

Joseph: A Saga Of Excellence (Part Four)

Conclusion of Series

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We are going to begin the sermon in James 1. This sermon is going to be the last one in the series on Joseph, even though we are not completely through with all that we could wring out of this saga.

The book of Genesis is very important to the Bible. That is where many, many fundamental principles that have to do with life are first laid down. We see this very early in the story, and many of the things that we go through almost on a daily basis—elements of temptation, or whatever, that we are confronted with—confronted Joseph. He overcame them, and he left us a sterling example of the way that a person ought to live. But, unfortunately, other things are happening within the greater church of God—and I think that we need to turn our attention to those things—and so someday, in the future, we will get back to Joseph.

To me there were two major lessons (in last week's sermon) that we can extract from the life of Joseph and his brothers. This first series of verses has very much to do with one of them.

James 1:12-16 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

What Joseph shows us, in broad principles, is that a person does not have to sin. It is not written in advance that Adam and Eve had to sin. It is not written in advance that we had to sin. But, rather, the truth of the matter is that each of us is drawn into sin through our own desires. It is obvious from Joseph's story that he did not allow Potiphar's wife to pull him into sinning. This series of verses, here in James 1, confirms that God is not to blame either. And neither is Satan. "The devil made me do it" is a lie. It is very comfortable to have that thought in the back of one's mind. It is a convenient escape for every one of us. However, I want us all to understand that God will not allow us to hide

behind that rationalization.

I am not saying that (in His judgment of us) He will not be merciful—understanding that there are extenuating circumstances—because I am sure that He is very merciful in His judgment of us. But I also want us to understand that He will not allow us to get to the place where we are excusing ourselves because "somebody else made us do it." We are maturing when we get to the place where we will take the responsibility for what we have done, and we will not dodge that responsibility. God's Word does not allow us room to justify our sins. From the very beginning, mankind's gut reaction has been to blame others for one's sins. So, in the generality, we say, "It wasn't my fault." Now, was it? Or, was it not? I think that God's Word shows us (at least, in a general way) that He holds us personally responsible for our part in any sin.

He does not hold us responsible for what others do—or, allow themselves to do. When Adam and Eve blamed the serpent (I do not know whether you are aware of this), they were in effect blaming God. Flip with me back to Genesis 3:12. "And the man said, The woman whom you gave me..." Did you ever notice that? *The woman that You gave me.* "It's Your fault, God, because if You hadn't given me that woman—and she wasn't the way she was, if she hadn't thought the way she thought, if she hadn't enticed me—then I wouldn't have sinned. And so, God, it's Your fault because You gave her to me."

So, you see, if somebody puts a gun into your hand and tells you to murder somebody, you can blame it on somebody else because they gave you the gun. I mean, that's the way Adam was reasoning. If a person imbibes too much alcohol, and he gets behind the wheel of an automobile, and then he crashes and kills somebody—we have a tendency to blame the alcohol, not the man.

You see this in the courts. If a man killed somebody with a gun, he would probably go to prison at least for life and maybe have his own life taken away. But if a man kills a person with an automobile while under the influence of alcohol, the chances are very great that the courts are going to be lenient because it was the alcohol—it was not the man. Strange reasoning, but that is the reasoning that Adam used here. "It was because You gave me the woman that I sinned."

Genesis 3:13 And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So it was the serpent's fault. "If he hadn't really been crafty—if he hadn't just put the right twist on his words, if he hadn't used that kind of reasoning that he did, if he hadn't been a temptation and enticed me into doing what I did—I wouldn't have done it."

Do you see that Joseph did not allow himself that, did he? He must have understood the principle that was involved here. Back in James the first chapter, James' concern here is not to allow us to use the specious argument that Adam and Eve did in order to evade responsibility for wicked conduct. We have to understand that, yes, God did endow us with desires and appetites, but they are good and (when we understand it) necessary to the kind of life that God created for us to live and to enjoy. But it is when we misdirect the wonderful gifts that He gave to us that evil consequences result.

Evil consequences do not result simply because somebody puts a gun in your hand. Evil consequences do not result simply because one drinks alcohol. Yes, there is a danger involved in both of them, but it is the use that is important. And the use is determined by the person who uses them. So God's position on this is very clear. God takes pleasure when we endure temptation, and He blesses us whenever we do so.

We can learn (from the case involving Joseph, again) that the blessing may not be readily apparent, but, when we do resist, often the events turn immediately worse. I mean, when we resist sin, things do not always get better. But you have to understand that the blessings will come for resisting sin. Maybe the first blessing of all is that we have a clear conscience. Does he not say, right here in James the first chapter, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation"? That is a restating of the promise: that when we do 'do' what God says to 'do'—we will be blessed! In I Peter 3 is a supporting scripture. A little bit different circumstance but I think it helps to understand a little bit more.

