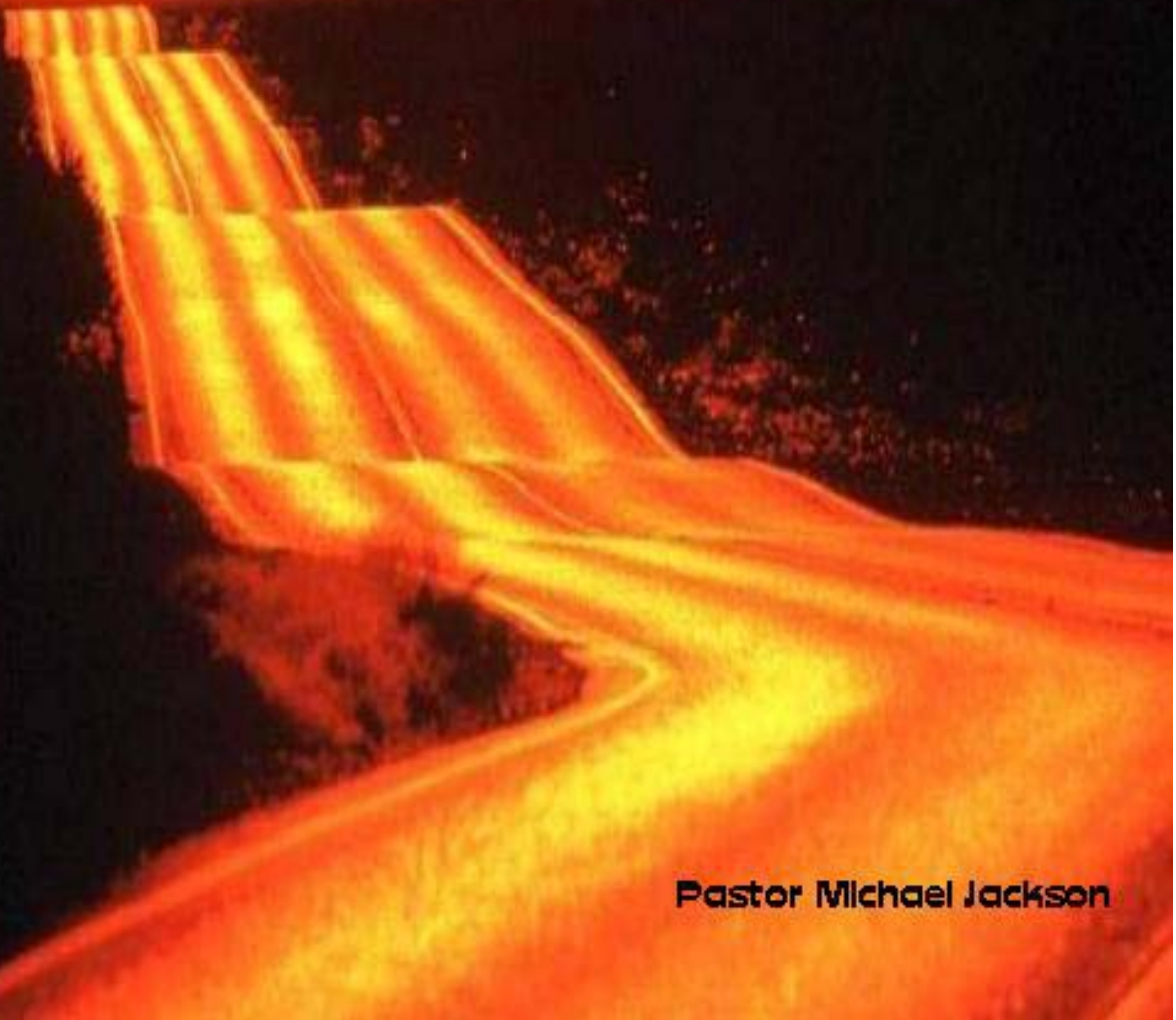


# THE ROAD



Pastor Michael Jackson

## THE ROAD

This morning I want to talk to you about Joseph. That doesn't help much, does it? Joseph is a rather common name.

- There is Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman from Connecticut.
- Joseph Haydn the composer,
- Joseph Stalin the dictator,
- Joseph Cotton the actor,
- Or, closer to home, there is Joseph that works over at the plant or the Joe who lives down the street.

Some of you are named Joe or Joseph. Joseph, by the way, was the sixth most popular boys name last year. For your information, Jacob has been the top male name since 1999. Prior to that, Michael – my name -- was the most popular name each year from 1964 to 1998. I just wanted to throw that in somewhere.

Joseph. The Joseph that I want to talk about this morning is actually the Joseph of the Old Testament in the Bible. The Joseph who owned the coat of many colors. Some of you may remember that I count this man as one of my all-time favorite men in the whole of scripture. I spent nearly a year going through his story on Wednesday nights starting in early 2000.

As I begin this message, I want to give you a few facts about Joseph. He was one of the most righteous men in all of the Bible. More space is devoted to him in Genesis than is given to:

- Adam,
- Noah,
- Abraham,
- Isaac, or
- Jacob.

He was born nearly 1900 years prior to the birth of Jesus.

- He was a dreamer.
- He suffered unjustly and spent years in prison.
- He eventually served as the second most powerful man in all of Egypt.
- His story can be found in Genesis 37-50. Do yourself a favor and read it again sometime.

This message will be divided into three parts. Throughout these messages, I want to show you how God works in a life. How God guides. How God is present even when He seems to be a thousand miles away. How He always keeps the big picture in view, even when we don't or can't. All of this is found in the story of Joseph, and more.

### PLEASE TURN IN YOUR BIBLES TO GENESIS 37.

We will begin reading with verses 1-2, **“Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers.... and he brought their father a bad report about them.”** The story begins when this fellow is but a teen. His horrible ordeal begins when he is still wet behind the ears.

The Word of God lists a number of teenagers including:

Ishmael, Abraham's son, is spoken of in Genesis 17:25 as being 13 years old when he was circumcised. Can everyone please say ouch!

A whole string of kings ascended to the throne in the Bible at the age of sixteen. Notice:

- **“All the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king to succeed his father.....”**
- **“Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem.”**
- Another teenager, named Jehoiachin, **“was eighteen years old when he began to reign....”**

Another of my favorite Bible characters has to be Esther. The Bible describes her as being a young virgin. In those days, this quite likely meant not much more than 14 years old. She went on to become a queen as well as the savior of her people. Esther is a true Bible hero.

David was more than likely a teenager when he went up against the giant Goliath.

Then too, Mary was probably a teenager when she gave birth to the Christ child.

At least a couple of the disciples were very young including John, the author of the forth Gospel.

We discover Jesus as an adolescent – 12 years old – in Luke chapter 2. Can anyone tell me what His first word was? “Why?” (Luke 2:41) Seems fitting for a twelve-year-old. Jesus’ step-father’s name was...? Joseph.

