Joseph: From the Pit to the Palace

Bible Stories Anthology — Genesis 37–50

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

Ye Thought Evil — But God Meant It Unto Good

A seventeen-year-old boy is stripped of his robe, thrown into an empty pit, and sold by his own brothers for twenty pieces of silver. He is carried in chains to a foreign country, sold again as a slave, falsely accused of assault, and left in a prison for years, forgotten by the one man who promised to remember him.

Thirteen years after the pit, he stands before the king of the greatest nation on earth. By the end of that day he is the second most powerful man in the world.

Twenty years after the pit, his brothers kneel in front of him to buy bread, not knowing who he is. He has the power to do anything he wants to them. He weeps instead.

The story of Joseph fills fourteen chapters of Genesis — more space than scripture gives to the creation, the Flood and the tower of Babel put together. God clearly meant us to read it carefully. It is the most complete story in the book, and one of the most complete pictures of the Messiah in the whole Old Testament: loved by his father, hated by his brothers, sold for silver, counted dead, raised up, exalted to the right hand of the throne, and made the saviour of the very people who rejected him.

And it closes with one of the most important sentences in the Bible about how God deals with evil: "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."

The Setting

When. Around two hundred years after God first called Abraham. Joseph was Abraham's great-grandson. His father was Jacob, whom God had renamed *Israel*; his grandfather was Isaac. The story runs from the time Joseph was seventeen (Genesis 37:2) to his death at a hundred and ten (Genesis 50:26) — nearly a century.

Where. It begins in Canaan, among the pastures of Hebron and Shechem and Dothan, where Jacob's family lived in tents and kept flocks. It moves to Egypt — the richest, most ordered, most powerful kingdom of its day, watered by the Nile, ruled by a Pharaoh, run by officials and priests and scribes. And it ends in Goshen, the fertile land in the eastern delta of the Nile where Jacob's whole family came to live.

Who. Jacob, the aged father. His twelve sons, born to four different mothers: Leah bore Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun; Leah's maid Zilpah bore Gad and Asher; Rachel's maid Bilhah bore Dan and Naphtali; and Rachel, the wife Jacob loved, bore Joseph and, at the cost of her own life, Benjamin (Genesis 35:16-19). In Egypt: Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard, and his wife; a butler and a baker in prison; and Pharaoh himself, whose name scripture never gives.

The situation. This is still the **Patriarchal administration** — the period from the expulsion from Eden to the Law at Sinai, in which God dealt with men individually and a person stood right with God by believing Him. God had sworn to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that their seed would become a great nation, that the land would be theirs, and that in their seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. He had also told Abraham something darker: "thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them… four hundred years" (Genesis 15:13). How would a family of shepherds in Canaan end up in a foreign land? Joseph's story is the answer.

And it is a family full of wounds. Jacob had deceived his own father to get the blessing (Genesis 27). He had been deceived in turn by his father-in-law, and had married two sisters who spent years competing for his love (Genesis 29-30). He loved Rachel more than Leah, and made no secret of it. When Rachel died, her firstborn son Joseph became the one Jacob loved most.

The Story, Told Faithfully

The Coat

> **Genesis 37:2** *These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.*
>
> **Genesis 37:3** *Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.*
>
> **Genesis 37:4** *And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.*

Three things set Joseph apart from his brothers, and each one fed their hatred.

He reported on them. “Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.” Scripture does not say whether the report was true or whether Joseph should have brought it. It only records that he did, and it is the first thing we are told about him.

He was the favourite. “Israel loved Joseph more than all his children.” Jacob had grown up in a home where his father favoured Esau and his mother favoured him (Genesis 25:28), and he had seen what it did. Now he did the same thing to his own sons.

He wore the coat. “A coat of many colours.” The Hebrew phrase, *kethoneth passim*, is not certain in meaning. It may mean a robe of many colours, as the ancient Greek translation took it. It may mean a long robe reaching to the palms and the soles — a robe with long sleeves, down to the ground. The phrase appears in only one other place in scripture, of the robe worn by King David’s daughter Tamar: “a garment of divers colours… for with such robes were the king’s daughters that were virgins apparelled” (2 Samuel 13:18). Either way, it was not a working man’s garment. A shepherd hauling sheep out of a ditch does not wear long flowing sleeves. As this series understands it, the robe marked Joseph out as the favoured son, the one set above the others, perhaps the one Jacob meant to make his heir. Every time his brothers saw it, they saw their father’s preference.

“They hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.” The Hebrew is literally *they could not speak to him for peace* — they could not even say *shalom*, the ordinary greeting, to him. The family could no longer manage a civil word.

The Dreams

> **Genesis 37:5** *And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.*
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> **Genesis 37:7** *For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.*
>
> **Genesis 37:9** *And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.*
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> **Genesis 37:10** *And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?*
>
> **Genesis 37:11** *And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.*

Two dreams, with one meaning: the family would one day bow down to Joseph. The sheaves are a picture of the harvest field — and, as the story will show, grain would be exactly the thing that brought them to their knees before him. The sun, moon and eleven stars are the whole household: father, mother and eleven brothers.

“Made obeisance” means to bow low, face toward the ground. In the East, this was how a subject greeted a king. Jacob understood the dream at once, and rebuked his son for it. And yet “his father observed the saying” — he kept it, turned it over, did not forget it. Something in him suspected the dream might be from God. Later, Joseph himself would explain why dreams from God are doubled: “because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass” (Genesis 41:32).

Was Joseph wrong to tell the dreams? Scripture does not say he was. It shows a seventeen-year-old telling his brothers exactly what he saw, perhaps with more candour than wisdom. What it does say is what the dreams stirred in his brothers: "they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words," and "his brethren envied him." Mark that word *envy*. Stephen, preaching in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years later, summed up the whole story in it: "the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him" (Acts 7:9).