I Peter 3:14 But, even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake [Joseph suffered for righteousness' sake], you are blessed.

I did not look it up, because I did not think of this until this morning; but that word "happy" may be exactly the same word that is translated "blessed" back there in James 1:12. "*Makarios*" is the Greek word—very frequently translated either "blessed" or "happy." All of us are familiar with The Beatitudes there in Matthew 5. They all start off "Blessed is the man..." who does this and that. If you look at a modern translation, they usually have it translated "Happy is the man. . ."

I Peter 3:14-16 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

Now, reflect again on Joseph's experience with Potiphar's wife. Did you ever stop to think that Potiphar's wife was persecuting him? Do you know what "persecuting" means—or the biblical word "persecute"? It means, "to follow after." The implication is to follow after with intensity, to follow close on the heels of. Today we would not use that word, but [we] would probably use it in the same way that the Greeks did. Our modern connotation would be "He kept hounding me. He was on my case."

Potiphar's wife had 'the hots' for Joseph. Her hormones were pumping the juices through her body, and the only thing that she could do, since she had no resistance, was to chase after him. Do you see what I am getting at here is that persecution—hounding, following after very closely, being on somebody's case—does not have to be intensely angry. It can be a wonderfully pleasing enticement, something that would normally be very gratifying to the senses. So, persecution does not have to be mean-spirited at all. It does not have to be hateful. It does not have to be vindictive. That is normally the area that we put persecution into. But, if somebody is after you like Potiphar's wife was, that is really a trial!

We can recognize the mean-spirited and vindictive persecution for what it is immediately. Chances are, when that occurs, our defenses are up right away. We can see it. But when persecution is warm, enjoyable—I mean, it is really tasty to the human spirit—that is the kind that we are most likely to fall for; because, you see, it can be alluring. That is the way it was with Joseph. He withstood something of very alluring intensity. The kind of thing that any normal, red-blooded, carnal person would fall for in a moment. But he did not, and therein lies a wonderful lesson. Even the most difficult of persecutions—the most difficult of enticements—can be resisted.

Now, in II Peter 3, we find another familiar scripture, only this one begins to put us on the track of the second lesson that we can learn from last week's episode on Joseph.

II Peter 3:16-18 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall away from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen

The second lesson (I mentioned towards the end of the sermon last week) is that Joseph did not find the strength to endure the temptation overnight. It did not suddenly

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appear as a transforming infusion of righteousness from God. But, rather—like all of us—the strength was steadily accruing, and when the severe test came, he was ready. I want you to connect this. In I Corinthians 10:13, God says—a promise—that He will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able but will, with the temptation, provide a way of escape.

This impacts upon both areas that I am talking about here. One, if the temptation comes, God has judged that we are able to endure it and overcome it. That fits with point one. Number two is that we have been prepared—and we should continually be being prepared—so that, when the test comes we are ready in every way that we possibly can be.

We have a tendency to associate "magic" with God, with overcoming, with success, with growth. I can put it another way: we have a tendency to associate luck with those kinds of things. I heard an interesting example of how untrue this is. A young man, who attends the University of Illinois, and apparently a very fine football player. So fine that most of the people who judge those kinds of things expected that, when the professional teams would make their draft choices of the college seniors and juniors who were eligible to be drafted into the National Football League, it was generally conceded that this young man would be drafted either first or second. (He is a lineman for the University of Illinois.) Well—in hearing some of these stories on the radio back there in Charlotte—what happened is that he decided not to go into the draft but to wait one year. Most of the people who talked about it thought that this guy got some bad advice because he is likely to get hurt. But that the young man is already a success is evident—as far as his life has gone in his chosen area of endeavor, which happens to be football.

But, was he an overnight success? Was he just lucky? Was there magic involved in why this young man is generally conceded to be (they feel that, if he does not get hurt, he definitely will be) the number one draft choice next year. An overnight success? He spends six hours a day pumping iron to prepare himself—to have the strength, to have the endurance, to have the stamina—to be fit, to be ready, to be prepared. If things go well, this young man is going to make millions.

There is a principle involved here. It is the same principle working with Joseph—and working with you and me. From his earliest years, we understand that he was Jacob's favorite, and that young man was being prepared. Jacob did not know what he was being prepared for. But Jacob was spending a great deal of time and energy, and pouring whatever he felt was right and good and needful, and he found in Joseph an apt and willing pupil—somebody who was willing to go along, in his youthful way, with his

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father's endeavors and attention.

Now God was certainly involved, but He is involved in your life too. He is involved in my life.

