

A DREAMER OF DREAMS

Genesis 37:1-11

Intro: I am beginning tonight a series on the life of Joseph--Joseph, the son of Jacob, the grandson of Isaac, the great grandson of Abraham. The account of his life is given to us in thirteen out of the last fourteen chapters of Genesis--beginning with chapter 37. Chapter 38 deals with Judah, but all of the other chapters at the end of Genesis deal with Joseph.

Actually the birth of Joseph is recorded for us in Genesis 30:22-24. It came about in a very unusual way.

Jacob, Joseph's father, had two wives and two concubines: Leah, and her maid, Zilpah; Rachel, and her maid, Bilhah.

Jacob had fled to Padan-aram when he and his mother thought that Esau, his brother, would kill him. He went to his uncle's home, and there fell in love with his cousin, Rachel. He agreed to work for seven years in order to be able to marry Rachel, and this is what he did. But Laban deceived him, and gave Leah to Jacob, Rachel's older sister, saying that it was not the custom to let the younger one marry first. And so after one week Rachel was given to him also after he agreed to work another seven years for her.

When the Lord saw that Rachel was loved, but that Leah was hated, He opened Leah's womb so that she began to have children. She gave birth to four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Rachel was unable to have children, and this made Rachel very unhappy. She and Jacob had trouble over it, but there was nothing that Jacob could do.

Rachel decided to have children by her maid, and so she gave Bilhah to her husband, and Dan and Naphtali were born.

Leah was not having children at that time, and so she did what Rachel had done: she gave her maid to Jacob, and this is when Gad and Asher were born.

Then the Lord took pity on Leah, and she gave birth to two more sons and a daughter. Their names were Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah.

Then we read these words in Genesis 30:22-24:

And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.

And she conceived, and bare a son, and said, God hath taken away my reproach:

And she called his name **Joseph**; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son.

As Joseph was taking his family back to Canaan, Rachel gave birth to her second son, Benjamin, but she died at his birth.

The story of Joseph begins when he was seventeen years of age. Now, with this background, let me read my text:
Genesis 37:1-11.

Why would we study biography, especially Biblical biography? A biography is, by definition, "the written history of a person's life" (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, p. 104).

The first answer certainly would be that we study Biblical biography because much of the Bible was written in biographical form. We have the story of the lives of many, many people in Scripture—both in the OT, and in the NT. Thus, biography was important to the Holy Spirit.

Biblical biography is very selective, and often very brief.

Most biographies try to give us all that they can about a person's life from his birth to his death, with as few omissions as possible. But that is not true of the biographies of Scripture. Even though we have four books devoted to the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, not one of them, nor all of them put together, actually give us a complete biography of the earthly life of our Lord. The same is true of the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, John the Baptist, the Apostle Paul, or any other Biblical person that you want to mention.

This leads us to realize that those parts of each person's life that are recorded in the Bible have been carefully chosen by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of showing us the ways of the Lord in that person's life. Thus we see in Biblical biography real evidence of the sovereignty of God, of the providence of God, of the patience and mercy of the Lord—and so much more! But every biography contains something, and often many things, that can be very helpful for us in our walk with the Lord, and in the work that the Lord has given us to do. Sometimes we are warned. Sometimes we are encouraged. Often we are made to marvel at the wisdom and goodness of God.

Whatever can be said about the value of studying the biographies of Scripture, certainly can be said about the life of Joseph. It is generally agreed by those who have studied the Scriptures carefully that no person in the OT is, by his life, a greater type of our Lord Jesus Christ, than Joseph was. He was not perfect, as our Lord was. But we can see so much in Joseph and in his circumstances which was to be seen later in the Person, the life, the works, of our Lord. I hope to point the similarities out as we go along.

The first thing that we notice is:

I. JOSEPH'S YOUTH (Gen. 37:1-4).

He was only 17 years old. So this is a story that ought to interest young people. We know very little about him before this time.

He was living with his father and his brothers. So this is a story that ought to be of interest to parents and to families.

As we look at what is said here about Joseph we can see that he had:

A. Four distinct disadvantages.

1. His youth.

He was not to blame for this. Every person who has grown to adulthood has gone through this time. It is usually a time when we do not know as much as we think we do, and it is a time when we may do a lot of things which we afterwards regret.

David, whose life was, for the most part, exemplary, prayed this prayer in Psalm 25:7:

Remember not the sins of my youth,
nor my transgressions:
according to thy mercy remember thou me
for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.

We are not told what they were, but they bothered David. He has many things to say about his youth in the Psalms, how the Lord had taught him, etc.

We do not need to feel that we must jump to the defense of Joseph as though he were incapable of doing anything wrong. He did make mistakes, and some of them are recorded here.

2. His mother was dead.

Rachel may not have been an ideal mother, but every child needs his mother. But Joseph's mother died when he was even younger, and we can see how she would have been a help to him. You young men who are here tonight, be thankful for your mother, and thank God that you still have her, if you do. You will appreciate her more and more the older you get.

3. He was born into a family where his father had four wives altogether, and his father had had children by all of them. That certainly was not God's plan for the family. In Scripture that always contributed to jealousy and contention in the family, and Jacob's home was no exception. In fact, Joseph's half-brothers hated him so much that there were times when they would gladly have killed him.

We do not see many polygamous marriages in these days, but we can certainly thank the Lord if we were raised in homes where there was, or is, that kind of a relationship that God ordained from the beginning.

4. He was his father's favorite.

It was certainly commendable to Jacob that he loved Joseph. There are many fathers even today who really do not love their children. But it is tragic that he loved him more than he loved his other sons. And to show his love, he gave Joseph a special coat (regardless of what its true description might be), so that his brothers could never even look at him without being reminded that their father did not love them as much as he loved Joseph. They even found it impossible to speak to him without causing trouble.

This is a lesson for every parent. We need to love our children, but not to have favorites. And that goes for grandchildren, too. We need to love our families like God loves us--all with the same continuing, deep love.

I mention these things to point out that a person can have some definite handicaps in his life, and yet can see the blessing of God in his life. God is greater than the sins of our parents, and God is greater than our sins. All of us (and this is true of Joseph) are trophies of the grace of God. So if you have problems, and if you have displeased the Lord, pray that the Lord will restrain you, and guide you, and help you that your life can bring glory to him.

But with all of these disadvantages, let me point out:

B. Two advantages:

1. Although Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons, yet he gave him responsibility. He taught

him to work.

And whatever interpretation we may put on the fact that he brought an evil report about his brothers to his father, we can see that he was indignant when others were not faithful in doing what they were supposed to do.

Matthew Henry said about this that "those that are trained up to do nothing are likely to be good for nothing" (Vol. I, p. 212). As we follow the story of Joseph from Canaan to Egypt, from Potiphar's house to the prison, and from the prison to the throne of Egypt, we see the value of the training that Jacob gave Joseph at home. If we teach our children responsibility, that is one of the things they will not depart from as they get older. If we fail to teach responsibility, we are laying the foundation for a useless, worthless, and sometimes dangerous life.

2. He evidently had a keen sense of right and wrong.

I am thinking now about what Joseph did in reporting to his father about the evil that his brothers were doing. Some writers justify Joseph in doing this; others condemn him as a tattletale. I am willing to admit that Joseph may have done the wrong thing here, and that it only contributed to his problem with his brothers. But I do not think we can reach a solid conclusion as to what the actual situation was. We surely do not know what the "evil report" was. Whatever it was, it was bad.

But what does it teach us about Joseph? It teaches us that he knew the difference between right and wrong, and that it was an offense to him when others did the wrong thing. Can we not see that this was one reason that Joseph said "No" to the temptations he faced with Potiphar's wife. Joseph, even at 17, was a young man you could trust to do the right thing even when you were not watching him. He learned that at home. If he did the wrong thing here, it was because he was trying to do the right thing.

I hope you are a little bit better acquainted with Joseph after considering these things with me.

But now let us look at the rest of our text. Here we see:

II. JOSEPH AND HIS DREAMS (Gen. 37:5-11).

A. The two dreams.

Joseph had two dreams. The first one is recorded in verse 7; the second is in verse 9.

Both dreams he told to his brothers, and he told the second one to his father as well as to his brothers. He may have also told his father the first one.

As a result of the dreams, his brothers "hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words." They also "envied" him, which means that they were burning with jealousy. Their hatred got hotter than ever! It meant nothing to them that Joseph was given essentially the same dream twice--a matter which Joseph was to learn later meant that it was certain, and not far off!

What they understood about the origin of Joseph's dreams, we do not know. But they had no trouble understanding the meaning. Perhaps Jacob's thoughts went back to Peniel when he had a dream which was the real turning point in his life. God was dealing with him, and the Lord even appeared to him. So it is not surprising to read that while his brothers "envied him, . . . his father ~~observed~~ the saying." "The saying" means that he felt that it was a message, probably a message from God, and "observed" means that he did not put it out of his mind, but continued to think about it.

B. The meaning of the dreams.

All of you have read the story of Joseph. We are not covering ground that you have not gone over before. In fact, many of you have just finished reading it again. You know that these dreams were from the Lord, and that they were prophetic of what was going to happen, and what, in fact, did happen. Joseph would be put in a position where the members of his family would bow down before him, recognizing the high position which he would hold. The sheaves may have had a reference to the famine in Egypt; the sun, moon, and stars, to the Abrahamic covenant. The latter could even have been prophetic of the place of homage that would eventually be held by one far greater than Joseph: our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are details about these dreams about which we cannot be too dogmatic, but the meaning is clear.

God had spoken, and the prophecy was to become a reality.

Many, many years later the writer of the Book of Hebrews was to pen these words:

God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake in time past . . . (Heb. 1:1a).
God does not speak this way today. He did "in time past." God had spoken to Joseph.

C. The purpose for the dreams.

I can think immediately of two reasons:

1. It was for Joseph.
2. It was for us--for all believers from that day to the present time, and to the end of time.

Why for Joseph? Could the Lord have not just gone ahead and done what He did without making this revelation to Joseph? Of course, He could. Why, then, did He do it?

He did it because He knew that Joseph had some very difficult days ahead. He would be sold by his brothers. He would become a servant in Egypt. Under false charges he would be put in prison, and forgotten. And, after approximately 13 years he would finally be elevated to a position of second in the land over all of Egypt! THE LORD GAVE THESE DREAMS TO JOSEPH SO THAT HE WOULD HAVE SOME REASON TO BE ENCOURAGED DURING ALL OF THOSE DIFFICULT YEARS AHEAD.

Let me quote again from Matthew Henry:

God has ways of preparing his people beforehand for the trials which they cannot foresee, but which he has an eye to in the comforts with which he furnishes them (Vol. I, p. 213).

But why do I say that it was also for us?

F. B. Meyer in his little book on Joseph included this words from a Mr. C. Murray:

Behind our life the Weaver stands
And works his wondrous will;
We leave it all in his wise hands,
And trust his perfect skill.
Should mystery enshroud his plan,
And our short sight be dim,
We will not try the whole to scan,

But leave each thread to him.

Concl: It is very doubtful if the Lord will deal with any of us the way He dealt with Joseph. His will for each one of us is different, and we get into trouble if we try to follow His plan for someone else. We need to remember this as we read biography. It is easy for us to identify with someone we would like to follow, but that is not the Lord's way. He has His own unique plan for each one of us.

But there is a special way in which we can profit from the dreams which Joseph had. The Lord showed Joseph while he was still a young man that the plan for his life was already laid out. It was ordered by the Lord. And it was going to be fulfilled by the Lord. And every step between Joseph's youth and the time when he would become a ruler in Egypt was carefully planned by the Lord to contribute to what Joseph would eventually become in the providence of God.

So Joseph was being taught as a young man, not to be overwhelmed by his circumstances, but to keep His eyes on the Lord, and to look in every circumstance for the Lord's hand, knowing that the Lord would not fail to bring about those wonderful purposes which He has ordained.

And let me say that we still need that lesson in our old age. Things still can baffle us. Circumstances can discourage us. It is only as we keep our minds fixed on the Lord, trusting Him, and expecting His blessings, that we can take courage to move ahead. May our study of the life of Joseph help us to understand these most important ways of the Lord.

AN EVIL CONSPIRACY
Genesis 37:12-36

Intro: Last week we got acquainted with Joseph. We learned that, in many ways, his home situation was far from ideal. When he was 17, his mother had died. His father had three other wives, and had had children by all of them--13 in all, counting Joseph. Joseph had only one full brother named Benjamin. He had one half-sister, but no full sisters.

Joseph was his father's favorite child. To show his special love for Joseph, he had given him a coat of many colors. His brothers hated him because he was the favorite, and they had a very difficult time even saying anything that was half-way civil (polite, courteous, gracious) to him.

To make matters worse, Joseph as a young teenager had two dreams. It became apparent later in his life that the dreams were really from the Lord, prophetic of what God was going to do with Joseph. But when Joseph, perhaps unwisely, told his father and his brothers about his dreams, his brothers hated him even more. That is where we left the story last week.

How much later the events of our text for tonight took place, we do not know. But it seems safe to assume that it was not long afterwards. Joseph's brothers were out finding pasture for their father's flock. They had been gone long enough that Jacob wanted to know if they were getting along all right, and so he sent Joseph to find them. It took Joseph a little while to locate where they were, but he faithfully continued his search until he "found them in Dothan" (Gen. 37:17b).

When his brothers saw him coming, they immediately realized that this was the opportunity that they had been waiting for. And so we read in Gen. 37:18 that "they conspired against him to slay him." They were going to cast him into a pit and leave him to die. They would tell Jacob that he was eaten by a wild beast.

Reuben, the oldest son of Jacob, intervened, hoping to be able to deliver him, and get him back to his father. The brothers had cast him into a pit after they had taken his beautiful coat away from him.

About that time a caravan of Ishmaelite traders came by, and Judah suggested that instead of killing him, which would not have brought any profit to them, they could sell him to the Ishmaelites. This they did, and they received twenty pieces of silver. The Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt and sold him there to Potiphar who was the captain of Pharaoh's guard. This was done while Reuben had been away.

When Reuben came back and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he was greatly distressed. His brothers told him what they had done. And so to try to cover up their sin, they killed a young goat, dipped Joseph's coat in the blood, took it to Jacob, who came to his own conclusion that Joseph had been eaten by some wild animal. Jacob was overcome with grief, and his sons were not able to comfort him. He told his sons that his grief would go with him to his own grave.

What lessons are we to learn from this incident in the life of Joseph?