The Pit

Jacob sent Joseph from Hebron to check on his brothers, who were feeding the flocks far to the north. He found them at Dothan.

> **Genesis 37:18** *And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.*
>
> **Genesis 37:19** *And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.*
>
> **Genesis 37:20** *Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.*

They saw him "afar off." They could see the robe coming across the fields long before they could see his face. "Behold, this dreamer cometh" — in Hebrew, literally *this master of dreams*, spoken with contempt.

"We shall see what will become of his dreams." They meant it as a sneer. They would see. Every step they took to destroy the dreams would carry Joseph closer to the throne.

> **Genesis 37:21** *And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.*
>
> **Genesis 37:22** *And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.*
>
> **Genesis 37:23** *And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him;*
>
> **Genesis 37:24** *And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.*

Reuben, the eldest, tried to save him quietly. The first thing the brothers did was strip off the robe — the sign of his father's favour. Then they threw him into a pit. In that dry land, a "pit" was usually a cistern, a hole cut in the rock to catch rainwater. This one was dry. A cistern was shaped like a bottle: narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom, so that a man inside could not climb out.

And then comes one of the coldest sentences in Genesis:

> **Genesis 37:25** *And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.*

They sat down to eat, with their brother in a hole beside them. Years later, they would remember what they had heard while they ate: "we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear" (Genesis 42:21). Joseph had been pleading with them from the bottom of the pit.

Twenty Pieces of Silver

> **Genesis 37:26** *And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?*
>
> **Genesis 37:27** *Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content.*
>
> **Genesis 37:28** *Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.*

"What profit is it?" Judah did not say, "It would be wrong to kill our brother." He said, "What would we gain?" He found a way to be rid of Joseph and make money doing it. Remember Judah. By the end of the story, he will be a different man.

The traders are called both "Ishmeelites" and "Midianites." The two names are used together again in Judges 8:24, where Midianites are said to wear earrings "because they were Ishmaelites"; the name seems to have been used broadly of the desert caravan traders. They were on the great trade road that ran from Gilead down to Egypt, carrying spices, balm and myrrh.

"Twenty pieces of silver." That was the price the Law of Moses later set on a boy between five and twenty years old (Leviticus 27:5). Joseph was sold at the going rate for a slave boy. Centuries later, another of Judah's descendants — one named Judas, the Greek form of Judah — would sell another beloved Son for thirty pieces (Matthew 26:15).

The Coat Again

> **Genesis 37:31** *And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood;*
>
> **Genesis 37:32** *And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no.*
>
> **Genesis 37:33** *And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.*
>
> **Genesis 37:34** *And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.*
>
> **Genesis 37:35** *And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.*

A goat and a garment. Years before, Jacob had deceived his own blind father with a goat and a garment: his mother "put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands," dressed him in his brother's clothes, and sent him in to steal the blessing (Genesis 27:9-16). Now his sons deceived him the same way. Scripture does not stop to point it out. It lets the reader see it. What a man sows, he reaps (Galatians 6:7).

"Know now whether it be thy son's coat." They would not even say "our brother." They said "thy son." And they did not lie in words; they let the bloody robe tell the lie for them.

Jacob "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins" — the Eastern signs of deepest mourning: tearing one's garment, and wearing coarse goat-hair cloth against the skin. "He refused to be comforted." For more than twenty years, Jacob believed his son was dead.

Judah and Tamar

Genesis 38 seems at first to interrupt the story. It leaves Joseph on the road to Egypt and turns to Judah, the brother who proposed the sale. Judah left his brothers, married a Canaanite woman, and had three sons. When the eldest died, the custom of the day required the next brother to marry the widow, Tamar, and raise up a son in his dead brother's name — a custom the Law later wrote down (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). The second son refused his duty and died. Judah, fearing for his third son, sent Tamar home and never kept his word to her.

Years later, Tamar disguised herself and sat by the road, and Judah, not knowing her, went in to her. When she was found with child, Judah ordered her burned — until she produced his own seal, cord and staff. Judah's answer is the first sign of change in him:

> **Genesis 38:26** *And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son.*

The man who had said "What profit is it?" now said, "She hath been more righteous than I." It is the first time in the story that one of the brothers admits he was wrong.

Why is this chapter here? For at least two reasons. First, it begins the change in Judah that the rest of the story will complete. Second, Tamar bore twins, and one of them, Pharez, stands in the line of the promised Seed: "Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar" (Matthew 1:3). The story of Joseph is not only about Joseph. Through all of it, God was keeping the line of the Messiah alive — through Judah.

The LORD Was With Joseph

> **Genesis 39:1** *And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.*
>
> **Genesis 39:2** *And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.*
>
> **Genesis 39:3** *And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.*

Four times in this one chapter scripture says, "the LORD was with Joseph" (39:2, 3, 21, 23). It says it when he is a slave, and it says it again when he is in prison. God's presence did not keep Joseph out of trouble. It went with him into it.

"He was a prosperous man" — not rich, but *successful*: everything he put his hand to went well. And an Egyptian who did not know Joseph's God could see it: "his master saw that the LORD was with him." Joseph "found grace in his sight" — the same idiom we met with Noah, meaning to be looked on with favour — and Potiphar made him overseer of everything he owned. "The LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake" (39:5). This was God's promise to Abraham, being kept in small: "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). An Egyptian household was blessed because a son of Abraham lived in it.

The Garment Left Behind

> **Genesis 39:6** *…And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.*

> **Genesis 39:7** *And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.*
>
> **Genesis 39:8** *But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;*
>
> **Genesis 39:9** *There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*

"Cast her eyes upon Joseph" — the lust of the eyes again, the same door temptation has used since Eden (1 John 2:16).

Look at Joseph's answer. He was a young man, perhaps in his twenties, far from home, a slave with no family and no one to know what he did. Everything made it easy to give in. He gave two reasons for refusing. The first was loyalty: his master had trusted him with everything. The second was deeper: "how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against *God*?" Joseph understood that sin is never only against another person. It is against God. No one in Egypt knew his God. Joseph did, and that settled it.

