



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



GENESIS 40 - 46

Genesis 40

40:1-6 - "Then it came about after these things, the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the same place where Joseph was imprisoned. The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time. Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation. When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected. "

If we gauge only by Joseph's outward circumstances we might question the degree of the Lord's commitment to Joseph and His blessing upon his life. Even though Joseph has been promoted to prison administrator, he remains a prisoner which does not seem to be the right place for a man called by God. Joseph is the first, but not the last of several men of God in Bible history that were called by God to endure undeserved imprisonment for God's purpose. Joseph, Jeremiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul and John all pass through similar tribulation. This pattern displayed in these seven examples should confirm for us that God does use undeserved difficulties in the lives of His servants. In none of these cases is the difficulty appointed for the servant of God meant to be interpreted as a failure by God to watch over and care for His servants. The Lord is fully committed to Joseph, but His activity is unfolding behind the scenes at this point in His sovereign control of circumstances that will have a huge impact on Joseph, but which are completely beyond Joseph's control. The first sovereign work of God in this chapter is seen in the interaction between Pharaoh and his chief cupbearer and chief baker.

These two men previously had Pharaoh's trust, but they managed to both offend Pharaoh at the same time resulting in their imprisonment in the same place where Joseph was imprisoned. The purpose of God was for Joseph to interact with these two men. The Lord planned for their dreams and Joseph's interpretations to one day be the means by which God would bring Joseph to prominence in Egypt. But, in order to get there, it was necessary to first have both men imprisoned, and in order for them to be imprisoned they must first anger Pharaoh. The text does not spell it out, but the inference is that God caused these two servants of Pharaoh to offend him, and He also caused Pharaoh to choose imprisonment as their punishment. This development is not accidental or coincidental, but providential. God was not waiting for something to go wrong so that He could step in and take advantage of the situation. He actively soured the relationship between Pharaoh and his servants to set the stage for what He had planned for Joseph. then, when they arrived in prison, the

Lord gave both men on the same night a spiritual dream. The hand of God in the situation is recognized not only in their dreams, but also in their waking reaction. God caused both men to vividly remember their dream and both to be troubled by the dream once they woke. He even influenced both men's body language so that Joseph noticed their mood which led to him initiating the conversation that would fulfill God's plan. Our lesson is to trust that God is far more involved in the circumstances around us that are affecting our lives and our calling than is obvious from the surface.

40:8 - "Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please."

The men both have spiritual dreams which each communicated a message from God about their life and what would happen to them in the next three days. However, while the Lord gave them the dream, He withholds the interpretation and understanding of the dream from them. The Lord has planned for them to share the details of their dreams with Joseph and then for Joseph to interpret the dreams true meaning. I love Joseph's response when the men tell him that there is no one to interpret their dreams. He does not mention his own spiritual dreams from his younger days as though having had those dreams now qualifies him as a dream interpretation expert. He does not presumptuously claim to have any special talent in this arena. In our culture today there is an entire profession built around dream interpretation in which people presume to know the meaning of other's dreams from so called similar patterns of symbols and their grasp of psychological theory about dreams. Joseph is no psychologist here. He is not going to interpret the dreams based upon any dream interpretation textbook. Instead, Joseph defers to make any claims for himself at all regarding dreams. What Joseph does assert in his answer is true and describes for us as well as them the true nature of dreams and dream interpretation. "Do not interpretations belong to God?"

Here is the truth, not a theory. God rules over the sleep of mankind just like he does over their waking lives. God rules in the dreams of people. It is God who gives dreams. We do not give them to ourselves (Job 33:14-18). Because dreams are given by God, they actually mean what He wants them to mean, not what we want them to mean. The ability to correctly interpret a dream is given by God as a gift, not acquired by education, degrees, and diplomas. Joseph recognized that only God could enable him to interpret their dreams and when he encourages them to tell him their dreams it is not in presumption of his own ability or wisdom, but in faith that God may grant him understanding for them.

40:14-15, 23 - "Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon... Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."

Up until this moment, Joseph has never once uttered a single word of complaint or self pity regarding his circumstances. Now, after being given the interpretation by the Lord that chief cupbearer's dream meant that he was going to be restored to Pharaoh's service in three days, Joseph saw that this might be the Lord's doing to provide a way out of prison for him. Joseph boldly requests that the cupbearer not forget him once he is released and even asks him to appeal to Pharaoh on his behalf. In order for any appeal to Pharaoh to be heard, there must be some reason or grounds for the appeal. Joseph provides that reason by testifying to the cupbearer on his own behalf that he was taken from his home and unjustly imprisoned. Joseph sticks to the facts of his story and does not flavor his account with any emotional descriptions of how he was affected by the experience. Even in this, he indulges in no self pity bitterness toward those responsible for his situation. Joseph also wisely omits unnecessary details that would require lengthy explanation including being sold by his own brothers and accused by Potiphar's wife of assault. Joseph's request to the cupbearer is reasonable, and in a very real sense the cupbearer owes Joseph a favor now.

This development now serves as one final test of Joseph's faith before God causes him to be released from prison to fulfill his great purpose in Egypt. The test is a test of timing, not discernment. Joseph has correctly discerned that God gave the men the dreams and the interpretations to Joseph as a prelude to his release from prison. However, the timing of how it would occur is probably not what Joseph anticipated. Since the dream would be fulfilled in three days, Joseph was most likely expecting that his appeal would be heard by Pharaoh and that he may be free in another 3-4 days. What happens next is that the cupbearer inexplicably forgets Joseph as soon as he is restored to Pharaoh's court. His forgetfulness means another long waiting period for Joseph just when he probably thought he was on the verge of freedom. Rather than three days, Joseph has to wait on the Lord's timing for another two years (Genesis 41:1).

40:16-19 - "When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also saw in my dream, and behold, there were three baskets of white bread on my head; and in the top basket there were some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you."

The chief cupbearer was the first to tell his dream to Joseph and he had no way of knowing what Joseph might say in interpreting it. Joseph gives interpretation that was very favorable to the cupbearer. His dream meant that Pharaoh would release him from prison in three days and restore him to his former responsibilities in Pharaoh's service. The description of the chief baker hints that the baker was listening closely to how Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's dream. Because Joseph gave the cupbearer a good interpretation, the baker was ready to tell his dream so that he could receive a similar good interpretation from Joseph. Instead, Joseph gives the baker a shockingly different interpretation. Rather than being freed and restored in three days time, Joseph informs him that his dream means that he will be executed in three days.

