

GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL
THE STORY BEGINS
GOD THE COVENANT MAKER
God Is Faithful In His Covenants

Some people choose to spend a lifetime in a “prison of unforgiveness.” Others choose to “let go” of bitterness and become a ‘forgiver’ that reflects Christ. ***Ephesians 1:7 (ESV)***⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.* Joseph is a wonderful biblical example of a “forgiver.” Even though he was first a slave and later imprisoned for a total of at least 13 years because of the evil deeds of his own brothers, he forgave them recognizing that what they had done had become the means for preserving the very life of the entire family line. Although he did not know it, Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers also became a beautiful picture of the forgiveness extended to us by the Son of God. Recall Jesus’ words from the cross. ***Luke 23:34 (ESV)***³⁴ ... *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*...

Our God keeps His Word – as we trace the history of the Bible, we see confirmation of how God keeps His promises. We have studied in past lessons of God’s long-range promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ***Genesis 15:5 (ESV)***⁵ *And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”* From today’s passages, we see once again the Old Testament truth of the New Testament promise. ***Romans 8:28 (ESV)***²⁸ *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Last week we studied how Joseph chose to do the right thing and flee the adulterous temptation of his master’s wife. Joseph’s righteousness caused her to tell lies about him and he ended up in prison but even that turned into a blessing. ***Genesis 39:23 (ESV)***²³ *The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph’s charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.*

While Joseph was serving the LORD, in prison of all places, Pharaoh’s chief butler and chief baker offended the Pharaoh and they were both imprisoned and put under the care of Joseph. During their incarceration, they each dreamed a dream. Joseph interpreted the dreams of both men – the butler’s dream indicated he would be restored to his position and Joseph asked that the butler remember him when he was restored. The baker’s dream indicated that he would be hung and he was. After the butler returned to his position, two long years passed before he chose to remember Joseph. When the Pharaoh came in need of a dream interpreter, the butler finally ‘spoke up’ and Joseph was brought before the Pharaoh for the purpose of interpreting Pharaoh’s dream.

In Potiphar’s household and then in prison, Joseph had acquired the necessary management skills he would need to accompany his natural abilities. From the life of Joseph, we learn that God’s preparation of us is often long-term rather than instantaneous. The LORD did not just bring a 17-year-old boy to Egypt and immediately set him up with Pharaoh. Just like in the life of Joseph, the LORD uses the trials and temptations of our lives to prepare us to be instruments of His grace to others. Joseph also learned like the prophet Jeremiah would later

learn in **Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)** ²² *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* ²³ *they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

Next, we see how the LORD's timing of bringing Joseph out of prison at this particular time was about to connect to Almighty God keeping His promise to Joseph's grandfather, Isaac, as found in **Genesis 26:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *... in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.*

Pharaoh's dream was a warning of a severe famine that was destined to arrive in ALL the land. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream of an upcoming seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine and by the grace of God made such a sensible suggestion to Pharaoh that Pharaoh designated Joseph to make provision for Egypt to survive a famine.

God brings fruit out of our affliction.

Read Genesis 41:46-57 (ESV) ⁴⁶ *Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph ... went through all the land of Egypt.* ⁴⁷ *During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly,* ⁴⁸ *and he gathered up all the food of these seven years... and put the food in the cities...* ⁴⁹ *And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea...* ⁵⁰ *Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore them to him.* ⁵¹ *Joseph called the...firstborn Manasseh. "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house."* ⁵² *The ...second he called Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."* ⁵³ *The seven years of plenty... came to an end,* ⁵⁴ *and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.* ⁵⁵ *When all the land of Egypt was famished...Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do."* ⁵⁶ *So when the famine had spread...Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians...* ⁵⁷ *Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.*

Overnight, Joseph went from being a slave held in prison for a crime he did not commit to the position of being Pharaoh's "right hand" man. Part of Joseph's rise to power included the Pharaoh giving Joseph a wife who was daughter of the priest of On. Some might think it was 'out of character' that Joseph would marry a "Gentile" bride and have children with a woman outside of the Hebrew faith. Let's look closer. Joseph had been rejected by his family. In Joseph's marriage to a Gentile, we see a picture of Jesus, the Bridegroom of the New Testament, who was rejected by the house of Israel taking a Gentile bride (the church). **Revelation 22:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ *The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.* After the resurrection of the Messiah, the Promised Seed of Abraham, through His Spirit and His Bride, the church, beckon everyone to come to the Savior causing the family of Abraham to become as promised in **Genesis 32:12 (ESV)** ¹² *But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'* Even in Joseph's storing of the grain we see a picture of God's promise: *And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea.*

As you find yourself with those who do not share your faith or those who do not seek after heavenly things, remember how Joseph ruled in an idolatrous kingdom that did not worship the Almighty God; yet, he remained faithful to his LORD.