I. SOME LESSONS ABOUT SIN.

When I was a young man, over 40 years ago, I was in Seminary. During that time I had the privilege of being under several very wonderful Bible teachers. My eyes were opened to a lot of things in those days. One of the things I learned then was from a visiting Bible teacher by the name of Dr. Carl Armerding. One of his sons later became the President of Wheaton College.

One day when Dr. Armerding was teaching (and I do not remember now what Book of the Bible it was), he was talking about how we can learn about sin. And he mentioned that a lot of young people, raised in Christians homes, sheltered from the evil in the world, felt that they needed to get out into the world to learn about sin. That was called, "sowing wild oats." But Dr. Armerding said this to those theological students, and I have never forgotten it. He said, "Remember that you can learn far more about sin from your Bible than you can by experiencing it. When you are living in sin, you are blinded to it. You are being deceived by it. But in your Bible you will see sin as it really is, and it will make you want to stay as far away from sin as you possibly can." Those are not his exact words, but that is the gist of what he had to say.

Truer words were never spoken. I hope we will all remember that because it is possible for us as older Christians to be deceived by sin also, and that is really tragic when that happens.

I see several important lessons about sin this this passage.

- A. You should not be surprised to find ^{the most} grievous sins in the best of homes.

Whatever else you might be able to say in criticism about Jacob's home and family, it is clear from

Scripture that Jacob was a man who knew the Lord. God had dealt very clearly with him at Bethel, and again at Peniel. The very names which he and his wives gave to his children suggested that he and they saw the hand of the Lord in the family the Lord gave them.

Children born of godly parents are, nevertheless, sinners by nature, and, therefore, capable of the most grievous sins. Their father may have been Jacob, and their grandfather may have been Isaac, and their great grandfather may have been Abraham, but none of that could change their hearts. When John the Baptist was warning the Pharisees and Sadducees that they needed to repent, he said this to them:

And think not to say within yourselves,
We have Abraham to our father:
for I say unto you, that God is able
of these stones to raise up children to Abraham
(Matt. 3:9).

This is something for all Christian parents to remember, and it should serve as a warning for every child in our families. You can be brought up in a Christian family in a church like Trinity Bible, but if God does not change your heart, you are just as lost as any person who has never even entered a church.

It is my constant prayer that the Lord will not let us lose a single one of our children.

B. Sins never travel alone.

They always gather company. First his brothers hated him. Then they envied him because they were jealous of him. And ultimately they purposed in their hearts to kill him—and undoubtedly they would have done this if Reuben had not intervened.

Wherever you find one sin, always look for others. And do not feel that you will be an exception. There are no exceptions!

C. Sins grow.

How easy it is for hate to become murder! It can happen before you know it.

Have you noticed that when the Lord spoke of what comes out of our hearts, he first said "evil thoughts," and the next sin he mentioned was

"murders"! And envy and jealousy and sins like them are to be found in the same heart. How careful we need to be to confess and judge the first evidence of sin that we see in our hearts.

Another lesson:

D. Sins get out of control.

More than one sinner has been forced to say, "How could I ever have done such a thing?"

E. One sin always has to be covered up with another sin.

The evil plan of Joseph's brothers was covered up with a big plan of deception with their father, Jacob. This is one reason that sins never travel alone.

F. Sins hurt the worst those people who love us the most.

Apart from the grace of God, the sins of Jacob's sons would have put him in his grave. This is one deterrent that the Lord has emphasized more than once in His Word.

G. Sin causes great personal distress that is not erased with the passing of the years.

When things went wrong in Egypt years later, the brothers immediately felt that it was because of what they had done to Joseph. Guilt can plague us long after the sin has been committed.

I hope that you have made a note of these lessons, and that you will read this chapter over again and again and think of these things which are so clearly presented here to warn us against sin and its consequences.

But let us look at another series of lessons in this chapter.

II. SOME LESSONS ABOUT GOD.

If it were not for these lessons, the story of Joseph would have ended here. If there is a single story in the Bible which illustrates the truth that He will make the wrath of men to praise Him (Psa. 76:10), it is the story of Joseph. While God is never responsible for our sins, yet He works so often even through our sins to see that His purposes are accomplished.

I see three special evidences of:

A. The providence of God.

1. That Reuben intervened so that Joseph's brothers did not kill him.
2. That that caravan of traders came along when they did.
3. That the traders were headed for Egypt which is just exactly where the Lord wanted Joseph to be.

It would be a very superficial consideration of this chapter not to be able to see the overruling hand of

God in all of these events.

But I see evidence of another great truth concerning God. It is this:

B. The grace of God.

What was to become of Joseph's brothers? Just reading over their names anyone who has read the Bible knows that he is reading the names of the very men who were to become the heads of the tribes of Israel, the nation which God had chosen to deal with, and to make a blessing to all of the nations of the earth in the coming of God's beloved Son to be the Saviour of men. These are those men!

How would you have felt about them? And remember that it was Judah, the one who was to be the head of the tribe in which our Lord was to be born who made the suggestion that they sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, not knowing what would become of him after that.

*And God
would not
let his sin of
theirs to
save their
lives*

How thankful all of us can be for the grace of God! David was thankful. Peter was thankful. Paul was thankful. If it were not for the grace of God, and that God is greater than our sins, there would have been many, many times throughout history when the work of God would have come to a halt, and even been destroyed. But grace is written all over the Bible, isn't it? And it is written upon every life. How thankful we can be for the wonderful grace of God that is greater than our sins.

Concl: And so this chapter gives us both warnings and

reasons to be encouraged. Let us heed the warnings, and pray daily that the Lord will keep us from sin, even keep us from temptation, and that He will cause us to hate what He hates, the sins which made it necessary for our blessed Lord to come and die.

And let us look for the encouragements in our own lives. The story of Jacob and Joseph and Joseph's brothers is further evidence of the truth of Phil. 1:6 and Jude 24.

THE LORD WITH JOSEPH IN EGYPT

Genesis 39:1-6

Intro: As we have seen, the story of Joseph begins in Genesis 37. Chapter 38 tells us about the shameful experience of Judah. I do not know exactly why we are told those things about Judah except I do realize the the Book of Genesis should tell us about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah since Judah was in the Messianic line, not Joseph. Perhaps Moses in recording these different lives told us what he did about Judah so we would see that it was due to Judah's sin that we are not told about him.

However, it is more likely that we are told about Joseph because it was through what happened to Joseph that the Lord was preparing His people to move into Egypt--the prophecy of which had been given to Abraham without specifically mentioning Egypt. Cf. Gen. 15:13-16.

It may also have been the case that Judah was disturbed by what he and his brothers had done, and so he sought to get away from them. His story certainly indicates how quickly other sins come along when once we have disobeyed the Lord in some particular thing, as Judah had. He was the one, you will remember, who suggested that they sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites.

Whatever the reason, we come back to Joseph's story in chapter 39. The account continues from the last verse of chapter 37. There we are told (v. 36) what we are told again in 39:1--that Joseph was taken down into Egypt, and sold to "Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian."

So here we have this young Jew, who had been hated by his brothers and sold into servanthood, in a strange country, all alone, separated from his family and especially from his father Jacob, who loved him so very much.

Joseph was to be, for the next 13 years, the victim of what people did, or did not do for him. His brothers sold him, Potiphar's wife tempted him and then lied about him so that he was cast into prison, and there, after the butler had been restored to his job with Pharaoh, he was forgotten, as 41:1 says, for "two full years"! Joseph was certainly a candidate to become one who hated people because of their actions toward him.

But Moses, in relating this most interesting story, wanted those who read this account, to get the right understanding about Joseph's experiences from the very first because this chapter really ends as it began, although Joseph was a

prisoner at the end of the chapter, and his circumstances had deteriorated greatly. Let me read verses 2 and 3, and then verses 21-23.

What is it that Moses emphasized? Let me call it . . .

I. THE KEYNOTE (fundamental fact or idea) OF THE CHAPTER.

Very simply stated it is this: "The Lord was **with** Joseph." Joseph's mother was dead, so she was not with him. Jacob was not with him. His brothers were not with him. Joseph was surrounded by strangers who spoke a different language, who had a different culture, and who had no reason to be kind to him.

But this made the difference: "The Lord was **with** him." When you have said this about a person, you have said all that needs to be said, as the life of Joseph from this point on will show us. What does it mean?

II. THE MEANING OF THE KEYNOTE.

There are two basic ideas here. We all might guess what the first one is, but we need to understand the added meaning as expressed in the second idea.

A. God is omnipresent.

This means that God is present everywhere at once, at the same time. And it does not mean that He is parceled out all over the universe, a little of Him here, and a little of Him there. He is present everywhere at the same time as a whole Person. He is present in heaven; He is present on earth. He was present in Canaan at this time, and present in Egypt. He is present in every place just as though He were present in no other place.

David was dealing with this truth when he wrote Psalm 139. Listen to verses 7-11:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend up in heaven, thou art there:
if I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
Even there shall thy hand lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.

That is the omnipresence of God. When David left one place to go to another, he found God where he was going, and yet he did not leave God behind. And as he went from one place to another, he left God behind,

took God with him, and found God waiting for him when he got there! Think about that for a while. It is difficult for us to comprehend such an amazing truth about God. But it is true.

Later to Jeremiah the Lord said this (Jer. 23:23, 24):

Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord,
and not a God afar off?
Can any hide himself in secret places
that I shall not see him? saith the Lord.
Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.

So in this sense, the Lord was with Joseph--a truth which his brothers had not taken into consideration.

And we can count on this, too. Regardless of what happens, or when it happens, good or bad, we can always count on the presence of the Lord. And this truth will keep us from sin, and this truth will give us sufficient comfort in our greatest trials.

But there is another aspect of this truth that we need to understand. To say that the Lord is with us also means that . . .

B. The Lord is working on our behalf.

A verse which teaches us this is Isa. 41:10. It had not been written yet. And I do not know how well even Joseph understood this part of this truth. But Joseph was to learn that the Lord was on his side. Listen to what Isaiah wrote. Perhaps this is a verse you have committed to memory:

Fear thou not; for I **am with thee**:
be not dismayed; for I am thy God:
I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;
yea, I will uphold thee
with the right hand of my righteousness.

What can you add to that? (Repeat the I will's.)

It has been rightly said that God loves prepositions.
"I will be **with** thee."

It seems like it takes a time of testing for us to learn this great truth about God. Actually we would not be able to live a day if the Lord were not "with" us, helping us, providing for us, protecting us, guiding us, and doing all of the other things that He does for us. But there are those special times when it becomes particularly evident.

Jacob started to learn this lesson at Bethel. Do you remember the dream he had the first night away from home as he was fleeing from Esau. Stones were his pillows that night, but it was a night that Jacob would never forget.

Among the things that the Lord said to him that night were these:

And, behold, I am with thee,
and will keep thee in all places
whither thou goest,
and will bring thee again into this land;
for I will not leave thee, until I have done
that which I have spoken to thee of (Gen. 28:15).

Just follow through that verse, and you will see what the Lord meant that He would be with Jacob.

When God called Moses from the land of Midian where he was in exile to return to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel, Moses had four big reasons why he felt that that was not a good idea. The first one was this (and it was a good reason):

Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh,
and that I should bring the children of Israel
out of Egypt? (Ex. 3:11).

Do you remember what the Lord's answer to Moses was? It was this: **"Certainly I will be with thee."**

The Lord was saying, in effect, "All you need is for Me to be with you!"

When Moses had died and Joshua became the new leader of the Israelites, this is what the Lord said to him when the heart of Joshua must have been overwhelmed with his new responsibilities: Joshua 1:5:

There shall not any man be able to stand
before thee all the days of thy life:
as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee:
I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

That was all that Joshua needed. Then he could be strong and of a good courage.

There are so many examples in Scripture of this truth that they seem endless. But let me conclude with a NT promise. It is to be found in what the Lord said to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 when He commissioned them to the great task ever committed to men. (Repeat.) With the Lord's authority behind them, and His presence and help with them, the job could be done!

And the same promise is for us. Cf. Heb. 13:5, 6:

"Let your conversation be without covetousness . . ."

Meditate on these verses. Think about this great truth. Keep it in mind as we consider the life of Joseph. It will be transforming upon our hearts, our lives, our work.

But there is one other point that I must mention before I close.

III. THE EVIDENCE OF THIS KEYNOTE TRUTH.

Moses did not want us to miss this. What proof do we have that the Lord was with Joseph, helping him, blessing him, using him?

That was the main thing that Moses had to say about Joseph from verse 2 down through verse 6.

Why did Joseph prosper? Because the Lord was "with" him. Why did Potiphar like Joseph? Because the Lord was "with" Joseph. Why was Joseph given such great responsibility so that he became Potiphar's overseer? Because the Lord was "with" him. Why was there such great blessing upon Potiphar, his home, and the work that was done in the field, i.e., his crops. Because the Lord was "with" Joseph.

The life of Joseph could have been most tragic if it had not been for the Lord. Joseph was good looking. He was smart. He was a hard worker. But none of those can explain this amazing story. The glory does not go to Joseph; it goes to Joseph's Lord!

Concl: Now was all of this written just because it was such an unusual story, and deserved to be told? No. It was told because you and I need to know that we have the same Lord. People may turn against us. Our circumstances can get completely out of our control. (They do every day.) But this is one truth that we can all count on, be strengthened by, and take comfort from: THE LORD IS "WITH" US, TOO. Therefore, we do not need to fear people, nor any future circumstances. As Paul the Apostle said, "If God be for us," or better, Since God be for us, "who can be against us?"

I love that old saying attributed to one of the Puritans: "If God is your friend, it does not make any difference who your enemies might be."

May God enable us to live and to serve Him in the light of these glorious truths!

THE TIME TO RUN
Genesis 39:7-20

Intro: We all are inclined to have unrealistic ideas as to what it means to have the blessing of God upon us. Often it is said that the happiest place to be, and the safest place to be, is in the will of God. That is very true. But it is also true that our lives are a constant battle with the world, the flesh, and the Devil. The Devil will see to it that, when we do the will of God, and when we have the blessing of God is upon us, we will be beset with temptations, strong temptations, and perhaps temptations that we have never had before.

Such was the case with Joseph. We have no indication that he ever had been bothered with the kind of temptation that Potiphar's wife was to put before him, not just once or twice, but "day after day."

Now let us look at:

I. HIS CIRCUMSTANCES.

- A. He was away from home--which could have been an excuse "to do as the Romans do."
- B. He had done nothing to provoke such a temptation. It came to him unsolicited.
- C. He had been tremendously successful after suffering the greatest humiliation at the hands of his brothers. This might have caused him to have been careless because success often corrupts us.
- D. Although he had initially said, "No," yet the same temptation kept coming from the same source. He and Potiphar's wife were together at least part of every day, and the tendency would have been to be weakened by the repeated pressure that was put upon him.
- E. He would have naturally been flattered by this attention from an older woman, and especially from one so high in Egyptian society.