This interpretation demonstrates important principles regarding God's message and God's messenger. The first principle is that God's message is never altered to suit the preferences of the people receiving it. The integrity of the truth of the message is a far higher priority than the feelings of the person(s) receiving the message. Of course, the baker did not want the dream to mean his death, and was only motivated to have his dream interpreted because of his hope that he would get a pleasing interpretation. But, because he was told the truth, even though the truth hurt, it was a mercy from God. He now knew he had three days to consider where he stood with the God Joseph had just declared to him. The second principle affects the messenger chosen by God to deliver His message. The messenger's responsibility is to the One who sent him, not the one to whom he delivers the message. The messenger dare not modify the message, or soften its impact out of concern for how the person may take the message. This message was going to sting, and Joseph wisely delivers the sting without apology or hesitation. Joseph does not add to God's Word or take away from it, but allows it to have its full effect on the hearer. The deeper message for both men is that the God of Joseph is in charge of both of their lives.

Genesis 41

41:1-9 - "Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh. Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I would make mention today of my own offenses."

Pharaoh has two troubling dreams the same night. When Pharaoh wakes up he does not understand the dreams, but he clearly remembers them in detail. He has a strong sense that they carry a message for him because he seeks out an interpretation, but he has no idea what that message may be. It was not uncommon within ancient cultures like this one to place spiritual significance on remembered dreams. Pharaoh knows just where to turn when he wakes up from his troubling dreams. That morning he called for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. The term magician did not describe our modern usage of the word. Today, a magician is an entertainer that uses various tricks and sleight of hand to perform illusions. In Pharaoh's court magicians were occult practitioners that also served as his spiritual advisors. The wise men here were counselors who advised the Pharaoh on any issues that concerned him, but were less spiritual in their influence than the magicians. When all his counselors were assembled, Pharaoh told them his dreams but none of them could interpret the dreams.

Of course, if Pharaoh were living today, he could have called for the preeminent psychiatrists and psychologists to come and give him the benefit of their extensive education in dream therapy. They might have told him that the dreams symbolized the traumas he experienced in his first seven years of life and the seven unresolved issues he had with his mother. At least the magicians and wise men of Pharaoh's court were wise enough to be silent when dealing with something they did not really know or understand. Today's wise men will simply invent things to say when they should be silent and pronounce their invented ideas as though they were the gospel. Sigmund Freud himself would not have been of any help to Pharaoh on this morning. The truth of Pharaoh's dreams was that they were not an expression of his own mind creating an opportunity for therapy. These two dreams were a message from God, and God was withholding the interpretation from all of the so called experts because He had selected the

man to interpret them for Pharaoh. This purpose of God is confirmed by the chief cupbearer who had forgotten Joseph for the last two years suddenly, in the perfect timing of God, remembering that Joseph had interpreted his dream for him. Now we see that even though the Lord had left Joseph in prison for two years, the reason was not that the Lord forgot Joseph like the cupbearer had done, the issue was that the Lord was patiently waiting for the specific day He had planned, in which He would give these dreams to Pharaoh.

41:15-16 - "Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Pharaoh calls for Joseph because of the testimony of the cupbearer. Pharaoh's perspective as he is waiting for Joseph to arrive is that this young man is like his other counselors, only that he has a special knack or skill in dream interpretation. When Pharaoh speaks to Joseph, he gives him a perfect opportunity to exalt himself and take full advantage of the opportunity to get out of his imprisonment. Joseph could have answered Pharaoh, "Yes, it is true, I am particularly adept at dream interpretation, and have been called by others a master of dreams. If Pharaoh will release me from prison I will gladly serve him by interpreting all his dreams in the future." Joseph does not answer in that way, or in any other way to take inappropriate credit for himself and from the Lord in this.

Joseph's answer is a notable blend of true humility and holy boldness, and in it he takes a real risk to proclaim God to Pharaoh. Joseph's humility is shown in again redirecting all credit for dream interpretation away from himself to God. His answer is short and direct. "It is not in me." The meaning is that the ability to interpret dreams according to what they actually mean is not a skill but a gift from God. If it were a skill that a person could learn or be trained in, then it would be "in" Joseph. Instead he declares that only if God gives him the understanding of the dream can he interpret it. Joseph is appropriately humble in this answer, but he is also courageously bold. He sees this as an opportunity to proclaim the Name and the role of God in this circumstance. Joseph does not hesitate to make God the focus of their conversation even though he is talking to the absolute ruler of the most powerful nation on earth and the man that had the power to end his life. Joseph does not pause out of concern that Pharaoh may be offended by him talking about God. Joseph does not measure the political correctness of bringing up God in this setting. He puts all the focus on God and in such a way as to show that Pharaoh is dependant upon God to give him the answer he seeks. Joseph's courage in this situation to proclaim God is magnified if we remember that Pharaoh was considered by all Egyptians to be a "living god" who was himself worshipped by his people. For Joseph to speak of God to Pharaoh in this way implied to Pharaoh that God was God and not him. Joseph had know way of knowing in advance just how Pharaoh would respond.

41:32 - "Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about."

Joseph does more than give an interpretation of the details of Pharaoh's dreams. He also identifies for Pharaoh that there is spiritual significance to the circumstances of his dreaming. Pharaoh had two dreams that were messages in one night. The dreams were different in detail, but were communicating the same message from God. The message was that the sovereign God was controlling the circumstances of Egypt's economy to give seven years of great prosperity to be followed by seven years of even greater famine. What Joseph now reveals to Pharaoh is that there is additional meaning in the fact that he had two different dreams that both gave him the same message. The additional meaning is that the message is confirmed as being a message from God, and that it is meant to stir him to immediate action in response because the meaning of the dreams will soon happen by the hand of God.

