with Emaline Fetty. He told Uncle Jed that he

tried to keep the lid clamped down tight on his charm but he guessed some just slopped over the top.

He had the same trouble when he proposed to Miss Jane and wanted to get out of it.

Jed: "Sorry, boy, but you're honor bound. You proposed and she accepted. It's the code of the hills. The only thing that'll save you is if she changes her mind."

Jethro: "Fat chance of that. You think she'll give up the prize catch of the century, now that she's bagged me?"

Jed: "She's probably impressed with your sixth-grade education."

Jethro: "Never mind that, just look at this face!"

Jed: "Well, I wouldn't count on that stoppin' her, it ain't up to now."

So poor Joseph is being pursued by Potiphar's wife day after day. You'll notice that he has more restraint than his brother Judah showed in the last chapter.

He tries to reason with her and show her that such a thing would be a great sin against both Potiphar and God.

Joseph understood that sin is sin against not just others but against God.

David understood the same thing when he wrote Psalm 51 after his affair with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah. "Against you and you only have I sinned."

and even more so for us as it is a denial of the truth of Scripture, tests God's grace, grieves the Holy Spirit and insults and hurts Jesus all over again - "Does He still feel the nails?"

So for the second time Joseph's clothes will be used against him as Potiphar's wife grabs his garment and he flees just as Paul will advise young men to do about 1600 years later:

2Ti 2:22 But flee youthful lusts, and follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.  
1Ti 6:9 But they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which plunge men into death and destruction.

10 For the love of money is a root of all evils, of which some having lusted after, they were seduced from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness.

And let's not forget all the advice that Solomon will give the young men about not falling prey to the seductive woman.

Pr 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life,

24 To keep you from the evil woman, From the flattering tongue of a seductress.

25 Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, Nor let her allure you with her eyelids.

26 For by means of a harlot A man is reduced to a crust of bread; And an adulteress will prey upon his precious life.

Pr 6:32 Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so destroys his own soul.

33 Wounds and dishonor he will get, And his reproach will not be wiped away.

Did you notice something in those? The very things that it says will happen to the person who gives in to temptation are the things that happened to Joseph anyway. He did right but was reduced to a crust of bread and had his happy life destroyed and he got wounds and dishonor.

Sounds like it's time for another birdwalk, doesn't it?

Have you ever noticed that the parts of the Bible that deal with people, the historical parts, seem more honest sometimes than the poetic and theoretical parts such as Psalms and Proverbs. In those two books we're given all sorts of assurances of things that will and won't happen to people based on their character, but when we look at real life people in the Bible we often find that there's times when that doesn't seem to happen.

Poor Joseph, for instance, he did everything right and it seems like everything wrong is happening to him.

Does it seem to happen that way in your life sometimes? You do right and something bad or wrong happens to you. I know we're in Sunday School and church so we're supposed to talk like good religious people and deny that we think that expect to be rewarded for being good and for bad people to get punished, and to deny that we feel bad and have doubts and anger when the opposite happens, but are we being honest?

Asaph, who was a prophet and one of the song leaders in the tabernacle who was appointed by David, had this to say:

Ps 73:1 ¶ <<A Psalm of Asaph.>> Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart.

2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped.

3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm.

5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men.

6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment.

7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish.

8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily.

9 They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walks through the earth.

10 Therefore his people return here, And waters of a full cup are drained by them.

11 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"

12 Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches.

13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence.

14 For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning.

15 ¶ If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.

16 When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me-

17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.

18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.

19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.

20 As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.

21 ¶ Thus my heart was grieved, And I was vexed in my mind.

22 I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

23 Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand.

24 You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

26 My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.

28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works.

We've got an advantage over Joseph because we know how his story ends and how God was using everything that happened to him for good.

Can we believe that about our own lives and our problems and hardships and pains?

It's easy to reply in the positive until something actually happens that we don't like. Then we might sound more like Asaph and less assured and confident.

The question is this: faith is described as the ground of things hoped for, the evidence for things not seen. When the present circumstances we find ourselves in seem to be a contradiction of the promise of Scripture and of our own expectations and belief about what's best, do we have a strong enough faith to be grounded in what we hope for and to believe in things we can't see? Will we trust the hand of God and the work of God and the control of God and the promises of God when we simply do not see any evidence for them?

Let's have another video!

Can we believe, when we're tossed about on the seas of the storms of life that the anchor holds? Ray Boltz was faced with this when his little daughter became deathly ill and his wife was diagnosed with cancer. While he was in the midst of this, he wrote this song:

back to the story. Boy, didn't Solomon have Potiphar's wife nailed:

3 For the lips of a strange woman drip honey, and her palate is smoother than oil;

Ps 55:21; Pr 2:16; 6:24

4 but afterward she is as bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.

She didn't waste any time getting Joseph in trouble. First she calls the other servants back in and tells them and then Potiphar. That way Potiphar can't just ignore it if he doesn't believe her without losing face in his own household.

She has a three-fold strategy:

- 1) she blames her husband for buying Joseph
- 2) she plays up the fact that he's a foreigner
- 3) she emphasizes that this is a mockery and an insult to the entire household, not just her.

By the way, that playing up the fact that he's a foreigner would be effective because at that time in history Egypt is being ruled by non-Egyptians, which can also help explain the ease with which Joseph is accepted into the ruling elite. Later the native Egyptians will rebel and run out their rulers and take back over; that's when there arose a Pharaoh who didn't know Joseph.