> **Genesis 39:10** *And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.*
>
> **Genesis 39:11** *And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within.*
>
> **Genesis 39:12** *And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.*

"Day by day." This was not one temptation. It was a siege. And notice what Joseph did about it: he would not even "be with her" — he kept away from her company. When she finally trapped him alone and took hold of him, he did not stay to argue. He ran, and left his garment in her hand. Paul gives the same instruction to believers: "Flee fornication" (1 Corinthians 6:18); "Flee also youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22). Some temptations are to be resisted by standing. This one is to be resisted by running.

For the second time in his life, Joseph lost a garment, and for the second time it was used to tell a lie about him. His brothers had used his robe to say he was dead. Potiphar's wife used his cloak to say he was guilty. She told the household, and then her husband, that the Hebrew slave had attacked her.

> **Genesis 39:20** *And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.*
>
> **Genesis 39:21** *But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

An Egyptian master could have had a slave put to death for such a charge. Potiphar put him in "the king's" prison instead — the place for royal prisoners. As this series understands it, that choice may suggest Potiphar did not fully believe his wife. But scripture does not say. It says only this: Joseph did right, and was punished for it. And "the LORD was with Joseph." Before long, the keeper of the prison had put him in charge of the whole prison, "because the LORD was with him" (39:23).

The psalmist tells us what those years were like: "Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him" (Psalm 105:18-19). "Tried" means *tested*, *refined*, as metal is refined in the fire. The dreams God had given him at seventeen were being tested by everything that seemed to contradict them. The pit, the slavery and the prison were not the end of God's word to him. They were the furnace in which he was being made ready for it.

The Butler and the Baker

Two of Pharaoh's officials were thrown into the same prison: the chief butler, who served Pharaoh's cup, and the chief baker. Each dreamed a dream on the same night, and each woke up troubled.

> **Genesis 40:8** *And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you.*

"Do not interpretations belong to God?" This is a figure of speech called **erotesis** — asking a question, not to get information, but to make a point. Joseph was not unsure. He was declaring that the meaning of a God-given dream comes from God, and not from any man's cleverness. Egypt had whole schools of professional dream-interpreters, with books of dream meanings. Joseph did not claim to be one of them.

The butler had dreamed of a vine with three branches, whose grapes he pressed into Pharaoh's cup. Joseph told him that in three days Pharaoh would "lift up" his head and restore him. The baker had dreamed of three baskets of baked goods on his head, which the birds ate. In three days, Joseph told him, Pharaoh would "lift up thy head from off thee," and hang him on a tree (40:19). Notice the play on words: the same phrase, "lift up thy head," means restoration for one man and death for the other.

Then Joseph made one request of the butler:

> **Genesis 40:14** *But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:*
> **Genesis 40:15** *For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.*

"Think on me" is, in Hebrew, *remember me*. Everything happened just as Joseph said. On the third day, Pharaoh's birthday, the butler was restored and the baker hanged.

> **Genesis 40:23** *Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him.*

"Did not… remember… but forgat." The same thing is said twice, once positively and once negatively. This is a figure of speech Bullinger calls **pleonasm** — saying more than is strictly needed, for emphasis. We are meant to feel it. The butler forgot him completely.

Two Full Years

> **Genesis 41:1** *And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river.*

"Two full years." Two more years in prison, after Joseph had done everything right and asked the one man who could help. We are not told what those years were like for him. We are told they were *full* years — every day of them.

Then Pharaoh dreamed. Seven fat cows came up out of the Nile and were eaten by seven thin, ugly cows. Seven full ears of grain were swallowed up by seven thin, wind-blasted ears. None of Egypt's magicians could interpret the dreams. And at last the butler remembered: "I do remember my faults this day" (41:9).

> **Genesis 41:14** *Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.*

"He shaved himself." Hebrews wore beards; Egyptians of rank were clean-shaven, and a man came before Pharaoh shaved and in clean linen. Joseph was made fit for Egyptian court in a matter of hours. Thirteen years of waiting ended in a single morning.

> **Genesis 41:15** *And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.*
>
> **Genesis 41:16** *And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*

Here was the chance of a lifetime, the one moment that could win his freedom. And Joseph's first words to the king of Egypt were: "It is not in me." He would not take for himself the credit that belonged to God. In the next few minutes, he named God to Pharaoh again and again: "God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do" (41:25); "the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (41:32).

Seven years of great plenty were coming, and then seven years of famine so severe that the plenty would be forgotten. And Joseph did not stop at interpreting. He gave Pharaoh a plan: appoint a wise man over the land, gather a fifth of the harvest in the good years, store the grain in the cities, and keep it against the famine.

Second Only to Pharaoh

> **Genesis 41:38** *And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?*
>
> **Genesis 41:39** *And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art:*
>
> **Genesis 41:40** *Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.*
>
> **Genesis 41:42** *And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck;*
>
> **Genesis 41:43** *And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.*

Every detail of this scene is an Eastern sign of authority:

- **The ring.** Pharaoh's signet ring was his seal. Pressed into clay or wax, it made a document law. To give it to Joseph was to give him the power to act in Pharaoh's name.
- **Fine linen.** The dress of Egypt's nobility and priests.
- **The gold chain.** A mark of royal honour, hung on the neck of those the king wished to reward.
- **The second chariot.** Joseph rode directly behind the king. Everyone who saw the procession knew who was second in the land.
- **"Bow the knee."** The Hebrew here is *abrech*, a word whose exact meaning is uncertain; it may be an Egyptian word. Whatever it meant, the crowds cried it out ahead of Joseph's chariot, and the people bowed.

Pharaoh also gave Joseph an Egyptian name, Zaphnath-paaneah (the meaning is debated), and an Egyptian wife, Asenath, daughter of the priest of On (41:45). “And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt” (41:46). He had been seventeen at the pit. Thirteen years had passed.