There is a principle of how God speaks that still applies to us today. There is a fairly common experience of people having what is termed a recurring dream. This is when a person has the same dream more than once, or similar dreams that seem connected more than once. If we understand from Pharaoh's experience and Joseph's counsel to him that God is in charge of our dreams, then what should we make of repeated dreams, or groups of similar and apparently connected dreams? We should not dismiss the importance of those dreams. We should consider the possibility that the Lord is communicating some important message to the person that experiences the repeated dreams. The repetition confirms the message to make sure the message is not missed. Like Pharaoh, we may not understand it when we first wake up, but the experience is meant to direct us back to the Lord to seek understanding from Him in what He is wanting to convey to us. As a young believer, I had a series of similar dreams within the first year of becoming a Christian. In each dream I was standing in front of a meeting of people teaching from the Bible and preaching the gospel to them. I was troubled by them because I was not comfortable with seeing myself in a public speaking role, since I was very shy and uncomfortable with the attention public speaking required. Yet, the Lord had a purpose for me to be a teacher and preacher and those early dreams was one of the ways that God began to prepare my heart for what I now do on a regular basis.

41:40-43, 50-52 - "You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you." Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt... Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." He named the second Ephraim, "For," he said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

Joseph has now arrived at the moment of the fulfillment of God's plan for his life. His personal fortunes are now instantly and unexpectedly reversed. Early that morning he was in prison with no foreseeable way out, and by the afternoon that same day he is not only free, he is exalted to second in command of the most powerful nation on the face of the earth. Everything that he has endured up until this moment was preparatory for where God has now placed him. Joseph had to endure being stripped of his garment and betrayed by his own brothers. Then he was stripped and betrayed by Potiphar's wife. Now, God, through Pharaoh not only restores what was stripped from him but gives to Joseph far more than he had previously lost. Yet, this is much more than just the idea that some people took advantage of Joseph and now he "gets what he deserves in the end." This story is about Joseph, but the focus of the story is God's plan and purpose. Joseph endured 13 years of undeserved hardship, and Joseph was finally exalted to prominence in Egypt for one great overriding reason. God had planned it all in order to fulfill through Joseph a great purpose.

Joseph has begun to understand this purpose of God. Until now, we have no indication that Joseph really grasped why all this had happened to him, nor should he, because until now God had not explained it to him. We know Joseph walked in faith during the 13 years between 17 years old when he was sold by his brothers until the 30th year when Pharaoh exalted him because he was not embittered by his trials and continued to honor the Lord at every opportunity. Here we see that years of faith may precede years of understanding in our lives. God may not give us the full explanation of why He requires us to pass through certain trials until after the resolution of that trial. The names Joseph chose for his two sons reflects this new understanding that he has gained. Their names instruct our hearts in how and why we should trust the Lord in our own trials.

Manasseh means "to forget" and Ephraim means "double fruit." Manasseh showed that Joseph had learned this key to God's purpose; what is most important is not where we began, but where God is taking us. Ephraim showed that Joseph had learned that there is double fruit ahead when God ordains a trial for us and we trust Him in it.

Genesis 42

42:6-9 - "Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, "You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land."

Joseph's brothers have no clue that the man that they must deal with to buy grain in the time of famine is their brother that they had betrayed and sold into slavery now nearly 20 years earlier. Joseph immediately recognized his older brothers since they were already mature when he last saw them. He is not recognizable by them because he has changed the most since he was 17, he is now dressed as an Egyptian, speaking the Egyptian language, and in a role that they would never even imagine he could be. Joseph chooses to not reveal himself to his brothers, and at first glance his reasons appear to be hard feelings he still holds against them because when he speaks to them he does so "harshly." What we should remember though is that Joseph's faith in God during his long trial filled his heart, and left no room for bitterness toward his brothers to fester. The names he gave his sons in the last chapter was the confirmation that he had successfully overcome the temptation to indulge in bitter hatred toward them. We will see as the story unfolds that Joseph now holds love in his heart for the same brothers that abused him. Joseph's love for his brothers does not overwhelm his good judgment however. He is not bitter toward them, but he has not forgotten the wicked way they treated him. His choice to greet them in disguise and with harshness is not an indulgence in vindictive revenge, but a sober minded caution. He has grown spiritually in the past twenty years, but the real question is have they?

As Joseph meets his brothers they bow to honor him as an acknowledgment of his position of authority and his ability to meet their desperate need for food. As they are bowing before him, Joseph remembers the twin spiritual dreams he had years before that were instrumental in his brothers betrayal. In those prophetic dreams from the Lord, his brothers all bowed before him. In the dreams he is

seen as a superior sheaf of grain to their sheaves and a superior authority to their authority and even their parents. In this meeting Joseph is identified with two titles that signify ruler and provider. In this moment, the Lord has fulfilled the prophecy of the dreams and Joseph's heart takes it all in that everything up until this moment has been orchestrated by the Lord to bring them all to this place. If there was any remaining temptation for Joseph to get even with them, this spiritual revelation of the Lord's fulfilled plan anchors his heart to righteousness. His accusation of them being spies is not what he believes, but a very wise way to both reveal their hearts and teach them a necessary lesson.

42:11-17 - "We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies." Yet he said to them, "No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!" But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive." Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies; by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! "Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." So he put them all together in prison for three days."

Joseph's intent is to discover the condition of his brother's hearts. When he last saw them they were all (with the exception of Benjamin) jealous, callous men who were willing to kill their own brother. His accusation draws out a response from them in which they protest their innocence of the spying charge. To clear themselves in his eyes they tell Joseph several truthful facts about themselves, but their answer contains two key lies which show that their hearts have not completely changed from where they were 20 years before. They proclaim to Joseph that they are all "honest men" even though they are still living in the deception of having convinced their father Joseph was killed by a wild beast and hidden that they sold him into slavery. That deception has been conspiratorially hidden by common agreement among them for all these years. That is not the pattern of honest men. Then, they mention to Joseph about their one brother (him) that is "no longer alive." The truth is, they have no idea whether Joseph is still alive or dead, but they easily lie to Joseph here to perpetuate a more favorable impression of themselves.

Joseph perceives their lack of complete honesty, and holds to his accusation of espionage. He declares that they will be tested. The word he uses is often used in Scripture to describe the way metal is tested under heat to reveal its true ingredients. Joseph was himself tested to the core by their betrayal and he lived for the next 13 years in the furnace of that test. He came out at the end of the test refined by the fire of his long trial. Now, his brothers, who are all destined to bear great covenant responsibility as heads of the tribes of Israel must themselves be tested. This is actually God's test for their hearts and He has

chosen Joseph to be his instrument to administer the test to them. As part of their test Joseph places them all in prison for three days. Remembering that Joseph spent two years in prison because of them, the three days he imposes on them is amazingly merciful, and will at the same time serve a redemptive purpose for them. By themselves tasting the circumstance they forced on Joseph, their hearts will be freshly reminded of their unresolved guilt for that wicked deed.

