

## JOSEPH'S JOURNEY WITH GOD

Do you often find yourself confused with how life turns out? As believers, we know God orders our ways (**Ps. 37:23** The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD), but do you sometimes wonder why He allows what He allows and does what He does and how He does it? ... As Paul wrote, who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? (**Rom. 11:34**).

At various times throughout the Bible God's servants struggled to understand what He was doing and why. ... To take a few examples ... *Abraham* tried to persuade God to turn His wrath away from Sodom and Gomorrah, where Lot and his family lived, arguing that if fifty righteous persons could be found the cities should be saved. When fifty could not be found, he appealed on the basis of forty-five and forty, but they could not be found either, or thirty or twenty or even ten (**Gen. 18:20-33**).

Perhaps no Bible character suffered more than *Job* who was stripped of his wealth, his family, and his reputation. Even though he *loved* God, when his circumstances plummeted to an extremely low ebb, he *wept*, **Job 23:2** Even today is my complaint bitter ... <sup>3</sup> Oh that I knew where I might find him [*God!* that I might come even to his seat! ... <sup>8</sup> Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive [*find*] him: <sup>9</sup> On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself ... that I cannot see him.

And *David*, described as a man after God's own heart (**I Sam. 13:14**), yet, when he was hiding from King Saul in the cave, he lamented, **Ps. 142:1** I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. <sup>2</sup> I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble. <sup>3</sup> When my spirit was overwhelmed within me ... <sup>4</sup> ... refuge failed me.

And also, *Moses* cried, **Ex. 32:11** LORD, why doth thy wrath [*laph, the nose or nostril, rapid breathing in passion, fuming*] wax hot [*burning, blazing*] against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with *great* power, and with a *mighty* hand? <sup>12</sup> ... Turn [*back*] from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. ... Lord, do not forget Your promises to us!

What a difficult world we live in! ... That is how it has always been. After *Paul* had been dragged outside the city of Lystra, and stoned, and left for dead ... when he had been restored, he went back into Lystra **Acts 14:22** exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that *we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*.

... It's how Jesus also said, **Jn. 16:33** In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. ... Generally, in the West, our trials and tribulations have little to do with suffering for our faith, but have more to do with the familiar testing such as is common to man (**I Cor. 10:13**). And even in these we have the promise of God's Word, God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. ... We are upheld with the unshakeable assurance, **II Tim. 2:19** the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.

God's purpose for all His creation is that we would enjoy His glory, as presently when we are surrounded by sin and its consequences. Our confidence is embedded in the knowledge that even where sin abound[s], grace [does] much more abound (**Rom. 5:20**). ... That is the principle upon which our faith rests. ... Neither Satan, nor his hosts, nor those under his authority can breach the will and plan of Almighty God, **Prov. 19:21** There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand. ... **Ps. 33:10** The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought ... **11** The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever. ... God works through sin and despite sin to achieve *all* His purposes, *all* to His glory.

By the time his brothers came to Egypt for food, Joseph had risen to become the second most powerful man in the kingdom. When he made himself known to his brethren, they were petrified for they feared he would exact revenge for having mercilessly sold him into slavery, all those years before. Yet, Joseph saw 'the bigger picture' from God's perspective, **Gen. 50:20** But as for you [*this brethren*], ye thought [*Ichashab*, '*meant*'] evil against me; but God meant [*Ichashab*] it [*your evil, your sin*] unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. ... God can use the bad circumstances to bring to us the good.

In the earlier times, prior to the famine in the land of Canaan, there was strife among Jacob's sons for they could not 'stand' young Joseph! Their hatred of him was because he was his father's favourite, and it intensified when his dreams predicted his brothers would one day bow before him (**Gen. 37:4-8**).

And yet the sequence of events by which God would save this family and their future generations was set in motion through a web of sins. ... The sins of Joseph's brothers contributed to how God would come to respond to their need. They took their opportunity against their brother when their father Jacob sent Joseph to find them. When they saw him coming, **Gen. 37:19** they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. <sup>20</sup> Come now therefore, and let us *slay* him, and *cast* [*'dump*] him into *some* pit [*any hole we find!*], and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. However, while Joseph was lying in

the pit ‘it so happened’ a caravan of Midianites was travelling towards Egypt, and in the will of the Lord, the conniving brothers sold him to them (v. 25-28).

To cover their crime, the brothers concocted a lie to deceive their aging father. They <sup>Gen. 37:31</sup> killed a kid of the goats, and dipped [*immersed*] the coat in the blood; <sup>32</sup> And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. <sup>33</sup> And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. Jacob was understandably heartbroken (v.34, 35)! Meanwhile, <sup>36</sup> the Midianites sold [*Joseph*] into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard. ... Yet, in the will of God, the sins of the brothers unknowingly had set in motion the sequence of events which would lead to deliverance from the famine.

Joseph was only seventeen years old when his brothers sold him (37:2), and during the next thirteen years his life descended from one ‘pit’ into another. From the pit in the desert, to becoming a slave in Egypt (Gen. 37:36), and then a prisoner (39:20). However, his days in prison ended when he turned thirty after he interpreted Pharaoh’s dream concerning the impending famine. He was subsequently elevated over all the land of Egypt (41:41) and was given responsibility for ingathering enough food during the seven prosperous years so it would last during the approaching seven years of famine.