Anyway, for the second time those closest to Joseph are deceived by people using his clothes to prove their lies. The text says that Potiphar is angry, but doesn't say who he's mad at. The fact the Joseph is put under house arrest at another captain of the guard and not executed is an indication that he's mad at his wife for forcing him into taking action against Joseph.

Once in prison or the guard's house or in the dungeon or wherever he was locked up, Joseph continues to be a good and reliable worker with God's blessings on him and those around him and before long he's running the place with almost the same amount of freedom that he had in Potiphar's house.

There's a phrase that we should look at in this chapter because it gets repeated so much that it should speak to us: "The Lord was with him." No matter how bleak things look for Joseph we are given this assurance, which to our minds should bring up Romans 8:31

Ro 8:31 ¶ What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

### and Psalm 118

Ps 118:6 The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

### or Psalm 27

Ps 27:1 ¶ <<A Psalm of David.>> The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

**vs. 2** The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man

**vs. 3** His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord p caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

**vs. 21** But a the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love

**vs. 23** The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because d the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

The Lord was with him. He was successful because the Lord was with him. The pagan people around saw that the Lord with him. The pagan people around him saw the Lord gave him success. Even falsely accused and in prison, The Lord was with him. Even when it looked like God had turned his back on him and hadn't kept the promises of Scripture, the Lord showed him steadfast love. The jailer trusted him and didn't worry about him running away or doing something wrong or being unreliable, not because Joseph was an especially fine fellow or a leader in society or had a big house to live in, but because the Lord was with him. Joseph was able to accomplish things not because he was extra-smart, not because he had plenty of resources, not because he had money in the bank, not because he everything figured and planned out in great detail; but because the Lord was with him.

Can we believe that about Joseph?

Can we believe that about ourselves?

Can we believe that about our church?

Can we act on those beliefs or is this just something that we learn in Sunday School because it sounds good and sounds like something we should say, but when it comes time for action then we act like it's some sort of nonsensical crap, some unrealistic pie in the sky dream that we couldn't possibly trust and behave like it's real?

If none of this is true or if we're not going to live our lives as if we believe it and it's not going to make any difference in how we face life, then let's be honest and throw away our Bibles and start studying the latest book recommended by Oprah or somebody else or talk about current events or just shoot the breeze because there's no need to waste all this time making up lessons on things that aren't true.

For that matter, if everything we hear and read and sing about on Sundays aren't going to make us think, act or be any different from the rest of the world, then why don't we just stay home and sleep in and watch TV? We can always come on Easter and Christmas.

Do we take advantage of opportunities to practice what we preach or do we actually believe what we tell others? If we don't, then didn't Jesus call us ugly names like hypocrites and blind guides and whitewashed tombs and even sons of hell and people who have no part in his kingdom?

I'm not talking about anybody in particular and not trying to get anybody's goat and it's certainly not like I live up to any of these high standards; These are just some tough questions that can be raised from this chapter as a challenge all of us to think about what we really believe. I'm not really looking for an answer other than "hmmmm...", just trying to give you a little gristle in your food for thought.

So here's another one that I'm not looking for an answer for: Do we know enough about what we're supposed to preach to practice it? Have we studied our Bibles enough to realize that we're supposed to be different and in what ways?

If we do, then the next challenge is are we acting like it? and if we don't, then the next challenge would be are we going to go back to the Book and see what we've missed or forgotten?

hmmmm.....Don't you just hate it when I get one of these wild hairs stuck up my keyboard and can't seem to get it pulled out so we can get back to the poor fellow we have sitting in prison waiting so patiently on us to get to the next chapter so he can be rescued?

“Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows that shall he reap.”

What seeds are we sowing: seeds of faith, seeds of trust, seeds of opportunity, seeds of potential, seeds of fear, seeds of faith in ourselves and our own ability or lack thereof to provide, seeds of lost opportunity, seeds of failure....

There’s a contemporary Christian song that starts out, “I keep my faith in the bank and I keep my money in my heart.”

Where’s our faith? What’s in our hearts? What seeds are we sowing?

Based on the seeds we’re planting, do we really want to be around when the garden starts to grow and yield its crops?

Anyway, let me take off my high hat, climb off the soapbox and get out of left field and back to our story:

Some time passes and two special prisoners arrive in chapter 40.

The pharaoh gets mad at his chief baker and his chief taster and has then put in the same prison as Joseph. Since they’re special prisoners the captain puts Joseph in charge of them.

secondary - how it links or shows connections to the rest of the story - Joseph loses clothes yet again but will be given another coat of honor - Judah gives away his seal and cord - Joseph is given a seal and a gold cord

Jacob doesn’t forget - he remembers what Reuben did, what Simeon and Levi did, what Judah did, burying Rachel and even Leah.

third - what we’re not told but may reasonably infer  
Jacob is suspecting brothers and fears that they might harm Benjamin

fourth - what we can learn about our own walk

God’s timing - He has a plan and things happen according to that plan and that time table.

God’s providence - God’s plan will be carried out; sometimes with our help and sometimes despite our efforts.

God’s assurance - promise to Jacob that he’ll go with him

God doesn’t desert us even when we die - he also said that He’d come back up with Jacob - so God was there in the funeral procession as well as

our need for growth and maturity - Joseph needed to grow and mature into the person whom God could use and his brothers also had to grow -