Time does not permit for me to tell the entire story. You can refresh your memory by reading **Genesis 41-50**. I will mention that the famine that Pharaoh dreamed about became a reality in seven years. It spread all over Egypt and also over other lands, including Canaan. Jacob, Joseph's father, learned of food for sale in Egypt and sent his sons there twice during the first two years of the famine. Joseph recognized his brothers immediately but they were unsuspecting that he was the long lost brother they had sold into slavery.

Let's look in upon the moment that God shows us a picture of forgiveness through Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers.

Read Genesis 45:1-15 (ESV) ¹ Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." ... ² And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it... ³ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. ⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ ... ⁷ And God sent me... to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. ¹⁰ You shall dwell in the land of Goshen... you and your children and your children's children, and ... all that you have. ¹¹ There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come... ¹² ... ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Joseph had been known to the brothers only by his Egyptian name Zaphnath-Paaneah. This Egyptian name basically meant "the man to whom secrets are revealed." Joseph had learned much since he had been exiled from his family.

We can only speculate about how they felt when Joseph said, *I am your brother, Joseph*. Did they think that the Egyptian ruler was toying with them or did they recognize Joseph in that instant? We don't know – but we know they were distressed! Wouldn't you be if you had sold out your brother only to discover that now he was in power over you? As a boy, Joseph had seemed powerless to his brothers but not anymore. **Proverbs 19:21 (ESV)** ²¹ *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.* Joseph had dreamed years before that his brothers would bow to him – and bow they had!

Some say that revenge is sweet but Joseph did not find it that way. He did not want the anguish he saw reflected in their faces to remain. In this passage, we see Joseph's recognition of God's faithfulness – *you sold me into Egypt – God sent me ahead of you*. Joseph had the privilege of recognizing both sides of what happened to him – the human side contrasted with the perfect will of God.

Wiersbe explains, “Keep in mind that this reconciliation was possible only because Joseph had suffered and triumphed, and it’s a beautiful picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ did for sinners in His death on the cross and His resurrection. Like Jesus, Joseph went from suffering to glory, from the prison to the throne, and was able to share his wealth and glory with others... *After that his brothers talked with him* – is a simple sentence that speaks volumes in what it doesn’t report. When Joseph was a teenager at home, his brothers so hated him that they couldn’t even speak to him, but now that they’ve been reconciled and forgiven, communication is possible.”

At the time disasters come, we often cannot see God’s hand or believe that any good can come from such trials. Usually, it is only in hindsight that we can see how God has used something bad to achieve something good. In some situations, we may never see the good on this side of eternity but we can trust that our God will be faithful through it all!

Belonging to Jesus gives us the confidence that God overrules evil with good.

Read Genesis 50:15-21 (ESV) ¹⁵ *When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.”* ¹⁶ *So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷ ‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.”* Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ *His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.”* ¹⁹ *But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?”* ²⁰ *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.* ²¹ *So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good is the defining verse of Joseph’s life.

Had Jacob really asked the brothers to send a deathbed message to Joseph regarding their forgiveness? To me, it is doubtful. Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years before he died. He could have spoke face-to-face with Joseph any time he wanted. However, in sibling relationships, it is sometimes one living parent or grandparent that will hold the family together. Many children conceal differences for the sake of the parent or grandparent. Obviously, this is what Joseph’s brothers thought he had done all these years. They were unable to accept the genuineness of Joseph’s forgiveness. Possibly, they were judging by their feelings. In the brothers’ lack of faith in Joseph’s forgiveness, we see a picture of many people today who fail to accept the forgiveness of God for sins of the past. They say, “I know God can forgive me, but...” Let’s get real! There is no but about it – when God forgives – He forgives. How can we be sure that God forgives us? We know because God’s Word tells us so. **1 John 1:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Joseph did not lie to his brothers when he said that he forgave them. Neither does our Heavenly Father lie regarding His forgiveness of us. **Psalm 103:12 (ESV)** ¹² *as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.* Believe it! And rejoice in it!