Again, the Joseph of Genesis was but seventeen years old when he stepped out on the stage of human history. He was also but seventeen when he entered what has to be one of the most terrible trials found anywhere in the Old Testament. In fact, his trial has been likened by some to be on par with what Job went through. Then, too, I must point out, that Joseph’s period of suffering was not short-lived. While we can not be sure how long Job’s period of testing lasted, we are quite sure how long Joseph suffered. Notice Genesis 41:46, **“Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”** His testing lasted some 13 years.

- During this time God certainly loved Joseph and proved it.
  - During this time, Joseph was right in the very heart of God’s will.
  - During this time, this teenager was yet able to receive fresh revelation from God.
- He was good, nevertheless, he hurt bad.

Back now to verse 2: **“and he brought their father a bad report about them.”** Joe tattled. He snitched. Do you parents understand the difference between tattling and reporting? When a person tattles their goal is to get someone else into trouble. When someone reports, their goal is to prevent someone from getting hurt. Joseph tattled.

I find it interesting that so many big problems begins with just a little word, a snide comment, a bad report. James 3:5 (*New Living Translation*) warns, **“So also, the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.”** Joseph’s tattling, though it was a rather small thing, certainly did ignite a great and terrible fire.

If you have a harsh word for someone. If you are about to set someone straight, I want to warn you – PROCEED WITH EXTRA CAUTION!

Genesis 37:4-5 states: **“When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.”**

While there are several important issues here such as:

- A father’s favoritism and the awful resentment that it caused,
- The long and painful result of hatred. The brothers will still be paying for their evil deeds and feelings of hatred many years later.

- The tragedy of broken family ties. The brothers could not, would not speak a kind or civil word to Joseph.

I would like to spend time on each of those issues, however I do not have the necessary time to do so this morning. They would make a very interesting personal Bible study though.

The thing that I want to point out from this verse is, **“Joseph had a dream....”** What’s the big deal, you ask? We all have dreams. You are right. In fact, an average 75-year-old man spends a total of about 25 years of his life asleep. As for dreaming, on average we have about 5 dreams per 8 hours of sleep. That figures out to be 1,825 dreams in one year, or back to the 75 year old man, he will have had a total of 136,875 dreams during his lifetime! That is a lot of dreaming.

However, this passage isn’t talking about dreaming, it is talking about a dream. This dream stood alone. It had meaning. **“Joseph had a dream....”** In other words, it was a God thing. Have you ever had a God dream?

Notice verses 6-11 with me (*New Living Translation*), **“Listen to this dream,’ he announced. ‘We were out in the field tying up bundles of grain. My bundle stood up, and then your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before it!’ ‘So you are going to be our king, are you?’ his brothers taunted. And they hated him all the more for his dream and what he had said.**

**Then Joseph had another dream and told his brothers about it. ‘Listen to this dream,’ he said. ‘The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!’**

**This time he told his father as well as his brothers, and his father rebuked him. ‘What do you mean?’ his father asked. ‘Will your mother, your brothers, and I actually come and bow before you?’ But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father gave it some thought and wondered what it all meant.”**

They all interpreted the two dreams correctly. One day Joseph was going to rule over them and they would all – dad included – bow before him in homage. He was more popular when he tattled!

**IMPORTANT POINT:** it is indeed rare that God ever gives us the total revelation of His plans and purposes all at once. Instead, He leads us one step at a time. Psalm 37:23 (*New Living Translation*), **“The steps (comings and the goings) of the godly are directed by the Lord. He delights in every detail of their lives.”**

I have put together a chart for you. Please notice that when Joseph received his dream all that he saw was the dream. See these dips? They all stand for a major trial, a test. However, they were below the radar. He only saw the dream and he correctly understood it to mean that someday he was going to rule over his family.

- What would he have to go through before he would see the fulfillment of his dream? He didn’t know.
- When would the dream be fulfilled? Six months; ten years? He didn’t know.
- Where would he reign? Israel? Elsewhere? He didn’t know.
- How would it all come about? What would be the process? He didn’t know.

Moses had to wait forty years to see his dream fulfilled.

- David still had to go back to tending sheep after he had received his call.
- Paul likewise had to wait patiently for a good number of years before he finally saw his dream of standing before Caesar fulfilled.

Joseph also had to wait. In the process of waiting, he was going to find himself on a very winding and curvy road.

Notice now Genesis 37:23-25, **“So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe--the richly ornamented robe he was wearing-- and they took him and threw him into the**

**cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal....”**

Joseph didn't know what in the world was going on. We are told here that the brothers took him and threw him into an empty well – a pit! The pit was as empty as a gourd. Empty as in without food or water.

- When he had had his dream, he didn't see a pit. No one had warned him of this! What was to become of his dreams now?
- Where was God?
- As far as he could see, there was no hope. He might well have thought that he was going to die in that pit. He was going to die at 17!

Again, he was in a pit without anything, including answers. Even his precious coat – his identity -- had been stripped away from him.

Now let me ask you a serious question. Where was God during all of this? Along this line:

- Where was God when the Three Hebrew Children were in the fiery furnace?
- Where was God when David faced Goliath?
- Where was God when Daniel was thrown in to the lion's den?
- Where was God when Jonah was in the belly of the fish?
- Where was God? Do you really want to know? I will tell you; **God was with His child!** Joseph's pit may well have been empty, nevertheless, God was in the pit with Joseph! The Lord was watching over Joe – as well as Joe's dream.

Another question. What about the will of God?

- Joseph was in grave danger of losing his life.
- He was hated and rejected by his brothers.
- He had been lied to and lied about.

Was he or was he not in God's will? There would be no way that Joseph could explain to anybody while in the pit that he was in God's will, but he was!

The Lord knew exactly where Joseph was. He also knew that before Joseph could become the second in command over all of Egypt, he had to go down into the pit. The pit looked bad, evil and dangerous to Joseph. However, from God's vantage point, the pit looked like a giant step in the direction of the very throne of Egypt.

Now to verses 26-28 (*New Living Translation*), **“Judah said to the others, ‘What can we gain by killing our brother? ... Let's sell Joseph to those Ishmaelite traders. Let's not be responsible for his death; after all, he is our brother!’ And his brothers agreed. So when the traders came by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver, and the Ishmaelite traders took him along to Egypt.”** Just when it looked as if things couldn't get any worse, they did. Now we see the dreamer being dealt into slavery and carted off to, of all places, Egypt. Egypt! What could possibly be worse than going to that horrible place?

He was a child of Abraham. A Hebrew. Why, the Egyptians wanted nothing to do with the Jews. Then too, they hated shepherds and he was a shepherd. This was bad – real, real bad!