Joseph’s two sons were born in the years of plenty, and their names tell us what had happened in his heart:

> **Genesis 41:51** *And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house.*
>
> **Genesis 41:52** *And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.*

Manasseh means *making to forget*. *Ephraim* means *fruitful*. God had not erased Joseph’s past, but He had taken the sting out of it. And notice where Joseph says he was made fruitful: not after the affliction, but “in the land of my affliction.” The place of his suffering became the place of his fruit.

Then the famine came, “over all the face of the earth” (41:56). When the Egyptians cried to Pharaoh for bread, he gave one answer:

> **Genesis 41:55** *…Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do.*

The Brothers Bow

> **Genesis 42:6** *And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph’s brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.*
>
> **Genesis 42:7** *And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.*
>
> **Genesis 42:8** *And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.*
>
> **Genesis 42:9** *And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them…*

More than twenty years after the sheaves, ten sheaves bowed before his. The brothers came from Canaan to buy grain, and they knelt with their faces to the ground before the governor of Egypt. They had last seen Joseph as a boy of seventeen. Now he was a shaven Egyptian lord in linen and gold, speaking through an interpreter. “They knew not him.”

Why did Joseph speak roughly? Why accuse them of being spies, put them in custody for three days, keep Simeon bound, and demand that they bring their youngest brother, Benjamin? Scripture does not give us his reasons in so many words, but it lets us watch what happened, and the purpose shows itself. Joseph needed to know whether these were still the men who had sold a brother and lied to their father — and he needed them to find out for themselves. He put them in a position where they could do the same thing again: abandon a brother, go home without him, and tell their father another story. Would they?

The first sign came quickly:

> **Genesis 42:21** *And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.*
>
> **Genesis 42:23** *And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.*
>
> **Genesis 42:24** *And he turned himself about from them, and wept…*

For twenty years their guilt had been buried. Three days in an Egyptian lockup brought it straight to the surface. And the man they were talking about heard every word. It is the first time Joseph weeps in the story. It will not be the last. Again and again — when he sees Benjamin (43:30), when he reveals himself (45:2, 14, 15), when he meets his father (46:29), when his father dies (50:1), and when his brothers ask his forgiveness (50:17) — the ruler of Egypt weeps. The man who had every reason to be hard was not.

The Silver Cup

The famine went on. Jacob refused at first to let Benjamin go — "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (42:36). All these things were, in fact, working for him; he could not yet see it. When the grain ran out, Judah stood before his father and made himself surety for the boy: "I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him" (43:9).

In Egypt, Joseph saw Benjamin, his only full brother, for the first time in over twenty years. "His bowels did yearn upon his brother" — in Hebrew thought the inward parts were the seat of deep feeling, as we would say *his heart ached* — "and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there" (43:30). He fed them at his own house, and seated them in the order of their birth, eldest to youngest, and "the men marvelled one at another" (43:33). How could this Egyptian know?

Then came the final test. Joseph had his silver cup hidden in Benjamin's sack, sent the brothers off, and had his steward overtake them on the road and accuse them of theft. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. The ruling was simple: the one with the cup would stay as a slave; the rest could go home free.

Here was the old situation, exactly. A favoured son of Rachel. A way to be rid of him without laying a hand on him. A chance to go home and let their father grieve. Twenty years before, they had taken it. What would they do now?

"They rent their clothes" (44:13) — every one of them — and every one of them went back.

Judah Stands in the Gap

> **Genesis 44:18** *Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh.*

What follows is the longest speech in Genesis (44:18-34). Judah told the whole story — their father, the brother who was "dead," the father's love for the youngest, his own promise to bring the boy home. And then:

> **Genesis 44:32** *For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever.*
>
> **Genesis 44:33** *Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.*

> **Genesis 44:34** *For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father.*

This is Judah — the brother who once said, "What profit is it? Let us sell him." Twenty years earlier he had sold Rachel's son into slavery for silver. Now he offered to become a slave himself so that Rachel's other son could go free. He asked to take Benjamin's place: "let thy servant abide *instead of* the lad." The man who once cared nothing for his father's grief now could not bear to see it.

A **surety** is someone who pledges himself to pay another's debt or bear another's penalty. Judah had made himself surety for Benjamin, and he kept his word at the cost of his own freedom. As this series understands it, this is the moment the whole story has been building toward. The brothers had been tested, and they were changed men. And the one who changed most was Judah — the tribe from which the Messiah would come. Hebrews calls Jesus "a surety of a better testament" (Hebrews 7:22). The Lion of the tribe of Judah would one day take the place of others, not as a slave in Egypt, but on a cross.

"I Am Joseph"

> **Genesis 45:1** *Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.*
>
> **Genesis 45:2** *And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard.*
>
> **Genesis 45:3** *And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.*
>
> **Genesis 45:4** *And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.*

He sent every Egyptian out of the room. What was about to happen was for his brothers alone. And then he wept so loudly that the whole palace heard it.

"I am Joseph." For the first time he spoke to them in their own language, without an interpreter. They "could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence." The word means *terrified*, struck with dismay. The brother they had sold was alive — and he held their lives in his hand.

"Come near to me." Not "Get out of my sight." Not "Kneel." *Come near.* And then Joseph said the thing that turned their terror into something else:

> **Genesis 45:5** *Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.*
>
> **Genesis 45:7** *And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.*
>
> **Genesis 45:8** *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.*

Look carefully at what Joseph says, and what he does not say. In verse 4 he says plainly, "ye sold me." He does not pretend they did nothing. But in verse 8 he says, "it was not you that sent me hither, but God." How can both be true?