The Devil was obviously very clever in setting such a temptation before Joseph, this young man who was to have such a large place in the outworking of the plans and purposes of God.

The next thing that ought to be of interest to us in this account is the evidence that there were certain convictions that influenced Joseph's decision each time Potiphar's wife

presented him with this temptation.

II. JOSEPH'S CONVICTIONS.

It is true that God works "in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Joseph was a young man with natural passions. Let us not think of him as some superhuman person to whom such a temptation was not appealing. It had to be a temptation for him, a severe temptation. The tendency to submit to such a temptation is in every heart by nature. But there were certain very strong convictions that were a safeguard to Joseph against sin. God had given him these convictions. And God can do the same for us. But we all need to recognize that the good tendencies in our hearts always come from God, and so the glory for them, whether in our hearts, or in Joseph's heart, belongs to God. These convictions are to be seen in Joseph's words in verses 8 and 9—the only words of Joseph recorded in this whole chapter! Notice what they were:

A. A strong sense of responsibility.

This is often lacking even among Christians today. Joseph did not take it lightly that Potiphar trusted him. Four statements bring that out: the two in verse 8, and the first two in verse 9.

This can only be explained by what we learned in the first six verses of this chapter. How amazing that Joseph should find himself in such a home, and should be trusted so completely with all that Potiphar had. We do not know how long it took for Joseph to be trusted to this extent, but he had Potiphar's trust, his complete trust. And Joseph was not about to violate that trust for the sake of even this sin with which Potiphar's wife was tempting him.

I believe Joseph learned this at home.

What an illustration he is of those words of Paul to the servants of Colosse:

Servants, obey in all things
your masters according to the flesh;
not with eyeservice, as menpleasers;
but in singleness of heart, fearing God
(Col. 3:22).

Whether Potiphar was there or not, watching or not watching, Joseph was not going to violate his responsibility to Potiphar in any way. God had given Joseph that conviction, and you see it at every turn

in Joseph's life—when he was at home, here, when he was in jail, and when he became a ruler in Egypt. It made not difference where Joseph was, how unjust the circumstances were that got him there, nor how long he was there, HE WAS ALWAYS A MAN WHO COULD BE TRUSTED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITIES THAT WERE PLACED UPON HIM.

But notice a second conviction:

B. A high view of marriage.

This is very rare today. I heard just this past week that 50% of all marriages in American will end in divorce. And this had to do with people who will be married this year. This means that to millions in American marriage is only a respectable convenience, but not a commitment that is life-long. It is wonderful to know that marriages are becoming more popular. More young couples are being married, but it should be of great concern to us all that half of them are not staying married.

Joseph was not married at this point, but he had a high respect for the marriage bond. I am sure that Joseph would have felt the same way if this woman had been single. But being Potiphar's wife, such a thought as committing sin with her was not an option at all.

Look at what Joseph said. His words are in the middle of verse 9:

. . . neither hath he kept back any thing from me BUT THEE, BECAUSE THOU ART HIS WIFE. Joseph was not concerned about what people thought about marriage in Egypt. This thing might have been practiced commonly among them; I do not know. But Joseph knew that the will of God does not vary from country to country. This was Potiphar's wife, and she was out-of-bounds for him!

Joseph did not have the written Word of God such as we do. The truth had been passed from one generation to another. But Joseph stood firmly for the will of God, and he knew that to violate that will would call a halt to all of the blessing that he was seeing. He would have suddenly changed from a blessing to a curse as far as the house of Potiphar was concerned.

But there is a third conviction:

C. A strong conviction regarding God.

Joseph believed that there was such a thing as sin. And he did not believe that sin was defined in terms of Egyptian culture, or even Egyptian law. He did not believe that sin could be defined by Potiphar's wife and himself. I do not if Joseph had heard what has become the basis of morality in so many instances in our country--the idea that almost anything is OK if it is between consenting adults! The idea is that if a man forces himself upon a woman it is wrong, but it is OK if they both agree. Where did that idea come from? It developed like so many other things in a society where the leaders are frantically trying to control behavior that has gone completely berserk.

Young people, do not be deceived by such talk. Joseph would have scorned such an idea, even though he was a young man. To do what Potiphar's wife wanted him to do was wrong even if both of them had agreed, and it was wrong because God had declared that it was S-I-N! Joseph called it a "great wickedness." He called it "sin." It would have been a sin against Potiphar's wife, a sin against Potiphar himself, a sin against those in that household who also trusted Joseph, a sin against Joseph's family back home, BUT MOST OF ALL IT WAS A SIN AGAINST GOD!

This was the thing that bothered David the most when he confessed his sins of adultery and murder. He said this (the words are in Psa. 51:4a):

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
and done this evil in thy sight . . .

David had sinned against Bathsheba. He had sinned against Uriah, her husband. He had sinned against his own family, and against the people over which he reigned as King. BUT MOST OF ALL, AND FIRST OF ALL, HE HAD SINNED AGAINST GOD!

God had taught Joseph this. David learned this. And it surely seems that we will never treat sin the way we should until we look at sin this way, too.

I come now to my final point:

III. THE CONSEQUENCES.

A. With Potiphar's wife.

Did what Joseph said change her mind? No. The wisdom of God is foolishness with men (and women). That might be Joseph's conviction, and he had a right to feel the way he wanted to feel. But that would not do for her. She seems to have been more

insistent than ever before.

B. For Joseph.

Did this settle the temptation for him?

No! Potiphar's wife kept the pressure on him "day by day."

And one day it looked to her like she would at last succeed. They were alone in the house. So she caught him, and tried to force him to sin with her.

And Joseph did the only thing that he could do: HE RAN! But this was THE TIME TO RUN. He did not try to talk to her. He did not suggest that they pray about it. HE RAN!

The Apostle Paul was to write these words later: "FLEE . . . YOUTHFUL LUSTS" (2 Tim. 2:22). There are times when the very best thing that you and I can do is to run. Don't play with sin. Run! Stand against the Devil, but "flee . . . youthful lusts."

Did that settle it for Joseph?

I wish I could say that it did, but his desire to please the Lord seemed to backfire right in his face. He, in fleeing, had left his garment behind which Potiphar's wife had pulled off of him. She concocted the story that Joseph had tried to force himself upon her. This, understandably, made Potiphar very mad, and he had Joseph cast into prison.

But I want to point this out: It was a miracle from God that Potiphar did not have Joseph killed because that was his job in Egypt.

Concl: What a reward to give to a faithful man? How can you explain the fact that God did not keep Joseph out of prison?

God's ways are to us very mysterious, but they always have a purpose. God was preparing Joseph for a higher job, but he had to bring him down lower first. It was all according to God's plan. The Lord willing, next week we will see what happened to Joseph after this.

But let us make sure that we are learning the lessons that the Spirit of God has given us here. Never be afraid to run away from sin. That is God's way for us, and, in the end, it always leads to greater blessing from God.

JOSEPH, THE PRISONER
Genesis 39:21-23

Intro: These verses introduce us to the third major episode in the life of Joseph. And it is just as amazing as the one before it.

Joseph, like his father and his brothers, began life as a shepherd. Because of the jealousy and hatred of his brothers, he became a servant in Egypt. And then he went from Potiphar's house, where he was a servant, to the round-house where the king's prisoners were bound.

For the second time in his life he escaped death because Potiphar had the authority to see him executed if he had chosen to do so.

All of Joseph's experiences would have been troublesome enough if they had happened only under ordinary circumstances. But these were not ordinary! God had given Joseph two dreams, and the meaning of the dreams was the same. In fact, their meaning was so clear that neither his father nor his brothers needed to ask about the interpretation. Both dreams, one about sheaves of grain, the other about the sun, moon, and stars, predicted the day when Joseph's family would bow down before him. Neither Joseph, nor his father, nor his brothers, knew why nor when nor where they would do this, but the purpose his brothers had in selling him was to do away with the possibility that that would ever happen.

During those 13 years between the time that Joseph had those dreams, and the time when his brothers finally came and bowed before him, not knowing that it was Joseph before whom they were bowing, Joseph never mentioned his dreams. At least it is not recorded in Scripture that he ever said anything about them. However, when his brothers came into Egypt during the time of the famine, and bowed before him, we read in Genesis 42:8, 9a,

And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not.

**And Joseph remembered the dreams
which he dreamed of them.**

It would be unthinkable to say that he had not remembered his dreams many, many times during those 13 years. It would be interesting to note what his thoughts were about how those dreams would be fulfilled. But we will have to wait until we get to heaven to ask him about that.

One thing must have seemed clear to him: that with each bad experience he had, being sold into a foreign country, and then being cast into prison, the fulfillment of the dreams would seem more remote than at the time that he had the dreams. We have the advantage of having the whole story

before us, and so we can profit from Joseph's experiences perhaps more than he did at the time.

But notice several things that ought to be of help to us.

- 1) It must have seemed to Joseph that people were in charge of his life. If his brothers wanted to get rid of him, they got rid of him. If Potiphar's wife wanted to tell a lie about him, people believed her. If Potiphar wanted to throw him into prison, he went to prison.

Have things ever looked like that to you in your life? Perhaps that is the way they look tonight.

- 2) There was a strange silence as far as God was concerned. Where was the Lord in all of this, Joseph could have asked.

Has that thought ever entered your mind when it seemed that everything was going against you.

- 3) Why should so many bad things, really bad things, happen to Joseph when he was seeking to do his work well. He refused to sin against the Lord. And yet that very refusal was what caused him to be imprisoned. Even in that early day it would seem that the people would know that obedience always leads to blessing. But at this point the opposite appeared to be the case: Do good, and things will go bad for you.

Have you ever felt like that? And we must remember that Joseph did not know at this point what the outcome of his imprisonment would be. After all, he was a foreigner. He was charged with the attempted rape of the wife of one of the most powerful men in Egypt. Death could well have been the final penalty as far as he knew.

- 4) And then, that which could have been the most agonizing of all, What about God's revelation to him in his dreams?

Have you ever doubted the Word of God because of things that were happening to you in your life? You were trusting in the Lord to help you, resting on some of the many promises of Scripture, but it seemed like they meant nothing! Your circumstances were just like there were no God, and just like He had never given any of those promises.

Perhaps you can think of other things that might have bothered Joseph. It seems to me that none of these details are recorded for us because Joseph probably kept them to himself. Who would he talk with about them? Do you always verbalize the things that are bothering you? But they bother you, they eat away at you, and demand that somehow you find peace in your heart. We know that Joseph did not want to stay in prison because when he told the butler that he would be restored to his job with Pharaoh, he made this request of him which is record in Genesis 40:14. (Read.)

My text tonight is very short in comparison with what is

quite a long story in the Bible, but the lessons we find there are so important that we could hardly spent too much time on them. Once you have discovered them, you will probably come back to them many times in the future. God's purposes for us as obviously different from His purposes with Joseph, but always remember: God has no favorites in His family. And so we can expect "over the long haul" (as we say) to see the faithfulness of God with us as Joseph saw God's faithfulness in His own life.

Let us look at our text now, and notice:

I. WHAT WE ARE TOLD ABOUT THE LORD.

Was it true that the Lord was not doing anything? Was it true that the Lord was just letting people have their way? Was it true that God had forgotten those dreams which He had given to Joseph--the word of the Lord to Joseph in those days? Was it a false idea that obedience leads to blessing?

Look at the text.

The first thing that we read about the Lord after Joseph was bought by Potiphar was this (see Gen.39:2a):

And the Lord was with Joseph,
and he was a prosperous man.

The first thing that we read about the Lord after Joseph was cast into prison was this (see Gen. 39:21): (Read.)

We do not read this after reading something good about Joseph, but this is the first thing that we read. The Lord went to Egypt "with" Joseph, and when Joseph went to prison, the Lord went "with" him there, too—not just meaning that He was present there, but that He was caring for him, protecting him, blessing him, and using him. When you read that "the Lord was with Joseph," you can be assured that he could not have been in a better or safer place than right there.

We always want to see the Lord doing something spectacular (and He often does just that), but we forget that the Lord is always teaching us, always working in us even when we cannot see that He is doing much for us.

What else did the Lord do for Joseph?

He "shewed him mercy." How did He do that? Perhaps not even the keeper of the prison did not know why, but he felt a special compassion toward Joseph. This 21st verse would seem to indicate that he was not that way with all of the prisoners, but he was toward Joseph! WHY?

Because it was the Lord Who touched his heart so that he, an Egyptian jailer, would be merciful to a Hebrew prisoner who was there because of a most serious charge against a very prominent man: Potiphar.

When you stop to think about it, it really does not make a great deal of sense unless you see the hand of the Lord in it all. Men were not in command; GOD WAS! Joseph was being trained in the ways of the Lord, and trained to look for the evidence of the Lord's work in other ways when we do not see Him doing what we would like for Him to do. The Lord was preparing His servant for that great place he would eventually have. But the Lord had His time, and He knows far better than we what we need in order to be able to bring the greatest glory to His Name.

Now let us look at:

II. WHAT THE KEEPER OF THE PRISON DID.

Do you know what would happen to a jailer in those days if a prisoner escaped? In most cases the jailer would pay for it with his own life!

What did this jailer do? He put his life in Joseph's hands. He trusted Joseph so completely that he did not concern himself about any of his own responsibilities. See verse 23.

Now this does not make sense--UNLESS you look behind what you can see, and realize that a sovereign God is here at work. The jailer did this because of what God was doing to him.

What did Solomon say in Prov. 21:1?

The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord,
as the rivers of water:

he turneth it whithersoever he will.

If the king's heart is in the Lord's hand, what about a jailer's heart? Where is it? IN THE HAND OF THE LORD.

I tell you that miracles were taking place in that Egyptian prison, or roundhouse, as it is sometimes called. God was working at the very moment it seemed that nothing was happening!

Now for my third and last point:

III. WHAT WAS JOSEPH DOING?

JOSEPH WAS PROSPERING. JOSEPH WAS DOING JUST LIKE HE HAD DONE FOR HIS FATHER, AND JUST LIKE HE HAD DONE FOR POTI-

PHAR! HE WAS FAITHFULLY DOING THE WORK WHICH HE HAD BEEN ASSIGNED TO DO.

What is the lesson here from what Joseph was doing? It is this: When you are waiting upon the Lord, always do that which is your responsibility. You may not see the Lord doing what you would like to see, but you will see His blessing, and you will find that obedience and faithfulness lead to greater and greater blessing.

