

Genesis 50:1-21 • When Misfortune is God's Opportunity

Introduction

No one goes through life without experiencing misfortune. Sometimes misfortune happens as a result of our own poor choices, or, in Joseph's case, naiveté. Other times, misfortune is the result of circumstances beyond our control. While we often focus on circumventing the misfortune, sometimes the better choice is to seek insight on what God is accomplishing through the misfortune.

This week's study revolves around the events that brought Joseph, and eventually his entire family, to Egypt. As you remember, Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. God's hand was upon Joseph, however, and he became Pharaoh's right-hand-man and a powerful official in Egypt. The chapter begins with the death of Joseph's father, Jacob. This study will focus on the remarkable insight Joseph had toward his brothers and the hand of God in all their lives. The lesson will focus on the message God is teaching us about trusting God during times of misfortune, and how God can make good come from even in the bleakest of circumstances.

¹Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him.
²Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel.
³Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: What kind of relationship did Joseph have with his father Jacob, and why? How does their relationship mirror the relationship between God the Father and God the Son?

A: The answer can be found in Genesis 37:3 and 46:28-31. There was a special relationship that, in spite of the evil deeds of men, could not be broken.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic.
—Genesis 37:3

Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out the way before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. Joseph 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. Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive." Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me;'"
—Genesis 46:28-31

Q: What does Joseph's relationship with Jacob tell about Joseph's life?

A: Joseph is a "type" of Christ. A type is a person or thing that reflects a greater person or thing. For example, Noah's ark is a type of Christ; it saved Noah and his family from the flood, and the flood is a type of God's ultimate judgment on all unrighteousness at the Second Coming. There are a great many similarities between Joseph and Jesus, some of which are:

- Joseph was the favored son of father; Christ was the favored Son of His Father.
- Joseph was sent to his brothers by his father but rejected by them; Christ was sent to His brothers by His Father but rejected by them.
- Joseph was sold by his brother Judah for silver and given into the hands of Gentiles; Jesus as sold by His disciple Judas (Greek for "Judah") for silver and given into the hands of Gentiles.

Genesis 50:1-21 • When Misfortune is God's Opportunity, Page 1 of 3

⁴When the days of mourning for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, “If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying, ⁵“My father made me swear, saying, “Behold, I am about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.” Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.””

⁶Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.”

⁷So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, ⁸and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father’s household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen. ⁹There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company. ¹⁰When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed seven days mourning for his father.

¹¹Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians.” Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.

¹²Thus his sons did for him as he had charged them; ¹³for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah before

- Joseph was imprisoned with two criminals, one of which died and one of which lived; Jesus was crucified with two criminals, one of which was granted life, the other death.
- Joseph went from a place of condemnation (prison) to a place of exultation (Pharaoh’s house) in a single day; Jesus went from a place of condemnation (crucifixion) to a place of exultation (resurrection) in a single day.
- Joseph took a Gentile bride; Having been rejected by the Jews, Christ took the Gentiles as His bride, the church.
- Joseph was placed in charge of the entire kingdom of Egypt; Jesus is given charge of the entire kingdom of God.
- Every knee in Egypt bowed to the authority of Joseph; every knee on earth shall bow to the authority of Christ.

Q: What motivated Joseph’s brothers to almost take his life? How does this relate to the events at the end of Christ’s life?

A: It was jealousy that drove Joseph’s brothers to reject him (Genesis 37:4). The same was true of the Jewish leaders rejection of Jesus (Matthew 26:3,4)

[Read v.4-14]

Q: What does Joseph’s relationship with Pharaoh teach us about our conduct in the workplace?

A: Joseph earned Pharaoh’s favor because he was an exemplary servant. Even though Pharaoh was a heathen, did not worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and may have participated in immoral behavior, Joseph, because he was Pharaoh’s servant, maintained respect for his employer and excelled in his work ethic. His position as a steward of Pharaoh’s possessions was assigned, but his favor and respect was earned.

Q: Why did Pharaoh see fit to send such a large contingent of Egyptian officials and chariots to accompany Joseph to bury his father?

A: Joseph was so valuable to Pharaoh that he sent official ambassadors and soldiers with chariots to protect the funeral party from any enemy it might encounter. (For an interesting comparison, see Matthew 26:53.)

Q: What is the significance of Jacob wanting to be buried in the cave of the field of Machpelah?

A: First, it was his request (Genesis 49:29-32). It was the burial place for his grandparents Abraham and Sarah, for his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, and for his wife Leah (Rachel was buried near Bethlehem). Second, his burial there continued the claim to the land that God had promised to Abraham. Part of the Abrahamic Covenant was the promise of land to establish a nation (see Genesis 12:7 and 15:17-21). Although promised to Abraham by God, Abraham had no possession of land until he purchased a burial site for Sarah. This significant and prophetic event is recorded in Genesis chapter 23, with emphasis in verse 20.

So the field and the cave that is in it, were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth.

—Genesis 23:20

Genesis 50:1-21 • When Misfortune is God’s Opportunity, Page 2 of 3

Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. ¹⁴After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

¹⁵When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" ¹⁶So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, ¹⁷'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.'" And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

¹⁸Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? ²⁰As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. ²¹So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

[Read v.15-21]

Q: After Jacob's death, why are Joseph's brothers so afraid.

A: Joseph would not have dared seek revenge while his father was alive, lest he lose his inheritance and his sons' blessings. Now that Jacob was dead, and being the powerful person he was in Egypt, he could now exact revenge and suffer no consequences.

Q: Why do you suppose Joseph wept when his brothers told him their lie?

A: First, Joseph could see right through the lie. If Jacob had actually said those things, why would he not have shared it directly with Joseph? Second, Joseph is grieving that his brothers actually thought he might exact vengeance. Third, his brothers are willing to admit that "they did you wrong." Lastly, he is grieved that they are so afraid of him.

Q: What event does verse 18 fulfill?

A: This event fulfills Joseph's dreams (Genesis 37:5-11).

Q: What is the meaning of Joseph's response to his brothers in verse 19?

A: He first wants to dispel their fear: "Do not be afraid." He then explains why they do not need to be afraid. He is not their judge but their savior. He is also offering the proposition that it is God who orchestrated the events of his life, even his misfortunes.

Q: Why is verse 20 so important to viewing life's misfortunes?

A: From a human perspective, Joseph experienced great misfortune at the hand of his jealous brothers. Those who were supposed to love him actually turned against him and hated him. He was treated unfairly by those in whom he had put his trust. But he had insight to see that "this present result" was orchestrated by God and that he had no cause for bringing harm to his brothers. This verse is one of the most important practical verses in the Old Testament regarding how Christians should view all misfortune. While we often struggle so hard to elude the misfortune, to protect ourselves against it, to circumvent unfortunate circumstances, the Christian has the assurance that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purposes" (Romans 8:28).

Q: How does verse 21 remind us of Christ's love for us?

A: In the midst of our misfortunes, Jesus calms our spirits by the Holy Spirit's voice, "Do not be afraid." Jesus assures us of His presence: "I will provide for you and your little ones." He brings comfort to us and continues to speak to us through His Word: "So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

Overall Application

How has God's voice spoken to you through this study of His Word? Are you in the midst of misfortune? If you experienced misfortune in the past, how did you handle it? What chapter of the Bible will you return to in the midst of the next misfortune you encounter? Is it possible that what you did not expect is turning out to something used by God?