If Joseph had not yielded himself to the training—to the preparation—of his father and the experiences of life that he was going through, he would not have been prepared whenever they got to Potiphar's house. I hope you see the point, and if you do not, I will spell it out. Spiritual strength accrues to us not by magic, not by sudden infusions of the Spirit; but it accrues to us because day by day we are developing our relationship with God and we are striving to overcome and do those things that are pleasing in our Father's sight—constantly. And when we do that, He pours out His love on us.

What father could resist that? That is the way it was. God could give to Joseph some of the greatest tests that have ever come on a person that young, and know that he would resist them and overcome them. Now turn with me to Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:14 That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

What is he talking about here? Grow up! And, in this particular context, he is saying that the ministry is a gift to the church (from Christ) to bring people—to help people, to aid people—in their growth process.

Ephesians 4:15-16 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying [or, building up] of itself in love.

In I Peter 2:2, Peter calls us *like newborn babes desiring the milk of the word*—growing toward the meat. It is a steady process. In the physical and human element, we see a baby born, and they grow daily—because they are fed and cared for. But the time comes when they begin to be weaned away from their mothers, and they begin to take on growth from other areas as well. The principle that has to do with spiritual growth is the same thing. If you did not feed the baby, the baby would die. And so, if we do not participate (with God) in the feeding of ourselves on His Word, and prayer, meditation, obedience—how can we expect to be strong? We cannot.

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

So, growth enabled Joseph to be prepared for some of the strongest kinds of tests that have come on those of us who are human. Now let us go back into the book Genesis—and before we leave this part of the sermon, just ask a question: Why does God have us do this? The answer is something that you heard Mr. Armstrong say many, many times: salvation is not the only reason that God called us. If salvation was the only reason that God called us, He could take us "to our reward" (if you want to put it that way) immediately when we accepted Christ—whenever we had sufficient strength to repent. God is preparing us for something else, something more, something greater, and something bigger. It is not just salvation. It is filling a responsibility in His Family. He is preparing us to rule.

What was He doing with Joseph? He was preparing that young man to rule Egypt. You do not become a ruler of the stature of a Joseph without preparation. (And I know that you have read the stories of the British monarchy and how Charles has been trained to take over that position from the time of his birth. So far, he does not seem like he is doing too well ruling over one woman and a couple of kids, but the principle is there.)

Genesis 39:19-23 So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused [that is, Potiphar's]. Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison. But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

Potiphar's wife (like everyone else in this story so far) compounded her sin of lust by deceitfully lying about the occurrence to Potiphar. That is the way sin is. When a sin begins, it is like opening Pandora's box. Other sins are going to follow right on the heels of the original sin. The leaven principle. The "whatever you sow, you reap" principle. And once sin is loosed, it is almost like it is alive—like it takes a life of its own. And it is very difficult to contain it. So difficult that the apostle Paul wrote, in Romans 7, "It is no longer I that do it; but sin that dwells in me." He was, through a metaphor, looking at sin as though it was alive—a separate entity within him—and occasionally dominating his thinking.

I am sure that they came up with those examples because of what they had seen sin produce and what they had learned from the Old Testament. So, one sin tends to

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

produce another to buttress the original one, and then it reaches out to begin to involve other people within it—right into its destroying web.

It is really going to be interesting (and maybe a little bit of a smile might come to your eyes, or mind, or whatever—thinking ahead to the Last Great Day) when Potiphar's wife is resurrected, and she has to look at Genesis 39 and realize that her sin was recorded for billions upon billions of people to learn from. Embarrassing. You know, she will learn from it too. And she is going to say, "What a stupid idiot I was, for doing such a thing." And it is going to be very humbling for her, to take a look at that. But I am sure she is going to be humbled, and it is going to do her good (as well as it is doing you and me good, now).

How would you like to be Joseph in this situation? Here he is, he does the right thing, and things get worse—another disappointment. In fact, when you look at it, the worst one of all so far. At least when he became a slave to Potiphar, it looks as though he had quite a bit of liberty. And maybe he was, after a while, free to leave the house. He was free to conduct his master's business and to go about the city taking care of his responsibilities. And he did them well. Now we find him confined. In fact, we read in the psalm last week (Did we not?) that he was in irons, chains, fetters. So maybe for a while he was bolted to a concrete wall somewhere and not able to move about at all.

Here you have been doing your job well, and all you get for your good work, all your energy, all your enthusiasm, all of your wonderful ideas, all of the help that you gave to your boss, and he is the one that puts you into the hoosegow. Here is the gal who caused it—she is free. She is running around. She looks like a heroine. And all of that because Joseph was faithful and moral. It does not seem fair, does it?

Paul says something like that back in Hebrews—that these people wandered around in skins, and they hid in the caves and the mountains. And he said that the world was not even worthy of them. It was not fair, but God let it happen. Does God ever tell you that life is fair? I guarantee you, the more righteous you are, the chances are very great that life is going to get worse. We can learn that from Christ. He was so righteous that the world could not stand Him. That is the way human nature does. It pushes away something that hurts its feelings. And so when it says that He was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, it means exactly that. It 'rose up' those who were offended by Him and put Him to death so that they would no longer be ashamed—I mean, shamed by His righteousness.