Concl: So we have a marvelous instance of the faithfulness of God at one of the darkest times in Joseph's history. When it seemed like the Lord had abandoned him, the evidence is overwhelming that omnipotence was in action. God was laying bare His holy arm in behalf of His young servant, Joseph.

On one occasion the Lord Jesus said,
My Father worketh hitherto, and I work
(John 5:17).

This means, among other things, that there is never a time when our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ are not working. They are always working, and never more than in those times when we are having a rough time. They are not only working for us, but They are working in us. They are always working! The trouble is that we are not always looking in the right places to see what they are doing.

Matthew Henry once wrote about the advantages of affliction. These were the advantages that he mentioned:

. . . penitence, patience, thankfulness, a thoughtful frame of mind, watchfulness against sin, weaning from the world, activity in faith, affection in prayer, a spirit of compliance with God's word, compassion to our brethren, love to Jesus Christ, and longing for heaven (The Life of Matthew Henry, p. 205).

When he wrote these words I do not think that he was considering the life of Joseph, but he could have been. When you look at the later life of Joseph and you see his lack of bitterness, his tenderness for his brothers, even here his "activity in faith," his preservation from the temptations of Egypt, and many other things, THINK BACK TO THIS PRISON AND THE YEARS THAT HE SPENT HERE. THIS WAS GOD'S SCHOOL FOR HIM, THE SCHOOL OF AFFLICTION, IN WHICH JOSEPH LEARNED SOME VERY, VERY WONDERFUL LESSONS WHICH MADE HIM A GREAT RULER, LESSONS THAT WILL REMAIN WITH HIM FOR ALL ETERNITY.

And then be encouraged concerning your own trials. Keep trusting the Lord. Submit yourself under His hand. Continue doing His will. And wait for Him. He is at work, and no one, brothers, Ishmaelites, Potiphar, nor an Egyptian jailer

can stand in the Lord's way. Instead, all that they do are sovereignly directed by the Lord so that His purposes for us are accomplished, and His work in us is perfected.

What a marvelous God Joseph had! And his God is our God! That is why Joseph's story should be of such great help and comfort to us.

A TIME OF WAITING
Genesis 41:1

Scripture Reading: Genesis 40:1-41:14.

Intro: Times of waiting are times which none of us particularly enjoy. They are usually very frustrating for us because they can seem to be so pointless. One thing that often makes them even more frustrating is that they come when we are eager to see things move ahead. And yet all of us experience them. We may even go from one prolonged period of waiting right into another. But it is also true that God accomplishes much in our lives during those times of waiting which apparently cannot be accomplished in any other way.

If we count all of the years during which Joseph was waiting, they number at least 13--from the time that he was 17 until the time that he was 30, from the time that he had his dreams to the time when he became second only to Pharaoh over all of the land of Egypt! BUT, of all of those years, there were two that were probably the longest to him. Those were the two years that he was left, and, from all appearances, forgotten, in that Egyptian jail. Read about it in the first verse of Genesis 41. (Read.)

"Two full years" are two years of days. They were years in which Joseph lived every day at a time, twenty-four hours of each day. Time clearly passed very slowly for Joseph. It may mean that there was not a day in which he did not pray that the butler, who evidently had forgotten him, would remember him and mention him to Pharaoh. But day after day came and went, and nothing happened.

As far as the Scriptures are concerned, they are passed over in silence. Often the 400 years (approx.) between the OT and the NT are called the four hundred silent years. But they are not the only silent years in Scripture, nor are they the only silent years in the lives of the people of God. And the years which are not always "silent" are nevertheless years of waiting. Think with me of some of them in Scripture.

The waiting years:

- 1) The twenty-five years that Abraham waited for Isaac to be born. We know some of the things that happened during those years, but they were years of waiting in Abraham's life.
- 2) The time (we do not know how long it was) that Job waited for deliverance from the Lord.
- 3) The time that Moses waited for the Lord to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt.
- 4) The years between David's anointing and his enthronement.

- 5) One of the greatest examples is the time that Israel waited for the fulfillment of the promises regarding the coming of the Messiah.
- 6) In the NT we think of John the Baptist's imprisonment and death, a time during which he himself began to wonder if the Lord Jesus were really the Messiah.
- 7) There are many others, some short, some long. But let us add to this list the promise of Christ's return.

You will never find the life of any of the Lord's people in which there are not just one, but many times of silence, times of waiting--waiting for the Lord to do something that we hope will some day be done.

We do not particularly enjoy these, but it is important for us to realize that they are important, and that, while they may be silent years as far as any explanation from the Lord, yet they are not wasted years. If we could speak to Joseph today, he probably would tell us that those two years, "two full years," were the most profitable years of his whole life. He could not have said that at the time, but he could have said it later--and probably did!

These are times which form a vital part of what we can call, the ways of the Lord. How important it is that we know as much as God has been pleased to reveal to us about them because then, and only then, will we really profit from those times when all that the Lord seems to be saying to us is, "Wait! Trust me, and wait."

What can we learn from this experience of Joseph? Let us examine the record.

I. JOSEPH AS AN INTERPRETER OF GOD'S WORD.

I am speaking now of the dreams that the butler and the baker had. Those were days when they did not have the written Word of God, but God spoke in other ways--among those ways, in dreams.

When Joseph came in that morning after these two servants of Pharaoh had dreamed their dreams, he noticed that they were sad. He asked why they were sad, and they told him that they did not understand their dreams, and there was no one there who could help them.

Joseph reminded them that the interpretation of dreams belonged to the Lord, not to me, and he asked them to tell him their dreams. They did. He interpreted them. And the dreams were fulfilled in exactly the same time and the same way in which Joseph said they would.

Now we probably have asked ourselves, What did this have

to do with God's ways for Joseph? Let me explain what I believe the reason was.

About the first thing we are told about Joseph is that he had two dreams. His brothers understood what they meant. His father understood what they meant. And we can assume that Joseph understood what they meant! The remembrance of those dreams, and the meaning of them, would have been one of the great consolations of those difficult days which followed. BUT, as with the case of John the Baptist who began to doubt even about Christ, that was probably true of Joseph as well. Did the dreams mean what they thought? Did they come from God? Would they be fulfilled, or was there the possibility that they were all wrong?

Sometimes God does not wait. And in the case of the butler and baker, He only waited three days! And during this time Joseph was reassured that he could discern the will of the Lord in interpreting dreams. This would have reassured him also that his own dreams were true, and that God would eventually fulfill them to him.

One of the purposes of those times of waiting is to make us see that the Word of God is true even when we cannot see any evidence that His promises are being fulfilled. We must never let circumstances cause us to doubt the Word of God.

A second purpose:

II. JOSEPH AND THE PLACE OF PEOPLE IN HIS LIFE.

I am not saying that it is wrong for us to ask people for help. Sometimes that is the way the Lord chooses to work. But we must not put our confidence in people--not even in each other.

Note Joseph's request of the butler in Gen. 40:14. Joseph felt that this could be the way that he could get out of that prison.

Now Joseph had suffered a great deal from what people did to him:

- 1) His brothers.
- 2) The Midianites.
- 3) Potiphar's wife.

And now a fourth was to be added:

- 4) The butler.

Look at what is said about him in the last verse of chapter 40. (Read.) Perhaps he was so overjoyed with being back on the job that he forgot all about Joseph.

But do we not see the hand of the Lord in this? Because surely during a two-year period at some time he would have thought about Joseph as he reflected upon his brush with death.

Do you know what I think happened? I think that the Lord blotted that out of the butler's mind until it was the Lord's time for Joseph to be released. Why would he do this? Because He did not want Joseph, nor does He want us, to put our confidence in men. Our confidence must be first and foremost in the Lord. And if we trust in men, the Lord will see to it that we are disappointed.

The third lesson:

III. JOSEPH AND THE LORD.

If Joseph felt that his only hope was in the butler, he was wrong. Men may fail us, but God never does. And this is the point in the first 14 verses of chapter 41! Let us learn what we can from these verses.

A. Pharaoh's dreams.

What do we have here? God was speaking again, this time to the king over all of Egypt.

What was Pharaoh's response to his dreams? The same as that of the butler and the baker. He was "troubled." See verse 8.

He tried to find out from his wise men, but they failed him. You see, God was dealing, not just with Joseph, but with Pharaoh as well. We often get so bound up in our problems that we forget about what the Lord may be doing with other people. But great things were being done here. And even Pharaoh needed to learn that the Lord is the only One Who can teach us what His Word means.

B. The butler's memory.

You see, behind the restoration of the butler's memory was the Lord. The butler forgot until the Lord made him remember. And the Lord had the butler in the right place as the right time with the right message about Joseph. Things worked out like Joseph thought that they might two years before this, but that was not the Lord's time.

C. Pharaoh's call for Joseph.

This is really unbelievable. But that is the way with the Lord. Even then He was doing according to Eph. 3:20. And look how much better God's timing was than Joseph's! What would Joseph had done if he had been released two years before? We do not know. But we do know that it would have been nothing like the results on this occasion. God had brought Joseph to the very time and place where Joseph's dreams would be fulfilled! How amazing are the ways of the Lord!

Concl: What are some of the results that we see from these years of waiting?

The first is that it is never a mistake to wait for the Lord however long that period might be.

Secondly, we can know that our God, being absolutely sovereign, is sufficient in Himself to do all that needs to be done to meet our needs, to fulfill His own pleasure, and to bring glory to Himself.

Third, we can see some evidence of what God had been doing in Joseph. When we cannot see outward evidence of what God is doing, then do not fail to look inside, in your own heart. We can see how Joseph's faith was strengthened, how Joseph had been humbled (see Gen. 41:16). There was no attempt by Joseph to take full advantage of this situation. He was trusting the Lord with his own welfare, and seemed concerned that Pharaoh recognize the hand of God in the dreams that he had had.

All in all, there was blessing ahead for Pharaoh and the Egyptians, for Joseph, for Joseph's brothers, and what is most important of all, there was glory for God Himself. God was at work to fulfill the promise that He had made to Abraham many years before. The scene was being set for the family of Israel to become to nation of Israel, and it was through this family and this nation that the Savior would come Who would provide redemption not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles.

May we learn from Joseph to wait on the Lord, to trust Him, to believe Him, and to see that when He works, it is always far better than if He had worked how and when and where we had hoped that He would.

LEARNING GOD'S WAYS
Genesis 41:14-45

Intro: Every child of God has to learn the ways of the Lord. That was true of Joseph; it is also true of you and me. The ways of the Lord are very, very different from our ways. We learn that through unanswered prayer. We learn it through unexpected trials. We learn that through things circumstances that baffle us, and which often seem so wrong. We learn that from the many times we experience delays which seem unnecessary at the time. We learn it when wrong triumphs over what is right, and then wrong seems to go unpunished.

God's ways are often disillusioning for us. They are humbling. Sometimes they make us angry. Sometimes we are inclined to give up because of God's ways with us.

There never has been a child of God who has not had real, and often prolonged, struggles over the ways of the Lord. They are not easily learned, but they are so very, very important if we are to glorify God with our lives here on earth.

It is God Who teaches us His ways. David said about the Lord and Moses in Psa. 103:7a, "He made known his ways unto Moses . . ." And if we look back at Exodus 33:13 we will see that Moses prayed during the journey of the Israelites in the desert, "Shew me now thy way, that I may know thee . . ." Since there is nothing more important for us as the people of God than for us to know God, we, therefore, ought to be very interested in knowing His ways. In getting acquainted with His ways, we learn what God is like.

Isaiah was the one to whom God gave that special word about His ways. You have heard it many times since Trinity Bible Church began. Listen to God's words again.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8, 9).

In saying this God was not only saying that His ways are different from our ways, but that His ways are better than our ways! David agreed! He wrote in Psa. 18:30, "As for God, his way is perfect . . ."

The whole book of Job is about the ways of the Lord, and how Job and his friends struggled with what God was doing.

What was the basic problem of the children of Israel in their journey from Egypt to Canaan? It was with the ways of the Lord, which they did not understand. They could not

understand their water problem, nor their food problem. They did not understand the way they were being guided. They struggled with God's ways.

Asaph wrote in Psa. 77:19,

Thy way is in the sea,
and thy path in the great waters,
and thy footsteps are not known.

So he, too, struggled with the ways of the Lord. But what did he mean?

When we were in southern California, we visited the large luxury liner, the Queen Mary. It is no longer in service, but is in Long Beach, tied to a dock, and open to visitors. We probably spent a couple of hours aboard that ship, and still did not see all of it. It is huge! We were up where the captain of the ship stood to steer the ship across the Atlantic again and again.

Now how would you have felt if in the days that the Queen Mary was in her glory, you were told to take her from New York to London—with this exception: All compasses were to be removed, depth sounders would be taken out, lights would be removed. How would you have felt? None of us would do it even if all of the equipment were left on board!

But suppose somebody would say, "The Queen Mary has been back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean. Others have done it. You can do it, too." That would have been little help for us. Why? Because the pathway is not clear. If you take a trip to California, you can get a map. The highways are well marked. And it is not a problem to get there. Why? Because there are highways.

But there are no highways in the ocean, are there? You have to make your own way. And if you get frightened, and want to turn back, you find that the ocean has already wiped out the path that you took to get where you are.

That is what Asaph meant when he said that God's "way is in the sea," and that His "path was in the great waters," and that His "footsteps are not known." Getting there from here is no problem to the Lord even though it may be across every ocean! He knows the way even though we usually cannot see what He is doing, nor where He is leading us.

The Lord's leading for us as a church has not been what I expected. I am sure that I felt that we would have our own building in eight years! And I thought that we would see more people saved, our numbers increase with people who would love the doctrines of the grace of God the way we do. BUT GOD HAS NOT LED US THAT WAY. So we, too, as a church, and as

families, and as individuals, have our struggles with the ways of the Lord. Rarely does God do what we think He should do, nor does He do things when we think He should do them, or even where! I heard of a church while we were on vacation that had its own building in four years!

I am sure that you could produce your own illustrations.

How would you describe all that happened in Joseph's life from the time that he had his dreams until he was exalted to a high position in Egypt? HE WAS LEARNING THE WAYS OF THE LORD. It was according to God's plan that He was sold by his brothers. It was according to God's plan that he was sold to Potiphar, and then lied about by Potiphar's wife, so that he was put in prison. It was according to God's plan that he be forgotten by the butler for two full years. Here was a young man who was seeking to please God, but look at the treatment he received. Many would say that God had forsaken him and forgotten him. But the completed story gives us a different message.

Here in chapter 41, the first forty-five verses, we see how God finally, after 13 long years, put Joseph where He had said earlier that Joseph would be: in a position where his family would bow down before him. At the time he could not have told where it was, but, by the end of this section, he knew!

