

CAPITOL STUDIES

MARCH 1, 2023 • WEEK 8



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

Contents

A God-Pressured Conscience	2
A God-Bothered Conscience	3
A God-Broken Conscience	4
Conclusion	5
About Capitol Studies	7



Verse of the Week

Genesis 42:6

Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

When Your Conscience Says “Ow!”



WHAT AN IMMENSE POSITION OF PRIVILEGE Pharaoh delegates to Joseph!—to feed all of the people of the kingdom (Gen. 41:40, lit. “all my people shall be fed by your orders”). But what a precarious responsibility! Exalted in a moment from the dungeon to a throne, Joseph likely realizes from his experience with the butler and baker that Pharaoh Sesostri II could exalt or debase a person on a moment’s notice. However pressure-filled these years proved to be, Joseph testifies that they were the beginning of years of fruitfulness.

Gen. 41:37-57 details for us some of Joseph’s role as the vizier (chief advisor or prime minister) of the land of Egypt. Pharaoh (Sesostri II) heeds Joseph’s advice, and Joseph receives full authority to implement the very plan that he has recommended: the need for a discreet administrator (41:33), the need for regional overseers (41:34), the need for a 20% levy for seven years (41:34), and the need to designate storage cities (41:35-36).

We are also given a brief glimpse of Joseph’s home life in Gen. 41:50-52. He is married to Asenath and graciously rewarded by God with two sons. In the naming of his sons, Joseph provides us with an inspired outline of his life: Manasseh (“forgetting”) and Ephraim (“fruitful”).

Pastor Arin Hess, *Chaplain, Capitol Studies*



INTRODUCTION

For Joseph to be able to say that he has forgotten the early years of affliction is remarkable. Somehow God has allowed those memories to remain with him in a helpful way—his memories of those years are colored by the eternal purposes of God rather than the sorrows and trials with which they were filled. Joseph’s life teaches us that God often uses affliction to produce fruitfulness.

Though it is evident that God is blessing Joseph for his obedience, God has a larger picture in view. God is using Joseph as His instrument to prepare Egypt to receive the nation of Israel. God will manipulate the weather in central Africa so that it affects the Nile River that flows into Egypt. He will send a famine that affects all the nations of that region (Gen. 41:53-57). And God does all of this so that He can move His people to the place of His appointment for their physical and spiritual preservation. God has been working to prepare Joseph and Egypt for this move. Now God must bring Joseph’s brothers to a place where they will submit to His choice of Joseph as their leader.

I. GOD USES PRESSURE TO AROUSE A CONSCIENCE

Genesis 42:1-5

Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, “Why are you staring at one another?” ²He said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die.” ³Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, “I am afraid that harm may befall him.” ⁵So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.¹

A. Forced Deprivation: Famine

God shows His goodness to the brothers *not* by what He gives them but by that of which He deprives them. He reduces their economic condition to match the impoverished state of their souls. For 22 years these brothers have tried to silence their nagging consciences. But when God applies the pressure of famine, coupled with the word “Egypt,” the sleeping giants stir. Time does not erase a guilty conscience.

Genesis 42:6-20

Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. ⁷When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, “Where have you come from?” And they said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.” ⁸But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. ⁹Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, “You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land.” ¹⁰Then they said to him, “No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹We are



all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies.”¹² Yet he said to them, “No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!”¹³ But they said, “Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive.”¹⁴ Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you, you are spies;¹⁵ by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.”¹⁷ So he put them all together in prison for three days.¹⁸ Now Joseph said to them on the third day, “Do this and live, for I fear God:¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households,²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die.” And they did so.

B. Forced Submission: The Egyptian Vizier

The scene in which the paths of Joseph and his brothers cross is probably one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture. Joseph, obviously aware of the geographical extent of the famine, may have been watching for his brothers. *When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them.* Joseph is face to face with his persecutors for the first time in 22 years! He must be trembling at the very realization that God is fulfilling the first of his dreams as his brothers “bow down.” How he manages to mask his emotions and totally disguise himself is a wonder. The brothers are face to face with their sin yet do **not** realize it. God brings them to Joseph, and God uses him as a tool to arouse his brothers’ consciences.

II. GOD USES MEMORIES TO BOTHER A CONSCIENCE

Genesis 42:21-24

Then they said to one another, “Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.”²² Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood.”²³ They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them.²⁴ He turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

While Joseph ponders what he should do, the brothers are pondering what they have done. Joseph likely is not being vengeful here, though initially it might appear to be so. Joseph’s response to his brothers (42:24) indicates where his heart is. Joseph is not recorded to have wept at any time until now. Before the story is over, he will weep eight more times. It seems evident that Joseph is subjecting his emotions to what he considers a more important task.