After the ‘seven years of plenty’ the famine began, and two years into the famine his brothers journeyed from Hebron in Canaan to Egypt asking for help. ... They had not seen Joseph since he was seventeen, and they were not expecting to see him ever again. ... It is now twenty-two years later ... and they do not recognise the thirty-nine-year-old ‘Egyptian official’ in front of them. ... It would never have crossed their minds this was Joseph! When he *did* reveal his identity, <sup>45:3</sup> ... his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled [*trembling!*] at his presence. ... They were petrified as to what he could do to them!

Joseph’s emotions were also in a turmoil for even though they did not know who he was, he recognised who they were ... and when it all came out, his first question was “what about my dad?”, doth my father yet live? ... Twenty-two years away from home and he was as much a Hebrew as ever! ... And despite the many idols in Egypt, he still loved and worshiped Jehovah, the God of his father Jacob, and his grandfather Isaac, and his great-grandfather Abraham.

Even though he had been so long away from home, because of his upbringing, he interpreted everything within the understanding God was in control of all his circumstances, ... from when he was cast into the pit, sold to the Midianites, into

Potiphar's household, the lies of Potiphar's wife, his prison sentence for a crime he did not commit ... Yet, without even a hint of malice, he told his frightened brethren, *Gen. 45:5* be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: *for God did send me before you to preserve life.* <sup>6</sup> For these two years hath the famine been in the land; and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup> And *God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth,* and to save your lives by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup> *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.* ... God was overseeing and directing Joseph's steps through the bad times and the good.

The psalmist wrote about Joseph, *Ps. 105:16* Moreover he [*God*] called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. <sup>17</sup> He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: <sup>18</sup> Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: <sup>19</sup> Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. <sup>20</sup> The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. <sup>21</sup> He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: <sup>22</sup> To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom. <sup>23</sup> Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. <sup>24</sup> And he increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies. <sup>25</sup> He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants. <sup>26</sup> He sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen. <sup>27</sup> They shewed his signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. <sup>28</sup> He sent darkness, and made it dark; and they rebelled not against his word. <sup>29</sup> He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish. <sup>30</sup> Their land brought forth frogs in abundance, in the chambers of their kings. <sup>31</sup> He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies, and lice in all their coasts. <sup>32</sup> He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land. <sup>33</sup> He smote their vines also and their fig trees; and brake the trees of their coasts. <sup>34</sup> He spake, and the locusts came, and caterpillers, and that without number, <sup>35</sup> And did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground. <sup>36</sup> He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength. <sup>37</sup> He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. <sup>38</sup> Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them. <sup>39</sup> He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night. <sup>40</sup> The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. <sup>41</sup> He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river. <sup>42</sup> For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. <sup>43</sup> And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness: <sup>44</sup> And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people; <sup>45</sup> That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise ye the LORD. ... If you had to write about all the trials you have gone through, could you end with those same words, Praise ye the LORD?

Sin looked to be in control ... undermining God's will and purpose. However, that was not how Joseph explained it, *Gen. 45:5* ... *God did send me before you to preserve life.* ... <sup>7</sup> And *God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth,* and to save your lives by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup> *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.* ... Of course, their sins of jealousy, hatred, and greed contributed to Joseph's slavery

in Egypt ...and it was their *evil*, for which they were responsible ... and they knew it and owned up to it, *Gen. 50:18* his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants [*bond-servants, slaves*].<sup>19</sup> And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> But as for you, ye thought [*chashab, meant*] evil against me; but *God meant [chashab] it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* <sup>21</sup> Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Their previous decisions were intended by *them* according to their sinful plans ... but on a grander scale, their decisions were intended by *God* according to His saving plan. God was in control throughout every stage of Joseph's 'journey', and He was working all things after the counsel of his own [*perfect*] will (Eph. 1:11)

And even though Joseph, during those first thirteen years of slavery and imprisonment, might not have easily seen God directing his paths, he continued to believe God was in control. As the Lord declared through Isaiah, *Is. 46:9* Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, <sup>10</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, *My counsel [plan] shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure [I will achieve what I set out and determined to achieve].* ... God works according to His own agenda. We need not always understand how it is for our good, but "My Lord knows the way through the wilderness", and "strength for today is mine all the way, and all that I need for tomorrow" ... That is what Joseph believed! That was the confidence which kept him going ... not his high-powered position in Pharaoh's court, but in the plain and simple knowledge, *Gen. 45:5* ... *God did send me ...* <sup>7</sup> *God sent me ...* <sup>8</sup> ... *it was not you that sent me hither, but God.*

We do not always need to understand, but we do need to believe on the basis we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). ... We do not know all the reasons why God does what He does, and He does not need our approval to do them. He does not need our advice for His thoughts are not our thoughts, and neither are our ways His ways (Is. 55:9). ... It is not Satan or fate which has the ultimate control over what happens, but rather, we press on trusting the sovereign God of the universe Who proved His love to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. He governs all things ... and He will achieve all His promises, including what is impossible with men and women, completing them to a greater level than we could ever imagine for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [*His*] ways higher than [*our*] ways, and [*His*] thoughts than [*our*] thoughts (Is. 55:9).

There is often not much point trying to work out why He leads us over and through rough and difficult terrain ... but there is one thing for sure ... "The will

of God will never take you where the grace of God cannot keep you, where the arms of God cannot support you". ... Beyond any shadow of a doubt, every born-again believer is held firmly and eternally in His mighty hand ...

What though the way be lonely, And dark the shadows fall;  
I know where'er it leadeth, My Father planned it all.

He guides my halting footsteps Along the weary way,  
For well He knows the pathway Will lead to endless day.

A day of light and gladness On which no shade will fall;  
'Tis this at last awaits me – *My Father planned it all.*