Was it? Really? Sometimes we are much too quick to jump to conclusions. I am reminded of a story that is found in Max Lucado's book: *In The Eye of the Storm*. Let me share it with you:

Once there was an old man who lived in a tiny village. Although poor, he was envied by all, for he owned a beautiful white horse. Even the king coveted his treasure. A horse like this had never been seen before.

People offered fabulous prices for the steed, but the old man always refused. "This horse is not a horse to me," he would tell them. "It is a person. How could you sell a person? He is a friend, not

a possession. How could you sell a friend?" The man was poor and the temptation was great. But he never sold the horse. One morning he found that the horse was not in the stable. All the village came to see him. "You old fool," they scoffed, "we told you that someone would steal your horse. You are so poor. How could you ever hope to protect such a valuable animal? It would have been better to have sold him. You could have gotten whatever price you wanted. No amount would have been too high. Now the horse is gone, and you've been cursed with misfortune."

The old man responded, "Don't speak too quickly. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know; the rest is judgment. If I've been cursed or not, how can you know? How can you judge?"

The people contested, "Don't make us out to be fools! We may not be philosophers, but great philosophy is not needed. The simple fact that your horse is gone is a curse."

The old man spoke again. "All I know is that the stable is empty, and the horse is gone. The rest I don't know. Whether it be a curse or a blessing, I can't say. All we can see is a fragment. Who can say what will come next?"

The people of the village laughed. They thought that the man was crazy. They had always thought he was a fool; if he wasn't, he would have sold the horse and lived off the money. But instead, he was a poor woodcutter, an old man still cutting firewood and dragging it out of the forest and selling it. He lived hand to mouth in the misery of poverty. Now he had proven that he was, indeed, a fool.

After fifteen days, the horse returned. He hadn't been stolen; he had run away into the forest. Not only had he returned, he had brought a dozen wild horses with him. Once again the village people gathered around the woodcutter and spoke. 'Old man, you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse was a blessing. Please forgive us.'

The man responded, "Once again, you go too far. Say only that the horse is back. State only that a dozen horses returned with him, but don't judge. How do you know if this is a blessing or not? You see only a fragment. Unless you know the whole story, how can you judge? You read only one page of a book. Can you judge the whole book? You read only one word of a phrase. Can you understand the entire phrase? 'Life is so vast, yet you judge all of life with one page or one word. All you have is a fragment! Don't say that this is a blessing. No one knows. I am content with what I know. I am not perturbed by what I don't.'

'Maybe the old man is right,' they said to one another. So they said little. But down deep, they knew he was wrong. They knew it was a blessing. Twelve wild horses had returned with one horse. With a little bit of work, the animals could be broken and trained and sold for much money.

The old man had a son, an only son. The young man began to break the wild horses. After a few days, he fell from one of the horses and broke both legs. Once again the villagers gathered around the old man and cast their judgments.

"You were right," they said. "You proved you were right. The dozen horses were not a blessing. They were a curse. Your only son has broken his legs, and now in your old age you have no one to help you. Now you are poorer than ever."

The old man spoke again. "You people are obsessed with judging. Don't go so far. Say only that my son broke his legs. Who knows if it is a blessing or a curse? No one knows. We only have a fragment. Life comes in fragments."

It so happened that a few weeks later the country engaged in war against a neighboring country. All the young men of the village were required to join the army. Only the son of the old man was excluded, because he was injured. Once again the people gathered around the old man, crying and screaming because their sons had been taken. There was little chance that they would return. The enemy was strong, and the war would be a losing struggle. They would never see their sons again.

"You were right, old man," they wept. "God knows you were right. This proves it. Your son's accident was a blessing. His legs may be broken, but at least he is with you. Our sons are gone forever."

The old man spoke again. "It is impossible to talk with you. You always draw conclusions. No one knows. Say only this: Your sons had to go to war, and mine did not. No one knows if it is a blessing or a curse. No one is wise enough to know. Only God knows."

The old man was right. We only have a fragment. Life's mishaps and horrors are only a page out of a grand book. We must be slow about drawing conclusions. We must reserve judgment on the road of life until we get to the end of the journey.

While Joseph didn't realize it at the time, He was right where God wanted him. You see, God had big plans for him – not in Israel – but in Egypt!

### **MOVE WITH ME NOW TO GENESIS 39**

Genesis 39:1 now notes, **“Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.”**

Was this good or bad? Joseph's being sold to Potiphar was to be both a great blessing as well as a tremendous trial. God was to be very near; God was to seem to be very far away.

It is said of Hezekiah, **“God left him to try him,”** that means that God hid His face – His favor -- for a moment. When God hides His face:

- We pray and we feel that God isn't even listening to us.
- We read the Bible and our eyes stare at the same verse for thirty minutes and we think, “I'm just not getting anywhere.”
- We cry aloud and the Lord doesn't even seem to care.

Haven't we all been there? I have.

Then too there are those moments when God seems to break out all over.

- When we are driving down the road,
- When we are at work,
- When we are having our devotional time with Him.

He's seemingly everywhere we go and in all that we do. He is showing us His favor.

The Apostle Paul called us to be instant **“in season, out of season”** 2 Timothy 4:2.

- **“In season”** is when the Lord shows His face; **“out of season”** is when He hides it.
- **“In season”** is when we feel and know His favor and blessing; **“out of season”** is when He seems to be a million miles away.
- Receiving the dream was **“in season”** for Joseph.
- Being cast into a pit and sold into slavery was definitely **“out of season.”**

Let's look now certain phrases from Genesis 39:2-6:

- **“The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered,**
- **His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did,**
- **Joseph found favor in his eyes,**
- **The LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.**
- **The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field.”**

Now it looks as if Joseph is back **“in season”** once again. Joseph was blessed, wonderfully blessed:

**First,** Joseph had rest from his enemies.

**Second,** Joseph had the presence as well as the favor of the Lord.

**Third,** Joseph was elevated to live in the house of his master. Imagine that if you will. Slaves, as a rule, were made to live in quarters far from the master's own house.

**Fourth,** Joseph prospered in his new career. Not only was Joseph blessed, everything he touched was blessed. He seemingly had a Midas touch. Even Potiphar prospered due to God's blessings on Joseph. In short, the fellow did not concern himself with any of his affairs except for the food that he

ate. Everything else he left to Joseph's care and attention.

**IMPORTANT POINT HERE:** Do not forget, we are talking about Joseph, a man who was someday destined to become the governor of Egypt. Although he didn't know that, God did. Joseph didn't know that starting at the bottom of Potiphar's household was preparing him for the fulfillment of his dreams.

We never know what it is that God is preparing us for. What is the Lord preparing you for?

- To be a governor someday?
- To become a missionary?
- To start an orphanage in India?
- To open a home for troubled teenagers?

