

Genesis 45: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 45 So Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me please.

And they came near. And he said, I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here.

For God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years. And there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest.

And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth. And to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, Thus says your son Joseph. God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me. Do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen and you shall be near me.

[1 : 25] You and your children and your children's children and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you. For there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household and all that you have do not come to poverty.

And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my honour in Egypt, and of all that you have seen.

Hurry and bring my father down here. Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept. And Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them.

After that his brothers talked with him. When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, Joseph's brothers have come. It pleased Pharaoh and his servants. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, Say to your brothers, Do this, load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households, and come to me.

And I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat of the fat of the land. And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, Do this, take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come.

[2 : 36] Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours. The sons of Israel did so. And Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey.

To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver, and five changes of clothes. To his father he sent as follows, Ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey.

Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed he said to them, Do not quarrel on the way. So they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob.

And they told him, Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt. And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

And Israel said, It is enough. Joseph, my son, is still alive. I will go down and see him before I die. It is hard to think of many more emotionally powerful passages in Scripture than Genesis chapter 45.

[3 : 57] Joseph finally discloses himself to his brothers. He weeps aloud. There are a number of key events of weeping in the book of Genesis, at critical junctures. Esau weeping at the loss of the blessing.

Jacob weeping when he meets Rachel. And Jacob and Esau weeping together later on, when they are finally reconciled. Joseph's concern throughout his speech is upon his father.

Is his father still alive? He is eager to bring his father down to Egypt, so he can finally be reunited with him. After all this time apart, and all the pain on both sides.

The brothers themselves are unsure of how to react to this. The first time Joseph speaks, they're nonplussed. They don't know what to make of it. Could this really be him? Joseph has to speak to them again, to insist, It is I.

It is Joseph. They've been shown remarkable favour on their previous trip. And then it all seemed to go against them, as they were pursued, and Benjamin was found in the possession of the cup.

[4 : 58] Then Judah interceded, and now the man who they've been dealing with to this point, who has been causing them all sorts of concern, turns out to be Joseph, a brother presumed dead.

Joseph stresses in his response to them, that this is a matter of divine orchestration. Joseph can see clearly now, that divine design was behind all of the things that happened to him.

And he makes a fourfold statement on this front. First of all, Do not be distressed or angry with your souls, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

And then, And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. Again, So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

And then finally, Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me. Do not tarry. In each of these statements, Joseph is hammering the point home.

[6 : 00] It is God that is behind all of these things. Joseph has a profound sense of God's action in his life. Now, compared the story of Joseph to stories that we've read to this point in the book of Genesis.

The Joseph story is not one of great miracles. It's not one with a fantastic flood or anything like that. God doesn't appear directly to him, as he appeared to Abraham or to his father Jacob.

God doesn't even speak directly to him. In all of these ways, it might seem that God has disappeared from the scene, but not to Joseph. Joseph has a deeper understanding of God's involvement in history.

God speaks to Joseph through his ordering of his life. And as Joseph looks back upon his life, he can see the way that God's hand is revealed. And it's this recognition that allows him to forgive his brothers.

A strong belief in providence makes it easier to forgive people and not to hold grudges. The course of our lives is ultimately in the hands of God, not in the hands of other human beings.

[7 : 02] This belief is the belief that God acts in human history. God isn't always on the surface of the story. Yet all of the story is about God. And as we've read through Genesis, there have been many points where you might wonder, where is God?

And at this point, we're beginning to see where God is. God is acting in all of these events. There may be many different actors on the surface of the story, but there's one actor holding all of the story together beneath the surface.

This is actually one of the reasons why typology matters, because one of the things we see in typology are traces of another hand at work. It isn't just chance. It's not human intent.

It's not just Joseph's contrivance in some of these events. In every single one of these events, God is ultimately at work. God is bringing about his purpose in history.

And this challenges us to read the entire story of Genesis on a deeper level. As Joseph and the brothers reread their life stories as ones in which God is the primary actor, it changes the way that they view things.

[8 : 03] Joseph, as he's reunited with the brothers, first weeps with Benjamin. Benjamin is the bridge to the other brothers. And then he weeps with each of the other brothers. The meeting at this point is reminiscent of the meeting between Esau and Jacob in chapter 33.

After they've greeted and wept together, they talk to him. Now, this might seem a bit anticlimactic. After all the drama and the emotion of this chapter, they just talk together.

But chapter 37 presents the failure to be able to speak peaceably to each other as the beginning of the story. And now they can speak. There's the resolution of the underlying problem.

Pharaoh instructs them to come back to the land with their father. So they return to Canaan with the joyful news to tell their father that they have found Joseph, that he is still alive and that he wants to see his father down in Egypt.

And when Jacob hears, his heart stands still. He can't process the news. He can't believe it. It's too wonderful. It's too unbelievable. And yet, when he's persuaded, when he sees the gifts that are sent

ahead, he knows that it is in fact true.

[9 : 16] And his response, it is enough. Joseph, my son, is still alive. I will go and see him before I die. Notice the similarity with this and the earlier statement that he made when he heard the message of Joseph's death.

Now he's again talking about going down to his son and about death. But it's different this time. He's going to go down and find resolution for all these things in his life that have seemed tragic and beyond repair. Joseph, my son, is still alive. I will go down and see him before I die.

And we could read the entire story of Joseph going down into Egypt and then up to this point as a great binding of Isaac's story. Jacob has sent away his son.

It seems as if the son was lost for good. And then the son is restored to him as if from the dead. And at this point, Jacob himself revives. It seems as if he's been like a living dead person for almost 20 years.

[10 : 20] His son has gone down to death. And now that son has come up from the grave. He's still alive. And his spirit comes to him again. This chapter then is one of the most powerful ones that shows how God's secret providence exceeds human design.

God is restoring history that seemed broken. Lives shattered beyond repair. Families torn apart. Things lost beyond recovery. And this is all a foreshadowing and picture of God's greater work in history.

God is going to wipe away every tear from our eyes. God is going to make all things new. God is going to restore the things that were broken. To recover the things that were lost.

And in the dramatic and emotional moment of Joseph meeting with his brothers. And finally seeing in his life God's hand leading him and them to this point. We will see a glimpse of what awaits us.

Of God's greater purpose in history. A question to consider. Looking through the book of Genesis and the changing ways in which God reveals his presence to his people and his action to his people.

[11 : 30] Are there any particular lessons that we can learn for discerning God's action and presence in our own lives? Especially in those times when he feels absent.