This is a Hebrew **idiom** — an expression whose meaning is found in the way a people used it, not in its individual words. In Hebrew, "not this, but that" is often a way of saying *not so much this as that* — the first thing is not denied, but the second is so much greater that it fills the view. Jesus spoke the same

way: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth” (John 6:27) — not a command to stop working for food, but to put the greater thing first. Joseph was not telling his brothers they were innocent. He was telling them that what they did was not the main thing. The main thing was what God did with it.

And what God did was “to preserve life” — “to save your lives by a great deliverance.” There were still five years of famine ahead (45:6). Without Joseph in Egypt, Jacob’s whole family would have starved in Canaan, and with them the line of the promise. The brothers had meant to get rid of a dreamer. God used what they did to save the family through which the Messiah would come.

> **Genesis 45:14** *And he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.*
> **Genesis 45:15** *Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.*

“After that his brethren talked with him.” For twenty years, they “could not speak peaceably unto him” (37:4). Now, at last, they talked.

As he sent them home to fetch their father, Joseph gave them one piece of advice that anyone who knows families will understand: “See that ye fall not out by the way” (45:24). He knew they would be tempted to start blaming one another.

“Joseph Is Yet Alive”

> **Genesis 45:26** *And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob’s heart fainted, for he believed them not.*
> **Genesis 45:27** *And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived:*
> **Genesis 45:28** *And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.*

Jacob could not believe it. For twenty-two years the bloody robe had said his son was dead. Now his sons said he was alive and ruling Egypt. It took two things to convince him: “all the words of Joseph,” and the wagons — the Egyptian carts Joseph had sent, which no shepherd in Canaan could have produced. The word and the evidence together, and “the spirit of Jacob… revived.”

On the way, at Beersheba, God spoke to Jacob one last time: “fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again” (46:3-4). The family went down, seventy souls in all (46:27).

> **Genesis 46:29** *And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.*
> **Genesis 46:30** *And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.*

“Fell on his neck” is how the East embraces: arms around the neck, face on the shoulder. The second most powerful man in the world climbed down from his chariot and wept on his old father’s neck “a good while.”

Joseph settled them in Goshen, and told them to say they were shepherds, “for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians” (46:34). Egypt’s contempt for shepherds kept Israel separate, in their own land within the land, where they could grow into a nation without being swallowed up by Egypt.

Then Joseph brought his father before Pharaoh, “and Jacob blessed Pharaoh” (47:7). An old shepherd blessed the king of Egypt — and “without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better” (Hebrews 7:7). Asked his age, Jacob answered: “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been” (47:9). He called his life a *pilgrimage* — a journey through a land that was not home.

The Blessings

Seventeen years later, as Jacob lay dying, he blessed Joseph’s two sons. He crossed his hands, “guiding his hands wittingly” — on purpose — so that his right hand, the hand of the greater blessing, rested on Ephraim, the younger (48:14). Joseph tried to correct him. Jacob refused: “I know it, my son, I know it… his younger brother shall be greater than he” (48:19). Again and again in Genesis, God chooses the younger over the elder: Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, Ephraim over Manasseh. God’s choice is not bound by the order of birth.

Then Jacob spoke over each of his twelve sons, and his words were prophecy. Over Judah he said:

> **Genesis 49:8** *Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father’s children shall bow down before thee.*
>
> **Genesis 49:9** *Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?*
>
> **Genesis 49:10** *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

“Judah is a lion’s whelp.” This is a **metaphor** — a figure of speech that speaks of one thing as though it were another. Judah is not *like* a lion; he *is* one, strong and royal. The sceptre — the ruler’s staff — would belong to Judah “until Shiloh come.” “A lawgiver from between his feet” is a Hebrew way of speaking of a man’s descendants, those who come from his own body (compare Deuteronomy 28:57, “her young one that cometh out from between her feet”). The rule would stay in Judah’s line. The meaning of “Shiloh” is debated, but from the earliest times Jewish readers understood it as a name of the Messiah, the one to whom the rule belongs, and to whom the peoples would gather. The New Testament names Him: “the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David” (Revelation 5:5); “it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda” (Hebrews 7:14). The brother who once sold Joseph, and then offered himself in Benjamin’s place, became the father of the royal line.

Over Joseph, Jacob spoke a blessing full of pictures:

> **Genesis 49:22** *Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall:*
>
> **Genesis 49:23** *The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him:*
>
> **Genesis 49:24** *But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)*

A fruitful vine planted by a spring, so full it spills over the wall; archers shooting at it, hating it; and a bow that held firm, because “the hands of the mighty God of Jacob” were on the hands of the archer. It

is Joseph's whole life in three verses. And in the middle of the blessing Jacob names the true source of all of it: "the shepherd, the stone of Israel."

Written in the Heavens?

Jacob's words over Judah (a lion, a sceptre, a ruler still to come) have a companion in the sky, and scripture itself opens the door to it.

The prophet who put them together. Centuries after Jacob, at the end of Israel's forty years in the wilderness, a soothsayer named Balaam was hired to curse Israel. He came "from Aram, out of the mountains of the east" (Numbers 23:7), and he could not curse; he could only bless. Twice he echoed Jacob's lion almost word for word: "He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up?" (Numbers 24:9; compare 23:24). Then he said this:

> **Numbers 24:17** *I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel…*

"Sceptre" here is *shebet*, the very word Jacob used in Genesis 49:10. So in one prophecy we have Judah's lion, Judah's sceptre, and a Star. Many centuries later, men came from the east once again, asking, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east" (Matthew 2:2).

The lion in the sky. "The heavens declare the glory of God… Their line is gone out through all the earth" (Psalm 19:1, 4). God asked Job, "Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season?" (Job 38:32), and Mazzaroth is generally understood to mean the band of constellations along the sun's yearly path. Some Bible students hold that these constellations were named in the beginning to tell the story of redemption. The best known of them is E. W. Bullinger, in *The Witness of the Stars* (1893). In that reading the last of the twelve is Leo, the Lion: the Lion of the tribe of Judah finishing His work, drawn with His feet over Hydra, the serpent. That is Genesis 3:15 again, the serpent's head under the conqueror's heel. As this series understands it, the picture fits scripture well, though scripture never spells it out. One fact about Leo is beyond dispute. Its brightest star, which sits almost exactly on the sun's path, has been called the king for as far back as records go. The Babylonians named it *Sharru*, "the King." The Greeks called it *Basiliskos*, and the Latin name *Regulus* means the same: "little king."