We don't usually know what it is that God is working out in our lives, but God knows. He knows exactly why and where He is leading us.

Picture life as being a giant jigsaw puzzle. We only see one piece at a time. With such limited knowledge it is easy to see why we occasionally become confused and even frustrated. God, though, sees the whole completed puzzle at one glance. To Him the puzzle is finished. To Him the pit as well as the working for Potiphar made all of the sense in the world.

While Joseph was seeing only the moment, God was looking all the way down the line to that which Joseph was to become. God was working throughout the process in order to bring His revealed will – the dream -- into reality.

Joseph needed to learn the graces of his new culture and Potiphar would be his model – his mentor. Potiphar was a man of class and prestige, a man of wealth who had the sort of skills and qualities that would be required of a governor. Without knowing it, God had Joseph in school. Strangely enough, Potiphar was the teacher.

Well, there is much more to learn about Joseph on this road. We will pick up at this point in my next message.

Isn't strange how God works to bring about His holy will? Someone once noted that when we can't see God's hand we are to then trust His heart. That is good. He is always worthy of our trust – even when the road appears to be nothing more than one curve after another.

# THE ROAD

## Part 2

Recently USA TODAY had an interesting and funny article entitled *Weird Goes the Extra Mile*. The lead story told about a flight between Brussels and Vienna that was scratched in midair because of an angry cat. The feline was apparently released from its cage by a child and slinked into the cockpit when crew meals were served. After the cat resisted being shooed out and scratched a co-pilot on the arm, the pilot turned back to Brussels and made an emergency landing. The kitty was grounded.

The article also told of a woman returning a minivan to the Boise airport who mistook a “terminal access” sign for the way to the car-rental return site. She drove into the baggage claim area through the automatic doors. Luckily, no one was in her path.

Not all the 2004 travel stories were necessarily bad. This fall, an anonymous letter arrived at the Clarion Hotel in Kristiansand, Norway. Inside the envelop was the equivalent of \$80 and a handwritten note of apology. The sender described skipping out without paying for a room, drinks and sandwiches after a stay in 1980. It was “because of my lifestyle at the time,” the writer explained, adding that the incident weighed heavily on his or her mind. “I’ve never seen anything like it,” hotel manager Kay Johnsen told the Associated Press. “He is forgiven, and probably by higher powers than us.” Hotel management decided to donate the money to the Salvation Army Christmas drive.

To be sure, some wild and strange things can take place on the journey of life. Take for instance, the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. His life was one series after another of strange twists and turns.

As you may recall from my first message in this series, the brother was a dreamer. Genesis 37:6-11 (*New Living Translation*) says, **“Listen to this dream,’ he announced. ‘We were out in the field tying up bundles of grain. My bundle stood up, and then your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before it!’ ‘So you are going to be our king, are you?’ his brothers taunted. And they hated him all the more for his dream and what he had said.**

**Then Joseph had another dream and told his brothers about it. ‘Listen to this dream,’ he said. ‘The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!’**

**This time he told his father as well as his brothers, and his father rebuked him. ‘What do you mean?’ his father asked. ‘Will your mother, your brothers, and I actually come and bow before you?’ But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father gave it some thought and wondered what it all meant.”** They all interpreted the two dreams correctly. One day Joseph was going to rule over them and they would all – dad included – bow before him in homage.

However, I also pointed out in that first message, it is indeed rare that God ever gives us the total revelation of His plans and purposes all at once. Instead, He leads us one step at a time. Psalm 37:23 (*New Living Translation*), **“The steps (comings and the goings) of the godly are directed by the Lord. He delights in every detail of their lives.”**

Genesis 39:1 points out, **“Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.”**

While, undoubtedly, things were looking rather bleak for Joseph, God had everything in complete control. The Lord was actively working throughout the process to bring His revealed will – Joseph’s dream -- into reality.

Joseph needed to learn the graces of his new culture and Potiphar would be his model – his mentor. Potiphar was a man of class and prestige, a man of wealth who had the sort of skills and qualities that

would be required of a governor. Without knowing it, God had Joseph in school. Strangely enough, Potiphar was the teacher.

Genesis 39:6 is a rare verse of Scripture. It says in part: **“Now Joseph was well-built and handsome....”** How many of realize that being well-built and handsome can have it’s drawbacks? Nonetheless, it is a cross that some of us just have to carry. Right?

Now look with me at verses 7-9: **“and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’ But he refused. ‘With me in charge,’ he told her, ‘my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?’”**

Potiphar’s wife was more than likely an attractive fashionable woman. As an officer’s wife, she moved in circles that spoke of class and position. Joseph was a slave, remember? Such a come-on might well have been good for his ego. Nonetheless, Scripture points out **“But he refused.”**

- The *King James Version* says here, **“But he refused....”**
- The *New Century Version*, **“But Joseph refused....”**
- *God’s Word* translation, **“But Joseph refused....”**
- The *New Living Translation*, **“But Joseph refused....”**
- The *New American Standard Bible*, **“But he refused....”**

Do you get the message? Oh, speaking of *The Message*, that translation says, **“He wouldn’t do it....”**

No doubt Joseph was both flattered and tempted. Then too...

- Potiphar was not at home,
- No one else was around,
- She was attractive and available,
- He easily could have reasoned that since he was a slave, he was to submit to his master,
- Finally, he had much to gain and seemingly little to lose.

And yet Joseph refused.

**HE GAVE FOUR REASONS FOR HIS REFUSAL.** Let’s notice them:

**FIRST**, he refused, saying, **“My master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care.”** He valued Potiphar’s trust; he considered Potiphar’s feelings.

**SECONDLY**, he looked at his own position. **“No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you....”** Joseph had self-respect; honor. He was also a person of integrity.

**THIRD**, he respected marriage. **“You are his wife.”** This was hundreds of years before God said, **“You shall not commit adultery.”** Nonetheless, the man refused to violate another person’s marriage.

**FOURTH**, Joseph knew that if he did this thing, he would be sinning against God. **“How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”**

Listen to Psalm 51:4 from *The New Living Translation*. The passage details David’s repentance before God after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba: **“Against you (God), and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight.”**

As I have said before, sin is a clenched fist and it’s object is the fact of God.

Hear me, please. Ultimately it will be our love for God alone that will -- in the end -- keep us from

falling into sexual sin. If we do not have a love for God that is greater than the intensity of our temptation, we will give in. Joseph proved by his actions that he loved God.

Genesis 39:10 now adds: **“And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.”** Her seductions were relentless. She pursued him on a daily basis.

Psalm 149:4 notes that the Lord **“takes pleasure”** (**“delight”** – NIV) in His people. Can you imagine the delight that God must have felt with Joseph? The fellow didn’t just say “no” one time, he said “no” again and again, day after day.

Victor Hugo said, “Hell hath no fury like that of a woman scorned.” Perhaps it was none other than Potiphar’s wife that gave Hugo the inspiration for this thought.

