

CAPITOL STUDIES

APRIL 19, 2023 • WEEK 15



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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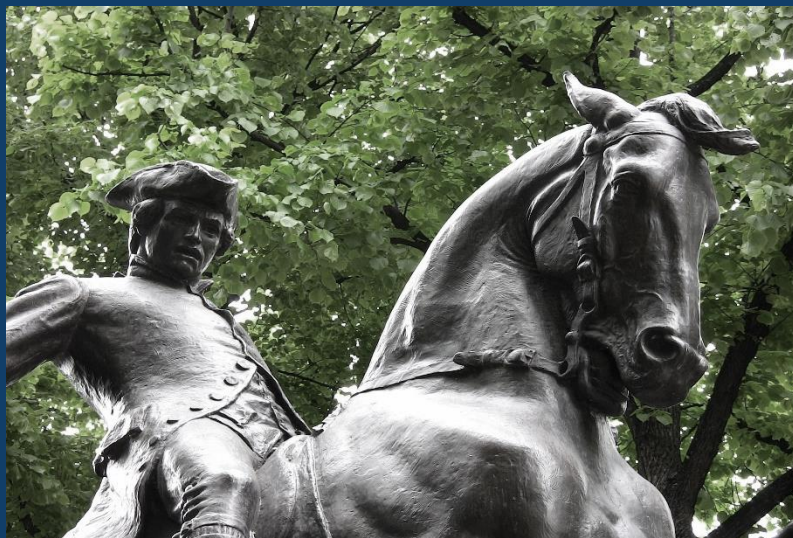


Verse of the Week

Genesis 46:3

He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there."

Can I Know God's Will for My Life?



HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW made famous the phrase, "One if by land, and two, if by sea," in his poem, "Paul Revere's Ride." The phrase refers to the signals agreed upon by Paul Revere, John Hancock, and Samuel Adams. If the British began advancing toward Concord by land, one lantern would be lit in the tower of the Old North Church of Boston. If the British were advancing by the shorter water route, two lanterns would be lit. The signal would alert the minutemen as to where to prepare for attack. When two lighted lanterns shone from the tower, Revere, along with four others, rode to spread the alert. The message was clear, "The British were coming by water."

At times we have all wanted a clear signal as to what to do. We wish that God would drop a little note down from Heaven with His plan written on it. Even something like the lanterns would be nice: one for yes, two for no. But God, knowing our need to draw near to Him, does not do that. Instead, He asks us to seek Him with our whole hearts. "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Knowing the will of God is always connected with knowing God.

Arin Hess

Pastor Arin Hess, *Chaplain, Capitol Studies*



INTRODUCTION

In Genesis 46:1-30, Jacob moves his whole extended family down to Egypt. It was not an easy thing for a 130-year-old man to do! There was a famine in Canaan, and his son Joseph had promised them the best of Egypt. Jacob desperately wanted to see Joseph, whom he had thought dead for 22 years. But Jacob knew that his grandfather, Abraham, had gotten into trouble in Egypt (Gen. 12:19-20). God had forbidden his father, Isaac, to go there during another famine (Gen. 26:2). Jacob knew that God's promise involved Canaan, not Egypt, so he stopped in Beersheba to seek the Lord and did not move on to Egypt until the Lord gave him a green light. **What do you do when making a big decision?**

I. YIELD YOUR OWN DESIRES AND SUBMIT WHOLLY TO GOD

Genesis 46:1

So Israel [Jacob] set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.¹

When Jacob finally believed his sons' report that Joseph was alive and ruler of all Egypt, going to see Joseph became the consuming passion of his remaining life. Joseph had invited Jacob and the whole family to move to Egypt, where he would provide for them through the famine. So Jacob had his sons load the wagons and the whole extended family set off for Egypt.

The first night they arrived at Beersheba, at the southern end of Canaan. Beersheba stirred up many memories for Jacob. More than 40 years before Jacob's birth, his grandfather Abraham had planted a tamarisk tree here and called on the name of the Lord (Gen. 21:31-33). It was at Beersheba that Jacob's father, Isaac, had seen the Lord. This was where God had reconfirmed His promises to bless Isaac and multiply his descendants (Gen. 26:23-25). Here Isaac had built an altar and dug a well. Shortly thereafter, Jacob tricked his father by stealing the blessing from his brother Esau. Jacob then fled north to escape from Beersheba and his brother's anger (Gen. 27:30-28:10).

As the old man sat under his grandfather's tamarisk tree and drank water from his father's well, Jacob undoubtedly reminisced about these things and grew a bit uneasy about his move to Egypt. What kind of effect would Egypt have on his family, who had been so easily lured by the evil ways of Canaan? Was Jacob making a fatal mistake to take his family there? He desperately wanted to see his beloved Joseph, but in light of God's past dealings with him, his father, and his grandfather, he needed to know if God really wanted him to make this move.

So, Jacob did a great thing: he stopped in Beersheba "and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac" (Gen. 46:1). He put a brake on his emotions, which were moving him toward Joseph, and submitted with sacrifice to the Lord. **It's important to understand that we can never know the will of God unless we yield ourselves totally to Him, putting our desires under His.**



Romans 12:1-2

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

George Müller warned against rushing forward in self-will, thinking that you're following God's will: "Seek to have no will of your own... so that you can honestly say you are willing to do the will of God."²

What Jacob did here was not easy because his emotions were running so high over the prospect of being with Joseph. What if, when Jacob sought the Lord, He said, "Don't go"? That was a risk, wasn't it? But Jacob realized that if God wasn't in it, he wouldn't be happy in going, even if it meant not seeing Joseph. It's easy to get excited about a change. Maybe life has been a bit boring. Maybe you're tired of your problems and you're ready to trade them in for a new situation. Maybe a move means more money, a greater challenge at work, a bigger home, a more desirable place to live. But if God isn't in it, don't do it! Put the brakes on your excitement long enough to yield yourself fully to Him, then...

