

What's the Message - Lesson Nineteen

Our study of Genesis continues with the selection of Joseph, and we see the purpose of selection fulfilled.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that our study today will help you to see that after God selects us as His workers, he equips us with life experiences to face the tasks that will lie before us, in order to meet His goal of being a blessing to others. This we pray confidently, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

In our last lesson we saw how Jacob had learned to trust in God, rather than his own abilities, to face the many life challenges that came his way. During the most difficult times of all, he learned that his life was in the all-powerful hands of God, and all he had to do was to trust in the promise of God.

Now we turn to the next generation, the sons of Jacob, and we have chosen three episodes in the life of Joseph, his favorite son, to illustrate a fundamental theme that appears time and time again throughout the entire Bible. The theme is: . . . selected by God, for a particular purpose.

These episodes appear in the last chapters of Genesis, from chapter 37 through 50, and begin with the well-known story of the dreams of Joseph and the jealousy of his brothers. We read the story in Genesis 37: verses 3 through 11, and highlight particularly the reaction of his brothers in verse 8. *His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to have dominion over us?" So they hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words.*

The conclusion of this episode is in the reaction that was fomented by the jealousy of his brothers. When Jacob sent Joseph out to check on the whereabouts and the well-being of the brothers, they saw this as an opportunity to take revenge. At first they intended to kill him, but ended up selling him to passing traders, who took Joseph to Egypt as a slave.

In an attempt to cover up their hateful action, they put the blood of a goat on the robe that Jacob had made for Joseph, and took it back to Jacob as evidence that he had been killed by a wild animal. Jacob mourned for his beloved son, and refused to be comforted by any of his family.

This leads us to the second episode of Joseph's life . . . his life as a slave. The person that he had been sold to was Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the royal guard. What we learn in chapter 39 is that the Lord was with Joseph, and caused *all that he did to prosper . . . so Joseph found favor in the sight* (of Potiphar). As a result, Potiphar *made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. And the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.*

The words of the sarcastic pun we hear often today, that "no good deed will go unpunished", certainly seemed to apply. For when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, and he refused her advances, she accused him of trying to attack her, and he was thrown into jail. However, as we learn from verse 21, . . . *the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison . . . and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.*

This second episode reaches its climax in chapter 40, where we read: *Some time after this, the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker, and he put them . . . in the prison where Joseph was confined . . . and they continued for some time in custody.*

One night both men had dreams, and were troubled by them because they had no one to interpret the dreams. *And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me."* So they did, and Joseph interpreted them, and everything happened just as Joseph had said it would. The butler was restored to his office, but the baker was hanged. *Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.*

Now comes the last part of this trilogy of events. After two years, Pharaoh himself had a dream, and none of the royal wise men could interpret it. Finally the butler remembered how Joseph had correctly interpreted his dream, and told Pharaoh. So Joseph was brought before the king, and Pharaoh told him of his dreams, and Joseph interpreted them. Not only did he interpret them, but he laid before Pharaoh a plan to address the famine that would be forthcoming.

Pharaoh was so impressed with what Joseph had said that on the spot he appointed Joseph to be the man to take charge of this very plan and to implement it. At only 30 years of age, Joseph is elevated to being in charge of everything in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. The seven prosperous years came as foretold, with Joseph storing up grain in great abundance. Then began the years of famine. And the famine was widespread, throughout all of the region, with people coming from all over to buy grain.

Jacob heard that there was grain to be bought in Egypt, so he sent all of his sons, except Benjamin the youngest, to obtain food so that they may not starve, but live. And they, like everyone else, came to Joseph to purchase grain, and bowed themselves before this master of Egypt . . . just as Joseph's dream years before had predicted. To test his brothers, Joseph at first charged them with being spies, and demanded that the youngest brother be brought. He tested them further, and held Simeon as a hostage in prison until they returned.

To make a long story short, Judah promised Jacob that Benjamin would safely return, and Jacob gave in to the requirement that Benjamin must be presented to this lord of Egypt. They all appear before Joseph again, and this time he treats them with a special meal, with each man seated in the order of their birth.

But Joseph also tests them further. And Benjamin is found guilty of stealing the silver cup of Joseph. Showing profound remorse, Judah explains to Joseph how he has sworn to Jacob that Benjamin would safely return, and offers himself to be punished, and not Benjamin. Then chapter 45 tells us of the emotional revealing of Joseph to his brothers and the command to return and bring Jacob and all of the family to Egypt to live under the protection of Joseph.

So now teacher, we have the highlights of these three events in the life of Joseph. They are all touching stories, but what is the message here for us in our lives today?

Each of these events builds on our central theme. First, the Lord is informing Joseph in a dream that he has been selected and set apart. There will be something wonderful in his future, something that he cannot clearly see yet. But revealing it to his brothers only brought out their jealousy, and instead of something good happening right away, Joseph is sold into slavery.

Second, this period of slavery . . . even with its heartache of being separated from his family . . . was being used by God to equip Joseph with experiences of responsibility and management that would be needed to fill the role God had laid out for him. Joseph was being prepared for a specific purpose.

This purpose becomes more obvious to us in the third event, in which Joseph first tests his brothers, then reveals himself and has his father Jacob brought to Egypt for a re-unification. By this time Joseph had learned what God had planned for him, and understood God's purpose. He was able to say to his brothers: *God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. . . . As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.*

This in turn takes us right back to God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1- 4, where God tells him that he has been selected to be a blessing to the entire world. It is the same purpose that God holds before us today.

We will complete our study of Genesis next time with a review of the major themes it contains.

This series has been developed and written by our director of teacher training, Mr. D. A. Senter, and is copyrighted by Lamb of God Lutheran Church in Flower Mound, Texas. Your narrator is Dale Gaus.

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