

PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

TEXT: GENESIS 37:1-11; 45:1-9; 50:15-21

Introduction:

1. I would like to speak this morning on the subject of the providence of God in the life of Joseph.
2. I have been preaching much the last few weeks on these great themes: knowing the will of God, and understanding the providence of God, and so on. In a recent message, I referred to the life of Joseph.
3. After the service, one of our men spoke to me and suggested I should have explained “which Joseph.” It was a good point because there are two well-known men by that name in the Bible, and we can clearly see the providence of God in both of their lives.
4. So this morning I will preach about the Joseph of the Old Testament, the son of Jacob, whose fascinating life dominates Genesis 37—50.
5. The providence of God is an important Bible doctrine. One preacher has said, “There is probably no point at which the Christian doctrine of God comes more into conflict with contemporary worldviews than in the matter of God’s providence. Providence means that God has not abandoned the world that He created, but rather works within that creation to manage all things according to the ‘immutable counsel of His own will’” (James Montgomery Boice).
6. The theme of Genesis 37—50 is the providence of God. Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him because he was their father’s favorite. So they conspired and sold him to a band of Midianite traders who took him to Egypt. The next four books of the Pentateuch deal with Israel’s journey out of Egypt.
7. In Egypt, Joseph worked as a slave for an Egyptian named Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. He was eventually thrown into prison through the false accusations of Potiphar’s wife.
8. Later Joseph was released from prison and brought to power as second-in-command to Pharaoh. He became the means by which grain was stored during seven years of prosperity for the subsequent seven years of famine and widespread starvation.
9. During that period his brothers, who were starving along with everyone else, came to Egypt and were helped by Joseph.
10. Therefore, God used their evil schemes, not only to save others, but also even to save their own lives and those of their wives and children. This is why we read in the very last chapter of Genesis, Joseph saying to his brothers, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Genesis 50:20).

I. JOSEPH SOLD INTO SLAVERY

II. JOSEPH PLACED IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

III. JOSEPH EXALTED IN EGYPT

I. JOSEPH SOLD INTO SLAVERY (37:18-36).

1. This is a rather sad story. Genesis 37:11 says Joseph's brothers "envied him." Acts 7:9 says, "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him."
2. Acts 7:9 is referring to the providence of God. Yes, Joseph's brothers were wrong. What they did was cruel and heartless, especially to their own flesh and blood.
3. Envy is a terrible sin; Galatians 5:21 lists it as one of "the works of the flesh." But yet God allowed all of this to happen for a good purpose, and Joseph understood all of this.
4. That is why Joseph said to his brothers in Genesis 45:5, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." And in Genesis 45:8, "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God."
5. Psalm 105:17 says, "He (God) sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant."
6. If we could only see the unseen hand of God, what a difference it would make in our thinking!
"There is an unseen hand to me
That leads through ways I cannot see.
While going through a world of care
His unseen hand will lead me there."

II. JOSEPH PLACED IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE (GEN. 37:36; 39:1).

1. I deliberately use the word "placed" because this is what the Bible teaches. Joseph himself said to his brothers, "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God" (Genesis 45:8; cf. 45:5).
2. Acts 7:9 says God was with Joseph. And we read in Genesis 39:2, "And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian."
3. We are told four times in the Bible that the Lord was with Joseph. This is referring to the providence of God. This is the blessing of all that trust God and obey Him.
4. What is very interesting about all of this is that even Potiphar, an unsaved Egyptian recognized that God's hand was on Joseph (Genesis 39:3-6).
5. But the devil was also at work, and he found just the right person – Potiphar's wicked wife (Gen. 39:6—10).
6. Potiphar's wife represents the sensual sinner, who only cares for the lusts of the flesh. Gratifying her lusts was all she cared about.

7. When sinners walk in the flesh, they are being led by the devil. Last week I mentioned that we must not allow Satan's schemes to discourage us. In fact, if Satan is trying to hinder you, you are in good company. Consider Joseph. He did not allow the devil to keep him from following God (Genesis 39:8, 9).
8. And consider the apostle Paul. "Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us" (I Thess. 2:18). Paul just kept on going forward for God.
9. If Satan is trying to hinder you, you can rejoice in the Lord. This must mean you are doing something good for God and the devil does not like it.
10. A preacher once told evangelist John R Rice that the devil never bothered him. John R Rice said that if this preacher were out winning souls like he should, the devil would surely bother him.
11. I mentioned last week that opposition did not bother George Muller. He said, "I had a secret satisfaction in the greatness of the difficulties which were in the way. So far from being cast down on account of them, they delighted my soul; for I only desired to do the will of the Lord in this matter."
12. In other words, George Müller understood that the Holy Spirit was guiding him step by step, and that if the devil were trying to hinder him, God would take care of that.
13. Joseph obeyed God, and God eventually worked it all out (Gen. 39:7-13). It meant being put in prison, but that too was all part of the providence of God.
14. First Corinthians 6:18 says, "Flee fornication." Second Timothy 2:22 says, "Flee also youthful lusts." Joseph wisely fled.
15. Lester Roloff said, "Joseph lost his coat, but he kept his character."
16. We see the providence of God in this fascinating story. Normally if a Jewish slave attempted to rape an Egyptian woman (especially one whose husband was a high-ranking official), he would be executed. "But the LORD was with Joseph" (Gen. 39:21; cf. 39:2, 3). The LORD was with Joseph all the time.
17. So rather than being put to death, Joseph was cast into prison where he soon found favor with the prison warden (39:21).