The sky in the year He was born. The chronology this series follows places the birth of Jesus in the autumn of 3 B.C. In September of that year Jupiter, which the ancients called the king planet, came alongside Regulus in Leo. Then, as Jupiter seemed to loop backward across the sky (what astronomers call *retrograde* motion), it met Regulus a second and a third time, in February and May of 2 B.C. The king planet circled the king star three times, in the constellation of the Lion, in the months when the Lion of Judah was born. As this series understands it, men of the east who knew Balaam's prophecy and watched the heavens could hardly have missed what that meant: a king was arising among the Jews. (Some who study these events count September 3 B.C. as the time of His conception rather than His birth. This series follows the reckoning it uses in its other studies.) Matthew does not tell us what the star was, and the star he records did something no planet does: it "went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was" (Matthew 2:9).

What to hold loosely. Scripture does not say what pictures were on the tribes' banners (Numbers 2:2). The lion on Judah's standard comes from later Jewish tradition, not from the Bible. Many of the "meanings" of star names printed in the popular books do not stand up either. Denebola, for example, is Arabic for "the lion's tail," not "the Judge who cometh." And the stars can only point. Psalm 19 itself

turns from the heavens in verses 1 to 6 to the written Word in verse 7: “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul.” The sky can declare the glory of God, but it takes the Word to declare the gospel.

Lion, sceptre, star. The Bible ties the three together in one Person. He is “the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David” (Revelation 5:5), the one to whom the sceptre belongs, and He says of Himself, “I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16).

“God Meant It Unto Good”

When Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers were afraid. Perhaps Joseph had only been kind for their father’s sake. Now he might take his revenge. They sent him a message asking forgiveness, and came and fell down before him: “Behold, we be thy servants” (50:18). The dream had come true one last time.

> **Genesis 50:19** *And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?*
> **Genesis 50:20** *But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*
> **Genesis 50:21** *Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.*

“Am I in the place of God?” Erotesis again. Joseph meant: vengeance is not mine to take. Judging you belongs to God, and God has already shown what He did with your sin.

Then comes the sentence that sums up the whole story. Read it closely, because it says two things and keeps them apart.

“*Ye* thought evil against me.” The evil was theirs. Joseph does not say God put the hatred in their hearts or sold him into Egypt. The envy, the pit, the silver and the lie were the brothers’ own. Scripture never calls evil good, and never makes God its author. God “cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13).

“*But God* meant it unto good.” The Hebrew verb in both halves is the same: *chashab*, to think, to plan, to weave together. They planned one thing. God planned another, through and over and beyond what they did. He did not need their evil, and He did not cause it. He overruled it. He took the very thing they meant for harm and turned it “to save much people alive.”

And then Joseph “comforted them, and spake kindly unto them” — literally, *spoke to their heart*. That is forgiveness: not pretending the wrong never happened, but refusing to repay it, and providing for the very people who did it: “I will nourish you, and your little ones.”

The Bones

> **Genesis 50:24** *And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.*
> **Genesis 50:25** *And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.*
> **Genesis 50:26** *So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.*

Joseph had lived ninety-three years in Egypt. He had been its ruler, married an Egyptian, and been given an Egyptian name. His sons were born there. Yet when he died, he made his family swear that they

would not leave his bones in Egypt. Egypt was not home. God had promised Abraham the land of Canaan, and Joseph believed God would keep that promise, even though he would not live to see it.

Hebrews singles out this act as the proof of Joseph's faith — not his rise to power, not his wisdom, but this: "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones" (Hebrews 11:22). The coffin lay in Egypt for about four hundred years. When Israel finally left, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him" (Exodus 13:19), and they were buried at last at Shechem, in the land of promise (Joshua 24:32). God kept His word, and Israel kept Joseph's.

Genesis begins with God's creation of life in a garden. It ends with a coffin in Egypt — and a promise that God would bring His people out.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

The New Testament never says in so many words that Joseph was a picture of Christ. But Stephen, preaching the gospel to Israel's council, told Joseph's story as part of a pattern — God's chosen deliverer rejected by his own brothers and then revealed to them (Acts 7:9-14) — and as this series understands it, the parallels are too many and too close to be accidental. Read Joseph's life beside the life of Jesus Christ:

- **Beloved of his father.** "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children." "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).
- **Hated by his brothers, without a cause.** Joseph's brothers "hated him." Jesus said, "They hated me without a cause" (John 15:25). "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).
- **Moved with envy.** "The patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph" (Acts 7:9). Pilate "knew that for envy they had delivered him" (Matthew 27:18).
- **Sold for silver.** Joseph, for twenty pieces, on Judah's proposal. Jesus, for thirty, by Judas — the same name.
- **Stripped of his robe.** Joseph's coat was taken from him; the soldiers divided Jesus' garments (John 19:23-24).
- **Counted dead.** For twenty years Joseph's father believed him dead.
- **Falsely accused, and silent.** Joseph was condemned for a crime he did not commit, and scripture records no defence. Jesus, accused, "opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).
- **Numbered with two condemned men.** In prison Joseph was with two of Pharaoh's officers, one restored and one put to death. On the cross Jesus was between two criminals, one who mocked and one who asked, "Lord, *remember* me" (Luke 23:42) — the very request Joseph made of the butler: "remember me" (Genesis 40:14).
- **Raised up at thirty.** Joseph "was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh." Jesus "began to be about thirty years of age" when His ministry began (Luke 3:23).
- **From the pit to the right hand of the throne.** Joseph went from the dungeon to the second chariot, with all authority given him: "only in the throne will I be greater than thou." Jesus Christ,

raised from the dead and taken up into heaven, “is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2), “by the right hand of God exalted” (Acts 2:33).