Let us turn to Psalm 73. This is a psalm that everybody ought to read through, every once in a while, to get your mind refreshed. And I think that it would be foolish to think

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

that Joseph just blithely went through his imprisonment, his trial, without thoughts that were similar to this. They are the kind of thoughts that anybody—even a righteous person—would have. Are we not supposed to be blessed for being righteous? I even said, in my opening, "Yes, God will bless us when we are righteous." And He will—but maybe not right away.

If we have really repented, we have given our life to Him, have we not? If we've given our life to Him, because He paid the penalty for us, He has every right to do with us as He desires because He now owns us. We are free only because of what He did. So He is up there pushing the buttons—at least, giving the general situations, circumstances, and events that He wants us to go through. He is preparing us for something. So He has the right to do with us whatever He pleases. We gave Him that right in exchange for forgiveness. In Psalm 73 we learn that, because we go through these things, it does not do away with our feelings. It does not do away with our emotions—our desire to see good.

Psalm 73:1-3a Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are pure in heart. But as for me [the psalmist writes; he confesses], my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious at the boastful [arrogant]. . .

Was Potiphar's wife arrogant in falsely accusing him of trying to go to bed with her? Yes, she was. On the surface, she might have been a very sweet lady (entertaining, sociable, hospitable); but in her heart of hearts she arrogantly condemned this righteous man to prison—in order to hide her own lie and her own lust. That is arrogance. What is she saying? She is saying, "I'm worth more than he is—because, look who I am."

Psalm 73:3b . . . when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

There she was—out there prospering. Nobody was pointing the finger of scorn at her. It is very likely that her female friends were saying, "Boy, you did the right thing. I'm glad you escaped that."

Psalm 73:6, 13a Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. . . . Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain. . .

The righteous person is likely to say, "It's been vain. It's been futile. It's been useless to do this."

Psalm 73:13b, 16-17 . . . and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. . . . When I thought to

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

understand this [why these things were happening], it was too painful for me—until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.

Never forget that. It is how you finish at the end of the race that counts—not where you are in the middle. He is expressing his faith in God, that there is going to be blessing for obedience. There is going to be salvation to those who do give their lives over to Him and work to overcome. But those who may be prospering and doing it evilly, their end is not going to be so good.

Psalm 73:18-19, 21-25 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. . . . Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually before You; You have held me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

You see, his faith is coming out now. But Joseph had those kinds of thoughts. I am sure of that.

Psalm 73:27-28 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert you for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all your works.

So there is a natural tendency—a right tendency—to believe that virtue will be rewarded with prosperity. And it will. Trust God. Have faith in that. Just because things are going what we think are wrong, it does not mean that they are going wrong as far as God is concerned. Do we believe that He is really with us? You all know that obedience is in many, many cases going to put us behind the eight ball somewhere. If you keep the Sabbath, you might lose your job. If you tithe, you are going to give away money (it seems) that you could spend better your own way. We could go on and on.

So, it would be awfully easy for us to bemoan our lot—the way things are right now. Every week you hear me talking a roll call. In some areas, you hear somebody say, "One." (Or two, or three.) We are really scattered now, are we not? In many cases, we came out of good-sized congregations. It seemed as though there were plenty of friends to socialize with, to fellowship with, to go to services with. And now, we are almost alone. There may have been cases, even now, where even though you are able to meet with someone (other people—like here in Anaheim we have 39 people here today); but yet, where you live, there is nobody. And it may be, as I also know in several cases,

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

right in your own home is a person who is in Worldwide—and you are not with them any more.

Think of yourself in relation to Joseph. It would be awfully easy to make a comparison, at least in type, with him. The question is this: What are you doing to do? What is your reaction going to be? You can bemoan your lot, get down in your cups, and be so desirous of socializing that you will just try to skinny by on the truth—knowing full well that it is really not the right thing to do. But what did Joseph do? Did Joseph compromise? Did he go to Potiphar? Did he go to Potiphar's wife when he had the opportunity? Did he appeal to them? I feel absolutely certain that he appealed to the great God.

We know, already, what Joseph did. The Lord was with him, and the Lord made everything he did to prosper. Did that prosperity within the prison come because it was magic? [No.] Joseph did what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 9:10. Regardless of his circumstance, he did everything with all of his might. (It says, "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.")

