

# God's Providence in Joseph's Life

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Date: 21 May 2023

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     When we close, we are going to sing this song, Rejoice in the Lord, and it begins with the words, God never works without purpose or plan. He never works without a purpose or plan.

He has a plan for everything he does, his eternal decrees, his plan. And then by his providence, he works out that plan in time history.

So this is a truth loaded with encouragement for us. Whatever he's planned, he works out. Whatever he works out in our lives is what he planned.

And we're given that truth in two forms in the Bible. We're given it in the form of precept, just a clear statement of it, Isaiah 46, 11, where God says, what I have planned, that I will do.

Or Ephesians 1, 11, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

[ 1 : 0 6 ]     So there are these statements. God's never winging it. He's never working without purpose or plan. But we also see that same truth not only stated in precept, but we see it in action in the lives of real life people like ourselves, but those who have been recorded for us in God's word.

So briefly this afternoon, I want to see the providence of God working out the eternal plan in the life of Joseph. It's Genesis 37 to the end.

You don't need to turn to it. We're going to take a helicopter ride through it, so you wouldn't be able to keep up turning. But first let's identify what was God's plan for Joseph in this event.

And then we'll see how he providentially worked it out throughout Joseph's life. Though God's plan was decreed in eternity past, we only learn of it at the end of the story.

Indeed, Joseph himself did not know it until the end of the story, which is a lesson to us that like Joseph, we may live out our lives in the dark as to much of why these things are happening and have to wait to the end of the story, indeed heaven itself, to know what was God's plan in all of that.

[ 2 : 3 6 ]     So God's decreed plan was a famine throughout the whole region of the Middle East. Now, what those purposes and plans were for all those nations, I'm sure God had reasons for it all, but we know that included in this plan was to save the family of Jacob and many others from starvation and to do it through Joseph, Jacob's favorite son of the 12.

So that's God's plan. Famine, but I'm going to save this family and many with them, and I'll do it through Joseph. So at the end, we read, when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt, and it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

There's going to be five more years of famine, and then, but God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth to save your lives by a great deliverance.

So then it was not you who sent me here, but God. You see, he's going back to the first cause. It was his plan, and he worked it out in his providence.

So the story is like a chain with at least 20 to 30 links in that chain, and if any one of these events don't take place, then the whole mission is aborted.

[ 4 : 08 ] The whole plan is frustrated. So we're going to look at the providence that brought that to pass, all connected, working together to get Joseph down to Egypt to meet the Pharaoh, to learn of the seven years of feasting and seven years of famine, and to put him in charge of the largest grain storage plan ever to keep people alive through the famine.

So, buckle up. Here we go. It all started with a father doting over his favorite son, Joseph. And that was sinful and wrong, but it was part of the plan. It was for that that got Joseph down to Egypt. That unwise parenting led to the jealousy of Joseph's brothers and their anger that ripened into a desire to kill him, provoked by his dreams of them bowing down to him.

And that opportunity became present when Father Jacob sent Joseph to go check on his brothers tending the sheep. If he sent a servant, the plan was aborted. No, he sent Joseph.

Joseph couldn't find them, so he's meandering around in a field. But God, in his providence, had someone else out in that field. And not just anyone, but someone who had overheard his brothers saying where he was going.

[ 5 : 40 ] And so he tells Joseph. And sure enough, he's able to find his brothers. And as he's approaching them, they plan to kill him. That would have been the end of the mission. But the oldest brother, Reuben, comes up with a plan to not shed his blood, but just throw him in this dry cistern and just leave him there to perish on his own with the plan of coming around later and rescuing his younger brother.

In God's providence, all of the brothers agree. Or Joseph would have been killed. Plan over. But while they were eating, a caravan of Ishmaelite traders passed that way, not on some other route.

No, they passed that way, right by Joseph and his brothers as they're on their way to Egypt where the Pharaoh reigns.

There they would sell their wares. The timing was perfect in God's providence. If they came later, everyone would be gone. If they came earlier, Joseph wouldn't have been there.

But then Judah comes up with a better plan as he sees these traders. Not to leave him to die in the cistern, but to sell him. Let's make some profit on him.

[ 6 : 58 ] And again, it was a providence of God that the brothers all agreed. And at the slave auction in Egypt, Joseph is sold to Potiphar, who happens to be one of Pharaoh's officials, captain of the guard.

And that connection to Pharaoh was crucial for God's plan to be worked out. God blessed Joseph's slave labor such that it won the favor of Potiphar and he made him chief steward of all that he had.

But that brought him into further contact with Potiphar's wife, whose advances and temptations he resisted, which if he hadn't, we can only imagine what would have happened to Joseph when Potiphar found out.

End of mission. Potiphar. But because of his rejection of her advances, Potiphar's wife was stirred in anger and made false accusations against Joseph.

And when Potiphar heard the lies, he was angry and he threw Joseph in prison. But the Lord gave him favor in prison with the warden who put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners there.

[ 8 : 16 ] And then the Pharaoh's chief, butler and baker, offended their Pharaoh and he threw them where? In the same prison as Joseph, where he cared for them and befriended them since he was in charge of the prisoners.