- **Every knee bows.** Before Joseph they cried, “Bow the knee.” “God also hath highly exalted him… That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Philippians 2:9-10).
- **The giver of bread.** “Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do.” At Cana, Jesus’ mother told the servants, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (John 2:5). And He said, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger” (John 6:35).
- **A Gentile bride.** Joseph, rejected by his brothers, took a bride from among the Gentiles.
- **Made known to his brethren the second time.** Stephen notes that “at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren” (Acts 7:13).
- **The saviour of those who rejected him.** Joseph forgave his brothers and fed them. Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34).
- **Evil meant, good worked.** “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.” Peter told the men of Jerusalem that they had crucified Jesus “by wicked hands,” and that God had raised Him up (Acts 2:23-24). Men did the evil. God raised Him from the dead, exalted Him, and brought salvation to “much people.”

And through all of it runs the line of Judah — the brother who sold Joseph, then offered himself as a surety in Benjamin’s place, and received the sceptre “until Shiloh come.” The Messiah came from Judah.

To the Grace Administration

God works for good — without being the author of evil. Joseph’s words are the Old Testament companion to a verse every believer knows: “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Paul does not say all things *are* good. Joseph’s brothers were not good; Potiphar’s wife was not good; the butler’s forgetfulness was not good. He says God works all things *together* for good. The believer can face what others mean for evil with the confidence Joseph had: God is not absent from it, and He is not defeated by it.

The LORD was with Joseph — and He is with us. Four times in one chapter, in slavery and in prison, “the LORD was with Joseph.” The believer under grace has more than that. God does not merely stand beside him; “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). And “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Joseph’s way of escape was out the door, leaving his cloak behind. God always provides one.

Forgive as you have been forgiven. Joseph had power, cause and opportunity to take revenge. He wept, embraced, provided and “spake kindly.” Paul asks the same of every believer: “be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). “Am I in the place of God?” — vengeance belongs to Him, not to us (Romans 12:19).

Suffering, then glory. Joseph’s path went down before it went up: the pit, the slave market, the prison, the forgotten years — and then the throne. Paul says the same pattern holds for the believer: “if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:17-18). “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).

Fruitful in the land of affliction. Joseph named his son *Ephraim* because God made him fruitful not after his troubles, but in them. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

This world is not home. Joseph ruled Egypt, and still would not let his bones stay there. The believer lives and works in this world, but "our conversation" — our citizenship — "is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). Like Joseph, we wait for the day God will "surely visit" and bring His people home.

To the Topic of Integrity

Joseph's life is scripture's great example of a man who did right when no one was watching, and kept doing right when it cost him:

- **In slavery**, he worked so faithfully that his master trusted him with everything.
- **In temptation**, he refused "day by day," would not even be in her company, and when trapped, ran.
- **In prison**, he served so well that the keeper put him in charge.
- **In the palace**, his first words to Pharaoh gave the credit to God: "It is not in me."
- **In power**, he did not take revenge.

"The LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper" (39:23).

The Main Takeaway

What men mean for evil, God can turn to good — so keep doing right in the pit, and keep your heart soft in the palace.

- **God's presence goes with you into trouble.** "The LORD was with Joseph" — in the slave market, in Potiphar's house, and in prison.
- **Do right when no one is watching.** Joseph's integrity was the same in a foreign house as it would have been in his father's tent. Sin is always "against God."
- **Run from what you cannot stand against.** He left his cloak and fled.
- **Wait for God's timing.** "Two full years" more. God's word "tried him" until the time came.
- **Give God the credit.** "It is not in me." The man God raises up is the man who knows where his wisdom came from.
- **Forgive completely.** Not by pretending nothing happened — "ye sold me" — but by refusing to repay it, and by providing for those who wronged you.
- **Trust God's hand over the whole story.** "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."

For Our Learning — The People

- **Joseph.** Rachel's firstborn, his father's favourite, a dreamer of God-given dreams. Sold at seventeen, raised to power at thirty, reunited with his family at thirty-nine, died at a hundred and

ten. Faithful as a slave, clean under temptation, patient in prison, humble before Pharaoh, merciful to his brothers, and full of faith at his death. “The LORD was with him.”

- **Jacob (Israel).** The aged father, who loved Joseph above the rest and made no secret of it. Deceived by his sons with a goat and a garment, as he had once deceived his own father. Mourned Joseph for twenty-two years, revived at the news that he lived, blessed Pharaoh, and prophesied over his sons before he died.
- **Reuben.** The eldest, who tried to rescue Joseph quietly and later reminded his brothers, “Spake I not unto you… Do not sin against the child?”
- **Judah.** The brother who proposed selling Joseph for profit — and who, humbled by his own failures with Tamar, later offered himself as a slave in Benjamin’s place. From him came the royal line and the Messiah.
- **Benjamin.** Rachel’s younger son, Joseph’s only full brother, whom Joseph used to test whether his brothers had changed.
- **Simeon.** Held bound in Egypt while his brothers went home for Benjamin.
- **Tamar.** Judah’s daughter-in-law, wronged by him, who secured her rights by her own boldness and became an ancestor of the Messiah (Matthew 1:3).
- **Potiphar.** Captain of Pharaoh’s guard, who saw that the LORD was with his Hebrew slave, trusted him with everything, and put him in the king’s prison on his wife’s accusation.
- **Potiphar’s wife.** Unnamed in scripture. She pursued Joseph day by day and accused him falsely when he refused her.
- **The chief butler and the chief baker.** Pharaoh’s officials, imprisoned with Joseph. The butler was restored and forgot him; the baker was hanged.
- **Pharaoh.** Unnamed in scripture. He recognized “a man in whom the Spirit of God is,” raised Joseph to the second chariot, and welcomed his family to Goshen.
- **Asenath.** Joseph’s Egyptian wife, daughter of the priest of On, mother of Manasseh and Ephraim.
- **Manasseh and Ephraim.** Joseph’s sons, whose names mean *making to forget* and *fruitful*; blessed by Jacob with crossed hands, the younger before the elder.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **The favoured son’s robe.** *Kethoneth passim*, perhaps a robe of many colours, perhaps a long robe reaching to wrists and ankles; worn by a king’s daughters in David’s day (2 Samuel 13:18). Not a working garment — a mark of rank and favour.
- **Speaking “peaceably.”** The ordinary greeting was *shalom*, “peace.” To be unable to speak “peaceably” to someone meant the family could no longer manage a common greeting.
- **Bowing to the ground.** How a subject greeted a king. The brothers did it to Joseph again and again.
- **The pit.** A rock-cut cistern for rainwater, narrow at the mouth and wide below, from which a man could not climb out.
- **The caravan trade.** Ishmaelite and Midianite traders carried spices, balm and myrrh down the trade road from Gilead to Egypt.
- **The price of a boy.** Twenty pieces of silver, the value the Law later set on a male aged five to twenty (Leviticus 27:5).
- **Mourning.** Tearing one’s clothes and wearing sackcloth of goat hair next to the skin.