What can we learn about the ways of the Lord from this important episode in Joseph's life?

Let me point out several important things.

I. GOD'S WATCH RUNS SLOWER THAN OURS.

Joseph was ready long before God was. But it was God's timing that prevailed. Even two years before Joseph wanted out. But he had to learn more about God's ways.

II. IT IS NO PROBLEM FOR GOD TO DEAL WITH THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE LAND.

Years later Solomon was to write these words:
 The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord,
 as the rivers of water:
 he turneth it whithersoever he will (Prov. 21:1).

God gave Pharaoh a dream which none of his wise men could interpret, and that is what eventually led him to call for Joseph.

III. GOD CAN MAKE A MAN REMEMBER SOMETHING THAT HE HAD NOT

EVEN THOUGHT OF FOR TWO YEARS.

The butler was not a king; far from it. But God was dealing with him, too. So, in a sense, we have two ends of the spectrum when we consider God's dealings with Pharaoh and His dealings with the butler. It makes no difference who a person is, whether he knows the Lord or not, when the Lord gets ready to use him, nothing can stand in the way.

But look at another thing.

IV. GOD KNOWS HOW TO TAKE GLORY TO HIMSELF.

Think of how Joseph could have felt if God had not already been teaching him some important lessons. He had taught Joseph that the interpretation of dreams was not some special gift he had; he was merely the Lord's spokesman.

So, instead of having sweaty palms, and a fast-beating heart, and strain beyond what even Joseph could have been able to stand, Joseph stood before Pharaoh to honor the Lord, and to look to the Lord with Pharaoh for the interpretation.

Note another point.

V. GOD GAVE JOSEPH THE WISDOM TO INTERPRET PHARAOH'S DREAMS.

The Lord will never fail those whose chief concern is to glorify Him, that is, to glorify the Lord.

Do you know why the wise men of Egypt could not explain Pharaoh's dreams. It was because it was the Word of God, and all of the greatest minds of the world cannot understand God's Word, regardless of the wisdom or degrees they might have.

Finally,

VI. THE SCENE WAS SET FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF JOSEPH'S DREAMS.

Remember that Joseph's dreams did not represent Joseph's desires for himself, his ambition. Joseph's dreams were a revelation of God's plan and purpose for him. As Joseph walked in God's ways for him, he seemed to be moving farther and farther from God's revealed will. Then all of sudden, God had him where He had planned for Joseph ultimately to be.

And the Lord did this without Joseph having to apply for

the job. The whole thing was finalized without a word from Joseph.

Will you note something very important here. MOST OF THE TIME IT SEEMS THAT GOD MOVES VERY SLOWLY, PERHAPS THAT HE IS NOT MOVING AT ALL. BUT THEN, ALL OF A SUDDEN, HE MOVES SO QUICKLY THAT IT TAKES YOUR BREATH AWAY. WHEN GOD WANTS TO MOVE FAST, HE CAN TAKE THE WHOLE GOVERNMENT OF EGYPT WITH HIM!

Joseph not only got a job in which he was second only to Pharaoh, but he gave him a wife, too--the one who in the providence of God was to become the mother of Manasseh and Ephraim, two boys who, with their uncles, would become the heads of tribes in Israel--a double portion coming to Joseph!

Blessings were coming in an abundant supply.

Concl: So what are we to learn from all of this?

- 1) We learn the strangeness of God's ways.
- 2) We learn that God's ways for us are uniquely ours. He does not follow any plan that He has had for anyone else.
- 3) We learn that God is teaching us all along the way. Nothing that we go through is unimportant or wasted.
- 4) We learn that God does fulfill His Word, and that neither brothers, nor masters, nor liars, nor forgetful people, nor even kings, can stand in His way. All are instruments in God's hands.

So what should we do? Trust Him, and rest in Him. Keep your heart open to Him to learn all that He is seeking to teach you. Wait for Him. Do not take matters into your own hands. The Lord's ways are perfect, and a part of His ways is His timing for what He intends to do with us. We can so easily make all kinds of mistakes. God never does. When we see how He overcomes all of the obstacles to accomplish His will, we come through it having had our eyes opened to the greatness of our God.

EVIDENCES OF JOSEPH'S GROWTH

Genesis 41:46-57

Intro: One of the messages of this section of Scripture, and a very important message, is that the interpretation which Joseph had given of Pharaoh's dreams, was true. The years of plenty saw the harvests in the land of Egypt very abundant.

But then the years of famine started, and they were just as bad as Joseph had predicted. Verse 55 tells us that "all the land of Egypt was famished." "Famished" is the verb of the noun, famine. It means that everywhere throughout Egypt there was a lack of food. And this famine extended to many of the nations surrounding Egypt--just how far, we do not know!

During the years of famine two wonderful events took place in the life of Joseph. That was the birth of his two sons, MANASSEH and EPHRAIM. These names were to be linked with the names of their uncles, the sons of Jacob, as being heads of the tribes of the nation Israel. So they were very important babies in more ways than one. The birth of these two babies was undoubtedly times of great joy for Joseph and his wife, Asenath.

Now whenever a couple is expecting a child, this raises the question about what their names would be. It is very clear that Joseph is the one who chose the names. He wanted their names to mean something. He wanted them to commemorate the ways in which God had been pleased to deal with him. He believed that God had given him these two sons, and he wanted to honor the Lord with their names. The names would always be a message to Ephraim and Manasseh as to how God had dealt with their father.

The name Manasseh was Joseph's testimony regarding those 13 years from the time that he was 17 until he was enthroned in Egypt at the age of 30. It means this: Making to forget. The name Ephraim commemorated the years from age 30 on, and it means, To be fruitful. But Joseph chose the first name, as verse 51 tells us, "For God . . . hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." He chose the second name, as verse 52 tells us, "For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." That is what Egypt had been to him throughout his twenties, "the land of my affliction."

These names, and their meaning, are a great encouragement to me, and I trust that they will be an encouragement to you by the time I have finished my message. Let us think about these two names in this time together tonight. They are biographical of God's dealings with Joseph.

The first thing that I want you to note (and this is true of both of the names) is that . . .

I. THERE WAS AN EMPHASIS UPON GOD.

We were talking about the use of our tongue this morning in Ephesians 4. Have you noticed how prominent God has been in the few words of Joseph that have been recorded up to this point in his life?

- 1) He told Potiphar's wife when she was trying to seduce him, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Cf. Gen. 39:9b.
- 2) When he discovered the unhappy butler and baker who were troubled about the meaning of their dreams, he said, "Do not interpretations belong unto God?" Cf. Gen. 40:8b.
- 3) And even when he stood before Pharaoh, and had been complimented by Pharaoh because of his reputation as an interpreter of dreams, he said this to that mighty monarch: "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Cf. Gen. 41:16b.

So it really should not surprise us that we find Joseph thinking and talking about God when it came to naming his children.

This teaches us one of the major benefits that Joseph was learning all through his trials. It was that GOD was the One Who was in complete charge as far as his life was concerned, and that God was His sufficiency. He was placed in one situation after another where he had no one else but God, and He had found that God was enough--time after time!

And so we see that the names of these sons indicated that Joseph had learned much about God during those years of trouble in Egypt, which he called, "the land of my affliction." JOSEPH HAD LEARNED TO LOOK FOR GOD, AND THE HAND OF GOD, IN ALL OF HIS CIRCUMSTANCES. Even the worst times were under, not just the permissive will of God, but the sovereign, directive will of God!

We need to learn this. Joseph did not know the words of Isa. 26:3, 4, but he knew that truth. Cf. also what Paul wrote to the Philippian church from prison: Phil. 4:6, 7. There is no truth that will bring greater peace to you and to me than the truth of the sovereignty of God. Thank Him every day that He has placed you in circumstances where you have learned that this is a blessed reality.

But now let us think particularly of . . .

II. MANASSEH.

Remember the meaning: "For God . . . hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." See v. 51.

What did he mean by this?

What was his "toil"? It is a word which conveys a great deal about Joseph's years in Egypt. They had been hard years. They had been years in which he had worked to the point of exhaustion. They had been years of sorrow for him. He had come to the end of his strength more than once. And, from a human standpoint, it was all because of what his brothers, Potiphar's wife, and the butler had done to him. "All my father's house" was a reference to his brothers, not to his father.

Joseph was a prime candidate for bitterness, hatred, wrath, clamor, evil speaking, and malice. He had plenty of reasons to have been guilty of all of those sins. And remember that his trials were not over in a day, or a week, or a month, or even in a year! They lasted the greater part of 13 long years!

Now he said, "God has made me forget all of that!" Did he mean that it had been blotted out of his memory? Hardly. He was close enough to it that he could have written a very comprehensive report of all that he had gone through during those years. No, he did not mean that he had forgotten what happened. BUT HE DID MEAN THAT HE HAD FORGIVEN IT ALL. HE WAS NOT BROODING UPON IT. HE WAS NOT HOPING FOR REVENGE. HE HAD FORGOTTEN IT IN THE SENSE THAT IT WAS NO LONGER A PROBLEM TO HIM. HE COULD HAVE MET HIS BROTHERS, OR POTIPHAR'S WIFE, OR THE BUTLER, AND HAVE TREATED THEM WITH KINDNESS, WITH A TENDER HEART, AND WITH TOTAL FORGIVENESS.

Now this was not the work of Joseph. Joseph had the same kind of problems that you and I would have had if we had been in those circumstances, and had had to deal with those people. No, it is no credit to Joseph that he wanted to name his firstborn, Manasseh. He said, "For God . . . hath made me forget all . . ." It was as though He had said, "God has worked in my heart to show me that I should forgive all, and He has given me the grace to do it."

What a testimony! We can thank God that Joseph was able to say that because it was God Who had made that change in Joseph's life. He was not a young man poisoned with all kinds of bad feelings. He worked in Egypt as second only to Pharaoh with a heart that was freed from all that could have been there--freed by the grace of God!

Let me ask you this question: Has God been dealing with you about some people in your past life who have made things hard for you, and perhaps even changed the course of your life? Is your fellowship with the Lord being hindered by animosities and hopes of revenge and bitterness over what has happened to you. Take it all to the Lord, confess it to Him, and let your soul be relieved of those burdens. Forget

what has happened. Forgive it, even though no one has asked for forgiveness. Make it right with the Lord, and your heart will be at rest even though your troubles may still be continuing.

But now let us think about . . .

III. EPHRAIM.

This is what came to mind as Joseph thought about the amazing position which he now held.

I have been emphasizing as we have considered the life of Joseph that, wherever Joseph was--with his father at home, or with Potiphar in Egypt, or with the jailor--he was faithful. He did his work well. He sought to honor the Lord wherever He was.

But Ephraim does not mean that Joseph was being rewarded for his faithfulness. Undoubtedly he was, but there have been many faithful children of God who have not had the position that was given to Joseph. No, Joseph did not say that. Instead, Joseph said, "When you look at me now, the position the I hold, the power that I wield, be sure to recognize that this is what God has done. It is all by His grace. It would never have happened without Him!"

In the very place where Joseph had suffered so much, THERE God made him fruitful! God was with him through all of those years of trial, and He was still with Joseph during his years of triumph.

Joseph was just as indebted to the Lord as Pharaoh was in knowing that there would be seven years of plenty, and then seven years of famine. And it was no credit to Joseph that he could tell Pharaoh what to do during the years of plenty to prepare for the famine. And even Pharaoh recognized the special wisdom that Joseph had, wisdom which he in 41:38 to the spirit of the gods (which is probably what he said). It truly was all due to the goodness, the sovereignty, the wisdom, of Joseph's GOD--and Joseph wanted it to be known that way!

How wonderful it was that Joseph did not forget the Lord during those fruitful years! Even years later when he was about to die he told his family to make sure that his bones went back to Canaan when they went. His hope was the hope that God had given to Abraham.

Concl: I have wondered if Joseph had an office. I would be inclined to think that he did. And if he did, I wonder if he had a picture of Asenath and his two boys on the wall of

his office. I feel sure that he must have had something to remind him of them. Perhaps he had just their two names on the wall. Whatever may have been the situation, whenever he called them and talked with them, or spoke about them to others, they were constant reminders to him as to how he should view both the past and the present. Wherever he looked, he was reminded of God, His sovereignty, His goodness, His wisdom, His faithfulness.

But will you notice the order? Trials first; fruitfulness follows the trials.

However, I want you to see something which to me is very wonderful when we look ahead in the life of Joseph.

When Jacob, Joseph's father, was sick, and near death, Joseph went to see him, and took Manasseh and Ephraim with him. It was then that Jacob told Joseph that Manasseh and Ephraim were to have the same position in the family that Joseph and his brothers had. And this led to the blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim.

Joseph positioned his sons before Jacob so that Jacob's right hand would reach out and touch Manasseh, and his left hand would reach out and touch Ephraim. But do you remember what Jacob did? He crossed his hands, putting his right hand on Ephraim's head, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, giving Ephraim the greater blessing of the firstborn even though he was the younger.

When you think of the meaning of their names, what can we learn from what Jacob did? Remember Manasseh was linked with trials, Ephraim with fruitful blessings. It was as though God was saying by moving Ephraim ahead that He delight in the blessing. The trials lead to blessings, but it is the blessing that God is concerned about.

You and I may not yet be ready to raise our Ephraim, but let us make sure that our Manasseh is on the wall. And then be sure that in God's time Ephraim will be there, too.

(Close with the words of William Cowper's hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way . . .," #21. I doubt if anyone ever wrote a hymn about Manasseh and Ephraim.)

THE DAY OF RECKONING
Genesis 42

Intro: God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
-- William Cowper, #21.

These chapters dealing with the years of plenty in the land of Egypt, followed by the years of famine, give us an excellent picture of the sovereignty of God. What we are seeing here in the life of Joseph has to do with the eternal purposes of God. It had been about 200 years since the days of Abraham in which God had told him that he would not possess that land of Canaan, but his seed would possess it. However, before that Abraham's family would be moved into "a land that is not their's" (Gen. 15:13) for 400 years. They would be slaves in that land, an afflicted people, but then they would come out, not as a family, but as a nation. And they would have great material wealth.

We are about to see how Abraham's family, years after his death, was moved into the land of Egypt. And, while God was dealing with His own purposes, He also had to deal with the sins of His people.

Joseph, remember, had had two prophetic dreams. His brothers had objected to them, and were determined that they would never do as the dreams had predicted that they would. They wanted to kill him, but finally were satisfied to sell him as a slave into the land of Egypt. They believed that he had died there. See the end of Gen. 42:13. However, they were going to learn two things:

- 1) That we cannot sin against the Lord and get away with it.
- 2) That the purposes of God are going to be fulfilled regardless of what we may try to do to hinder it, or to block it altogether.