42:18-24 - "Now Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die." And they did so. Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us." Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood." They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. He turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes."

The strength of the test Joseph imposed on them when he put them in prison was magnified because he did not tell them that they were only going to prison for three days. As far as they knew, they would remain in prison until their one brother would return with Benjamin. But, Joseph graciously releases them except for one after three days and sends them back to Jacob. This pattern parallels what they had done to him years before when they first wanted to impose the harshest treatment of death, and then later relented and chose to only enslave him. Joseph's test is perfectly designed to awaken in them the full accountability for their earlier transgressions.

The three days in prison has a powerful impact on their hearts. Without Joseph saying a single word to remind them directly, on their own they become aware of the connection between the betrayal of 20 years ago, and their current dilemma. This is evidence that the Lord is powerfully at work in their hearts to bring them under conviction for their unresolved sin. God works through their own conscience to see this hardship as "the reckoning for his blood." As they openly discuss their shared guilt thinking that Joseph cannot understand their language, Joseph is deeply moved by what he hears from their hearts. He then releases them, but keeps Simeon as his prisoner. We know from the event with Dinah and Shechem from years before that Simeon was one of the hardest of the 12 brothers. Simeon is an appropriate choice since Reuben, the firstborn, was the logical one to keep, but he had made the only effort to save Joseph from his brothers, and Simeon was also the second born of Jacob's sons.

42:29-31 - "When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us, and took us for spies of the country. But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies.'"

As the brothers return home, their account to Jacob of what transpired in Egypt is a mixture of truth, shading the truth, and hiding the truth from him. They tell the account of what transpired, but completely leave out their discussion of their guilt over Joseph and their recognition that the ruler of Egypt's response was a spiritual reckoning for having betrayed their brother. To be that honest with Jacob would have forced them to finally admit their sin hidden for 20 years. What they could not anticipate at this point is to what degree their seeming success in hiding their sin was going to be exposed. It is not just that Joseph will know what they had done. It is not even that Jacob is going to learn what they have done. Consider this; by including this story in Scripture, God chose to expose their "hidden" sin for the whole world and every generation of history to come to see. The strong lesson for us here is that there is no such thing as a successfully hidden sin. "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4:12-13). God sees everything we do when we violate His standards. He sees every action, every word and every thought. No one gets away with hiding anything. God may choose to not fully expose everything now, but eventually it will all come to the light and we will give an account for even the hidden things.

42:36-38 - "Their father Jacob said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me." Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you." But Jacob said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow."

Jacob's response to the return of his son minus one, shows that in these last 20 years he has not yet grown spiritually out of all of his bad patterns. Jacob refuses to allow Benjamin to go down to Egypt even if that decision means Simeon will be killed or remain forever a prisoner in Egypt. In this, Jacob shows that he is still not above playing favorites among his sons and that Benjamin is valued more to him than Simeon. His reaction also reveals a familiar inclination to self pity and a failure to seek the Lord at a needed moment of family crisis. Jacob is quick to blame his sons for this development and bemoan how his life has been affected, but we do not see him lift his voice to the Lord in prayer seeking wisdom or understanding or even the Lord's intervention on behalf of Simeon. Even a godly

man can in a sense forget the Lord when he most desperately needs to call on His Name.

Genesis 43

43:1-6 - "Now the famine was severe in the land. So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food." Judah spoke to him, however, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' "If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. But if you do not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You will not see my face unless your brother is with you.'" Then Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had another brother?"

The famine of chapter 42 has continued and remains severe. We do not know how long it has been since the brothers returned from Egypt with the grain, but now they have consumed all that they had brought. At this point Jacob speaks to his sons to return to purchase some more food. His statement to them is curious, because they had strongly emphasized to him when they returned that they would need Benjamin to go with them the next time they went. The last word Jacob had spoken to them on this matter was his refusal to send Benjamin. Now he almost casually instructs them to go back as if they were being sent to the grocery store down the street. Jacob mentions nothing about Benjamin here, and most likely is hoping the other sons will agree to go without him and figure out when they arrive in Egypt some way to convince the ruler to sell them more grain. Judah speaks on behalf of the other sons and reminds Jacob of the issue of the ruler's insistence on seeing Benjamin. They are unwilling to go without him because the ruler had implied once before that if they did not bring Benjamin when they returned, they could lose their lives (Genesis 42:20). Judah describes what Joseph had said and exaggerates by putting words in his mouth that he had not spoken. Joseph only required they bring Benjamin. Judah adds that he said they would not see his face without him. Once again, in this family's history the truth is bent from son to father to serve the purposes of the son.

Everyone in this scene is concerned with themselves first. Jacob is more concerned about losing Benjamin and how that will affect him emotionally, than he is about leading and providing for his family. The sons are concerned foremost for their own safety. No one seems particularly concerned with the welfare of Simeon whom they left to languish in the Egyptian prison for all the time they have been back in Canaan. Jacob recognizes that the situation is heading toward his having to release Benjamin, but he remains blind to the hidden hand of God and can only blame his sons for letting the information about Benjamin slip out and causing him such grief. Jacob's perspective is limited to a

horizontal perspective and fails to see the vertical reason it is all happening. Jacob can't be blamed for his inability to recognize what he cannot see here, but he really should have learned by now to at the least call out to the Lord and ask about what was happening to him and what he should do in this situation.

43:11-14 - "Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. Take double the money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake. Take your brother also, and arise, return to the man; and may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, so that he will release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

Jacob is hemmed in by the severity of the famine and the requirement of the ruler in Egypt. Jacob really does not want to relinquish his favored young son Benjamin, but his choices now are to do so, or watch his entire family die of hunger. When the time comes for him to send Benjamin, Jacob rises to the occasion and shows both wisdom and faith in leadership. His wisdom is shown in his decision to send his sons back with a gift for the ruler to show his honor and hopefully gain his favor as they return. Jacob's faith, which has been strangely silent until now, emerges in his prayer of benediction over his sons for their journey back to Egypt. He identifies God here by the Name, El Shaddai, which means the powerful One. It is the anchor of Jacob's heart, that in releasing Benjamin, he is entrusting him to the power and safekeeping of God Almighty. He prays that God will go ahead of his sons on their journey and prepare the heart of the ruler by causing him to look with compassion on them. He prays that their journey will result in the release of both Benjamin and their "other brother" (Simeon). Following his prayer he makes a brief but important declaration. "And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." Jacob is indicating a final spiritual surrender to the will of God in this situation. He is taking his own hand off of Benjamin, and releasing the protective control he has maintained over his life. In place of his own hand, he is trusting in the hand of God upon the life of his dear son.

