

## **Joseph: His Role in a Bigger Story**

Scripture: Genesis 50:20

Code: B140529

*With the fear and uncertainty generated by the current COVID-19 pandemic, we consider this series by John MacArthur to be even more timely now than when it was first run six years ago. The following blog post was originally published on May 29, 2014. —ed.*

Joseph's sudden and shocking promotion to the right hand of Pharaoh was neither karma nor compensation. The betrayal of his brothers, the indignity of slavery, and the injustice of his imprisonment were all experiences ordained by God in preparation for a monumental rescue operation.

## **Abundant Blessing**

During Egypt's seven years of abundance, Joseph was busy organizing the collection and storage of grain in all the cities throughout Egypt. His efforts were so successful that it became impossible to keep an accurate count of the entire supply.

It was also during this time that Joseph got married and started a family. Joseph declared God's goodness to him in the names of his two sons. He named his firstborn Manasseh, which means *forgetful*. Joseph explained that the name meant, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household" (Genesis 41:51). He named his younger son Ephraim, meaning *fruitful*. Again he explained, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (Genesis 41:52).

## **God at the Center**

Despite all that Joseph endured, God was still at the center of his thinking. The Lord enabled him to put the pain of his past behind him and to enjoy blessings in the very place where he had endured so many trials. Though Egypt was about to experience a great famine, Joseph was enjoying great abundance.

When the good years of harvest ended and the famine began, Joseph's diligent preparations paid off. Not only were the Egyptians spared from mass starvation, but multitudes of people suffering famine in the surrounding regions came to Egypt to buy food (Genesis 41:57)—including Joseph's brothers. Twenty years after they sold their brother into slavery, Jacob's ten oldest sons made the same trek to Egypt that Joseph had been forced to make long ago.

God had allowed Joseph to endure so much so that, through his efforts, Jacob's family might be rescued from famine and brought to a place where they could grow into a large nation. It was all part of fulfilling the promise the Lord made with Abraham three generations earlier (cf. Genesis 15:13–14). In an ironic turn of divine providence, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt in order to avoid death and would be rescued by the very person they sought to kill two decades earlier.

That irony was not lost on Joseph. He could see the Lord's hand of providence in their earlier actions. He understood that God was using him to preserve his family and to bring them down to Egypt. Everything was according to the Lord's will. Listen to the God-centered theology that undergirded Joseph's thinking as he comforted his brothers with these words:

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. 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. (Genesis 45:4–8)

Three times, Joseph emphasized that God's hand was behind it all. Joseph was not *excusing* his brothers' sin—he was emphasizing the fact that the Lord uses even the wicked choices of sinful people to accomplish His sovereign purposes. Because God sent Joseph to Egypt, Jacob and his entire family were saved from a famine that could have wiped out the budding nation of Israel.

## **The Move to Egypt**

When Jacob heard the news that his beloved son Joseph was still alive, he initially did not believe it (Genesis 45:26). He was already 130 years old, but he eagerly readied himself for a journey to Egypt to see his long-lost son. As he travelled, God appeared to him in a vision and reiterated the fact that this was all part of His design to fulfill His covenant with Abraham. The Lord told Jacob, "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" (Genesis 46:3; cf. Genesis 12:1–3).

Pharaoh gladly received Joseph's father and brothers and offered them the best land in Egypt—a region called Goshen. There they were able to establish their families, raise their livestock, and thrive. Jacob lived another seventeen years in Egypt and died at the age of 147. Over the next four hundred and fifty years, Israel went from a family of seventy to a nation of nearly two million—large enough to take over the Promised Land. Looking back, we can see what Joseph couldn't—through him, the Lord set in motion events that would shape the history of Israel, culminating in the sacrifice of His Son.

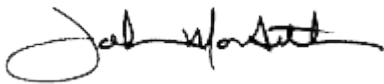
## **God Is Still Sovereign**

Although Joseph's circumstances and his place in redemptive history were unique to him, his perspective is one that all believers ought to emulate. The God who superintended the events of Genesis 37–50 still sits on the throne of the universe. He was sovereign over the circumstances of Joseph's life, and He is sovereign over our circumstances too. We may not always understand what is happening around us, but like Joseph, we can rest confidently in the fact that the Lord is not only in control, but using that control to further His plans.

Throughout Scripture, the theme of God's sovereignty is repeatedly presented as a comfort to believers. We need be anxious for nothing because our heavenly Father reigns over all. He is all-

powerful, all-wise, and all-present, and He has promised to work all things together for His glory and our good (Romans 8:28). We have nothing to fear because if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)? No one can oppose His will, and nothing can thwart His plans (Isaiah 14:27).

As these verses—and a host of others—show, the Bible is explicit in its depiction of God’s sovereign control over all things. Joseph’s example reminds us that “our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). That means we can trust Him and wholly rest in the reality that He is on His throne. Embracing that kind of perspective won’t take our trials away, but it will enable us to find joy and peace in the midst of them (James 1:2–4). Thus, even when others hurt us or life seems difficult and unfair, we can triumphantly declare with Joseph, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

(Adapted from [\*Twelve Unlikely Heroes\*](#).)

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