I do not think that God would back up—in the same way that He did with Joseph—and cause things to prosper if Joseph was not doing the right thing, even in prison. He had learned his lessons well, and he was prepared. And he made the most of the circumstance. He was learning a principle of God. You make lemonade out of the lemons yourself, as much as you can. You pray to God and ask Him to prosper. You ask Him to be with you in your difficult situation. You ask Him to provide. But God requires of us that we work towards success as well. (If it takes pumping iron to do it, you pump iron.) So Joseph did the equivalent of that—to make the best of a bad situation. All of those things were helping to prepare him to run a nation under the Pharaoh. But you have to remember this: when this was going on, Joseph did not know that! What was he doing? He was exercising his faith in what he had been taught—undoubtedly, by Isaac and Jacob.

I can understand, now, why God did not choose Reuben—or why He did not choose Simeon. Simeon would have been dead by this time, because instruments of cruelty were in his habitation. He would have very foolishly attacked his captors; and they would have put him to the sword. And he would have been dead.

Now remember that we are being prepared, just as Joseph was. It is not going to be as grandiose—at least, in this life—but what we are being prepared for over all is so much greater than what Joseph received in this life, there is no comparison to it. And we can be sure that Joseph's conduct, undoubtedly, glorified God.

It is interesting to note that Joseph was put into the prison "where the king's prisoners were bound." It is just a simple little statement, but it indicates something. It indicates that Potiphar did not bring a public charge against Joseph. But he too just arrogantly cast him into prison. I mean, he bypassed whatever system (justice system, judicial system) the Egyptians had. They had something, because the baker and the butler were not just summarily executed. In that case, they were put on trial by the Pharaoh, and then he put them into prison.

Joseph's case did not come to the Pharaoh. Now, why? It is highly probable that Potiphar did this because he did not believe his wife. To put Joseph on trial before the elders of the village, or the city, or anybody else would have involved the testimony of his wife; and I think that Potiphar did not want that to happen. Potiphar did not fully believe her.

Now, at this point, we would go into the story about the butler and the baker and Joseph's release from prison. But we are going to jump right over that, because a couple of years ago I gave a sermon on the Feast of Trumpets that heavily involved those two chapters. And so, if you want to, you can refer to that; and that will eventually be part of the series on Joseph. But we are going to go to chapter 42, where Jacob comes back into the story.

Genesis 42:1-2 When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" And he said, "Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us from there, that we may live and not die."

It is interesting because we get a little bit of insight into family operations here and also a little bit of insight into the brothers once again, because it says that Jacob said, "Why do you look upon one another?"—which means that they were in conference with one another. They were arguing back and forth, talking: "What shall we do? What shall we do? Can we do this? Can we do that? Can somebody else go to Egypt? I'll go to Egypt." (They could not make up their mind.)

Jacob is not always put in the best light. I think that we would have to agree with that. But we are to learn from the examples that are there about him. That does not mean that he was all bad. I do not mean that at all. He was a towering figure. And, I would say, overall he was a very fine individual. But the Bible tends to concentrate on the things that he did wrong, whereas with Joseph it concentrates on the things that he did right. They were significant, in either case. But there was one characteristic that Jacob had that was really outstanding. He was decisive. He could make up his mind, and he

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

was a commanding personality. When he made up his mind and said, "I'm going to do this" or "We're going to do this"—everybody felt impelled to go along.

He ran his family, and mostly, I guess, it was reasonably good. So, he said, "Get down to Egypt." And that settled it.

Now when I say that it was an insight into family life, it was—because he was the patriarch. He was the boss. And pretty much what he said, went. So, off they go. All of the brothers go, with the exception of Benjamin. You know the reasons why he was held back—because Jacob insisted upon it.

Genesis 42:6-7 Now Joseph was governor over the land: and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth. Joseph saw his brothers, and he recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food."

The story shows that Joseph had direct oversight of this whole program, even to the selling of the grain. Now, I do not mean that he did every last deal that came, but it does show that he was a hands-on person. Despite being Prime Minister, second in command, he was a hands-on person, and he was there. He recognized, of course, his brothers immediately, and the prophetic dream was fulfilled in an instant. They bowed to the earth to him.

The story, from this point on, shows Joseph in a position where he can manipulate his brothers. And the way that he did this is kind of interesting, because what he did kept them off balance. He knew who they were, but immediately he gave them the hard face and the rough voice. He began to question them, and immediately, when he heard that they were from Canaan (which he knew), he accused them of being spies. Now get this: They just went to the store to buy something to eat, and the owner of the store suddenly accuses them of coming into the store and spying it out so that they can see everything—see all the strength of Egypt, and then go back and they are going to invade.

Maybe to you and me, that would not be quite the test, or as quite a shock, or quite as traumatic, as it was to them. They knew, undoubtedly, from whom this person was (his position in life) that they were facing a figure of high responsibility. They may not have known yet that he was Prime Minister. But they did know that—because he controlled

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the grain (and, therefore, pretty much controlled whether or not they were going to live)—they were in deep doo-doo. So they were shocked, because now they did not know what to do.