Sadly, it is almost as though Jacob only leads as he should when he is forced to do so by the circumstance. In this, Jacob is an all too familiar example of spiritual leadership for far too many Christian men. God has called Christian men into a spiritual leadership role for the sake of their family and this calling is not just for moments of crisis, or when the circumstances require someone to lead. The principles of spiritual family leadership are to be applied daily and consistently. Our families will thrive or suffer spiritually depending in large part on how we respond as men to God's call to lead.

43:19-23 - "So they came near to Joseph's house steward, and spoke to him at the entrance of the house, and said, "Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food, and it came about when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back in our hand. We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; we do not know who put our money in our sacks." He said, "Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them."

When the 11 brothers return to Egypt, they first meet with Joseph's house steward, who is like his personal assistant. They tell the steward the story of finding their grain fee in their sacks of grain on their journey home before. They hope by telling him to lighten any reaction of anger if there had been a misunderstanding regarding the money. They are surprised and challenged at the steward's answer. He tells them that he had their fee money all along and that God has returned the money to them. The steward is most likely not making up this story, but acting under the specific orders of Joseph in this, just like he was when he returned their money to their sacks before (Genesis 42:25). This is a classic example of what has come to be called a "white lie" in our culture. His answer is true in one sense, but technically a lie regarding the fee. He told them that he had their fee, implying that he still had it. That was not true, because he returned their fee by Joseph's command. The aspect that is true, is that the Lord through Joseph caused their money to be returned to them. It was the Lord's influence in Joseph's heart that caused him to not hold any grudge toward his brothers and to bless them by returning their fee.

Some believers are convinced that any level of deception, even a so called white lie is always evil and must be avoided at all cost. Joseph, who is portrayed throughout this situation as a strong and faithful believer, apparently does not share their concern about white lies. His entire continuing deception of his brothers would fall in the category of a white lie. Of course, we should be clear as to what constitutes a white lie, in contrast to a sinful lie. The issue boils down to motive and purpose. If a person deceives or lies to another with any motive to harm them, take advantage of them, or only benefit themselves, then that lie or deception is sinful. However, if the motive is to benefit the other person and the deception serves that purpose then the lie is not sin. An example of acceptable deceptions are to "lie" to a person on their birthday if a surprise party is planned for them. It is a deception, but it has a good motive and purpose connected to it. Joseph's deception was not in any way meant to harm his brothers, but served the Lord's purpose to reveal their hearts and lead them to a true repentance for their hidden sin. One other element must be present for a deception to qualify as a white lie and avoid the taint of sin. The truth must at some point in the process be revealed. The cloaking of the truth is only temporary and the full truth must be revealed so that the person that was deceived can see for themselves that there

was a good purpose to the lie. Joseph will reveal the full truth of his identity, but not quite yet.

43:28-34 - "They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." They bowed down in homage. As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "May God be gracious to you, my son." Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and he controlled himself and said, "Serve the meal." So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians. Now they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment. He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him."

When Joseph welcomes his brothers this time he honors them with a feast. He goes out of his way to make Benjamin the guest of honor and gives him a very public and obvious blessing of five times the portions that his brothers received. This is not Joseph showing fleshly favoritism to his full brother Benjamin over his half brothers. Joseph is wisely going to use Benjamin as the final test of his other brother's hearts. He remembers that their mistreatment of him years before was due to the sinful jealousy of their hearts when their father Jacob had shown such favoritism to the youngest son Joseph. The way that Joseph now treats Benjamin is going to test their hearts and expose whether they have any remaining jealousy toward a favored younger brother. At the same time, this test will reveal if they have learned finally from the Joseph incident and will now accept the choice of the one in authority to show favor to whom he chooses to show favor. What Joseph has planned for Benjamin in the next chapter will give the brothers the perfect opportunity to get rid of Benjamin after he was favored above them, just like they did with Joseph for similar reasons. Joseph again is acting here in the wisdom of God. He is providing his brothers with a redemptive test to allow them to show their developed character when years before they all failed miserably.

The cultural boundaries between the Egyptians and the Hebrews provides a spiritually appropriate reversal of roles. Joseph sits down to eat with his brothers, only at separate tables because of Egyptian rules about not eating with foreigners. Years before, right after throwing Joseph in the cistern, he and his brothers ate a meal together while separate. They feasted while he sat a few feet away and went hungry. Now, Joseph is in the superior position by God's design, and they once again eat near each other but separate. He shows them the

compassion they denied him by graciously filling their table with portions from his own.

Genesis 44

44:2-4, 13 - "Put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph had told him. As soon as it was light, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys. They had just gone out of the city, and were not far off, when Joseph said to his house steward, "Up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? ... Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city.'"

Joseph has designed one final test for his previously wayward brothers. The test is centered on the their youngest brother Benjamin. We saw in the previous chapter that Joseph set them up for this test by flagrantly favoring Benjamin in front of them. He did so to discover whether they have changed since that day years before when they conspired against him as the favored younger brother. Up until that day, he had only done good toward them and yet they repaid him "evil for good." Now, even though they are innocent of the theft of his silver cup, Joseph is in a position through this situation to ask them the question they should have answered years ago. Joseph is holding them accountable for their previous sin against him, but in a non-vindictive way. He is also giving them a golden opportunity to choose a different response this time and to show a reformed character.

When Joseph's silver cup was discovered in Benjamin's sack the other brothers are now at the moment of testing. Under Joseph's direction, the steward had already announced that only the man discovered with the cup would be enslaved. The other men were free to go. Their test was in what they would choose to do at this point. For their own selfish reasons they has abandoned Joseph to a life of slavery years before. In their last trip to Egypt they had abandoned Simeon to slavery and returned to their home in no rush to return for his rescue. Now, would they treat their youngest brother Benjamin the same way? If there was any remaining issue with jealousy toward him, his having been favored by Joseph would reveal it. At the moment of testing, for the first time these previously selfish, jealous brothers respond with a unified commitment to share their brother Benjamin's fate if necessary. Even though they were free to go, the brothers all choose to return to Egypt to "face the music" together. There is hope for this family after all.