II. COME TO GOD AND SEEK HIS WILL ABOVE ALL ELSE

Genesis 46:2-4

God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." ³He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. ⁴I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes."

Jacob came to God, and God was waiting for him. Jacob sincerely sought God's will; he was afraid to do anything else.

III. LISTEN TO GOD AND CLAIM HIS PROMISES

Jacob listened to God's words and rested in them. God spoke to Jacob, calmed his fears, and reconfirmed His promises to him. Jacob was able to go on to Egypt, sure that God was with him in this big decision. Such comforting assurance from God! Sometimes we are afraid to make a big decision like Jacob was. Thoughts go something like this: What if I make the wrong decision? How can I know for sure that this is right? What if I regret it? What we need, above all else, is to be sensitive to and to hear from the living God. "Hearing from God" does not mean an audible voice. God does that so rarely that you should not expect it. You should also be cautious about subjective impressions, signs, and dreams. It's easy to put in your own interpretation if you greatly desire something. Sometimes a time away in prayer and fasting may help clarify things. Scripture records many instances of great men of God fasting and praying (Daniel 9:3, Nehemiah 1:4).





IV. SEEK TO KNOW NOT ONLY GOD'S WILL BUT GOD HIMSELF

Jacob knew God. Knowing the will of God is always connected with knowing God. The closer I walk to God, the more I will know His thoughts, and the easier it will be to discern His will. Jacob knew God's character. He had walked with God. He had wrestled with God. He had seen God's blessing. He knew what God had done in the past. He had seen God work for himself personally but had also seen Him work on behalf of his father and grandfather. Because Jacob knew God, he knew he could depend on Him to lead him and his family.

If you have surrendered your will to the Lord and are striving to walk closely with Him, if you have prayerfully sought wisdom from His Word and are claiming His promises, if you are seeking God with all your heart and depending on Him to answer, the Holy Spirit will often give you a strong inner sense of whether something is from God or not.

V. REMEMBER THAT OTHERS WILL BE AFFECTED BY YOUR DECISIONS

A. The Family in Your Home

Genesis 46:5-7, 28-30

Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob and their little ones and their wives in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶They took their livestock and their property, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him: ⁷his sons and his grandsons with him, his daughters and his granddaughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt... ²⁸Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out the way before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. ²⁹Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time.

³⁰Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive."

After God's confirmation of Jacob's plan to move to Egypt, Jacob did not hesitate. His entire family accompanied him on the trip. As we see in the reunion of Joseph and Jacob, real joy in life comes through relationships, not through where you live or what you own. The old father and his son whom he thought dead, who hadn't seen each other for 22 years, fell on each other's neck and wept for a long time. Jacob says, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive." He meant, "In seeing you, I have experienced everything I want in life."

If God has called me to have a family, then He wants my family life to be a priority. God has given us the family as the primary place to nurture relationships. You can climb to the top of your career, even a "Christian



career,” and have all the perks that go along with success, but if you neglect your family to get there, you’ll come up empty. Your decisions will not just affect you; your family will also be affected. Before you make a move, a job change, or any other major decision, ask yourself, “How will this affect my family relationships?” Will it give me more time to be with them, to teach them the Lord’s ways, to model before them what it means to walk with God? Will it give us as a family a better platform to serve the Lord together? Or will it simply satisfy my desires at the expense of my family?

B. The Family of God

Genesis 46:8, 26-27

Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt: Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn...²⁶All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt, his direct descendants, not including the wives of Jacob’s sons, were sixty-six persons in all,²⁷ and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy.

Verses 8 through 25 comprise a long list of names of people we know little about. These names meant something to Moses’ readers because this was family. Their identity was tied to being of part of a certain family, of a certain tribe, of the nation descended from Israel. They saw themselves as a distinct people, set apart unto God. As Christians, our identity is in Jesus. Together we are set apart to God also. But in America, we have made Christianity so personal that we have lost the sense of belonging to God’s Church as God’s covenant people, His extended family, just as Israel was His people. This lack of belonging makes us vulnerable to the enemy. God makes it clear that we need community. We need each other.

C. The Family of Mankind

God’s will from the beginning of time was that all nations would be blessed through the seed of Abraham. Abraham’s great-grandson was Jacob’s son Judah. It is through the family line (seed) of Judah that Jesus was born. Through Jesus Christ, God provided a way for each person born on this earth to be rescued from the punishment of his or her sin. It is through Jesus that all nations may be blessed. He died, taking our sin on Himself. He rose again and offers us His righteousness so that we may enter Heaven. Without the righteousness of Jesus (the seed of Abraham), no one can enter Heaven. It is God’s will for His children to devote their lives to sharing His plan of salvation with those around them. “The Lord is... patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

CONCLUSION

The outworking of God’s plan is certain, even though from our perspective it takes a long time. Our lives are too short for us to see the whole picture. We just need to complete our part of the “puzzle.”



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.

God will put all the parts together in His wonderful way. “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:5). Which people does God want you to reach? Who is there in your sphere of influence who needs to know of God’s saving grace?



Pastor Arin Hess

Questions to Consider:

- What does Matthew 6:33 mean? “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”
- When we’re seeking God’s will, how can we know whether an inner sense of peace is from Him or not?
- What would be the implications if every Christian focused on fulfilling the Great Commission: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15)?
- Do you agree that fathers should be a major part of their kids’ lives? Should a man change his job if it hinders him from doing this?

FOOTNOTES

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

2. Arthur T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol: His Life of Prayer and Faith*, Revell, 1899, p. 450.

Some of this material came from the work of Pastor Steven J. Cole, which can be found at <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-77>.



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