Joseph's treatment of them was capricious, to say the least. I think that most of us in that kind of circumstance (seeing our brothers for the first time in 22 years) would have wanted to say, "Well, Judah, how are you? Reuben, old boy, good to see you once again. Simeon. . ." and go right down, "Where's Benjamin?" But he did not do it that way. He interrogated them in such a way as to extract information from them—information he already knew. But, also to slowly but surely extract, from their own lips, things that would eventually incriminate them. He did it in this way, and I am sure it was inspired by God. I do not want to give Joseph all the credit here. I am sure that it was inspired by God to lead them to the place where they would repent.

Joseph was in a position to turn the tables on these men. So, after accusing them of being spies, he put them into prison. For three days they had the opportunity to ruminate. "What happened? Why are we here?" And you know that the brothers would talk to one another. Then, he appeared to relent. "Come on out of prison. I fear God." ("Huh?") And so he gives them the grain, and then he says, "Oh, wait a minute. One of you is going to have to stay here." And it is uncanny, the one that he picked. He did not wait for them to volunteer. He said, "I want you." He chose Simeon. Why Simeon? The Bible does not say, but knowing what the Bible does say about Simeon, I would guess that Simeon was the main instigator that put Joseph into this position.

This was a little bit of getting even, gently (really gently, by comparison to what Joseph was put through). And so Simeon was held back. He gave them the grain. And then you know what happened. He put their money back into the sacks; and off they went. And then, I guess, they stopped to eat; and somebody looked in their sack. And, uh oh, there was their money. Now they are going to be accused of stealing.

Do you see what I mean? A zig-zagging, capriciousness, keeping them off balance—not knowing quite what was going on—but still very gentle by comparison to what they put Joseph through. When they put him into the pit and when they sold him, that poor kid did not know what was going on at all, and he was in terror. The little bit that Joseph put them through was really merciful by comparison to what they put him through. But was it effective? You had better believe it.

Genesis 42:21 Then they said one to another, "We are truly guilty concerning our brother."

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Was their thinking leading them in the right direction? Yes, it was. Were they beginning to think, "Why is this happening to me?" They were. And they were talking to each other; and, as we are going to see in the next verse, accusing each other now.

Genesis 42:21-22 "We saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us ["Please, let me out of here." That kid was terrified.], and we would not hear [They went and ate—while he was screaming in the pit.]; therefore is this distress come upon us." [Whatever you sow, that shall you also reap.] And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us." [Reuben thought he was dead.]

They knew that they were murderers. And now they were beginning to see it come down on their heads. Whenever they first got rid of Joseph, they thought that was the end of the matter. But the effect of what they did began to infringe upon their lives immediately. That is why they had to lie to Jacob. You see, it was beginning to unravel. And so now their relationship with their father was poisoned. And then (think about this), they undoubtedly began to realize that their relationship with each other was also poisoned. Each of them had to live with the fear that what they had done would be discovered, because which one of them was going to betray the others and tell the father what the real truth was?

Under normal circumstances, because their hands were clean in this case (They were not spies.), they would have rejoiced at the generosity of the ruler of Egypt because he gave them their money back. He gave them the grain for free. But the shadow of knowing what they had done to Joseph was poisoning their lives twenty-two years after it occurred. Does sin have a long arm?

Moses said, "You can be sure your sin will find you out." You know, "to the pure, all things are pure." When you do not sin, there is nothing to worry about. These men were not pure. Their minds had been stained by what they did to their kid brother and what they had done to their father. At the foundation of their conscience was a rotteness, and they were afraid. Afraid that they would be discovered. They were afraid that their whole house of cards—this whole pretense that they had built up—was going to come tumbling down. So they lived in fear that those flimsy pretenses were going to come crashing down because they had flaunted God's moral realities.

Do you realize that this is the source of almost all mental illness? People are sick mentally because of breaking God's laws, and there is sufficient knowledge there to wear away at them. There is a quality of life (like a building rests on its foundation)—an

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

unstinting loyalty to God produces a stability that enables one to go through life without being afraid, because you know that you are in good hands. What I have just told you is in the Bible—in I John 3, beginning about verse 17. You can read it yourself.

Next they are explaining to their father, and they say:

Genesis 42:33 Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, "By this I will I know that you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, take food for the famine of your households, and be gone."

Genesis 42:37 Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you."

The pressure put on them by Joseph had put them between a rock and a hard place. The rock was that he held Simeon in ward (actually, a hostage) to guarantee the demand that they return to Egypt and that they had better have Benjamin with them when they came back. The hard place was that the famine just kept right on going, and they had to eat. So what was it? They could not ignore Joseph's command. Either they came back with Benjamin, or it was starve to death.

