

Joseph's Triumph

DAVE BAST

One of the ideas that people really seem to cling to is that if you are good and obedient and virtuous, God will reward you with blessing, happiness, a peaceful life, comfortable circumstances; this despite all experience to the contrary, not to mention all the contrary evidence of scripture. To take just one obvious example, today on Groundwork we continue our look at the life of Joseph; seized by his own flesh and blood; stripped of his beautiful multicolored coat; thrown into a dry hole; hauled out and sold to a passing caravan of traders; Joseph eventually ends up in Egypt, and that was just the beginning of his troubles.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and we are continuing the story of Joseph, Scott. You know, he was sold into slavery by his brothers, who were jealous and hated him, and he ends up with Potiphar, and then his wife accuses him and he is falsely imprisoned; and then these two officials have dreams – a dream keeps popping up through most of the story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, this is the motif, yes.

DAVE BAST

And we are going to see it again right now because after he correctly interprets their dreams, one of them is restored to his position – the butler; and then Pharaoh has a dream. Now we are coming down to it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; in some ways, Joseph's troubles with his family started with dreams he had; so, he had these dreams, and we figure out later the dreams came from God, that Joseph was going to be important; but now that he ends up in Egypt, he is not having any dreams of his own anymore, but it turns out he has some spiritual gift of God that he has a real knack for interpreting these things, and he does interpret them correctly. Then, as we said near the end of the last program, he interpreted one dream correctly – the cupbearer – that you will be restored; Pharaoh is going to bring you back. He put you in prison because he got mad at you, but he is going to put you back; and when you get back, tell Pharaoh about me...

DAVE BAST

Yes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he says: Oh, I'll do that; I'll do that.

DAVE BAST

Oh, sure, Joseph; we're buddies; don't worry about it. When I am restored, you are going to be right there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then the text says: But he forgot him for two more years.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; well, then Pharaoh dreams, and now we are in Genesis 41, and here is the dream, after two years: [0:02:25.4 ²Pharaoh is standing by the Nile when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds, ³and after them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank, ⁴and the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

But then he immediately falls asleep and has a second dream – same kind of theme – it is grains of wheat this time. ⁸In the morning his mind was troubled so he sent for all of the magicians and wise men of Egypt and told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him. ⁹Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I am reminded of my shortcomings.”

(Laughter) I love that line!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nice way to put it.

DAVE BAST

Yes; in the old King James it is: I remember me of my sins. I have often thought of that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, that nice boy, Joseph. How long has it been? A year, 18 months, no, two years.

Right; so Pharaoh wakes up and says: I have a feeling these dreams – dreams are weird – everybody has weird dreams, but these two were identical – I think they mean something nobody could tell him. So, he goes to all the standard magicians and gurus and whatnot. Nobody could tell him, and then finally, yes, this other guy remembers and says: There is this guy in prison. He has a real knack for this kind of thing – believe me, I know. So then they send for Joseph and he interprets them and says: Well, tell you what; the next seven years, pretty good. Seven years after that a famine is going to hit this entire region in the Mediterranean basin, and if you do not get ready for it, your people are going to starve to death. You will be the last Pharaoh of Egypt because everybody is going to die unless we do something about it. Maybe I can fix it for you.

DAVE BAST

Well, yes; you know, there was a universal belief in that ancient culture, and for that matter, in many cultures even today, that dreams really are something that comes from God. In our society, we have been influenced by Freud and modern psychology and all the rest, and so it is sort of psychoanalysis and dreams come out of your unconscious, and all that. But for the biblical world, dreams come from God, and we see that recurring throughout scripture, where God does speak to people through dreams. So, when Joseph is brought in, he immediately – I love this part of the story, too – he immediately distances himself from the magicians and the soothsayers and the fortunetellers, and he says: No, no, no; I cannot interpret dreams; because Pharaoh said: Well, my cupbearer tells me you can interpret dreams. No, no, no. This is from God, says Joseph. So he bears witness to Yahweh – the God of Israel – and then, God will give me the interpretation; but do not think it is me doing this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; interesting, interesting, interesting. Joseph could sometimes be just a little slow. His brothers already hated him back home. Dad had already given him the special coat – he was Daddy’s boy – Daddy’s favorite; and then he has one dream, which is going to insult his brothers because he is going to suggest they are going to bow down to him. Then he has another dream of the same thing... So, it is like Joseph keeps turning the spotlight onto himself: Look at me! Look at me! Look at me! But now, he has been chastened. He has been roughed up by those brothers. He has been falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife and imprisoned – been there for years now; and now, he just keeps throwing the spotlight onto God. It is not about me; it is about God,

God. It is not me who is going to tell you; God is going to give you the dream interpretation, Pharaoh. It is all going to be God. What a guy! He has changed. He is totally humble in putting all of the spotlight onto God.