To bring about His purposes, God used the weather. He did not let the famine take the Egyptians by surprise—and this was evidence of God's grace to the Egyptians, as well as to His own people, as well as to many others in other nations around Egypt who are not even mentioned in the Genesis account. He gave Pharaoh two dreams, and by the providence of God, Joseph was there to interpret those dreams. This is what brought about the exaltation of Joseph, second only to Pharaoh over the land of Egypt. How amazing to find an Israelite in such a position in the land of Egypt!

But the seven years of plenty were over, and Egypt, Canaan, and the surrounding countries were hit by a devastating

famine. If it had not been for the goodness of God in giving Pharaoh the dreams he had, and the fact that Joseph was there to interpret them, it is certain that none of those nations would have survived. But they did! And it could have only been by the sovereign power of God, for which He deserved (and still does) all of the glory!

As we come to Genesis 42 the famine had gotten so severe that Jacob and his sons knew that they had to do something. They had heard that there was food in Egypt. And so Jacob sent them down to Egypt to buy food. Cf. Gen. 42:1, 2.

Now there are four things in this chapter that I want to point out, things which show both the power of God and the fruit of sin. But keep in mind that we are seeing God at work as He was fulfilling His Word as well as dealing with those brothers who had sinned so grievously against Him.

The first point that I want you to see has to do with . . .

I. THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY.

Remember that Joseph's dreams were a prophetic revelation from God. It was not Joseph, but God, who had said that Joseph's family would bow down before him. That sounded utterly ridiculous at the time, completely preposterous, that anything like that could happen.

I want to remind you of what these brothers said when Joseph came to them in Dothan. You will find it in Gen. 37:20. (Read.) Notice their words at the end of the verse: "And we shall see what will become of his dreams." They knew that God had spoken in dreams before. That was the reason that Jacob, Joseph's father, could not cast the dreams aside like his sons did. But saying what they did was like saying, "And we shall see what will become of the Word of God." They were not defying Joseph; they were defying God!

A lot of men have had that attitude. They have felt that they were greater than God, greater than His Word. But no one has ever been able to stand against God. God's Word stands while men and nations fall before it.

So what happened?

Look at Gen. 42:6. And then look at v. 9a. There, without being commanded to do so, of their own wills, they fulfilled the prophecy which they had hated so much over 20 years before. They did not know that that was Joseph. But that is beside the point. Joseph saw them on their faces before him, and he remembered his dreams!

Years later Isaiah was to write those majestic words found in Isa. 46:9, 10:

Remember the former things of old:
for I am God, and there is none else;
I am God, and there is none like me,
Declaring the end from the beginning,
and from ancient times
the things that are not yet done, saying,
My counsel shall stand,
and I will do all my pleasure.

And then in the latter part of the next verse the Lord said,

. . . yea, I have spoken it,
I will also bring it to pass;
I have purposed it, I will also do it.

Let us learn the lesson well from this event in the lives of Joseph's brothers so that we will not have to go through some bitter experiences ourselves.

I shudder for men who think themselves so wise as to say that such and such a thing belongs in the Word, but this other does not!

But let us look at another point. Let us call it:

II. A GUILTY CONSCIENCE.

Joseph had charged his brothers with being spies. I do not argue the rightness or wrongness of what he did, but I know that he had to put his brothers under some kind of pressure to get them to do what he wanted them to do. So he told them that they were going to have to bring their younger brother, his only full brother, down to prove that what they were saying about their family was true. He was going to put all of them in prison while one of them went after Benjamin.

Look at the words which they spoke to each other in Gen. 42:21, and then what Reuben said in v. 22.

There was no reason for them to be talking about Joseph. As far as they knew, he was dead. But can you see what this tells us? We see in their words the fact that their sin against Joseph was as vivid in their minds as though it had been committed that very day! They had been expecting something terrible to happen to them, and this seemed to be it!

What a lesson for us!

Time does not erase our sins from our minds. Years and

years afterward we still remember them. The only way to deal with them is by confessing them to God, and then forsaking them. Obviously the brothers had not done that. Their father was still living under the impression of that lie that they had told him, and no one had ventured to tell him anything differently. But there it was! And when they ran into this unexpected problem, they all began to talk about it. They did not know that Joseph knew what they were talking about, but he heard it and it moved him to tears!

How careful we need to be about sin in any form! That is one reason God has given us this account, so we can learn that time does not erase our sins, and that they will continue to distress us as long as we live.

But let me point out a third thing:

III. A BLESSING THAT WAS NOT A BLESSING.

Note in Gen. 42:25 what Joseph did for them. (Read.) This was no small thing. There undoubtedly was a considerable amount of money involved to feed a large family like Jacob had, and to do it over several months. Joseph not only gave them their money back, but he gave them food for themselves and their animals for the trip home.

Why did he do this?

He did it because they were his family. He did it because he loved them. He did it for his father, and for Benjamin. But the main reason that he did it was because God moved his heart to do it. Joseph had had some lessons in theology since coming to Egypt. He had learned a great deal about the sovereignty of God. We learn later that he had seen God in all that had happened, and that his brothers would not have been able to do what they did if God had not had some purpose in it. Those brothers were already forgiven, but they did not know it.

But the point is that when we have sinned against God, we do not even recognize a blessing when we see it. In fact, our own consciences make us suspicious of God Himself! Note what they said in Gen. 42:28:

. . . and their heart failed,
and they were afraid, saying one to another,
What is this that God hath done to us?

It is amazing to see the goodness of God upon them, but very significant that they thought that God was doing

something to them instead of for them.

When we have displeased God we are not able to enjoy the things which ought to be a great blessing to us.

One more point:

IV. JACOB'S DISTRESS.

After Jacob heard their story when they returned home, note what he said in Gen. 42:36-38.

What are we to learn from this?

We learn that it is hardly ever, if ever, possible for us to sin without hurting other people. And usually our sins hurt those who are the dearest to us the worst. Think of the years of grief that Jacob had suffered because of what his sons had done. He did not really know what they had done, but he was suffering because of what they had told him about the disappearance of Joseph. Solomon said in Prov. 17:25,

A foolish son is a grief to his father,
and bitterness to her that bare him.

The knowledge of this is intended by God to keep us from sin. Think of the tears that parents have shed, and are shedding at this present time, because of children who have gone astray and are living in sin. This does not apply just to Christian parents; this applies to all parents!

Are you listening, young people? And are we who are older listening? Think of how David wept over Absalom! We have all seen Jimmy Swaggart's tears on TV as he confessed his sin. The Lord knows how sincere he was. I trust that it was real. But what we have not seen are the tears of millions of people who looked to him for spiritual guidance, only to find that they had been betrayed.

And what is even worse than the way we grieve others with our sins, is the way we grieve God. Listen to Paul's words in Eph. 4:30:

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God,
whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

When David confessed his two sins to God, although many people had suffered because of his sins, he said in Psal. 51:4a,

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
and done this evil in thy sight . . .

Concl: There are many very important lessons for us to learn from our Bibles. The Lord has not given these accounts to us to expose those who did wrong. He put them here so that you and I would not have to go through what they went through in order to learn what they learned. The person who claims that you have to sin in order to learn these things, is a fool! David said,
 Thy word have I hid in mine heart,
 that I might not sin against thee (Psa. 119:11).

Let us pray that our hearts will be open to what we have seen tonight. If you are living with a guilty conscience, do not go to sleep without getting that sin confessed to God. Say the same thing about your sin that God does, and then forsake it. Have nothing more to do with it. Only then can you have peace. Only then will you be looking for blessings, and not troubles, at the hand of the Lord.

If we confess our sins,
 he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,
 and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness
 (1 John 1:9).

Why? Because "the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). If you need to, get right with God tonight.

If you do not have Christ as your Saviour, these lessons are for you to, to teach you that your sins will control you regardless of what you do. Only Christ can deliver you from eternal death, from hell; only Christ can deliver you from the terrible bondage of sin. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" and He will save you.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JUDAH
Genesis 43:1-14

Intro: (Read the text, and give a recount of the situation, paying special attention to the providential ways of the Lord.)

It is apparent that the Lord was working in Joseph's life, but what about his brothers? We fail to recognize this possibility in the lives of those with whom we may have had trouble in the past. But they, as well as we, are included in the Lord's promise found in Phil. 1:6.

Judah was the spokesman here. He was son #4. Simeon, #2 son, was not there. He was in Egypt. Why Reuben did not speak up, we do not know. He was #1. Levi was #3. All we know is that Judah felt special responsibility. It was not a matter of choice; it was a matter of life or death. The existence of the whole family was at stake. It was urgent! Benjamin had to go with them or they would not get their food. And so Judah did the only thing that could be done: he accepted full responsibility for Benjamin. We have his words in Gen. 43:9. (Read.)

Notice four things about this promise, or pledge, that Judah was taking.

- I. IT WAS PERSONAL: "I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him."

He assumed full responsibility Benjamin. And he did not do like Reuben had done in 42:37, offering his two sons. Instead, he made himself the security for Benjamin.

He did it willingly. He placed no conditions on it. Nor did he place any time limit on it. Judah himself was the surety—not his children, nor his possessions, but Judah himself!

- II. IT WAS PROPHETIC: "I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him."

Judah did not know what it would require. He knew that it might involve his very life. But, whatever might happen, he pledged himself to his father for the safety of his younger half-brother.

He was not saying that he might help out; he indicated to Jacob that he would put himself ahead of all of his brothers in making sure that nothing happened to Benjamin. He did not even say that he would do it if Benjamin wanted him to; he would do it regardless of what

Benjamin might say or do! He would be Benjamin's substitute.

The more we examine these words, the more we realize how much Judah was saying.

And so we must recognize a third point:

III. IT WAS POWERFUL.

Judah was not omnipotent, but Judah was prepared to do any and everything in his power to make sure that Benjamin got back to his father again. Judah realized that he might not come back, but his promise was that Benjamin would be back!

Finally,

IV. IT WAS PERMANENT: "If I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever."

That applied to both the arrangement, and also to the blame if he should fail.

Be sure to note that Judah's concern in all of this was only secondarily for Benjamin; his primary concern was for his father.

We must note also that these words were only as good as Judah was. If Jacob thought Judah was a liar, the words, as wonderful as they were, meant nothing! But if Judah was a trustworthy son, a son who was honest and faithful, then Jacob could have asked for no more.

Jacob saw that he was in a terrible situation, but he agreed to let Benjamin go—sending gifts, returning the money, entrusting him to Judah, and then committing the journey into the hands of "God Almighty." See vv. 11-14.

But we cannot leave the story here. Please turn with me to chapter 44.

All of the events included in this second visit to Egypt are packed with emotion. The end of chapter 43 tells us about the arrival of the brothers in Egypt, and the meeting which Joseph had with Benjamin after being separated for more than 20 years. We probably have to experience something like that to know how Joseph felt. And it was even harder for Joseph because he was not yet in a position to let them know who he was. But he gave Benjamin five times as much to eat as he did the rest of his brothers.

Chapter 43 tells us about Joseph sending his brothers away with as much food as they could carry. He returned their money to them, and put his own silver cup into Benjamin's sack.

However, as soon as they were gone, Joseph sent his men after them to recover the cup. The brother's were so sure that the cup was not in their possession that they promised that the one in whose sack the cup was found would die, and the rest would become the bondservants of Joseph.

The search was made, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Joseph's brothers tore their clothes in grief, and returned to Egypt and to Joseph. When he saw them, he rebuked them, but agreed to keep Benjamin and to let the others go back to their father.

THAT IS WHEN JUDAH SPOKE UP. Listen to his words. (Read verses 18-34.)

Note two things:

- 1) Judah was being true to his word, and Joseph could tell that he was telling the truth.
- 2) Judah showed that his main concern was for what would happen to his father if they returned without Benjamin.

THIS WAS TOO MUCH FOR JOSEPH, AND WE SEE IN THE VERSES THAT FOLLOW IN CHAPTER 45 THAT HE DECIDED TO TELL HIS BROTHERS WHO HE WAS.

We will save that for another time, but I do want to point out two things of special interest for us as we conclude.

Concl: I want us to note (1) what this event indicated to Joseph about his brothers, and (2) the greater significance of what Judah did, as we look ahead to the time when Judah's greatest Son came to the earth from heaven.

What did this tell Joseph about his brothers?

It showed him that God had been working in the hearts of his brothers during those twenty years plus just as the Lord had been working in his own heart. This brought a flood of tears from the eyes of Joseph.

How wonderful it is to see this? I doubt if it is going beyond the facts in the case to say that Joseph could see right before his eyes and by what he heard with his ears that God had been answering his prayers.

What an encouragement this ought to be to us to expect that, as we are conscious that the Lord has been working with us,

so we can hope and continue to pray with real expectation that God is doing the same in the lives of those who are dear to us, and with whom we have had trouble in the past. If you are praying, don't stop! If you haven't been praying, then start! We may not see all that we would like to see, but there is no way for us to tell what great things we may yet see the Lord do before He takes us to heaven.

But let me pass on to that second point I mentioned a moment ago. WHAT CAN WE SEE HERE OF GREATER SIGNIFICANCE THAN EVEN THE PROMISE THAT JUDAH GAVE TO HIS FATHER, JACOB?

This was an amazing thing for Judah to do, and we have seen that he meant every word of it. But who, a Relative of Judah, did something even more wonderful than this?

How can any one of us read the words of Gen. 43:9 and not think of our Lord Jesus Christ? Must there not have been some such an agreement that the Son of God made with the Father in eternity past concerning you and me? But there was one great difference: Judah did not have to take Benjamin's place, but our Lord had to take our place.

I believe it was Martin Luther who used to say about the story of Philemon and Onesimus, "We are all the Lord's Onesimi!" I say this about Benjamin. We are all the Lord's Benjamins!

Think of our Lord saying these words to the Father about you!

I remember the first time I ever saw this and realized the full import of Judah's words. And I realized this. I was hesitant in saying it, and I have some hesitation in saying this tonight. But I am going to say it. I say it for myself, and I say it for all of you as well as for myself. It is this: Jesus Christ has become our surety, our guarantee that some day we will stand before our heavenly Father, and, if we are not there, then our blessed Lord will bear the blame for ever!

But He cannot fail, can He? Judah was not omnipotent, but our Lord is! Therefore, because He is our "surety," we know that we can never again be lost, but that our Lord Jesus Christ will make sure that at last we will get to our heavenly home.

What are some of the promises we have concerning our salvation?