- **The levirate duty.** A brother married his dead brother's childless widow to raise up a son in the dead man's name (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).
- **Egyptian dream-interpreters.** Egypt's magicians and wise men had professional schools and books of dream meanings; Joseph gave the credit to God alone.
- **Shaving before Pharaoh.** Hebrews wore beards; Egyptian men of rank were clean-shaven.
- **Signs of office.** The signet ring (the power to seal in the king's name), fine linen, a gold chain, and the second chariot.
- **A new name.** Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphnath-paaneah — a sign of his new standing in Egypt.
- **The divining cup.** Egyptians used cups for divination by watching liquids; the steward's words about the cup (44:5) were part of Joseph's test, and scripture never says Joseph practised divination.
- **"Fell on his neck."** The Eastern embrace.
- **Shepherds in Egypt.** "An abomination unto the Egyptians" (46:34) — which kept Israel separate in Goshen.
- **The patriarch's blessing.** The dying father's words over his sons were understood as prophecy; the right hand carried the greater blessing.
- **Embalming and burial in the homeland.** Joseph was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt, but his bones were carried to Canaan four centuries later.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Erotesis** — asking a question to make a point rather than to get information. "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (40:8); "Am I in the place of God?" (50:19).
- **Pleonasm** — saying more than is strictly needed, for emphasis. "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him" (40:23).
- **Idiom** — an expression whose meaning comes from how a people used it. "Could not speak peaceably unto him" (37:4); "his bowels did yearn" (43:30) — his heart ached; "fell on his neck" (46:29) — embraced him; "it was not you that sent me hither, but God" (45:8) — *not so much you as God*; "spake kindly unto them" (50:21) — literally, spoke to their heart; "a lawgiver from between his feet" (49:10) — his descendants.
- **Wordplay** — the same phrase used with two meanings. Pharaoh would "lift up" the butler's head (restore him) and "lift up" the baker's head "from off" him (execute him) (40:13, 19).
- **Metaphor** — speaking of one thing as another. "Judah is a lion's whelp" (49:9); "Joseph is a fruitful bough… by a well" (49:22).

What the Bible Actually Says

- **The "coat of many colours" is uncertain.** The Hebrew may mean a many-coloured robe or a long robe with sleeves. Either way, it marked Joseph as the favoured son.

- **The brothers first planned murder, not sale.** They "conspired against him to slay him" (37:18). Reuben persuaded them to use the pit; Judah proposed the sale.
- **Twenty pieces, not thirty.** Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver (37:28); Jesus was betrayed for thirty.
- **Joseph was not in prison briefly.** From the pit at seventeen to Pharaoh's court at thirty was thirteen years of slavery and imprisonment, including "two full years" after the butler forgot him.
- **Joseph did not dream in Egypt.** His own dreams came at seventeen in Canaan. In Egypt he interpreted the dreams of others — and gave God the credit.
- **Pharaoh and Potiphar's wife are never named** in scripture.
- **Joseph never claimed divining powers.** The words about the cup were part of his test of his brothers.
- **Joseph did not say his brothers were innocent.** "Ye sold me" (45:4); "ye thought evil against me" (50:20). He said God overruled what they did.
- **"God meant it unto good" does not make God the author of evil.** The evil was the brothers'; the good was God's.
- **The Bible does not say the twelve tribes carried the signs of the zodiac on their banners.** The lion on Judah's standard is later Jewish tradition. What scripture does join together is the lion, the sceptre and the star (Genesis 49:9-10; Numbers 24:9, 17; Revelation 5:5; 22:16).
- **Joseph's greatest act of faith**, according to Hebrews, was not his rise to power but his instruction about his bones (Hebrews 11:22).

God's Will and Intent

- **God keeps His promises across generations.** He had told Abraham his seed would sojourn in a strange land; through Joseph He brought them there, preserved them, and later brought them out.
- **God is with His people in trouble, not only after it.** "The LORD was with Joseph" in slavery and in prison.
- **God refines through trial.** "The word of the LORD tried him" until the time came.
- **God does not author evil, but He overrules it.** "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."
- **God changes hearts.** Judah the seller became Judah the surety.
- **God preserves the line of the Messiah.** Through famine, through a family's sin, through Judah and Tamar, He kept the promised Seed alive.
- **God's heart is to save life.** "God did send me before you to preserve life… to save your lives by a great deliverance."
- **God exalts the humble in due time.** From the pit to the palace, "only in the throne" greater — a picture of the One God would exalt to His own right hand.