DAVE BAST

Right, but, having said that – and I totally agree – I love Joseph’s humility here, and his piety, his faith; but he is no dummy either; and so he immediately follows up the interpretation by saying: You know, Pharaoh, if I were you I would find some really capable person and put him in charge and take a levy – take a kind of a tax – of all of the produce of the next seven years and store it all up, because when the seven lean years come – when the drought comes – when the disaster strikes – then you will have the wherewithal to keep your people. And Pharaoh says: Hey, you know what? I have a good idea of someone who might be able to do that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right; so Joseph suggests find somebody, and then kind of sticks his hands in his pockets and looks down at his feet and...

DAVE BAST

Whistles a little bit...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Any ideas, Pharaoh? Well, hey... do you have a job? Oh no, of course you don’t. You have just been in prison. And so, an amazing turnaround happens here, and Pharaoh says: You are going to become the Prince of Egypt. You are going to become the prime minister of this land. You will get Egypt ready for that famine. So, it took years, right? Let’s not forget, Joseph had languished in prison for two whole years after helping out that cupbearer; but now, talk about your fast track to the top: From prisoner to prime minister in a matter of moments; and from there his story really takes off, and we will look at that in just a moment.

BREAK

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork. So, now Joseph has been installed as the prime minister of Egypt. He is second in the land only to Pharaoh. Pharaoh is kind of a hands-off type manager – monarch – potentate. So, all the authority has been placed in Joseph’s very capable hands. Interestingly enough, we see that phrase coming up again – a couple of times we saw it where it says the Lord was with Joseph, and Potiphar put everything in his charge, and then later in the prison, the Lord was with Joseph and the prison director put everything in his charge; well, now the Lord is really with Joseph and so it has escalated. So now everything is being controlled by Joseph, and we have four chapters of Genesis – 42 through 45 – that tell this story in wonderful detail of how the famine comes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and then we have to also... So, ever since Joseph got sold into slavery the covenant family – and we know Jacob and his children and this family is the family of the covenant; these are Abraham’s descendents; but the family has been in two places. So Genesis sort of keeps switching scenes. So, we go from Egypt, and now back to Canaan; from Joseph now back to Jacob and company.

DAVE BAST

It is that word *meanwhile* again. Meanwhile...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes in the movies, you know, it is like: Meanwhile, back on the ranch; or in this case, meanwhile, back in Canaan, Jacob is not in such a good place. He is heartbroken over Joseph, whom he is convinced has been killed by an animal. Then his favorite wife, Rachel, dies in childbirth. She has one last child, and he is heartbroken again. In fact, he initially names that last child Benoni, which means son of my sorrow. He

thinks better of it later. What a name to give to a kid. So then he changes it to Benjamin – son of my right hand. But, the point being, things are not going so well. Jacob... We saw in a previous program how finally God cracked through to Jacob, and it ended his life of craftiness and living by his wits and convinced Jacob that grace alone and forgiveness and graciousness matter; and even so, things are not so easy for Jacob. You know, so often in our minds – and maybe it is because Sunday school versions of these stories sometimes clean them up, we think of the lives of the saints. Their paths of discipleship were straight lines. You could mark it out with a ruler; whereas, our lives just feel like zigzags – two steps forward, three steps back. I try to become a better disciple, but my path of discipleship is a zigzag. Well, guess what? It is that way for the people of the Bible, too.

DAVE BAST

You know, it is interesting to me – and really quite striking – that the Bible devotes so much time to Joseph's story, and it tells it in wonderful detail. I mean, it is almost like a novel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think it is the longest section in Genesis, right?

DAVE BAST

Right; and when you think of all that they skip over... So, here are four full chapters, and then some, just to tell the dynamics of the brothers coming and going; because what happens is, of course, there are seven years of...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The famine comes to the whole region, right.

DAVE BAST

Right, and they kind of skip through the first seven years with a hop, skip, and a jump; and Joseph has amassed all of this grain. He has built big, huge granaries and storehouse cities; and then when the tough times start to hit, one little detail that they just kind of mention and do not dwell on, but he ends up buying up all the people of Egypt because they run out. At first they sell him their land in exchange for food, and then they sell him their other property. Finally they have to sell themselves; and so, all the population of Egypt become Pharaoh's direct possession as Joseph dispenses food; but meanwhile, here come these visitors down from Canaan.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; everybody learned eventually. News got around: You hungry? Go to Egypt. There is this really smart guy there who seemed to know this was coming – don't know how, but the granaries in Egypt are full to overflowing. Need food? Go to Egypt.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is interesting, by the way. You had mentioned earlier Dave that Joseph is sometimes seen almost a Christ type figure in Genesis; and indeed, we know that the ultimate promise to Abraham made way back in Genesis 12 is that through Abram and his descendants, all nations would be saved; and here is the first little foretaste, where little old Joseph ends up saving the world – the known world at that time would have starved to death if it were not for Egypt's supplies that Joseph had prudently stored. So, Joseph is almost a little bit of a Messiah role here of God's anointed one to save people, and his own family will be among them.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is just it; he saves the people of God, because at this point, Israel is literally Israel and his descendants. That is the people of God – the chosen people. There are only a few dozen of them, including