“If Joseph had been a weaker man, he would have revealed his identity. But Joseph’s conscience was as sound as his heart was tender....





Forgiveness was not his only duty to his brothers. He had to test the reality of their repentance.... Providence was making him their judge, ...and he loved them with that exacting love which has often been an erring brother's salvation. He would rejoice to see them reconciled to himself, but still more to see them reconciled to God."²

Genesis 42:25-28

Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And thus it was done for them. ²⁶So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there. ²⁷As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸Then he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack." And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

Joseph's brothers don't deserve any kindness, but Joseph secretly puts each one's money back in his sack and gives extra provisions for the return journey (42:25). The brothers panic because they are sure they will be accused of stealing money when they return. "In the same chapter in which we read of Joseph's fear of God, we read also of his brothers' fear [v.28, 35].... Joseph's fear of the LORD, the holy reverence, which is the beginning of wisdom, is a noble, beautiful, honorable sentiment, issuing in a good conscience and a tranquil mind. His brothers' fear of God is an anxious, restless, troubled feeling, issuing in the pain of remorse and the dread of punishment. Their trials turn their eyes into their very souls. Memory does its stern work in them."³ Joseph's actions toward his brothers parallel how God brings us to repentance.

People who have not yet come to repentance before God do not understand grace. They fear God's judgment for the things they know they've done but have not confessed. Knowing they deserve judgment, they have trouble accepting God's undeserved favor.

God uses grace to temper the whole process. Romans 2:4 says that the kindness of God leads us to repentance. Through Joseph's kindness, for the first time in their lives, these crusty, worldly brothers see the hand of God. But note that their first response to this act of grace is not joy but fear. Verse 28 says that "their hearts sank" and they trembled with terror. How true are John Newton's words in his song "Amazing Grace": "'Twas grace that caused my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved." The brothers have yet to understand and accept grace.

III. GOD USES FEAR TO BREAK A CONSCIENCE

Genesis 42:29-38

When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, ³⁰"The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us, and took us for spies of the country. ³¹But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies. ³²We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no longer alive, and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.' ³³The man, the lord of



the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me and take grain for the famine of your households, and go. ³⁴But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'" ³⁵Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. ³⁶Their father Jacob said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me." ³⁷Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you." ³⁸But Jacob said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow."

When the brothers return home, they provide Jacob with a full report of the events of their journey. They speak again of being "honest" men. This is far from the truth and reveals that they still need to be broken in repentance. Jacob's distrust in his sons is fully aroused. He again states his suspicions about their involvement in Joseph's apparent demise and accuses them of having been the source of his bereavement. Jacob is distraught and interprets all these events as being "against" him, failing to take God into account. Reuben, on the other hand, makes a rash attempt to compensate for his sin himself.

CONCLUSION

"Why was Joseph so hard on his brothers? And why did he wait so long to reveal himself to them? Because he wanted to be sure they had repented of their sins. To excuse people who are not sincerely repentant is to make them a worse sinner."⁴ God's objective in His work with the brothers is to bring them to the place of repentance and submission to His will. God can work His will despite the brothers, but God desires to bring them to the place where they willingly cooperate with His plan.

This is often the way with us. We acknowledge God's omnipotent ability to accomplish His will. Yet are we able to rejoice in what God has been doing? Is there in our hearts a humble submission to the work of the Lord whether the work is in our own lives or in the life of another? When we have resisted the work of God, God needs to bring us to the place of honest confession before we can enjoy and appreciate the work that God is trying to do. God employs a variety of measures to arouse our consciences to our failures and sins. As we have examined this chapter, has the Lord aroused your conscience in a specific area of resistance to Him?

Pastor Arin Hess



Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren,
whatever is **true**,
whatever is **honorable**,
whatever is **right**,
whatever is **pure**,
whatever is **lovely**,
whatever is of
good repute,
if there is any
excellence
and if anything is
worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.

Questions to Consider:

- How can a Christian develop and maintain a good conscience? Can one's conscience be too sensitive?
- If we have confessed our sin but still have a troubled conscience, does it mean that Satan is accusing us, or could there be a need for deeper repentance?
- Can repentance without any feeling of remorse be genuine?

FOOTNOTES

1. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.

2. James Strahan, *Hebrew Ideals in Genesis*, Kregel, 1915, p. 309.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

4. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, Victor Books, 1993, pp. 42-44.

Some of this material was gathered by Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina; it is used with permission.

Some of this material is adapted from Pastor Steven Cole's work found at <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-69-coping-success-genesis-411-57>.



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