III. JOSEPH EXALTED IN EGYPT (GEN. 41:14-44).

1. In Genesis 40, we continue to see God's providence working in the life of Joseph: first in the imprisonment of two of Pharaoh's employees, and then through their strange dreams (40:1-23).
2. Genesis 40:23 says, "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him."

3. The chief butler may have forgotten Joseph, but God did not forget about Joseph.
4. A preacher friend recently sent me an interesting email. First, a picture shows our planet Earth alongside Venus, Mars, Mercury, and Pluto.
5. Then in the next picture, Earth is alongside the much larger planets, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. Alongside these great big planets, Earth looks like a tiny pebble next to huge boulders.
6. Then, the third picture shows Earth and the other planets alongside the sun. The sun is much larger than all of the planets in our solar system. It only looks small because it is about 93 million miles away.
7. The sun is about 860,000 miles in diameter compared to the Earth's diameter of 7,900 miles. In other words, the sun is over 100 times bigger than our planet Earth.
8. The next picture showed the stars Arcturus, Pollux, and Sirius alongside the sun. Our great big sun looked like a tiny little pea next to these huge stars.
9. In fact, these stars are so huge, that in the picture, Earth is invisible in the scale. The next picture shows even greater stars: Antares, Betelgeuse, Aldebaran, and Rigel, alongside Arcturus, Pollux and Sirius.
10. In this picture, our big sun is now only one pixel in this scale (smallest mark or dot on a screen), and Jupiter is invisible.
11. There are more pictures, but you get the idea. The email concludes with this question: "HUMBLING, ISN'T IT?"
12. And then a reference to our Lord's words from Matthew 10:29, 30: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."
13. The same God who created our solar system created you and me. The same God who put Joseph in leadership in Egypt puts you and me where He wants us.
14. One of the sweetest verses in the Bible is Romans 8:28. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."
15. God took care of Joseph. And God takes care of us. God is working. Jesus said in John 5:17, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."
16. He worked through Joseph's situation in prison. It took two years but God did not forget about Joseph (Gen. 41:1).
17. Pharaoh had an unusual dream. Genesis 41:8 says the dream troubled him, and so he "called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof."
18. But they could not help him (41:8). This is an important lesson for today – these fortune-tellers, psychics, mediums, new-age gurus and swamis, and all

- those who dabble in the occult cannot help people. All they do is deceive people and lead them in the direction of eternal damnation.
19. The occult is all over television these days: Crossing Over with John Edward, Harry Potter, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Sabrina, the Teenage Witch, Charmed, The X-Files, Heroes, and Ghost Hunters are just a few of the occult shows on TV.
 20. Oprah should be included in this list because she promotes the new-age movement and the occult. She is presently promoting a book called, *A Course in Miracles*. Here are some quotes from this wretched book:
 - “There is no sin...”
 - A “slain Christ has no meaning.”
 - “Do not make the pathetic error of ‘clinging to the old rugged cross.’”
 - “The Name of Jesus Christ as such is but a symbol...It is a symbol that is safely used as a replacement for the many names of all the gods to which you pray.”
 - “God is in everything I see.”
 - “The recognition of God is the recognition of yourself.”
 21. But when the butler saw that the magicians of Egypt could not interpret Pharaoh’s dream, he remembered Joseph (41:9), and told Pharaoh all about him (41:10-13).
 22. Joseph was sent for. He correctly interpreted Pharaoh’s dream, and was elevated to second-in-command – Joseph was in charge over all the land of Egypt (41:41-44).

CONCLUSION:

1. AW Pink, in his commentary, *Gleanings in Genesis*, says that, “all things *work together for good* to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose,” is writ large across” the story of Joseph.
2. Pink adds: “And well for us if we take this to heart. But the trouble is, we grow so impatient under the process, while God is taking the tangled threads of our lives and *making them* ‘work together for good.’ We become so occupied with present circumstances that hope is no longer exercised, and the brighter and better future is blotted from our view” (p. 373).
3. It is important to remember that Joseph had to wait two years before he was released from prison (Gen. 41:1). Pink says, “But the trouble is, we grow so impatient under the process, while God is taking the tangled threads of our lives and *making them* ‘work together for good.’ We become so occupied with present circumstances that hope is no longer exercised, and the brighter and better future is blotted from our view.”

4. “Biblical hope is the anticipation of a favorable outcome under God’s guidance” (Holman Bible Dictionary).

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