And one day night, God had given them each a dream, the dream that so troubled them that they confided in this Hebrew slave, Joseph, who was taking care of them and told him about their dreams.

And Joseph interpreted their dreams. And they came true, just as he said. Three days later, the baker was hanged and the butler returned to Pharaoh's service.

But before he had left, Joseph had made a request of him. When you get back to Pharaoh, tell him about me here. I've been put here unjustly.

I've done nothing wrong to be here and see if he can get me out. Well, the butler forgot about Joseph.

[ 9 : 21 ] That too was important. If he had told the Pharaoh, Pharaoh wouldn't have any interest in some Israelite slave complaining about injustice in some prison. No, that wouldn't have meant anything to him.

But two years later, Pharaoh himself has two dreams and he's troubled about them. And now he's interested, would be interested, if he knew that Joseph could interpret dreams.

But he knows nothing of it. And when the magicians came and could not give the interpretation of the dreams, it's then that the coin drops and suddenly the butler remembers.

That too is providence. And he tells the Pharaoh, there was a Hebrew slave in prison and we each had a dream and we told it to him and it happened just as he said.

The baker was hanged and you brought me back to your service. Well, that was it. Pharaoh's now got one thing. Go get that Hebrew slave and get him over here as fast as you can.

[ 10 : 22 ] He's now telling his dreams to Joseph who interprets them. Seven more years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. And then Joseph tells him what he didn't ask for.

He gives him some counsel. Pharaoh, you ought to find a wise and discerning man to be in charge of collecting the grain during the seven years of abundance so the nation will not be ruined by the famine.

And then God gives favor to Joseph in the eyes of Pharaoh. He, a foreign slave in a prison, is now chosen to be over the project, second only in all of Egypt to the Pharaoh.

God's plan is ripening. And so when the famine hits the whole region, Jacob's family back in Palestine Palestine is feeling the effects of the famine.

They need grain and they hear that there's grain to be had in Egypt. So the brothers come to Egypt to buy grain. And after a series of tests to see if his brother's hearts had been changed, Joseph finally reveals himself to them and has them and his father Jacob and all 70 in the extended family moved to Egypt where they were kept alive through the famine.

[ 11 : 43 ] God's purpose and plan to keep the chosen family alive through the famine along with others was brought to pass just as he planned.

How? By his providential control over all the variables, all his creatures and all their actions, all the time under his governance.

And that's why what he said he now has done. Four lessons, very briefly and we're done. Number one, brothers and sisters, God has a detailed plan for every one of your lives.

And all the intricate steps and details of that plan are being worked out in your life. No less than in Joseph's life. Not by some impersonal force or fate, but by God himself intimately involved with each one of you.

Him, he's the one accomplishing his plan. What I have said I will do. So he is working out by his providence in your life.

[ 12 : 55 ] And remembering that truth brings significance to the whole of life. There is nothing in life that is not significant. It was God's plan and it is now his providence and that raises the mundane, the difficult, everything in my life to have supreme significance.

So we live with a God who is actively involved in all of it with me. That wasn't just a special deal cut with Joseph. That's true of all the children of God.

Second lesson, God not only has a detailed plan for every one of you, God's plan in providence includes everything, even the sinful actions of others.

Father Jacob's poor fathering, the boy's jealousy and hatred and selling him into slavery, all integral parts of achieving the purpose that God had.

Sinful temptations of Potiphar's wife followed by her lying accusations, unjust anger of Potiphar who slammed him in the dungeon where he'll meet Pharaoh's butler, the link to the palace.

[ 14 : 13 ] Is that where God has some of you? In the dark. In the dark. You don't understand and you're far from where you'd like to be.

God is there with you just like he was with Joseph and God can bless you there just like he blessed Joseph.

Perhaps you too have been sinned against like Joseph. That doesn't throw God's plan out of kilter. It's rather part of his plan just as it was in Joseph's life.

He works all things together for good to those who love him and are the called according to his purpose. Even sinful things that other people do to you or say about you and yes, even your own sins and failures.

God works all things together for good. Joseph says to his brothers who sold him into slavery, you meant it for evil. It was sin.

[ 15 : 18 ] It was wickedness what you did. But God meant it for good for the accomplishing of his good plan of saving many people alive. How does that happen?

How is God involved in sin without dirtying his hands at all? He's not the author of sin and yet he includes sin and uses sin in all his wise plan.

I don't know exactly how he does it but he does do it. So that's the second lesson. God's plan in Providence includes everything. Sinful actions as well. Third, God's plan often includes long periods of waiting without knowing the plan.

All Joseph knows is he's a 17 year old. How old are you, Sam? You're not, okay. Henry, how old are you? Alright, you're getting there. He's 17.

17. And he's a slave far from home, far from father's love. And so he spends years of his best, the best years of his life slaving away totally in the dark as to what God is doing.

[ 16 : 28 ] What is his plan? Don't know, but I'm here, I'm a slave, I'm away from home. And then there are many ups and downs in the long wait.

For after years of servile labor, he's promoted to the chief steward in Potiphar's whole estate. Oh, but then due to his righteous rejection of temptation, now he's thrown down into the dungeon.

