



Week 8: Joseph

Week 8, Day 1 - Genesis 41:47-42:5 (famine, Joseph's brothers come for wheat)

41:47 During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. 48 He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. 49 So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

50 Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphra, priest of On, bore to him. 51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." 52 The second he named Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes."

53 The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." 56 And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57 Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

42:1 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another?² I have heard," he said, "that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die."³ So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. ⁵ Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

Understanding the Passage:

Pharaoh's dreams have come true and the land experiences the abundance that God told Joseph to foretell. But knowing that something is going to happen and acting upon it when it actually happens are two different things... and humans are not always great at doing

both. Joseph experiences success because does not squander the opportunity he has been given.

Neither the neighboring countries nor the Egyptian people had prepared for the famine. They were clearly not let in on the plan. Imagine what it must have been like for Joseph and the managers he hired - they were buying and collecting grain for seven years while things were going well. Verse 49 tells us it was so much that he couldn't even measure or keep track of it. People must have thought they were crazy. They were probably ridiculed. This makes it even more impressive that Joseph was faithful to the plan that God placed on his heart.

The passage we read last week reminds us that Joseph was just thirty when he took over this powerful position. He didn't have leadership training or administration experience. But what he had, which proved to be much more important, was a heart that was tuned to listening for and following God.

This was clearly earned through years of hardship in which he learned to rely on God. Joseph was 17 when his brothers sold him into slavery, which means 13 years have passed. In that span of time, Joseph was enslaved, wrongfully accused of rape, imprisoned (and remained there longer than he should have as he was forgotten by the person that was supposed to help him get out). He could have become bitter at God. He could have given into the feelings that God turned God's back on him and so he would turn his back on God. But according to the scripture, Joseph doesn't waver. He listens to God and lets God lead him.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is the significance of Joseph's sons' names? Do you think Manasseh's name was wishful thinking or the way Joseph truly felt?
2. Have you ever struggled to stay faithful to God's plan when everyone around you was doing something different?
3. How do you see the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3 fulfilled in this story?

Week 8, Day 2 - Genesis 45:3-11, 21-28 (Joseph reveals himself to his brothers)

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. ⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.'

21 The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. 22 To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. 23 To his father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. 24 Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Do not quarrel along the way."

25 So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 26 And they told him, "Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt." He was stunned; he could not believe them. 27 But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28 Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die."

Understanding the Passage:

It has been 22 years since Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. He has been waiting to be reunited with his family for more than two decades. This parallels the timeframe that his ancestors had to wait for fulfillment - Abraham waited 25 years for a son, Jacob waited 20 years working for Laban before he could return to Canaan. Though it may have felt like it, God did not abandon them. God's timing is often different than what they - or we - would like it to be. But in each instance, the promises are fulfilled at a time that ends up being a blessing to the Patriarchs and those around them.

Twice in this passage (verses 5 and 8), Joseph tells his brothers that being sold into slavery and ending up in this position was ordained by God so that he could eventually save his family and others. This is a tricky position for us to understand as Wesleyan Methodists who believe in free will over determinism. We do not ascribe to the Calvinist view that God has preordained every single event in our lives; rather, we have been given control over our decisions and actions by God who is omnipotent but self-limiting. In this understanding, a close reading of verse 5 helps us see that it was the brothers that sold Joseph but God took their wickedness and used it for good.

Joseph will further reconcile with his brothers after their father has passed away, but he begins the process here. Though Joseph is in a position to get revenge on them, he chooses to open the door for a relationship. One of the things we learn about reconciliation from this exchange is that you have to face the past (and the mistakes requiring forgiveness) before you can truly move on. Joseph says to his brothers, "I am Joseph, who you sold into Egypt." He reminds them of their sin, but just as quickly he tells them not to be distressed. When we truly want to reconcile with someone, we cannot make them feel guilty over and over and over again. Once we've acknowledged the source of hurt, we have to commit to not lording it over them continually.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Pastor Jeff Bassett writes, "Joseph really is a type of Christ. He has been clothed by his father in the promise of peace (a rainbow), abandoned and sold off by his kinsmen, accused of crimes he did not commit, descended into the pit and prison and then has been lifted up from that dank hole (because of his faithfulness to God) to reign over all the known world, distributing life-giving bread both far and wide.

Finally, his own brothers come to him and witness that Joseph is, in fact, alive. This is a resurrection... Joseph does what a Messiah should—he makes a way for the people of God to make it through periods of difficulty. By his faithfulness, God uses even the terrible events of his life to save and to redeem.”

What do you think of this statement? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

2. Read Romans 8:28. How does this story fulfill what Paul wrote to the Romans?
3. Take a few minutes to write down the times that God has brought purpose out of your painful circumstances. It is helpful when we are struggling to feel near to God to recall those times.

Week 8, Day 3 - Genesis 46:28-30 (Joseph and Jacob reunited)

²⁸ Israel sent Judah ahead to Joseph to lead the way before him into Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen, ²⁹ Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet his father Israel in Goshen. He presented himself to him, fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. ³⁰ Israel said to Joseph, “I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive.”

Understanding the Passage:

This is an understandably emotional and joyful reunion. The last time Joseph saw his father was when he was a teenager. He spent many years wondering if his father was still alive. Jacob, who had seen the bloodied cloak his sons brought home, didn’t wonder if his son was still alive; he was convinced he was dead. In fact, his pain over losing his favorite son was so great that it caused him to be overprotective of Benjamin, his youngest son (and his only other son by his great love Rachel). His life was shaped by this unimaginable and painful loss.