wives and children; and when they run out of food, he says to the ten older brothers: Look, you better hightail it down to Egypt and get enough food for us; buy it; here, bring some presents; bring what we have. We have some luxury goods, but we do not have grain; and so they do. Of course, he is going to hang onto Benjamin because now Benjamin is the baby of the family.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the last time his favorite son went out, he got killed, so he is not going to go; and that sets up that whole thing. We do not have time to go into all the details, but that whole thing where the brothers come before Joseph; no way are they going to recognize him. He is all gussied up like an Egyptian wearing the normal Egyptian attire; no way are they going to recognize their former snot-nosed little brother, Joseph; but he recognizes them, and he plays a game with them for a while, and you are never quite sure where it is at. It is a little mean. There is a little... it almost looks like a little revenge here. He is going to play these bad boys a little bit.

DAVE BAST

Yes; well, you know, they had it coming, I am sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, I think they did, too. So, he plays a little game with them and they do not know who he is and he sends them back home and says: Look, you want grain? You have any other brothers? Yeah. Well, you have to bring him; which about kills Jacob again; and now they have got to let Benjamin go.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, there is this wonderful line in Genesis 42, where when they come back and tell Jacob: The only way we are going to get more food is if Benjamin comes with us this time; and Jacob just cries out: Everything is against me. Everything is against me! And again, the reader's eye view. We are standing outside the story, and we realize: Jacob, hey! How wrong you are. You are about to be blessed beyond your imagining. Joseph is going to be restored to you. You are going to be fed. You are going to have all your needs met. You are going to live together with all of your children...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Your whole family...

DAVE BAST

Yes, and just this sense... I take away from that, do not judge too quickly whether your life is a disaster and a tragedy or whether God will bless you in the end, because until we get to the end, we do not realize often when we think, you know, everything is against us, no, you are just one more – one more mile and you are going to see it all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it reminds you of that verse in Romans 8 that many of us cling to, especially during tough times. ²⁸We know that in all these things – all these *bad* things, oftentimes – God works for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. We cling to that – we believe that – but we cannot see the end of the story sometimes. We believe it will have a happy ending somehow by and by, but it is pretty tough to see, and these characters testify to that.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is right; but we can see the end of Joseph's story, and we will look at that in just a moment.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we are getting to the very end of the book of Genesis; the end of

the story of Joseph, who has become now the Prince of Egypt, and his brothers have appeared before him, and eventually – finally, finally, Joseph reveals to them – after they bring Benjamin with them – he reveals to them: Hey, it is me; your long lost brother. You know, the one you sold; but, he forgives them, and it is a little bit like Jacob meeting up with Esau again that we saw; it ends up being lots of hugs and tears and the brothers still are fearing for their lives – this guy could kill them – but, no; it is going to be grace.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is a wonderful scene in Genesis 45. Joseph tells all the Egyptian servants: Leave, get out of the room; and then he makes himself known to his brothers. It is just a deeply moving scene, and they reconcile; but then he says: Okay, enough of this. Listen, we have five more years of famine ahead of us and there is no way you are going to survive, and you cannot keep running back and forth up to Palestine; so you have to go back and get my father – get everybody – round them all up.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Move the whole thing.

DAVE BAST

Come on back here; and Pharaoh gives them a choice spot to live when Joseph tells him: Hey, I have my family coming. And so, back they come.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and right in the middle of all of that is one of the most famous lines in the Bible; sometimes misinterpreted, but as he is forgiving his brothers and just before he says go back and get Dad, too. Bring Dad here, too. Everybody, you can live with me. Boy, have I landed on my feet, so come live with me. But then he says... the brothers are still sort of like, oh, man, what we did to you; and Joseph says: Look, you meant it for evil, God meant it for good; and that is going to become a classic verse of Providence that again a lot of people cling to, that it was the sense that, yes, rotten things happen, but God is saving the world as we know it through me now, and it would not have happened if... but it raises all kinds of questions. Do we have to think that it was God's idea that they rough up their brother, throw him in a well, sell him? Were these the actions of God, or is it more God working through the actions that should not have happened that have nothing to do with God, but God is able to bring good out of it anyway. There are two schools of thought on this.