But even there, God lifts him up to be in charge of the whole prison, to care for all the prisoners. And how his hopes must have risen even higher when the chief butler of Pharaoh was heading back to the palace with instructions to mention me to the Pharaoh and get me out of here.

but then no news for days, no news for weeks, no news for months as the butler had forgotten Joseph.

And that up is followed by a down, up and down, two more years of waiting in a dungeon. But God has not forgotten him. He's with him there.

[ 17 : 36 ] Maybe you're stuck in a period of waiting on God and nothing's happening. Don't be so sure about that. God is doing far more behind the scenes than we ever know.

All that we know of what God is doing could probably be two or three percent. The rest is hidden from us. God was getting all the pieces in place.

And when everything is set, he often works very quickly. Joseph has been languishing for years in prison. He wakes up that morning like he woke up every other morning in prison, just thinking it's another day.

But before the end of this day, he'll be in the palace, lifted to the highest place, Pharaoh only above him.

God is doing something far more than what we may be aware of while we're waiting, stuck in some dark dungeon. And then he's doing something in us during the wait.

[ 18 : 46 ] Indeed, no small purpose, part of the purpose of the wait is for us to know God better. Remember what Paul wrote from his dungeon? I want to know Christ.

Philippians 3.10. That's it. Waiting there in the prison not knowing what's going to happen. But I want to know Christ. I want to lay hold of that for which he laid hold of me.

That too is part of the plan of waiting. It was 13 years waiting as a slave and prisoner before being brought to the palace and finally understanding what it was all about, what God had planned and now had brought about by his providence.

But none of those 13 years was wasted. serving in Potiphar's house, serving in the prison was all preparation for serving in Egypt under Pharaoh.

God was at work preparing him for his future work. So serve the Lord where you are right now. Embrace the weight, embrace the providence that has you there, God has you there.

[ 20 : 00 ] Serve him there and now rather than saying, oh, when this is all over, then I'll serve him. No, he has you there. Serve him there. No one waits on him in vain. And then our last lesson this afternoon, there is a humbling before exaltation.

There is a cross before a crown. There is suffering before glory. 13 years of humiliating slavery in prison before being exalted by the Pharaoh.

You know, that's interesting. That was the agenda of our Lord Jesus Christ, the suffering servant of the Lord. Because of his submission to suffering, he was exalted.

it's our agenda too, isn't it? This is the way the master went, should not the servant tread it still.

But know this, there's a humbling before an exaltation, but there's also an exaltation after a humbling.

[ 21 : 18 ] That's the good news. It's looking at it the other way, but that too is important, that it was because of the humble submission to suffering, even the death of the cross, that God highly exalted Christ and gave him a name above every name.

And we're following his train. So in Jesus Christ, we can see our future. Yes, we may be stuck in some dark dungeon, but there's an exaltation coming after the humbling.

There's a cross to be followed by the crown and glory to follow after suffering. And Paul says, well, I consider that our present sufferings aren't even worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.

So humble yourself under God's mighty hand that he may exalt you, lift you up. When? In due time. His time.

And that's always the best time. So God never works without purpose or plan, and he never fails to accomplish his plan because he has a providential control over all his creatures all the time in all their actions.

[ 22 : 41 ] We can safely trust him with our present, our future, and indeed our eternity. did you know that this history of Joseph's life is really our history? This is our history.

Because in keeping Joseph's family alive, about 2,000 years later, a descendant of Joseph's brother Judah would be born of a virgin who is our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Christ, how little did Joseph know at the time that he was being used and all this suffering and mistreatment that he was going through was being used to save the line from whom came his and our Savior.

That's why I say this is our history as much as it was Joseph's. You know, there's no book like the Bible, is there? There's no stories like the Bible. There's no God like the Bible.

No Savior like the Bible's Jesus. Because what he has planned, that he has done and that he will do. So take your song sheet.

[ 23 : 53 ] We're going to rejoice in the Lord that he makes no mistakes. That none of this in Joseph's life was a mistake. It was rather all part of his wonderful plan. And your life is no mistake.

Now the author of this song is Ron Hamilton. And I don't know how many years ago it was that he lost his eye to cancer. So he showed up in church the next Sunday I guess with a patch over his eye and one little boy asked him, are you a pirate?

And that was the seed thought that spawned a whole ministry to children. If you've heard of Patch the Pirate. And that was Ron Hamilton.

and this song is something of his personal testimony. That was no mistake. That was part of God's plan that was being worked out by his providence that went by the name of cancer and brought about his plan.

It's also as we'll see in the song Job's testimony. It could be Jacob's, Joseph's testimony as we've just studied.

[ 25 : 09 ] It's in a sense your testimony and mine. Since our God is the same God as Joseph's, as Ron's, as Job's, and Jesus's.

Last month, or just a few weeks ago, the Lord took Ron home. And so it reminded me of a song that he wrote. Let's stand and sing it together in faith in our God that's sovereign over our lives.

God never works without purpose or plan. The chorus is on the back sheet, so you've got to flip it over for the chorus.