Verses 11-12: **“One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’ But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.”** Finally she decided that since a subtle seduction was not proving effective, she would try overwhelming him with her demands! Joseph, however, pulled himself away from her arms and rushed out of the room and even out of the house.

Verses 13-18: **“When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. ‘Look,’ she said to them, ‘this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.’ She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: ‘That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.’”**

At that point, the passionate desire of Potiphar's wife suddenly turned into the rage of a woman scorned. Knowing that her desire for Joseph was not only to fulfilled, her only thought was to humiliate him as deeply as possible for his rejection of her.

- She wanted revenge.
- She wanted her pound of flesh!

Verse 19, **“When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, ‘This is how your slave treated me,’ he burned with anger.”** On hearing this story, Potiphar’s got mad.

Notice two things here. The Bible simply says that he **“burned with anger.”** The reader naturally assumes that his anger was directed at Joseph. We do not know that for sure though.

- He might have been angry with his wife. This might not have been the first time that she had used this change against some other man. He probably had a pretty good handle on his wife’s character.
- Then too, the Scripture notes that he got mad; it doesn’t say that the fellow got even. If Potiphar had really believed his wife, you can rest assured that Joseph would never have gotten off with just a prison sentence.

In the ruins of the hall of judgment of the palace at Khorsabad, Assyria, there is on the wall a representation of a naked man with limbs stretched out, and arms and ankles fastened to the floor or table, while a tall, bearded man is in the act of mercilessly beating him with a whip. The bearded man is supposed to be the captain of the guard, “the chief of the executioners” engaged at his horrid work. May I remind you, Potiphar was the chief executioner or captain of the guard here in our story.

I believe that Potiphar believed in the integrity of Joseph. I suspect that one look at his servant’s face

told Potiphar all that he needed to know, but to protect his own household, his dignity, his wife's reputation, and his marriage, Joseph (innocent Joseph) had to be punished.

AN IMPORTANT POINT BEGS TO BE MADE HERE: JOSEPH WAS NEVER CLEARED OF THE CHARGES MADE BY POTIPHAR'S WIFE. We never find an instance where or when someone declared him innocent. The state found him guilty of attempted rape. He went to prison. The main witness was the captain of the guard's wife – the alleged victim. It was her word – and the coat as evidence – that convicted him. In simple terms, it was her word against Joseph's words and, again remember, Joseph was nothing more than a slave. Who would believe him given the circumstances?

I will tell you who believed him -- God. That's who. God knew the truth. He always knows the truth. God dictated the whole story to Moses and Moses wrote it all down in the book of Genesis. If the prosecution would have, could have, called God to the witness stand, the Lord could have said with complete accuracy, "I was there. I saw it all unfold. I know do did what to whom. Joseph is innocent."

IMPORTANT POINT: God knows. If you have been falsely accused, God knows. If you were raped, violated, molested, hurt, lied about, lied to... God knows. When everyone else was saying Joseph was guilty as charged, God wrote down for the ages,

- JOSEPH RAN.
- JOSEPH REFUSED HER ADVANCES.
- JOSEPH DID NOTHING WRONG.
- JOSEPH WAS INNOCENT.

Let me say it one more time. God knows the truth!

Verse 20: **“Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.”**

A couple of important points need to be made here. While Potiphar didn't have Joseph killed, neither did he have him placed in a country club. While this was a place for political prisoners rather than the common criminal, it still was not a place you would want to go for a vacation. Conditions were not good.

Notice Psalm 105:17-19, **“and he sent a man before them-- Joseph, sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true.”** Other translations put this: **“The iron entered into his soul....”** In other words, the fetters pained both body and soul.

The hardships that he endured were compounded by the fact that the captain of the guard was non other than who? Potiphar. Then, too, does anyone here know where this prison was located? Listen to Genesis 40:3-4, **“and put them (I will get to the them in a few moments) in custody IN THE HOUSE of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph....”** Then verse 7 here adds: **“who were in custody with him IN HIS MASTER'S HOUSE....”** The Bible wants us to realize that Joseph's prison was somewhere in Potiphar's house! This was not at all unusual. In ancient times, the Captain of the Guard – the warden – usually housed the prison in his residence.

I have a picture of what is believed by some to have been the holding cell or prison where Jesus was kept between the various stages of His trial. The prison was in what we would call the basement of Caiaphas' house. Caiaphas was the high priest at the time of the Lord's crucifixion. Again, it likely that Joseph's prison was in or under Potiphar's house. Don't think of today's prisons, think of how they were a long long time ago.

Verses 21-23: **“But while Joseph was there in the prison, THE LORD WAS WITH HIM; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden**

**put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did."**

Does verse 23 sound familiar? Listen again to Genesis 39:4-5, "**Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph."**

Joseph continued to bear a good testimony for the Lord, and the Lord confirmed Joseph's testimony by clearly showing that He was with him.

Bill Gothard teaches that our dreams go through a three-stage process:

- The dream stage. The dream is born.
- The death of the dream. It seems as if there is no way that the dream is going to come to pass. The dream is dead.
- The resurrection stage. The dream is reborn by the help of Almighty God.

Joseph is in the second stage here in our story. He has been locked up for several years now. His father thinks that he is dead. His brothers hope that he is out of their hair for good. No one that would or should care even knows that he is alive. The question begs to be raised, what dream?

Oh, by the way, we never hear of Potiphar again after the story of Joseph. The only reason that he was in the Bible was due to his association with this special man of God. Our enemies may...

- Strip us of outward distinctions and ornaments; but wisdom and grace cannot be taken from us.
- They may separate us from friends, relatives, and country; but they cannot take from us the presence of the Lord.
- They may shut us from outward blessings, rob us of liberty, and confine us in dungeons; but they cannot shut us out from communion with God, from the throne of grace, or take from us the blessings of salvation.

The Apostle Paul was to later write, "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Romans 8:35, 38-39. Joseph was being kept in the love of God.

### **MOVE WITH ME NOW TO GENESIS 40 AS THE PLOT THICKENS.**

Genesis 40:1-4, "**Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time...."**

It was while Joseph was doing his time that he come upon two other prisoners: Pharaoh's chief baker and Pharaoh's chief cupbearer. The account of these two men and their relationship with Joseph is important. How do I know that? It is the only single event that the Bible alludes to during Joseph's stay in prison. The rest of the time that he served is more or less covered in silence. Why was this event recorded then? These two men eventually prove to be Joseph's link to Pharaoh and his eventual release.

**THE CUPBEARER** was the overseer of Pharaoh's vineyards and wine cellar. Also, he was responsible to see that all drinks served the king were both safe and of the best quality. He tasted everything before the king tasted it. If the drink had been poisoned, then the king could tell by watching his cupbearer die right there at the table.