I am not quite sure what to make of verse 37, because of what Reuben said. Was he once again making a resolution that he would not follow through with? (There is a possibility.) Or, are we beginning to see here that the brothers are not the same as they were when they sent Joseph into Egypt? Now we find Reuben willing to make a great personal sacrifice in order that they be able to go down into Egypt and eat. I do not know.

There is a third possibility. Some commentators put this forth, and that is that a later editor inserted the word Reuben in there; and the actual one who uttered this was Judah. There is apparently some reason to believe that—and even somewhat of a biblical reason—because, when finally the appeal was made to Joseph, it was Judah that did it (not Reuben). So there is that possibility.

In chapter 43, the famine continued, and they were forced to go back down into Egypt. We find in verses 14 and 15 and in verse 18 (I was going to quote these, because it is very evident that their feelings were running really deep.) When you make the comparison with their feelings here and their feelings back in chapter 37, the feelings were just as strong—except in chapter 37 the strong feelings were against Joseph and in chapter 43 the strong feelings are about themselves. I do not know whether you get the lesson there, but I will tell you. The tables had been turned completely. Now they

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

realized they are on the head of the pin, and they are beginning to see it. You can see it in the things that they say. They do not know which way to jump, because they feel that whichever way they jump they are going to hit a land mine there somewhere, and he is skewering them. (Really, God is doing it, but He is doing it through Joseph.)

When they arrive in Egypt, they are ushered directly before Joseph once again—right into his home. And they are expecting the worse. They are expecting to be made his slaves, because they have stolen the money. Do you know what they do? They get to the house and immediately they jump on the steward of the house and say, "We didn't do it. We just found the money in our bags." Now, I am paraphrasing it, but that is what they said. And they tried to give the money back.

Now the steward must have been in on what Joseph was doing, because he just brushed them off. And he said, "I've got your money." He said, "Be thankful that God put that money in your bags." Interesting comment! He counted it as a gift from God. Probably Joseph told him what to say. (I do not know—but there is a possibility.)

They were afraid when they went there, but what they feared would happen did not happen. There they are feeling up again. So Joseph entertained them. There was no incident that occurred. But at the beginning of chapter 44, he instructs the steward to do the same thing that he did before—only this time, a very special silver cup is put into Benjamin's bag. Of course, you know what happens. They no sooner got out of town and the steward comes charging after them on his chariot with his horses. He accuses them. ("Oh, here we go again.") He accuses them of being thieves, of rejecting the hospitality of this great man, and he says, "We're going to search your bags." And, you know what, the brothers really put their foot in it this time. They were so sure of themselves that almost with one voice they told the steward, "Go ahead and search our sacks, and if you find anything there, we will be your slaves."

What did they do to Joseph? They made a slave out of him. Now here they are, volunteering to be a slave. [Chuckle.] I will tell you: This thing is really rich! And then, the silver cup is discovered. Do you know what their reaction is? It is exactly the same reaction that Jacob had when he heard of Joseph's death. They wept. They tore their clothes. They thought the worst thing that could possibly happen to them had happened. You see—the thing came full circle, and they had actually volunteered to be a slave.

There are so many lessons here it is incredible. There is even a great deal we can learn from the kind of fear that they had as compared to the kind of fear of Joseph. Joseph said, "I fear God." But they were afraid. Though there are some similarities between being afraid and fearing God, the fruits of the two are entirely different. The fear of God

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

will produce stability, faithfulness, loyalty, and absolute assurance that things are right. The kind of fear that those men had was the kind of fear that will make one compromise, and accommodate, and disobey—in order to protect the self.

Genesis 44:18 Then Judah came near to him [that is, to Joseph] and said, "Oh my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's hearing, and let not your anger burn against your servant; for you are even like Pharaoh.

Judah, then, proceeds to throw himself on the mercy of the court. Of course, it is understood that he was throwing his brothers (as it were) also at the mercy of the court with him. He really makes a stirring appeal—I kid you not. And he appeals to Joseph in a way that could not help but strike a sympathetic cord with anybody of normal compassion, because the basis of his appeal is: if Benjamin dies and if these men have to go into slavery, it is going to kill their father. In the process of it, he recounts why it would kill their father. The father had already lost his one beloved son. On the surface, it almost seems to gloss over what was really going on in Judah's mind (at least Judah's). In verse 20, there is something that would almost appear to be a slip of the tongue; but I am sure that, when Joseph heard it, it really struck something in him.

Genesis 44:20 "And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a child [Benjamin] of his old age, who is young; and his brother is dead.'

Do you see what that told Joseph? They thought that they were guilty of murder—and that they were bearing that burden. Now, in verse 28, it is confirmed. Here Judah is quoting Jacob:

Genesis 44:28 And the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn to pieces"; and I have not seen him since."