Part of that pain had to stem from the fact that Joseph was clearly favored by Jacob as the one to carry forth his family’s covenant. Losing Joseph must have felt like a death blow to the covenant that God made with Abraham and renewed with Jacob. When Jacob is reunited with Joseph after more than 20 years, he says he can die now because he knows Joseph is still alive. No longer does he have to worry that the covenant is affected by Joseph’s death, for he knows that his family will continue to be blessed and be a blessing through him.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. How has your life been shaped by pain and loss? Do you think God intends for you to live this way?
2. What do you think Jacob thought when he saw Joseph approaching in his chariot (a mode of transportation only used by someone especially powerful)?
3. Read Genesis 37:26-28. Why is it significant that Judah is the one who is sent ahead to meet Joseph?

Week 8, Day 4 - Genesis 50:14-21 (Joseph forgives his brothers)

¹⁴ After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

¹⁵ Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph’s brothers said, “What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?” ¹⁶ So they

approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves."¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹ So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Understanding the Passage:

Even after all they have been through, there is not much evidence in this story that Joseph's brothers feel contrition about the way they treated Joseph. It appears that their desire to reconcile with him is primarily motivated by fear and about saving themselves from his potential (and deserved) wrath. They even hatch a plan to tell Joseph that their father was hopeful that they would be forgiven, thus playing on Joseph's devotion to Jacob. We have no scriptural evidence that Jacob ever knew what his sons had done to Joseph, so it's unlikely that he commanded them to ask Joseph for forgiveness. This seems to be an invention of the brothers' to manipulate Joseph. In spite of all of that, verse 20 echoes what Joseph told his brothers in Genesis 45:5 ("do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.").

Even if Joseph wanted to punish them, he recognizes that it is not his place: "Am I in the place of God?" God is the only one who can righteously cast judgement and mete out punishment. The proper (and only) role of humans then is to be channels of God's forgiveness and to extend mercy to others, just as God has extended it to us. Additionally, Joseph takes a wide-angle view of their situation. Though he is faced with the betrayal of his brothers, he is also cognizant of how God has used it for good. And so, he alleviates their primary concern -- fear -- by telling them twice (in verses 19 and 21) not to be afraid. He offers to take care of them and their offspring, thus preserving the Abrahamic covenant.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Do you think Joseph forgave his brothers of his own volition or because of what they told him their father said? In other words, how much of Joseph's forgiveness was tied up with his father?
2. How do you think Joseph's brothers felt after receiving his forgiveness?
3. When did you last find yourself taking the place of God and judging or punishing someone else for their actions? How might you have responded differently?

Week 8, Day 5 - Genesis 47:13-25 (Egyptians sell themselves into slavery)

¹³ Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. ¹⁴ Joseph collected all the money to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁵ When the money from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, "Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone." ¹⁶ And Joseph answered, "Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. That year he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock. ¹⁸ When that year was ended, they came to him

the following year, and said to him, "We can not hide from my lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. ¹⁹ Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate."

²⁰ So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. ²¹ As for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other. ²² Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land. ²³ Then Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you; sow the land. ²⁴ And at the harvests you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones." ²⁵ They said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh." ²⁶ So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

²⁷ Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly.

Understanding the Passage:

Just as the story of the Israelites began with Abram entering Egypt to escape from a famine, this chapter of the story closes the same way - with Abraham's descendants selling themselves to the Pharaoh of Egypt to escape the pains of famine.

Though Joseph was trying to save the people and make a way for them to survive the famine, he did it at their expense. The scripture doesn't tell us his intentions. It could be that the generational enslavement of the people was a consequence that he had not foreseen. It could also be that Joseph had gotten caught up in the power of the Pharaoh and oppressed the people as a way to further consolidate his power. Regardless, his lifesaving

The irony of this story is that Joseph began his life sold into slavery and will conclude his life forcing others into the same fate. Even worse, the serfdom that Joseph imposes on the Egyptians includes his family (the nascent tribe of Israelites) as well. When the book of Exodus opens, it declares that Joseph has been forgotten. However, all of the Israelites live in slavery under the Pharaoh, which means the effects of his actions are not forgotten.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Genesis 47:27 says the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied. How does this fulfill the covenant that God made with Abraham?
2. How does this story set up the book of Exodus?

Video Questions:

1. Katie and Tom talked about the evolution of Joseph's faith journey. How have you seen your own faith journey evolve?
2. How have you seen God's purposes accomplished in your life in retrospect, even if you didn't see it in the moment?

3. Joseph has experienced more than a decade in slavery and imprisonment, and he still doesn't turn his back on God. In fact, he continues to rely on God. What do you think kept him so faithful?
4. What do we learn about reconciliation from Joseph and his brothers?
5. Do you think of forgiveness and reconciliation as a single moment or a long process?
6. Do you think reconciliation is realistic?
7. What do you make of Joseph's statements that God ordained him being sold into slavery so that he could eventually save people?
8. How does Joseph fulfill the covenant with Abraham?
9. When Exodus opens a couple hundred years later, we'll see that the Israelites are suffering under the Egyptian Pharaoh, presumably because Joseph sold them into servitude during his reign. How does this demonstrate the idea of generational sin?

Prayer requests and other notes.