

Why does God devote so much space to telling the story of Joseph? It fills about 13 chapters of Genesis. The story contains an important historical record surrounding the story of Joseph. It relates how God fulfilled prophecies and promises concerning his offspring given to Abraham about two centuries before, Genesis 15:13 —.

But if one desires to impart moral truths, tell an entertaining compelling story! And since God delights in His Son He revealed some delightful aspects of the character and glory of the coming Messiah by telling the story of Joseph. The story also reveals some solemn aspects of so called “human nature.” While man tends to consider the attitudes and behaviors of Jacob and his sons as normal, the norm of the human race since Adam is sinfulness, Romans 3:23, 5:12.

Judging by the amount of detail that would be known only by Joseph, the story was written or told by him. Yet it does not appear to be self serving but a sincere desire to light the way toward genuine, selfless caring about those whose behavior is directed by the shackles of inborn sin. It is an example of Paul’s proclamation in 2Timothy.

2Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

Joseph had the heart of a shepherd. But he is an example for each of us, as we are our brothers’ keepers. As a result of Joseph’s love for his father and his half brothers God’s purposes and plans were carried out through them. Their descendants were destined to become the chosen nation that would be the “mother” of the promised Messiah. Descended from Judah, King David would head the dynasty that would culminate in the reign of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Judah took (in this chapter) a pivotal role in enabling the emigration of Jacob and his sons to Egypt. Ultimately Jacob blessed Judah as the one who was to be the ancestor of One called Shiloh (tranquility), Christ, Genesis 49:10.

From the story of Joseph’s endurance and faith we learn to accept and value chastening of this life, for it prepares us for future glory. (For all believers will be glorified with Christ when He returns to reign.) And it meanwhile prepares us for work and rigors we may be given here while awaiting His return for us. And it implants in us a growing sympathy for suffering ones (or fallen ones) around us, so we can minister to them. There is much needed to comfort the suffering and to restore souls overcome by sin. As we said before, what better way to teach and encourage than by a story of an example. So the story of Joseph fleshes out the commands and exhortations of the rest of scripture, Old Testament and New. We are to love our brother as we love God.

Deuteronomy 6:5 *And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

Leviticus 19:18 *Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.*

(Both of the above quoted by Jesus, Matthew 22:37-39.)

John 13:34 *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

1John 4:21 *And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

Watch for other stories with a lesson as you go through the Bible.

Did Joseph possess his remarkable love and patience in dealing with his brothers from the beginning of his trials or did it develop over the years of his captivity. Either way the fact he even possessed such love for them is remarkable. Then, though suddenly exalted to a position of almost absolute power, he had to still restrain his impulses toward his father (if he was even still alive) and go about managing his brothers’ reconciliation with him. He would take his chariot and ride on up to Canaan to comfort his father, and confront his brethren. They must endure some suffering in order that they be brought to the end of themselves. Their consciences must be awakened and a realization of what they had done be drawn out in them. Even if Jacob could be said to have a good conscience (which is open to question at this point in his life) he would have to endure and suffer some more so that patience would have its perfect work in him and his family. Jacob must accept all of his sons into his heart together with favored Joseph and Benjamin.

James 1:4 *But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

Then he and all the sons must instill and nurture faith in the children. After all, these would be God’s chosen people forever. Joseph’s endurance and work with his troubled siblings is like God’s work in us, if we stray or sin. He will use circumstances and use alert believers close to us to awaken a guilty conscience defiled by sin in order to bring us back to Himself as His children. What grace. Join Him in His work calling sinners to repentance, and restoring straying believers.

Judah’s mistakes and adversities of life are fully covered in chapter 37. God in His grace used these sins, failures and troubles to change Judah to a compassionate and loving son and father. He was ready to put not only his own present comfort but his birthright and future blessing on the line in order to gain Jacob’s permission to send the favorite, Benjamin, with him to Egypt. Judah stood between them and starvation (and, unknowingly, incomprehensible blessing at the hand of Joseph). Jacob allowed himself to trust Judah for he saw he had gained a spiritual dimension the others lacked. Having been bereaved of his grown sons, Judah understood Jacob’s fears and feelings. Reuben, the eldest, had proved boastful, impetuous, unreliable, untrustworthy and foolish. The next two in line, Simeon and Levi, had proved violently independent of their father at Shechem. So Judah was sent to Egypt with Benjamin to get food for the rest. He succeeded, though not without a severe test of his faith.

By Ronald Canner, February 2, 2011