**THE BAKER** was responsible for the food that Pharaoh ate.

I want to show you a couple of pictures. I think it will help you better understand the importance of the king's taster. As you can see, these are pictures of Viktor Yushchenko. This fellow has been in the news a great deal lately. He is the opposition leader who was running for president of the Ukraine. As you may know, the Ukrainians recently had their national election and this gentleman lost. Anyway, last September Yushchenko became ill and checked himself into a hospital. Let me pick up the account from a news clip on this matter from CNN NEWS:

But the illness, whatever it was, has dramatically changed his appearance since he first sought treatment at Vienna's private Rudolfinerhaus clinic on September 10. Known for his ruggedly handsome, almost movie star looks, Yushchenko's complexion is now pockmarked. His face is haggard, swollen and partially paralyzed. One eye often tears up.

By the time Yushchenko checked out of the clinic last month after returning for follow-up treatment, physicians said they could neither prove nor rule out that he had been poisoned.

The clinic director said doctors were unable to explain some of Yushchenko's symptoms, particularly his strong backaches.

Yushchenko's doctors in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, said they had determined that "chemicals not of a food origin" had triggered the illness.

Yustchenko may have needed a king's taster – someone like Pharaoh's cupbearer -- to taste his food first.

Again, the cupbearer and the baker were in prison with Joseph. No big deal. Right? Wrong. Many of the things that God allows in our lives seem so insignificant – even bothersome -- at first: A chance meeting with an old friend, having to wait on a train at a railroad crossing, missing a particular flight, a telephone call. These things may initially be resented as an intrusion; an imposition. Nothing at the moment would signal that God is in any way in the event or encounter.

- No lights flash,
- No bells ring,
- No voice booms forth from the heavens...

It is just a non-descript moment. But then as time unfolds, we come to see God's fingerprints all over the thing. He ordered it; orchestrated it for our good and for His glory.

If Joseph had kept a diary, he might well have penned as his entry for that day:

Dear Diary:

Just another day in jail. Nothing of consequence took place. Ten years, 5 months, 28 days and counting. Met two new prisoners: the former cupbearer and the baker for Pharaoh. The baker is a little flaky, other than that, he is an OK kind of guy.

I am beginning to wonder if I will ever get out of this awful place. Where is God in all of this?

Regardless of what Joseph might have thought, though, at the time, God was in the jail that day. The Lord had arranged that chance meeting with those two men. The path out of the dungeon was starting to unfold and now Joseph was now only a few semesters from graduating out of God's school of hard knocks into the very throne room of Egypt. The long and windy road was coming to an end. The dreams were about to be fulfilled.

By the way, the last passage I read used the phrase, "**Some time later....**" How long was Joseph in prison? Remember? Thirteen years.

Has your trial lasted 13 years? Does it seem to go on and on and on? Take heart. The end might well be just in sight. It was for Joseph.

## THE ROAD

### Part 3

I am preaching a series of messages on the life of the Old Testament Joseph.

Joseph's life reminds me of one of my all-time favorite illustrations. It comes from the book, *Come Before Winter* by Chuck Swindoll. The account is supposedly a true story about a construction worker who had a particularly bad day at work. This is his actual accident report form that he handed in. (The tale has been around for quite a while. Some of you may have heard it before. However, it is worth repeating.) He wrote:

When I got to the building I found that the hurricane had knocked off some bricks around the top. So I rigged up a beam with a pulley at the top of the building and hoisted up a couple barrels full of bricks. When I had fixed the damaged area, there were a lot of bricks left over. Then I went to the bottom and began releasing the line. Unfortunately, the barrel of bricks was much heavier than I was – and before I knew what was happening the barrel started coming down, jerking me up. I decided to hang on since I was too far off the ground by then to jump, and halfway up I met the barrel of bricks coming down fast. I received a hard blow on my shoulder. I then continued to the top, banging my head against the beam and getting my fingers pinched and jammed in the pulley. When the barrel hit the ground hard, it burst its bottom, allowing the bricks to spill out. I was now heavier than the barrel. So I started down again at high speed. Halfway down I met the barrel coming up fast and received severe injuries to my shins. When I hit the ground I landed on the pile of spilled bricks, getting several painful cuts and deep bruises. At this point I must have lost my presence of mind, because I let go of my grip on the line. The barrel came down fast – giving me another blow on my head and putting me in the hospital. I respectfully request sick leave.

That is what I call a bad day. Amen?

Now I want us to return to the other fellow that had a bad day, in fact, he had bad days in bunches -- Joseph. While in prison, Joseph came to know Pharaoh's cup-bearer and baker.

**ONE NIGHT THE CUP-BEARER AND THE BAKER EACH HAD A DREAM.** Their dreams troubled them. In those days; if anybody had a strange dream, he could make his way to the nearest dream interpreter. However, as you might imagine, there wasn't anybody who could interpret a dream in prison – or so they thought. Along came Joseph...

Genesis 40:9-13 (*New Living Translation*), **“The cup-bearer told his dream first. ‘In my dream,’ he said, ‘I saw a vine in front of me. It had three branches that began to bud and blossom, and soon there were clusters of ripe grapes. I was holding Pharaoh's wine cup in my hand, so I took the grapes and squeezed the juice into it. Then I placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.’ ‘I know what the dream means,’ Joseph said. ‘The three branches mean three days. Within three days Pharaoh will take you out of prison and return you to your position as his chief cup-bearer.’”** This is good news – great news! Three days, man, and you are **O U T** of here!

There are aspects to this dream that could not have been guessed, such as the three branches representing three days. Another way of looking at it, in three days all of the parties would know whether or not Joseph was right – or wrong.

I also want you to notice with me that while Joseph was able to foretell the cup-bearer's deliverance, he was unable to foretell his own deliverance. The Lord had given him the necessary revelation for the one but not the other.

Genesis 40:15, **“For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I**

**have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”** What is missing here? Names. Dates. Details.

I easily imagine Joseph saying something like this: “Hey, man, I have listened to you; now you set down and listen to me. I too have a story to tell. My brothers, in a fit of jealousy, sold me into slavery. They are the ones who got me into this mess. Even though I have done nothing wrong, I have been rotting in this stinking dungeon for 11 long years. Then too, look at my scars. I have suffered here. Oh, by the way, let me tell you a thing or two about Potiphar’s wife....”

Let’s not kid ourselves. Many people today would have listed names, brought in all of the details, and more. None of that is found here. He simply offered the fact that he was innocent of any wrong. He left the issue of vengeance to God.

1 Corinthians 13 declares that love keeps no record of wrongs suffered. Joseph seemingly chose to forget who had done what and when.

Doug Murren in *Achieving Your Dreams* writes, “It isn’t the dream that gets tested--it’s the dreamer.” Remember that, if you will.