DAVE BAST

Well, yes; I guess we do not have time in about five minutes left to dig down into the depths of the ways of Providence – the good plan of God reconciled with the evil actions of people. Neither one cancels out the other. I mean, maybe that is the best and quickest and easiest way to say it. The fact that God can bring good out of human evil does not cancel out the fact that it is still evil, and we do not pin that on God – we do not blame God; at least, we should not. I really get tired of people who keep hurling back against God the evil that people have done. Do not blame Him for that. It was people's choices that did that – that did these awful things – that killed – that maimed – that blasphemed – that whatever; but at the same time, God is still God and He has this incredible capacity to make evil turn out for good ultimately.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God and God's Spirit are endlessly nimble – endlessly creative. Not undone. Not thwarted, even by the terrible actions of these brothers...

DAVE BAST

Well, and we have the supreme example in the cross, don't we, of evil that God turns into good.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The worst thing that could ever happen did happen on the cross, and yet, through it God brought salvation. So, the covenant family is saved from starvation. Joseph – because God was able to make lemonade out of

those lemons, God was able to bring a better day; save the family; they all come down. Jacob gets reunited with Joseph. It had to be just nothing but joy for the old man. Benjamin is safe. Joseph is safe. And the whole family is well fed and well taken care of, but there is one little thing wrong with this picture; all along the promise has been for the land flowing with milk and honey – the land of Canaan – and guess what? God's covenant family, as Genesis ends, they are not there – they are in Egypt.

DAVE BAST

Yes, yes; something is going to have to give here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They cannot stay there forever...

DAVE BAST

This is not the end of the story, right; and there is this... to me, one of the most wonderful little vignettes in the whole book of Genesis comes at the very end, and it is an odd ending to be sure because in Chapter 50 old Jacob dies. He is old, he is full of years, he has had a great life. They bring him back and they bury him in the family plot back in Canaan, alongside Abraham and Isaac and Sarah; and then finally it is Joseph's turn, and in the interval he has again forgiven his brothers, reassured them: Do not worry; and then he gives these last instructions to his brothers, or presumably their kids; whomever: Look, I am about to die, and when I die I am going to be buried here, but I want you to promise... Listen, someday God is going to visit you – that is the phrase he uses – God will visit you; and when He does, I want you to carry my bones up with you back to the Promised Land. I love that!

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a seed of hope in the narrative because the amazing thing about Genesis... here is the very last verse of the whole 50 chapters – Genesis is a big book – 50 chapters – Genesis 50:26:

So, Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten; and after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt. That is the last... When I preached on this years ago, the title of my sermon was: A coffin in Egypt. In some ways, it is an ominous ending because is the covenant buried with him, too, now? I mean, how can we be in Egypt – a coffin in Egypt – and yet, there is this hope of return; and Joseph says: When you do, *when* – bring me home – because we are not going to stay here forever.

DAVE BAST

Right; see, what he is saying there – he is giving a testimony to his true identity. He looked like an Egyptian; he talked like an Egyptian; he lived in Egypt for ninety three of his one hundred and ten years; he even died like an Egyptian, and they turned him into a mummy...

SCOTT HOEZEE

A mummy; they embalmed him.

DAVE BAST

Think King Tut – that is what he looked like; and yet, he said: I am not really an Egyptian, I am an Israelite...

SCOTT HOEZEE

None of us are.

DAVE BAST

And Egypt is not my home – the Promised Land is my home – Canaan is my home – and that is where I am headed and I want you to take me with you. So, it is a confession of his own sense of faith and identity, but it is also an encouragement to them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you know, Dave, throughout this six-part series, we have been noticing the surprises of grace. God keeps upending expectations. He keeps choosing the younger over the older; and so, Genesis ends almost with a pregnant moment of saying God is going to have to do something again someday, which sets up the book of Exodus, of course; but God is going to have to do something again someday to get us out of here. We will just back up a little bit, but maybe a good way to end this series since we have seen again and again the reversals of grace all through Genesis, maybe the last thing we could think about is something that happened in Genesis 48 just before Jacob died. Joseph wants to bring his two sons in; he has two boys...

DAVE BAST

Ephraim and Manasseh.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and they need to paternal blessing of Grandpa Jacob; and so Joseph very carefully puts to older boy right next to Grandpa's right hand because that is where the big blessing comes, and at the last second Jacob crosses his arms – now his arms are forming an X – he puts his right hand on the younger boy and blesses him. Joseph says: You are making a mistake. And I picture Jacob looking over the top of those crossed arms, winks at Joseph and says: NO, this is what God does. He always surprises you. So, his arms are crossed; it is like X marks the spot of grace, and what a great ending for the book of Genesis, where we keep seeing that reversal of grace again and again.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation today. I am Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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