44:15 - "Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?"

They return to be confronted by Joseph for their apparent theft of his valuable cup. As Joseph rebukes them, he makes a strange reference to divination that has confused many believers. Joseph is consistently portrayed in the story as a righteous, godly man, but divination is universally condemned in the Bible (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). The confusing element is in Joseph's claim to "practice divination." To understand Joseph's words here as a declaration that he actually practiced divination and even was in some sense recommending it is a misreading of the intent of the passage. This is also a part of Joseph's plan just like hiding his identity from them and making it seem that they have stolen money from him. It is true that the Egyptians did practice divination including a form using a cup such as this by pouring oil and water together into the cup and then interpreting the pattern formed on the surface.

Rather than reading this as a Joseph describing what he actually practiced, it would be better to interpret this as more of the deception Joseph is using to bring them under conviction. His claim fits into his story to them by essentially saying, "Of course, I would know you took my cup because I learned you did from divination." The claim of divination here just serves as a confirmation that one of them must have stolen his cup. They stand in front of him doubly guilty because they were discovered with the cup and he also apparently had supernatural help to identify them as the culprits.

44:16 - "So Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found."

Judah knows acts as the spokesman for all the brothers. By this time, Reuben, the firstborn has faded into the background of family leadership, most likely as a consequence for his sin against his father with his father's concubine. Judah has filled the gap in leadership among the brothers. Since they stand convicted by the double evidence, Judah wisely chooses to not make any excuses or justifications. Instead, he responds with a curious declaration. "God has found out the iniquity of your servants." The meaning of Judah's statement could be misinterpreted as him admitting that they stole Joseph's cup. He is not saying that, because they did not actually steal it. What he is saying is something much more significant and spiritually profound. He is saying that God has exposed their shared iniquity from years before in their sin against Joseph. Judah has come to a deep realization of the justice of God. They managed to sin against Joseph and cover all their tracks by a conspiracy of deception. They successfully deceived their father into believing Joseph had been devoured by a wild animal. They had lived all the years since then convinced that they had forever hidden their sin.

Now Judah realizes that there is ultimately no sin that remains well hidden. As long as God sees it, then it is not truly hidden. Judah believes that this development of the "stolen" cup is God's way of making them pay for what they did to Joseph. It does not matter that God waited more than 20 years to punish them, the only thing that matters is that someday, somewhere, someday God will hold them accountable for what they did. In this, Judah shows more spiritual understanding of where he stands with God than he ever has in his life until this moment. This is the point at which we could say Judah arrives as a man of God. He then accepts the consequences, not of stealing the cup, but of mistreating Joseph. He now embraces the consequences without argument because he realizes that while he is innocent of this, he deserves much more because of what he had done before.

44:18, 33 - "Then Judah approached him, and said, "Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh... Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers."

Judah wisely approaches Joseph with an appeal to the one in authority. His speech from 44:18-34 is filled with godly wisdom and sacrificial love for both his brother Benjamin and his father Jacob. In this speech Judah gives us an early hint of the sacrifice his own descendant will make in the ultimate expression of sacrificial love when Jesus of the tribe of Judah will offer Himself on the cross for the sins of others. He offers to take Benjamin's place in slavery if only Joseph will release Benjamin to return home to Jacob. His offer is very similar to what we hear in Moses (Exodus 32:32), Paul (Romans 9:3), and finally Jesus.

His appeal to Joseph is also a wonderful example of intercession of one person appealing on behalf of others to the one in authority. If we substitute ourselves for Judah, and God for Joseph we find a tremendous example of how to pray effectively in intercession for others. Judah speaks with reverence and great respect to the one in authority. He recounts the key elements in the history of the issue. He shows real concern for his father above himself. We will see in the next chapter that, representing his brothers, Judah has passed the final test and shown himself to be a changed man. His intercession moves the heart of Joseph.

Genesis 45

45:4-5 - "Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."

Judah's wise and humble appeal so affects Joseph that he cannot control his heart's overflowing emotions any longer. Even in the rush of emotions Joseph exercises discretion by having the room cleared of all the Egyptian officials and servants present. This moment is one to be shared among the brothers alone, and in wisdom, there is no benefit for any of the Egyptians to learn the details of how Joseph originally came to Egypt by his brother's hand. This is another indication of how completely free of bitterness toward his brothers Joseph is. Had he held any bitterness, he would have chosen to use this moment to expose them in front of the Egyptians and vindicate himself. Instead, in deep compassion for them he calls them to come near to him. This is a signal of the forgiveness he is extending to them for their mistreatment of him, and at the same time showing that the nature of their relationship has changed. His forgiveness is seen in bidding them to come close and not keeping them at a safe distance from him. The change in the relationship is seen in the need for them to come to him. He is their brother, but he is also their superior now due to his position in Egypt and protocol is not completely ignored here. After identifying himself with a fact that only he and they could possibly know ("whom you sold into Egypt"), Joseph then makes one of the great spiritual declarations in the Bible.

Joseph recognizes that his brothers will be reticent to come closer out of fear that he has planned revenge against them. That fear is natural, but Joseph has the opposite intention. He assures their hearts by first encouraging them to not be either grieved or angry with themselves for what they had done in selling him into slavery. How amazingly kind and considerate Joseph is here, that he is concerned that they not "beat themselves up" over what they had done to him. It is what he declares next that we discover the spiritual perspective that is the deep anchor point of Joseph's heart. "... for God sent me before you to preserve life." Joseph could warmly accept his brothers that had so horribly mistreated him because he really believed that in spite of their evil intent, God was behind the scenes working through them without their knowledge to accomplish a greater good than would occur otherwise. They did what they did in ignorance and malice, but God was doing something hidden and redemptive. The lesson for all believers is that there are two layers to the circumstances of our lives. The first

layer is on the surface and is the natural decisions and developments that happen to us. The second layer is beneath and hidden, and involves the hand and plan of God for His people.

45:5-8 - "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have."'