Here is one: Jude 24, 25. Here is another: Heb. 7:25. Here is another: 1 Pet. 3:18, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, . . ." Here is another: 1 Thess. 4:16-

18, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven . . ."

Charles Wesley wrote the words of that great hymn which tell the story I have been seeking to relate to you tonight. Listen to them as I close:

— Arise, my soul, arise, shake off thy guilty fears:
The bleeding Sacrifice in my behalf appears:
Before the throne my Surety stands,
Before the throne my Surety stands,
My name is written on his hands.

Five bleeding wounds he bears, received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers, they strongly plead for me;
Forgive him, O forgive, they cry,
Forgive him, O forgive, they cry,
Nor let that ransomed sinner die.

Let me change the first line of the last verse. It reads,
"My God is reconciled." Let me read it this way:

I now am reconciled; His pard'ning voice I hear;
He owns me for his child, I can no longer fear;
With confidence I now draw nigh,
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And "Father, Abba, Father!" cry.

— Are you lacking in assurance? You are trusting Christ for your salvation, but you have fears about whether or not you will make it to heaven. I hope you have seen tonight what it means that your guarantee of salvation is Christ and that He cannot fail. He saved you. He will keep you. And He will make sure that you are there when He gathers all of His people into the Father's house.

If you are not a Christian, does this help you to see that it is Christ that saves you. And that He does it for the Father's sake. Come to Him tonight. Trust in His work on the Cross. He is the only surety for sinners, and He will save you if you will only come to Him.

This is THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JUDAH. And this is THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

THE GREATNESS AND GOODNESS OF GOD
Genesis 45:1-15

Intro: When Joseph listened to the intercession of Judah on behalf of Benjamin, his heart was so moved that he could not longer "refrain" from telling his brothers who he was. Cf. Gen. 43:31 where he had "refrained himself" when he first saw Benjamin. The word indicates that he had wanted to tell his brothers who he was, but up to this point had been able to control himself. But now he reached the breaking point, and could no longer hold himself back.

He put everyone else out, wept until his crying was heard throughout the royal palace, and then, through his tears he said, "I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?"

What a shock this was to his brothers? They revealed that they had been looking for judgment from God because of what they had done to Joseph 22 years before. (The 13 years from the time that he was 17 until he was 30, plus the 7 years of plenty, and the 2 years of the famine: $13 + 7 + 2 = 22$. Cf. Gen. 45:6.) BUT THEY NEVER EXPECTED TO SEE JOSEPH!

Once they had told Joseph that "one is not" (Gen. 42:13). As Judah began to plead for Benjamin, he told Joseph at that time that "his brother is dead" (Gen. 44:20). So there is no doubt but they thought that Joseph had died in Egypt. Then suddenly they realized that he was alive, standing there before them, clothed not only with royal garments, but having royal power. And so it should be no surprise to us that we read in verse 3 of our text that "they were troubled at his presence."

So on the one hand we have Joseph in tears, and on the other, his brothers gripped with fear and amazement! "Troubled" means that they were suddenly gripped with fear at this unexpected turn of events. Who can possibly describe the emotions, the fears, that devastated them at this moment.

This is the word that was used to describe Saul's feelings when Samuel was brought back from the dead and told Saul that he and his sons would die the next day and that Israel would be delivered into the hands of the Philistines. Cf. 1 Sam. 28:21.

This is the word that was used to describe how Ishbosheth felt when he heard that Abner had been killed. Cf. 2 Sam. 4:1.

This is the word that Eliphaz used to describe how Job felt after all of the troubles that he had had. Cf. Job 4:5.

David used this word to describe how he felt when it seemed that the Lord had forsaken him. Cf. Psa. 30:7.

In all of these and other circumstances which we could cite we can see that we are dealing with a traumatic experience, a shocking event, which leaves a person disabled and distraught! This was the farthest thing from Joseph's brothers' minds, and they feared the worst!

We ought to try to put ourselves in their places as we read this account. It is interesting to see that they thought that Joseph was dead, but not one of them expected that his dreams would come true!

Take those words in verse 3 at their full value: **And his brothers could not answer him;** for they were trouble at his presence." It was not that they would not, but they "could not." They were not able to speak. Their shock and their fears had left them speechless!

And they had every reason to be fearful because Joseph possessed the authority to have them put to death, if they had been what he had wanted to do.

But we are about to discover a most wonderful thing.

Joseph had just seen how the Lord had been working in the heart of Judah (and, doubtless, his other brothers as well). **NOW THEY WERE GOING TO SEE WHAT AN AMAZING WORK HAD BEEN DONE IN THE HEART OF JOSEPH OVER THE PAST TWENTY-TWO YEARS.**

What had happened?

There in Egypt, separated from his father and the godly influences of that home (because although it was not a perfect home, yet it was a godly home)—but separated from all of that, surrounded by heathen influences, God had been dealing with Joseph, taking every bit of the animosity out of his heart, utterly obliterating any desire for revenge against his brothers.

What do we see when we look at Joseph, now 37 years of age? We see a man who was living . . .

I. A GOD-CENTERED LIFE.

Joseph had learned that, although he had been forced to leave his home, his father, and his beloved land, **HE HAD NOT LEFT GOD BEHIND!**

More than that, he had seen the hand of God in all that had happened to him—so much so that at this point it

seemed to him as though his brothers had not hand anything at all to do with his coming to Egypt. He saw that this was something that God had done. Joseph had been thoroughly indoctrinated in the truth of the sovereignty of God.

We can see the truth of the sovereignty of God in the Scriptures--His sovereignty in history over all of the nations of the earth, His sovereignty in prophecy, his sovereignty over the weather, over disease, over men and their plans, over human errors and sins, even over death, and certainly His sovereignty over salvation. We can read books about it. We can talk to our friends about this amazing truth. We can go to Bible schools or seminaries and hear about it (sometimes!). But only God can really teach us what this truth means; only He can show us the evidence of His sovereignty in our lives. THIS IS WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO JOSEPH.

Note what Joseph said in verses 5, 7, 8, and 9.

His brothers had hated him. They really wanted to kill him. They were able to sell him into slavery. They really thought that he was dead. AND YET JOSEPH HAD COMPLETELY FORGIVEN THEM. HE SAW IT ALL FROM WHERE HE WAS STANDING AT THAT MOMENT AS SOMETHING THAT GOD HAD DONE!

Joseph was not saying that they had not sinned. And he certainly was not saying that God had caused them to sin, nor that God was to be blamed for their sin. BUT HE WAS SAYING THAT GOD HAD WORKED THROUGH THEIR SIN, THAT GOD HAD USED THEIR SIN, THAT GOD HAD OVERRULED IN THEIR SIN, SO THAT HIS WILL WAS ACCOMPLISHED, AND HIS PLAN FOR JOSEPH WAS CARRIED OUT EXACTLY AS HE HAD PLANNED THAT IT SHOULD BE. Joseph told his brothers that God have never for one moment lost control of the situation, but he had been in charge all along.

It was Joseph's dreams that had infuriated his brothers, and had made them say, "Let us cast him into some pit. And we will say that his was killed by some wild animal. And then we will see what will become of his dreams!" THEY FOUND OUT! GOD FULFILLED THOSE DREAMS USING WHAT JOSEPH'S BROTHERS DID TO DO AWAY WITH THAT REVELATION FROM GOD!

If you had read, or are reading, Jerry Bridges' book, Trusting God, you may remember how he referred to some of those powerful statements in the Word of God having to do with the sovereignty of God. One of them is Isa. 14:24: The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying,

Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass;
and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.

Another is Isa. 46:10,

My counsel shall stand,
and I will do all my pleasure.

And still another is Dan. 4:35:

And all the inhabitants of the earth
are reputed as nothing:
and he doeth according to his will
in the army of heaven,
and among the inhabitants of the earth:
and none can stay his hand, or say unto him,
What doest thou?

These are verses that we need to read over and over,
asking the Lord to write them upon our hearts, and to
show us in our own lives that they are still true!

The hymn says,

O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer.

But it could also be said that we forfeit peace, and bear
needless pain because we do not really believe that God
is sovereign in all of the circumstances of our lives!
There is no truth that can be more strengthening to our
faith, no doctrine that can take the resentments out of
our hearts, no truth that can keep us walking more in the
joy of the Lord, than this grand and glorious truth of
the sovereignty of God!

But there are a couple of other things that I want to point
out from this wonderful passage on the life of Joseph. One
of them is the evidence of . . .

II. THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

The life of Joseph teaches us that God is not only
sovereign, but God is good, really good.

It takes God to bring good out of evil, but He is doing
that constantly. He does it for people who do not even
know Him, people who pay no attention to Him, people who
live as though God did not even exist. But He also does
it, and does it especially for His own people.

The goodness of God is really seen in three ways here. I
want to mention two of them under this heading, and then
make the third into a separate heading. The two that I
want you to notice are:

A. "To preserve life" (Gen. 45:5b).

In the last chapter of Genesis, verse 20, Joseph spoke of this again after Jacob, his father had died. His brothers still feared that Joseph might want to get even. But this is what Joseph said:

But as for you, ye thought evil against me:
but God meant it for good,
to bring to pass, as it is this day,
to save much people alive.

Who did God save? He saved the Egyptians. And He saved all of the surrounding nations. He accomplished that purpose through the evil that Joseph's brothers did. God is GOOD to all, and let us never forget that as we study history and read current events.

Our Lord Jesus said about our heavenly Father,
. . . he maketh his sun to rise
on the evil and the good,
and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust
(Matt. 5:45b).

It is no wonder that the Psalmist wrote several times in Psa. 107,

Oh that men would praise the Lord
for his goodness,
and for his wonderful works
to the children of men!

God is good, very good, good to all! And none of us deserves a bit of it!

But notice also God's goodness:

B. To Joseph's brothers (Gen. 45:7).

Oh, what grace! What goodness! God took the sin of Joseph's brothers, the evil which they did, and turned it into an amazing blessing for them and for their families, and for all of their descendants down to the present day.

How many times throughout history do you think that the Lord has done this? Millions upon millions of times. The world itself could not hold the books that would record the times when God turned the evil that men have done into a blessing for themselves and their loved ones.

The salvation of the Apostle Paul is one of the greatest examples of this in Scripture. And he never

forgot it! Can you see evidences of this in your own life?

But now let me mention the third evidence of God's goodness, but let me point it out thinking of . . .

III. THE GREATNESS OF GOD.

I am thinking of what Joseph said in verses 8 and 9 about himself.

When Joseph's brothers stood before Joseph, did they stand before a proud, arrogant monarch, one who looked down on them as being far below him, which they were--socially. No, you see a humble monarch, recognizing that what had happened to him never could have taken place if it had not been for the sovereign, almighty, gracious and wise power of God! He told them that this was what God had done. He wanted God to have all of the glory.

It is only when we recognize the sovereign hand of God in our lives that we will be kept humble when God is pleased to honor us. I believe that Joseph learned this during all of those years when it seemed that God was doing nothing. He may not have been doing much outwardly that was recognized as His work, but He was working in the heart of Joseph preparing him for two things:

- 1) The high place of power and honor that he would hold in Egypt.
- 2) The reunion with his brothers.

Concl: God probably does not have the same plan for you or for me that He had for Joseph, but He has a plan. And that plan will be realized. Circumstances cannot change it, nor can people hinder it. God is able! His plans will prevail through His power, and what He does results in blessings for all concerned, and in the end, in each of our lives, we will spend eternity glorifying Him for His greatness and His power in each of our lives.

Jerry Bridges raised the question in his book, "Why is it easier to obey God than to trust Him?" Read his book to learn what his answer is, but from the life of Joseph we can learn that, as hard as it may sometimes be, to trust the Lord, trusting Him is no mistake, and it is the path that always leads to even greater blessings that we were ever expecting.

THE WORK OF GOD IN EGYPT

Genesis 46:1-7

Intro: Joseph's brothers had, at this point, returned to Canaan. They had informed Jacob that Joseph was alive, and in the last verse of chapter 45 we have Jacob's decision to go to Egypt to see Joseph.

But this is where we see a change in the way God had dealt previously with this family of Abraham with respect to Egypt.

In Genesis 12 Abraham had gone down into Egypt, but the blessing of the Lord was held back from him until he went back to Canaan.

In chapter 26 there was another famine in the land of Canaan, and Isaac was headed for Egypt when the Lord stopped him and told him that he was to stay in the land.

Now we see that the Lord told Jacob to go down to Egypt, and we know that he lived the rest of his life there. How do we account for the difference between God's leading in Abraham and Isaac's lives, as compared with Jacob?

This leads to an even greater question: What was God's purpose in taking His people down into Egypt? Let us take the first question first: Why the difference?

I. WHY THE DIFFERENCE?

In studying the life of Joseph (or the life of any other person in Scripture) one of our chief purposes should be to learn things that will help us understand the ways of the Lord in our own lives. Or, to state it another way, that we might learn more about knowing the will of God.

The answer here has to do with the timing. It was God's purpose from the beginning that His people would eventually go to Egypt. The circumstances in Moses' day, and the exodus of the people from Egypt, were not a mistake; they were according to the plan of God. But God was not ready for them to go to Egypt in Abraham's day, nor in Isaac's, BUT IN JACOB'S DAY THE TIME HAD COME!

This part of knowing the will of God is even better illustrated in the life of our Lord. Our Lord's enemies were ready to take Him and kill Him long before they were finally able to do it. Several times we read, especially in the Gospel of John, that our Lord's time had not yet come. Then suddenly it came, and His enemies were able to carry out their evil scheme. Thus we see again that timing is an important factor in knowing the will of God

—not our time, but the Lord's!

In Joseph's case, the Lord was greater than His brothers, and could have stopped the whole thing before it got started. He was certainly greater than Potiphar's wife. And at any moment in those two years that the butler forgot Joseph, the Lord could have made him remember. The Lord also was the One Who brought the famine upon that whole region. He caused the brothers to go down into Egypt to buy food. We see the hand of the Lord all through those events, and finally the Lord was ready for His people to go to Egypt, not just for a visit, BUT TO LIVE THE REST OF THEIR LIVES THERE!

In considering any matter in our lives we always need to be concerned about THE LORD'S TIME! Abraham got himself, his wife, and his descendants into a lot of trouble because he ignored this most important matter of timing.

But we might consider this to be almost incidental when we consider the second question that I raised earlier: WHAT PURPOSE DID GOD HAVE IN TAKING HIS PEOPLE DOWN INTO EGYPT? After all, if God were sovereign (and He is), then He could easily have kept the famine out of Canaan, or He could have provided for His people in some other way.