Back now to verse 14, **“And please have some pity on me when you are back in his (Pharaoh’s) favor. Mention me to Pharaoh, and ask him to let me out of here.”**

- Maybe he thought that God had indeed forgotten him.
- Maybe he felt that matters had taken much too long to be resolved.
- Maybe he thought that God needed a little help. Who knows?

Nonetheless, Joe finally asked for some help. However, his request was not to do any good for quite some time.

When the baker saw that the interpretation for the cup-bearer’s dream was positive, he said to Joseph, **“I also had a dream....”** He then proceeded to tell Joseph about what he had dreamt. Without taking the time to read the dream, Joseph’s interpretation was, **“Within three days Pharaoh will cut off your head....”** Please notice, Joseph was just as faithful to deliver the bad news as he had been to deliver the good news.

Genesis 40:20-22 adds, **“Pharaoh’s birthday came three days later, and he gave a banquet for all his officials and household staff. He sent for his chief cup-bearer and chief baker, and they were brought to him from the prison. He then restored the chief cup-bearer to his former position, but he sentenced the chief baker to be impaled on a pole, just as Joseph had predicted.”**

Both dreams were fulfilled just as Joseph had said – within three days. Sadly though, the chapter ends with these words, **“Pharaoh’s cup-bearer, however, promptly forgot all about Joseph, never giving him another thought.”** This is the fourth dip in our chart. Joseph had now been forgotten!

If there ever was a biblical figure who knew the pain of other people’s forgetfulness, it was Joseph. When you’re back on top, **“remember me”, “have some pity on me”, “mention me to Pharaoh”,** please!!! Yet chapter 40 ends with: **“he forgot him.”**

Who knows why?

- Was the cup-bearer merely distracted?
- We do not know his age. Maybe he simply had a senior moment.
- Then, too, maybe he thought it beneath his dignity to mention that some grungy Hebrew con had predicted these turns of events?

- Or did he conclude that although Joseph had interpreted the dreams correctly, still it was none of Joseph's doing that got him released from jail. Therefore, why should he trouble Pharaoh was such trivial matters?

Whatever the reason, the cup-bearer rather quickly dispatched Joseph to a back closet of his memory. So Joseph waited expectantly, hopefully, for some time. How long? We don't know. Finally, though, the truth dawned on him. He had been forgotten. He had been wronged once again.

Some of you have perhaps seen the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* in which an innocent man, Andy Dufrawin, is sent to a state penitentiary for life on a charge of murder. At one point in the film a new prisoner arrives who, as it turns out, has the knowledge that could at long last set Andy free. But the prison's warden is an evil and corrupt man. He does not want Andy to be released. And so when Andy insists that the warden pursue this matter, he gets dispatched to solitary confinement for an entire month. Meanwhile, the warden arranges the death of the other prisoner who alone spelled Andy's hope. When in solitary Andy learns of the other fellow's death, the look of despair and dejection on his face is gripping.

- That sense of hopelessness is what I am beginning to discern in Joseph.
- Forgotten!
- Dismissed from one's memory.
- Yesterday's news.

Is anything worse than being forgotten by a friend in your hour of need?

How true to life this is; how much like our own experience! There are times and situations when we expect much of people, especially those who are close to us, or those whom we have helped. And yet, all too often, we find that our expectations are dashed and we end up disappointed or worse! We simply find ourselves left languishing, forgotten. For two more long years Joseph remained a prisoner.

Job in his time of trouble said, **"Though he slay me, I will trust him"** (Job 13:15). That is the secret of true greatness – knowing that however difficult our case may be, there is one who stands guard over us, and who has pledged himself to do us good. While the situation certainly looked bleak for our hero here, remember this, the story is not over till it's over.

J. Vernon McGee in his *Thru The Bible* commentary says this:

Joseph's one glimmer of light had been that the cup-bearer would remember him to Pharaoh. This seemed to be such a marvelous way of getting the ear of Pharaoh. But the cup-bearer is so elated with going back to his job and being in favor with Pharaoh again that he forgets all about poor Joseph. God wants to leave him there for a purpose. Suppose the cup-bearer had said to Pharaoh, "There is a prisoner down there who is innocent. He should not be there -- he has been falsely accused. And he interpreted my dream for me. I sure would appreciate it, Pharaoh, if you would let him out." Suppose Pharaoh had let him out, don't you see what would have happened? He would have been at home in the land of Canaan at the time that Pharaoh needed him.... God wants to keep him nearby, and prison is a convenient place to keep him -- there will be no difficulty in Pharaoh's finding him when he needs him.

#### **CHAPTER 41 BEGINS WITH THESE WORDS, "WHEN TWO FULL YEARS HAD PASSED, PHARAOH HAD A DREAM...."**

Two years don't tell the whole story. The brother had been in the slammer for a total of thirteen years. Thirteen LONG years. Thirteen years for a crime which he had not committed. Thirteen years plus interest – the time which he had served as Potiphar's slave.

Someone wisely noted, "All men God uses greatly, He first prepares greatly."

Not all trials and tests are equal. This one was a biggie:

- Being tossed into a pit and left to die – by one’s own brothers,
- Being sold into slavery,
- Being falsely accused and then sentenced to years in prison,
- Being forgotten by a friend whom he had helped....

Where was God in all of this? Genesis 39 tells us in four different verses that **“the Lord was with Joseph.”** God was there throughout the whole ordeal. Now, He is just about to reveal Himself.

Again, the king had a dream. As a result, the cup-bearer, at long last, remembers Joseph before Pharaoh. The king needed someone who could and would interpret the dream for him. The cup-bearer told him that Joseph was his man. He was right and almost as quickly as Joseph had gotten thrown into prison by Potiphar, he is taken out of the dungeon and elevated to the second-highest position of power in all of Egypt:

- Governor,
- Vice-Pharaoh,
- The chief of staff...

Whatever you want to call him, he was nonetheless a very big wheel.

### **ONE OF THE MANY THINGS THAT I LOVE ABOUT HIS STORY IS THE FACT THAT JOSEPH WAS ULTIMATELY VINDICATED.**

The word “vindication” means: “to be proven right when one has been right all along.” Vindication means that one’s name has been cleared and that the accusations made against him or her have been proven to be false.

Genesis 41 carries the beautiful account of Joseph’s vindication. He was vindicated in three ways:

#### 1. FIRST, JOSEPH’S SPIRITUALLY WAS AFFIRMED.

Listen to Genesis 41:38 (*New Living Translation*), **“Pharaoh said, ‘Who could do it better than Joseph? For he is a man who is obviously filled with the Spirit of God.’”** It is really something when the king himself has to acknowledge that you are a godly person. That happened here.