Whenever Joseph heard that, he knew that Judah was telling him the truth. He also knew that there was a secondary sin of which they knew that they were guilty. That is, that Jacob did not know the truth about what happened to Joseph. ("He was torn in pieces," Jacob thought.) Now Judah, if he was telling the truth, could not have told the story any other way. And he did tell the truth. If he had told it the way that it actually happened, then he would have had to admit before Joseph of a far greater guilt than that which they were now accused. Thus, as he gives the story to demonstrate his and his brothers' innocence, Judah gave testimony to Joseph (and now, to us) of his and his brothers' guilt that they were carrying in their heart of hearts. Joseph became unglued, because he knew that these men were facing up to it.

Joseph: A Saga of Excellence (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

In Ezekiel 36:25-27 is a prophecy that God is going to change the hearts of people from stony to what He calls "a heart of flesh"—human, soft in comparison to one that is hard. Whenever the brothers did what they did to Joseph, they did not care. Their hard hearts did not care what they did to Joseph, or what they did to Jacob. All they cared about was what they perceived as their own need. They had an itch that needed to be scratched. They had an impulse that needed to be filled. They gave no heed at all as to whether what they were going to be doing was edifying, up-building, positive—just so they would be taken care of. Total, complete self-concern, and hardhearted oblivion to anything else. And now they, or at least, Judah, cares about his father. And so he issues forth with a torrent of emotional intercession in behalf of his brother, Benjamin.

I do not know about you, but I wonder about the historical ramifications of these things because, about 600 years later (whenever the nation of Judah seceded from Israel), God said I am going to give you one nation as your companion. It was Benjamin.

In I Peter 3:8 Peter talks about a situation somewhat like this—something that can take place within a congregation. He says to be sympathetic to one another, to be real brothers. He says to be "pitiful". The word has changed in meaning since the King James, but it means be filled with compassion. It means be tenderhearted. It means be soft towards one another.

And Joseph's adept maneuvering of his brothers so that they would be able to see and admit their guilt, reminds me of how Nathan skillfully led David into his repentance—telling him the story about the man who owned one little ewe lamb. Do you remember that story? What did David say? He said, "Surely that man will pay with his life"—because he was not pitiful. And Nathan said, "You are that man."

Five or six hundred years before, that is what Joseph (playing the part of Nathan) did. He led his brothers to repentance—and, especially, Judah—because now he could see that they were tenderhearted toward one another. Each of them was willing to give his life for Benjamin, so that Jacob would not be hurt. That is quite a change.

So Joseph, then, revealed who he was. You might wonder why Joseph did not contact Jacob earlier. Twenty-two years have gone by. Since the age of 30 (nine years), he had opportunity to write Jacob a letter, to send word to him; but he did not. I can only surmise that Joseph must have thought it through and realized that, in order to really help his brothers, he was going to have to depend upon God to work something out—by which they would not be able to just conveniently say, "Well, I'm sorry, Joseph, old boy" and not really be led to repentance. (There cannot be reconciliation without repentance. It is impossible. Nothing has changed.) But they did repent.

There is a beautiful analogy here; and we will just stop with this, because it teaches us something about Christ. When Jesus was born, He came late in (but not at the end) of the family of mankind. Even as Joseph was born the eleventh of twelve sons, he was late entering into that family, but he was not at the very end. Jesus came to His own, and His own received Him not. In fact, His own became major players in bringing about His death. And Jesus was betrayed by another Judah (Judas); and, in this case, He was thrown into the pit of death. And He arose the Firstborn, as the Judge of all of mankind, with wealth and power greater than all (except for One).

When Joseph was found to be alive (by his brothers), he was revealed to them that he was actually sent before them—to prepare their way and to preserve them alive. Jesus said, "I go and prepare a place for you." And it was He who was now the Chief Heir (Jesus, I mean)—the recipient of the birthright, which, even though He was born late in the family, He was now in a position to receive, as the firstborn.

It was the same thing in the case of Joseph. He became the firstborn. He received the right—the birthright—of the firstborn. Joseph, too, was second in command. There was none greater in Egypt, except one, Pharaoh. And Joseph, like Christ, is seen as the judge of his brothers. (Who is judging you and me? We all have to pass before the judgment seat of our Elder Brother.) They must all repent before him (Joseph/Jesus); and he is the one who is seen as giving forgiveness—and giving them the cleansing balm of a cleared conscience, communication, sustenance, and sharing life with them in the land of the one who is greater than he.

There is one part of this analogy that we did not cover. It comes a little bit later. And that is that through Joseph's dealings—in selling the grain—he was able to accumulate everything and turn them over to the One who is greater than he.

We are going to stop this series of sermons at this point. And I think, to sum it all up, we have to say that in this Joseph is one unusually pure and outstanding personality of tremendous integrity.