We do not know at what exact moment in his twenty year long trial that Joseph grasped with full understanding what God had planned and was doing in his circumstances. It certainly was not when he was first betrayed, because then he wailed for his brothers to release him from the cistern. There is no hint that while he served Potiphar he grasped the big picture yet. There is no hint that while he spends two undeserved years in prison that he knows how the story is going to end. It is possible that once Pharaoh made him second in command of all Egypt that he saw what God had planned, or it may have been only when his brothers first arrived desperate for food in the famine that he saw how God had arranged for him to be in the unique position to provide for them and to preserve the covenant family alive during the famine.

The key word in Joseph's spiritual explanation to his brothers of what has happened is the word "sent." He uses it three times in verses 5-8, and the three fold repetition is a clue that this is the dominant perspective in Joseph's heart. The spiritual and theological implications of Joseph using this specific word are huge. He could have described these events in this way instead. "You sent me to Egypt, but once I was here, God turned your evil actions into a good thing." Had he done so, it would have portrayed God as the "Plan B God." What I mean by that is that many believers see God as constantly scrambling to fix the unplanned bad things that happen to us and that He works to try to salvage something good out of all that bad. That was not Joseph's perspective or faith, and it should not be ours either. God is the "Plan A God." Plan A is His plan, and He plans the end from before the beginning. It is no mistake or accident of history that Joseph ends up in Egypt. He was sent there. Yes, on a natural level, Joseph was sent to Egypt by his brothers' sin, but above and beyond their decision, God decided to influence their decision to accomplish His purpose. God sent Joseph to Egypt. Just like a missionary sent to a foreign country by God, Joseph was sovereignly dispatched to fulfill the plan of God for Israel. How does this affect our lives?

Before grumbling and complaining about our current circumstances we would be wise to consider what part God has played in our arriving at this exact spot. The difficulties are obvious, but the greater purposes of God are often hidden until the time that He ordains to reveal His role. Joseph had become a man fixed on the greater purpose of God. The hardships he endured to get this place were a light price to pay to be blessed with such significant usefulness in God's kingdom.

45:9-11 - "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished."'"

Joseph's heart is bursting with the generosity God has shown to him and he cannot wait to share it with his father. There is in Joseph's gracious invitation to Jacob to come down and live in Egypt, both a short range provision of God and a yet hidden sovereign plan. Joseph has been blessed by God to see what God had planned and how God had provided for the entire covenant household of Jacob through this great famine. The Lord had not revealed all of his plan to Joseph however. Joseph's focus at this point is for the next five years. The famine has continued for two years at this point, and God had shown through Pharaoh's dreams that it was destined by God to last for a total of seven years. Joseph is anticipating Jacob and his sons coming to live with him in Egypt for the duration of the five remaining famine years. He probably anticipated that they would leave and return to their home in the Promised Land after the famine ended.

What God knew and planned, even though none of Joseph, Jacob, or the other sons understood it is that Jacob's household is going to move down to Egypt for the next 400 years. The development of Joseph being sent to Egypt actually has a total of three layers. The top layer is what the brothers planned, and the deeper layer is what God planned for the seven years of famine. The deepest layer will remain hidden for now as God is setting up circumstances that will not be fulfilled for generations to come. This is His sovereign hand operating at levels way beyond our grasp. It is amazing to me that something going on in my life circumstances today may be planned by God to affect for great good things 400 years from now.

45:14-15 - "Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him."

This is a tender moment that Joseph shares with his brothers. His heart is first and foremost drawn to his only full brother Benjamin. Benjamin was the only

brother of his eleven brothers that had no part in his being sold to Egypt, so we would expect Joseph to warmly greet him. It is Joseph's affection for the other ten brothers that had sinned so grievously against him that is such a powerful demonstration of the amazing grace of God. One by one, Joseph approaches each brother and kisses them and weeps on them in a warm embrace. He gives them no rebuke, no recrimination, no effort to make them feel any guiltier than they already do. Because Judah's appeal already showed that they were under conviction of the Spirit of God, Joseph has no need to hold them accountable any longer for what they had done to him. Now, because he fully understands that God had planned this for great good in spite of their own reasons, he is completely free in his heart to embrace them without hesitation or reservation. This is full reconciliation. Joseph willingly gives up any right he may have held to bring this up between them again in the future. It is resolved, they are restored, and the once fractured family is now whole again.

Genesis 46

46:1-3 - "So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. "

Jacob has received a trustworthy word that Joseph is amazingly alive after all these years and thriving in Egypt as a ruler over the land. Even though Jacob longs to see Joseph again once more before he dies, he also has more than one reason to hesitate to make this journey. Jacob by this point is 130 years old, and even considering the longer Biblical lifespans, his advanced age is a factor in weighing the difficulty of such a long journey to Egypt. Another hesitation is the uncertainty of placing his whole family in the position of being entirely dependant upon the good graces of Pharaoh. Joseph was currently in a position of great favor in Pharaoh's court, but Jacob had no guarantee that he and they would remain in the favored place. The third and greatest reason Jacob had to hesitate about this trip to Egypt was the two previous problems his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham encountered with Egypt during times of famine in their days. Remember Abraham had gone to Egypt in a time of famine without seeking the Lord and had created an unnecessary crisis while there. Isaac had been specifically warned by the Lord not to go to Egypt for famine relief (Genesis 26:2). In spite of the circumstances now pointing Jacob toward Egypt, he shows real spiritual growth here in his decision to not go before first seeking the Lord's direction.

Jacob journeys first to Beersheba to seek the Lord. The location is not incidental. He has returned to a place where God spoke to Abraham and also to his father

Isaac. The Lord's appearance to Isaac in Beersheba is almost identical to how the Lord will now speak to Jacob here. "Then he went up from there to Beersheba. The LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, For the sake of My servant Abraham." So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well." (26:23-25). The order of what occurs here is notable. First Jacob chooses to go to Beersheba, and once there offers sacrifices to the God of his father. Then, God speaks to Jacob. When Jacob was younger and God appeared to him or spoke to him it was always the Lord taking Jacob by surprise in the encounter. Jacob at critical moments would be caught up in his fears, and God would speak to him and overwhelm his fears with words of comfort and purpose. Here, Jacob is struggling with natural fear, which the Lord confirms in His exhortation "do not be afraid to go down to Egypt", but he is not overwhelmed with fear as in his younger days. In his fear he seeks the Lord, worships, and offers sacrifice to his father's God. This is a picture for us of a spiritually mature man. His maturity has not obliterated fear in his heart, but his faith has grown stronger than his fear. The Lord's Word to him is aimed right at the root of the remaining fear and confirms for him that this journey to Egypt is the direction of the Lord. God reminds him of the original promise spoken to Abraham to make him into a great nation (12:2) to assure his heart that this move will in no way disrupt that purpose, but rather take him to the place where that covenant promise will be fulfilled.