This is where we need to remember something which, from all of the evidence, it seems that Jacob and all of his family, including Joseph, may have forgotten. It was this:

II. A PROPHECY GIVEN TO ABRAHAM.

Cf. Gen. 15:12-16.

Abraham, or Abram as his name was then, had asked for assurance that he would inherit the land. The confirmation of the promise was not given until after this prophecy had been made. So the confirmation not only had to do with the eventual possession of the land, but it had to do with that long sojourn in some unnamed foreign land. Now, in Jacob's day, we see that that land was EGYPT.

But this is the point that I want to make about this promise. Although it does not seem that any of Abraham's descendants at this point remember the prophecy, GOD DID NOT FORGET IT! Just how low things had gotten spiritually, we can only guess. Joseph's brothers certainly were not spiritual giants. However, in spite of the lack that we see when we look at the Lord's people, the Lord does not forget His plans, His does not set aside His prophetic word, He never loses sight of

His purposes for His people.

This ought to be very encouraging for us today. It seems that very few of the Lord's people are thinking in terms of what the Lord is doing, or if He is doing anything! We can so easily forget God and His purposes. People still talk somewhat about prophecy, but isn't it interesting, and tragic, how prophecy has been set aside when it was so prominent a few years ago? People still talk about the coming of the Lord, but not many are living as though they really expect it take place soon.

Often we get discouraged about the promises of God. Prayer goes unanswered, and it is so easy for us to give up. What has happened when that takes place? We have really forgotten the God that we have, that He is faithful even when we are not, and that nothing is going to stand in the way of the fulfillment of His promises. When God called Jacob in verse 2 of our text, and Jacob answered, it is significant that God said, "I am God, the God of thy father" (Gen. 46:3a). If you believe that, and remember that, you will not have any trouble with anything else that the Lord said to Jacob—nor with any of God's other promises.

IF EVERY CHRISTIAN ALIVE TODAY WERE TO FORGET THE PAST PROMISES OF GOD, THAT WOULD NOT NULLIFY EVEN ONE OF THOSE PROMISES. The story of Joseph at this period in history is a confirmation of that.

So, what was God doing in Egypt? God was standing by His Word, moving ahead with His plans for the family of Abraham.

Now there are some other things connected with that. This move of Joseph's family into Egypt marked:

III. THE BEGINNING OF A GREAT CHANGE.

Look at those words: "Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 46:3b).

How many were there in Jacob's family? Gen. 46:27 says there were seventy! How long had God said that they were be there? "Four hundred years." What did He say would happen to them during that time? They would become "a great nation." What naturally might be expected? That they would be absorbed into the Egyptian nation so that the family of Abraham would have come to an end.

What did happen? Did they lose their identity? No! Did

they become a great nation? Yes! When Moses led them out we are told that there were 600,000 men besides women and children, which has given rise to estimates of from 1,500,000 to 2,000,000 people. After all of those years the Israelites were still Israelites, and the Egyptians were still Egyptians!

How could this be? It was a part of the marvelous work that God was doing in Egypt. The Israelites themselves were not much spiritually at the end of that time, but God was still in control and His people were intact (whole, untouched by anything that would hinder the fulfillment of God's purposes).

And two things that are most important which we should always remember are that this is the nation which God used to give us:

- 1) Our Bible.
- 2) Our Savior.

Thus, in preserving the nation, God was preserving His Word, and the promises having to do with coming of His Son into the world to provide salvation for all who will eventually be saved.

There are undoubtedly many other things that I could mention, but let me confine myself to just one more---having to do with the work of God in Egypt. It is this:

IV. THE TESTIMONY TO THE EGYPTIANS.

It was a new day for Egypt when the Midianites brought that young slave into Egypt. They had no one like him (as far as we know). But more like him were to come. And they would multiply and multiply until Pharaoh and the Egyptians became afraid of them. As slaves they became a most vital part of the Egyptian economy. In fact, as you remember, after Pharaoh let them go, he went after them because he did not feel that Egypt could survive without them.

But this brings me to another point.

God not only preserved the nation, the Israelites, but He preserved the worship of Himself in their hearts. The first we learn of that in the Book of Exodus is when it is stated that "the Hebrew midwives" who cared for the Hebrew women when they had their children, were a group of women who "feared God."

And the story of Moses is also most amazing. He was taken into Pharaoh's own family, trained as an Egyptian, surrounded by power and wealth. And yet the Book of

Hebrews tells us that

By faith Moses, when he was come to years,
refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;
Choosing rather to suffer affliction
with the people of God,
that to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;
Esteeming the reproaches of Christ greater riches
than the treasures in Egypt:
for he had respect unto the recompense
of reward (Heb. 11:24-26).

Where does our faith come from? It comes from God. So when you read that Moses did this "by faith," what does it tell us about God? It tells us that God was at work in Egypt, not only preserving the true faith, but preserving the testimony of His people for the sake of the Egyptians!

What am I saying here about the work of God?

I am saying that those seventy sons and daughters of Abraham who went down into Egypt as Jacob's family, went down as missionaries to the Egyptians. And God never let that testimony die! In fact, many of you will remember that when the plagues were poured out upon Egypt, the Lord told Moses that He was bringing His signs and wonders upon the land of Egypt for this reason: "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."

That family of Jacob was very insignificant along side of the millions of Egyptians, but God was with them, and He kept His people that they might glorify Him, and that eventually all of His purposes for them and through them to other Gentiles might be gloriously fulfilled.

Concl: Was God at work in Egypt? Oh, yes, mightily at work.

Is He at work today? Yes, He is always at work. Is He at work with us? Yes, He is. The Lord will never let His work fail. Therefore, let us take courage from the lives of Joseph and his family, and look to the Lord to fulfill his purposes in us, whatever they may be, but always for His glory.

THE BLESSING OF JOSEPH
Genesis 48

Intro: The next two Sunday nights we are going to have the privilege of hearing Mr. Dennis Hayes, at our Communion Service, and then Mr. Bill Kramer the last Sunday night. So, rather than come back to this series on the life of Joseph three weeks from tonight, I am going to conclude our studies of Joseph's life tonight.

But the subject I have chosen from the 48th chapter really covers the last three chapters: THE BLESSING OF JOSEPH.

We have seen much of the trials of Joseph: with his brothers, while he was at Potiphar's house, and then as a prisoner in a Roman jail. But we have also seen the many blessings of God upon Joseph: God spared his life so that his brothers did not kill him, he prospered in Potiphar's home until Potiphar's wife falsely accused him, and the same was true when he was a prisoner. God blessed him richly.

But, at least from a human point-of-view, we saw a most amazing thing when Joseph was taken from prison, and exalted to be second only to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt.

On two occasions, involving three men, Joseph had interpreted their dreams for them: for the butler, for the baker, and then for Pharaoh--two dreams. Since in those days God was speaking through dreams (as well as in other ways), Joseph's explanation of the dreams amounted to an interpretation of the Word of God to those three Egyptians. These occasions would also have to be numbered among his blessings.

Joseph was very restricted for those 13 years until he became a ruler in Egypt. There had to be many smaller trials which are not recorded in the Word. Likewise, even after he became a ruler, there had to be many frustrations and difficulties which are not recorded in Scripture. Life is full of such trials for all of us. BUT, WHEN WE COMPARE THE TRIALS THAT ARE SPOKEN OF, WITH THE BLESSINGS THAT WE ARE TOLD ABOUT, IT IS APPARENT THAT THE BLESSINGS FAR OUTNUMBERED THE TRIALS. AND, IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD, EVEN THE TRIALS WERE TURNED INTO BLESSINGS.

That was not only true with Joseph, but it is true of all of us. Even King David, who had so many trials before he became King of Judah, wrote in Psalm 68:19,

Blessed be the Lord,
who daily loadeth us with benefits,
even the God of our salvation.

And to all of this he added a "Selah." This means that every day he was tried was also a day when blessings were literally

poured out upon him. So in the worst days we all can count our blessings.

Even Joseph's father, Jacob, when he returned home and faced the unhappy prospect of seeing his twin brother, Esau, again, said this to the Lord in his prayer, following those twenty years of trial when he had worked for his Uncle Laban:

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies,
and of all the truth,
which thou hast shewed unto thy servant;
for with my staff I passed over this Jordan;
and now I am become two bands (Gen. 32:10).

So with all of us, the blessings far outweigh the trials, especially when you realize that God takes the trials out of the trial column and puts them in the blessing column.

Therefore it is not surprising that the record of Joseph's life in the Book of Genesis concludes with blessing after blessing. And I want to take one blessing from chapter 48, one from chapter 49, and one from chapter 50, as we conclude this present study of Joseph's life.

I. THE FIRST BLESSING: THE BLESSING OF JOSEPH'S SONS (Gen. 48:15-20).

Notice that verse 15 begins with the words, "And he (i.e., Jacob) blessed Joseph ..." The blessing was to be conferred upon Ephraim and Manasseh, but the Scriptures say that the blessings were Joseph's!

Cf. Gen. 46:20 re: Ephraim and Manasseh. They were half-Egyptian. Jacob was one of their grandfathers; the other was Potipherah, priest of On. Now let me tell you about On. It was a city in southern Egypt. Its Greek name is Heliopolis, which means the city of the sun. It was so-called because there the sun-god, Helios, was worshipped. All that remains of the temple in which this god was worshipped is a single pillar, a little over 68 feet high. So we can imagine from that how awe-inspiring the temple must have been.

I mention this because it is very likely that Manasseh and Ephraim were there many times. Perhaps it was their grandfather's hope that they would become priests of the sun-god. Along with being brought up in an ungodly nation, the pressures were upon the two sons of Joseph to follow their maternal grandfather rather than Jacob.

So, when we read what happened here in Genesis 48, let us view this as a triumph of the grace of God. These young men may have had strong ties with Egypt, but they had

stronger ties with God. And there they were, kneeling before Jacob, to receive his blessing (which, in turn, was a blessing from the Lord), because of the sovereign grace of God!

Now--completely apart from all of the significance that this had as far as the nation Israel was concerned, that these two boys were to join their uncles as being heads of the twelve tribes of Israel, let me point out something which, if anything, was greater than that.

Why was it called Joseph's blessing? Joseph was certainly being honored that his sons would have such a place in the future of the nation, and that he was being given a double blessing (having two tribes of Joseph instead of just one). BUT I SUGGEST TO YOU THAT THE BLESSING THUS GIVEN TO JOSEPH WAS THAT HIS TWO SONS WERE DESTINED BY GOD TO BELONG TO GOD, NOT TO THE SUN-GOD, HELIOS. As the Apostle John said, there is no greater joy, no greater blessing, than to have your children walking in the truth. Cf. 3 John 4.

This ought to be an encouragement to every parent--that it is possible to raise children in a pagan society like we live in, and yet see the grace of God triumph in their lives so that they spend their lives walking with the Lord. There is no greater blessing than this.

II. THE SECOND BLESSING: THE BLESSING OF JOSEPH'S DESCENDANTS (Gen. 49:22-26). Cf. Gen. 49:1 as to how the following statements applied.

Jacob was speaking here prophetically, by the Spirit of God. He did not have some special foresight himself; the Lord was directing him in what he said. Here was a man of God speaking as he was moved to speak by the Spirit of God--to use the Apostle Peter's words in 2 Pet. 1:21.

Here, again, is a testimony of the sovereignty of God. In spite of all that was done to stand in way of God's plan for Joseph, God prevailed not only in Joseph's day, but the blessing of the Lord would be seen through all of the years to come, up to the very last.

These tribes may have had their ups and downs, and they did, but in Rev. 7 you will find both of these tribes mentioned (Ephraim as "the tribe of Joseph), but proof that in the last days the blessing of God upon Joseph would still be evident!

Again, is this here for our encouragement? Do you ever wonder what will become of your family if the Lord

tarries? I am speaking not only of your children and grandchildren, but your great grandchildren, and your great great grandchildren, and so on and on until the Lord returns. Will there continue to be those who know the Lord, and love the Lord, and delight in trusting the Lord?

The life of Joseph at this point tells us that that is not too much to expect! I am not saying that all of Joseph's descendants were saved. Neither am I saying that it is certain that all of our descendants will be saved. But I believe we can pray that way. And the evidence that God is working in our families now is some hope that He will continue to work with our descendants. God is not going to let His work fail, and surely such things as we have here in Genesis 49 are here for our encouragement AND to keep us diligent in prayer and diligent in bringing our own children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). We must not be weary in doing the work of the Lord. He will not let us labor in vain. Cf. Gal. 6:9.

III. THE THIRD BLESSING: JOSEPH'S BONES (Gen. 50:25).

This Joseph is only mentioned in three chapters in the New Testament: Acts 7 (Stephen's sermon), Heb. 11, and Rev. 7.

And in these three blessings of Joseph that we have been talking about, the first and the third are mentioned in Heb. 11. Heb. 11:21 says,

By faith Jacob, when he was dying,
blessed both the sons of Joseph;
and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.
So Jacob blessed Joseph "by faith."

Heb. 11:22 says,

By faith Joseph, when he died,
made mention of the departing
of the children of Israel;
and gave ~~commandment~~ concerning his bones.

What did this indicate? It indicated that Joseph was saved by hope. It indicated that he believed in the promises of God. The words of Heb. 11:13, 14, and 16 apply just as much to Joseph as to any of the others that are mentioned there. Listen to them:

These all died in faith,
not having received the promises,
but having seen them afar off,
and were persuaded of them, and embraced them,
and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims
on the earth. (Continued on next page.)

For they that say such things declare plainly
 that they seek a country ...
 But now they desire a better country,
 that is, an heavenly:
 wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God:
 for he hath prepared for them a city.

Joseph was blessed with special understanding concerning the future. What did this mean but that eventually the nation would be back in their land. BUT IT ALSO INDICATED THAT JOSEPH BELIEVED IN RESURRECTION, AND BY FAITH HE WANTED TO EXPRESS HIS FAITH IN THE ULTIMATE PERFORMANCE OF ALL OF THE PROMISES OF GOD.

Egypt did not turn Joseph's heart away from God. Neither did it turn Moses away. Cf. Heb. 11:24-26.

Concl: Can we come to the end of the earthly life of Joseph with anything else but the deepest worship and the greatest praise for their God, Who is also our God! It is true that His ways are "past finding out" (Rom. 11:33b). At times it may seem that the Lord's work will come to an end. But that never has been the case, and never will! Therefore, when we understand this, we, like Joseph, and Moses, and hosts of others, will continue to cast our lot with God, knowing that neither God's promises, nor His purposes, nor God Himself, can ever fail. When we walk with Him, we walk in continual triumph Who is continually turning curses into blessings.