#### 2. SECOND, JOSEPH EXPERIENCED A MORAL VINDICATION.

Joseph’s character was affirmed in a moment. Genesis 41:39 (*The Amplified Bible*) states, **“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, For as much as your God has shown you all this, there is nobody as intelligent and discreet and understanding and wise as you are.”** *he American Standard Version* likewise uses the word “discreet”. Potiphar’s wife accused Joseph of, to put it mildly, an indiscretion. I think it is precious that the most powerful man on earth at the time comes along and says, **“There’s none as discreet as you.”** What more needed to be said?

#### 3. THIRD, IT WAS AN INTELLECTUAL VINDICATION.

His wisdom was affirmed. Again, Pharaoh said, **“you are the wisest man in the land!”**

I don’t want you to think, though, that the only one who vindicated Joseph was the king. To be sure, Pharaoh’s servants vindicated him as did the rest of the people of Egypt. Wherever Joseph went in the country, servants ran before him crying: “Bow the knee!” “Bow the knee!” And, do you know what? Everyone bent the knee including -- Potiphar and his lovely little wife.

I want you to think with me here. Was were the worst high-profile crimes of the Twentieth Century – pre 911? Give up? According to a Zogpy Poll:

- 36% pointed to the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963,
- 24% named the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, and

- 11% cited the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968
- Interestingly enough, the next one on the list, with ten percent of those polled, was the O. J. Simpson case.

Do you realize that OJ was arrested ten years ago last June? It has really been that long. How many of you remember what you were doing and where we were when the verdict was announced?

The 133 days of televised courtroom testimony turned countless television viewers into Simpson trial junkies. When Boris Yeltsin (then President of Russia) stepped off his plane to meet President Clinton, the first question he asked was, "Do you think O. J. did it?" As you may recall, the verdict was rendered on October 3, 1995. As Judge Ito's clerk read "Not Guilty," 91% of all persons viewing television were glued to the unfolding scene in the Los Angeles courtroom.

Please notice, 56% of the people back then disagreed with the verdict. In other words, a majority of Americans thought that Simpson got away with murder. A CNN/Gallup poll taken last summer indicates that now 78% of us believe the charges against him were true. We will never know.

Christopher Darden, a member of the prosecution team that tried the ex-football star wrote a book on the trial. The book, *In Contempt*, became a best seller. On the back cover Darden wrote these words:

"I never got a chance, of course, to cross-examine him. And I didn't want to anymore. I just wanted to talk to him, to make sure he knew that he hadn't fooled all of us and that his "Dream Team" hadn't fooled most Americans.

I wanted to tell him that there was another court that would hear his case one day, with a judge who would separately try racist cops and murderers. A court where everyone will have to account for his actions alone. A court where the only witnesses will be the eyewitnesses, Ronald Goldman and Nicole Brown."

Mr. Simpson is yet today a wealthy man; a free man. How much of that money do you think he would be willing to part with if only his name could be cleared? If only he could go back on television? If only he could be vindicated? Vindication is such a sweet word.

**LAST WEEK I NOTED THAT BILL GOTHARD** teaches that our dreams go through a three-stage process:

- The dream stage. The dream is born.
- The death of the dream. It seems as if there is no way that the dream is going to come to pass. The dream is dead.
- The resurrection stage. The dream is reborn by the help of Almighty God.

Last week, Joseph was in the second stage – the death of a dream stage. Now we see him moving on to the resurrection stage.

Noni Tari is quoted in *Dare to Dream* by Florence Littauer "God never simply buries our dead and broken dreams because He'd be burying our hearts along with our dreams. Instead, He creatively turns our failures into fertilizer for an even more wonderful dream, a dream with even more potential to become fruition." Joseph did not have a clue as to what was in store for him. We are about to see that the actual fulfillment of his dream was much greater than the dream itself.

Next, Pharaoh said to Joseph, **“I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, ‘Make way!’ Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift a hand or foot in all Egypt.’”** (Genesis 41:41-44)

The next act was to change Joseph's name to Zaphnath-paaneah, which means among other things,

"abundance of life." Next, Joe married a girl from a powerful Egyptian family. Pretty impressive, wouldn't you say?

Genesis 41:53-56 now states, **"The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph and do what he tells you.' When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt."**

The famines in the Bible were particularly difficult. Listen to these verses of Scripture: 2 Kings 6:25 (*New Century Version*), **"There was a time of terrible hunger in Samaria. It was so bad that a donkey's head was sold for about two pounds of silver. Half of a pint of dove's dung sold for about two ounces of silver."** Verses 28-29 then shows how the people resorted to cannibalism: **"Then the king said to her, 'What is your trouble?' She answered, 'This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so we can eat him today. Then we will eat my son tomorrow.' So we boiled my son and ate him. Then the next day I said to her, 'Give up your son so we can eat him.' But she had hidden him.'"**

Given time, the famine in Egypt extended all of the way to Canaan and other neighboring countries.

#### **WHERE WAS ALL OF THIS LEADING? LET'S SEE.**

The famine hit Joseph's family back home especially hard.

Listen to Genesis 42:1, **"When Jacob (Joseph's father) heard that there was grain available in Egypt, he said to his sons, 'Why are you standing around looking at one another?'"** Where is Jacob and Joseph's brothers? The land of Canaan. Where is Joseph? Egypt.

Verse 6, **"Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground."** They bowed! The dream had been fulfilled. The revealed will of God of years earlier had now become the realized will of God.

#### **I WANT US TO NOW NOTICE GOD'S PLAN IN ALL OF THIS**

His being sold, his wrongful imprisonment, his final position of power, all were a part of God's plan to preserve His people. The Lord had promised the land and the people to Abraham. Now the Lord was watching over His Word – His promise. In preserving Israel during this famine, He was preserving His covenant with Abraham. He was also showing all generations His faithfulness and His attention to His Word.

Next, please notice Matthew 1:2 with me: **"Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers...."** Then "fast forward" forty-two generations to verse 16: **"...and Jacob the father of Joseph, (different Joseph) the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."** Without Joseph's dream, starvation would have prevented salvation! The ancestors of Christ – Jacob and his sons -- might well have perished in that awful famine and you and I would not be celebrating Christmas this month.

Perhaps the greatest single verse in the entire story is found in Genesis 50:20. Joseph says to his brothers, **"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."** The verse goes on to say, (*New Living Translation*), **"He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people."**

Joseph now recognized the hidden hand of God in all that had happened. "So," he tells the brothers, "don't be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, it was all God's plan."

Romans 8:28 confirms, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

**SO, WHERE ARE YOU IN YOUR DREAM?**

Are you in the pit? In Potiphar's house? In prison? Or have you arrived at the palace? Regardless of where you find yourself, hold fast to your dream.

Then too, trust in God's guidance even when things seem blackest. The story of Joseph shows that that our greatest days: your days of victory, your days of vindication, your days of blessing and abundance, might be just ahead. Believe it.