46:4 - "I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes."

God has just given Jacob the assurance of covenant continuity in that what He had promised to Abraham and Isaac will now be fulfilled through Jacob in the land of Egypt. That alone should have given Jacob all the confidence he needed in this journey. Yet, the Lord gives now gives to Jacob one additional promise which is both the most simple promise God gives to anyone and the most powerful promise at the same time. The promise is "I will go down with you to Egypt." This promise, once given, should end any concern any believer ever would have about an uncertain circumstance in life. The promise boiled down to its essence is that the Lord will go with him. Jacob will face difficulties on the trip, but God will be with him. In Egypt are uncertainties for the future, but God will be with him. The only thing to fear is not the journey, or Egypt, but any life circumstance in which the Lord is not with us. If He is with us, then what is there to fear? If He is not with us then what is there not to fear? I recently returned from two back to back trips requiring air travel. I don't really enjoy the whole flying experience, but my confidence was rock solid because I knew the Lord had directed these two trips and I had His assurance that He would go with me. I would much rather be in an uncertain plane at 30,000 feet with the Lord, than on the "safe" ground without Him. Our spiritual priority in every step or change we

make in life is to get clarity from the Lord that we are following His direction and to be assured that He is with us in the step we are taking.

The Lord also speaks to Jacob about the future beyond Egypt. The Lord gives Jacob a clear indication that this move is not permanent, but it is at the same time not temporary. The Lord promises that He will surely bring Jacob up again from Egypt. The Lord's ultimate purpose for Jacob's life is tied to the Promised Land. Here the Lord assures Jacob that this move to Egypt will not disconnect him in any way from the fulfillment of the Promise. However, the way the Lord worded this promise to Jacob is open to misunderstanding. He could have taken it to mean that he would not die in Egypt and that the Lord would one day in the future bring him up alive into the land of Promise. That is not the plan ahead of Jacob. So, the Lord gives Jacob one additional Word as a hint that he will die in Egypt. "Joseph will close your eyes" is an indicator to him that his death awaits him in Egypt, but it is also a wonderful comfort that Joseph, who was separated from him for over twenty years will be with him right up to his final breath.

46:28-34 - "Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out the way before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time. Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive." Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me; and the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.' "When Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians."

We see examples of godly caution and wisdom in this time of transition in both Jacob and Joseph. Jacob sends Judah, who has taken the lead in the family, ahead as a scout and guide. In spite of the assurances from his sons, Joseph, and even Pharaoh, Jacob sends Judah ahead to make certain of their way. Then when Joseph arrives to greet his father, he gives unusual counsel to them to prepare them for the meeting with Pharaoh. First Joseph tells them that he is going to speak to Pharaoh and identify them as shepherds. Then he coaches his family to all respond to Pharaoh's anticipated question regarding their occupation with a confirmation that they are shepherds. His counsel at first seems strange because of his explanation that shepherds are loathsome to Egyptians. The question is why Joseph would want to introduce his family as commonly loathsome shepherds to Pharaoh. The answer is that Joseph knows that Pharaoh would insist that Joseph's family live in the capitol near him. Joseph has chosen Goshen as a home for his family. The benefit of settling in Goshen is

twofold. First, it will allow them to maintain their herds and flocks without problem. Second, and even more important, it will keep the family close enough to the capitol for fellowship, but maintain some necessary distance from the Egyptian culture. It is critical for the family of Israel to maintain their own spiritual and cultural identity in the midst of Egypt, and not simply blend into Egyptian culture and end up being swallowed up and become Egyptians themselves.

This issue has remained a concern for the people of God in every generation since Jacob. Jesus described the issue for us in this way. "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." (John 17:14-18). In order to fulfill the mission of God, first Joseph, and then his entire family were sent into the world of Egypt, which presently was friendly, but ultimately was based in evil and would eventually turn on them. The issue was how they would be able to obey the Lord and go into Egypt, without Egypt going into them. The church has throughout the centuries swung to opposite extremes in dealing with this issue. At times the church has withdrawn too much from the world in fear of becoming like it. But, in full withdrawal, the church also abdicates its God ordained mission to reach and influence the world for God. The other extreme finds the church at times going so far into the world that it becomes difficult to distinguish the world from the church. If the church becomes so like the world it is trying to reach that it cannot be differentiated from the world then what does it have left to offer the world? The danger always remains that the world can influence the church more than the church influences the world. Joseph's wisdom in choosing Goshen for his family finds the perfect balance point in this issue. I pray that we would all settle in Goshen in our own time in Egypt, and be in the world but never of the world.

Questions from Genesis 45:

Question: 45:5 We tend to pray for God to move in that surface layer of our circumstances. A lot of the prayers in Scripture seem to be directed to that second layer, as you described, "the hand and plan of God". (an exception, perhaps, was Moses praying for God to change his mind and God did). Are there some thoughts you could share on applying this lesson to our prayer life?

Answer: I agree with you that most Christians tend to pray on the surface of issues that affect their lives. Usually the prayer is an exercise in identify whatever circumstance in my life is most uncomfortable and asking God to change it to something more comfortable as quickly as possible. Let me say that I also prefer comfort to discomfort, but I have learned in prayer to not assume that my comfort is God's first concern or priority. One strong application from Joseph's statement in 45:5 that you picked up on for prayer is that Joseph's perspective had risen above his natural circumstances and recognized that God had a greater purpose in his difficult circumstances. If Joseph had prayed for release back when his brothers threw him in the pit and then sold him into slavery do you think God would have answered that prayer. The answer is no, because it was a key element in God's purpose for him to be thrown in the pit and sold into slavery. Our strong desire for a comfortable life can at times even lead us to pray at cross purposes from what God is going to do. There would be nothing wrong for Joseph to begin by praying his desire for release, but once it became clear that God was not answering that prayer, he (we) would be wise to begin to seek the Lord regarding the greater purpose at work in his difficult circumstances. Asking God what He intends to accomplish, how we can work with Him in our difficulty rather than against Him, and what character shaping changes He is using the circumstance to work in us are all more mature starting points in prayer in the midst of trials.