



# Light from the Word

## The Faith of Joseph

Theme verse: *“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”* Hebrews 11:22

Joseph demonstrated his faith in God through many traumatic experiences, and through them all trusted God to keep His promise to give the land of Israel to his great-grandfather Abraham's descendants. Joseph would die, like other Old Testament heroes of faith, *“not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”*<sup>1</sup> He had the ‘long view’ – the same trust and confidence that describes our yearning for Heaven and walk of faith today.

Joseph's story begins with Genesis Chapter 37 when he is seventeen years old. There was already enmity between Joseph and his older half-brothers, which may be partly attributed to their father's attitude – which favored Joseph – because his mother was Rachel – and because Joseph was *“the son of his old age.”* Joseph either unwittingly – or perhaps deliberately – provoked their animosity by telling his brothers of

two dreams which suggested that they would become subservient to him. His attitude at that point appears to have been conceited or arrogant, and his resentful and jealous brothers conspired to sell him to a traveling merchant caravan as a slave.

However, soon after his arrival in Egypt we read that *“the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man,”*<sup>2</sup> first as overseer of Potiphar's household but also later when he was unjustly accused and imprisoned for refusing the advances of Potiphar's wife. Even in prison Joseph showed no indication of bitterness, and when two of his fellow prisoners were disturbed because no one could interpret their dreams, he assured them that God could. God was preparing Joseph for his mission, and at this point he seems to have overcome any pride or self-confidence he may have had earlier. But apparently the time was not quite right, because the butler forgot about Joseph interpreting his dream for two more years. These last two years could have been a very trying and discouraging time for him, but once again there is no indication that he ever lost his faith that God was still with him and that things would somehow *“work together for good.”* Some of us may also experience struggles to keep faith through times when

God is silent – or when His answer to our request for something that seems good and necessary, or for relief from a difficult or painful situation, is ‘No,’ or ‘Wait,’ or possibly even, ‘Not in this life.’ Joseph's preparation took thirteen years, as he was thirty years old when finally called out of prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Once more he acknowledged God and took no credit for himself: *“It (the interpretation) is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.”*<sup>3</sup>

In the later dealings with his brothers, Joseph's character again proves true. Just as God had revealed through Pharaoh's dream, seven years of plentiful harvests were followed by seven years of crop failures and famine. Because Joseph had wisely overseen the stockpiling of grain in the plentiful years, there was enough food for both the Egyptians and for people from surrounding countries, including Canaan where his father and brothers were still living. When ten of his brothers came to Egypt to buy food, they were required to deal with Joseph and respectfully bow before him, unknowingly fulfilling what he had dreamed about them some twenty years earlier!<sup>4</sup>

Joseph now fully understood that being sold into Egypt by

# Continued Articles

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his brothers was God's working, but he initially concealed his identity by answering them "roughly" through an interpreter. Inwardly he yearned to forgive his brothers, but first proved them to see whether they were sorry for how they had treated him. When Judah humbly confessed, "*God has found out (uncovered or exposed) the iniquity of thy servants*"<sup>5</sup> and offered to become Joseph's servant in place of Benjamin, Joseph finally revealed himself and offered words of comfort and reconciliation: "*be not grieved, or angry with yourselves that you sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life...it was not you that sent me hither, but God.*"<sup>6</sup> He not only acknowledged God's sovereign will and work, but simultaneously absolved his brothers of their guilt. Nevertheless their consciences would be burdened for years to come. After their father Jacob died, they said, "*Joseph will peradventure hate us, and certainly requite us all the evil we did unto him.*"<sup>7</sup> But Joseph's faith and character had not changed. Once more he wept upon seeing the guilt his brothers were still carrying, and again assured them that "*God meant it unto good.*"<sup>8</sup>

This is one of many instances in Scripture where God used temporary adversity to accomplish a greater and longer term good, and Joseph's forgiving heart foreshadowed how Christ would be willing and ready to forgive us if we acknowledge our sin.

Near the end of Genesis Chapter 50 we come to the theme verse. Joseph had fulfilled his mission in Egypt, but desired to be carried back to his homeland for burial, as his father Jacob had. Once more he reaffirmed his faith and vision of the future: "*I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land he sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from hence.*"<sup>9</sup> Exodus 13:19 records that some 360 years later, amid the urgency, confusion, and excitement of the Israelites being forced to leave Egypt suddenly and without preparation, Moses remembered to take Joseph's bones with them.

Once he had reached emotional and spiritual maturity through his experiences in life's 'boot camp,' Joseph became a role model of faith, repeatedly acknowledging God's working both in his life and in the lives of people around him. There is no evidence that he became

despondent or bitter when things seemed to be going badly. He believed God would provide for his family's immediate physical needs and also bring his people into the land of promise – trusting God for the little things and the big. Did Joseph envision an even greater promise of an afterlife? We can be confident that he did. The prophets spoke clearly of resurrection, as in Isaiah 26:19, Ezekiel 37:12-14, Daniel 12:2, and Hosea 13:14. And then there is the wonderful Messianic prophecy from Job, who lived in the patriarchal period hundreds of years before the prophets: "*For I know that my Redeemer lives... and though worms destroy this (present) body, yet in my (resurrected, immortal) flesh shall I see God...*"<sup>10</sup> Today we have an even clearer view, since Christ has "*abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*"<sup>11</sup> May He enable us to endure our individual tests of faith and embrace not only a long view but an eternal one, desiring "*a better country, that is, a heavenly.*"<sup>12</sup>

Endnotes:

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| <sup>1</sup> Heb 11:13  | <sup>7</sup> Gen 50:15     |
| <sup>2</sup> Gen 39:2   | <sup>8</sup> Gen 50:20     |
| <sup>3</sup> Gen 41:16  | <sup>9</sup> Gen 50:24,25  |
| <sup>4</sup> Gen 42:6,9 | <sup>10</sup> Job 19:25-27 |
| <sup>5</sup> Gen 44:16  | <sup>11</sup> 2 Tim 1:10   |
| <sup>6</sup> Gen 45:5,8 | <sup>12</sup> Heb 11:16    |