



FEED MY SHEEP

PUBLISHED BY DR. JAMES W. BRUGGEMAN
STONE KINGDOM MINISTRIES
P. O. Box 5695
ASHEVILLE, NC 28813 U.S.A.
See my blog at www.stonekingdom.org

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Jacob, aka “Don Corleone”

The Story of Joseph, Part 19

We are now well along in the story of Joseph the Patriarch. This series of studies is based on my oral lecture series called *Joseph the Overcomer*. In a sense, it is a parallel study to the one we did some years ago on the character of Saul and David. (That 54-part lecture series is now available for free listening or downloading at our website.)

We have been essentially interlacing the story of Joseph from the book of Genesis with the expanded version given in the book of Jasher. I have to confess that I was a little bit concerned when I first decided to quote so much material from Jasher, that many in the audience might find it boring. However, I am pleased to report that just the opposite is the case: all the feedback has been positive and enthusiastic—which just goes to show us once again, that the story of Joseph is timeless in its popularity, that it is indeed one of the greatest dramatic stories in all of the world’s literature, and that the narrative in the book of Jasher has done nothing except to enhance your enjoyment of the story.

I stated, without fear of rebuttal, that this story is one of the greatest stories in all of literature. Why is that so? For many reasons, I am certain. But primarily, it is because it is a story that every human being who has a heart beating within him cannot help but relate to on a very deep level. Every human heart cannot help but be profoundly moved at the extended climax of the story when Joseph first sees Benjamin and then later when he reveals himself to his brethren. Then, there is even another climax when Joseph is reunited with his father, Jacob. Those word pictures pull powerfully at our emotions. I am not ashamed to tell you that I choke up and sometimes weep openly every time I read or hear the story. It matters not how many times I have read it before. When I come to those passages, there is just something intrinsically powerful about it that my

eyes well up with tears and I get a lump in my throat. (Even as I edited the story for this issue, my eyes welled up again.)

In the last lecture, we saw that Joseph’s full brother, Benjamin, had remained at home in Hebron in Canaanland while Joseph’s ten older, half-brothers came to Egypt to purchase grain for their starving families. We found, however, that before attempting to buy any grain, they first resolved to find Joseph, knowing full well that he had ultimately been sold into slavery there in Egypt some 22 years or so before.

They spent three days looking for him, and you will remember, that even though they had great remorse for how they had treated him, that they *still* did not give him much credit in terms of noble character. How do we know that? We read about it in Jasher, remember? Where were they looking for Joseph? Yes, in the brothels! They knew that he was a superlatively handsome individual and so they imagined that he would have gone into the gigolo business, to put it bluntly. So their estimation of his character was light years below Joseph’s *actual* character—a character so virtuous that it was *that very thing*—his refusal to play the gigolo for Zelicah—which landed him in the dungeon in the first place.

But obviously, this was all orchestrated by the Most High God. Your Father and mine planned every single detail of the whole scenario. Because it was only through the dungeon experience, that Joseph and his abilities came to the attention of the Pharaoh. And now we are at the point in the story where Joseph has been appointed as the de facto ruler of Egypt. He both *planned* the food storage and survival program for the entire nation and he also *administered* the collection program during the seven years of bumper crops.

Now in the second year of the famine, here are his brothers bowing down in his presence, having not the faintest knowledge that this great and wise ruler of Egypt, this clean-shaven 39-year old man, named Zaphnath-paaneah, that he was their very own, long-lost brother Joseph! We related previously how Joseph treated them as spies—and why? So that he could get revenge upon them for the way that they had treated him? No, not at all! This was the means by which Joseph could learn if, and to what extent, the character qualities of his brothers had developed along virtuous lines. He *needed* to press them.

Joseph is using an interpreter so that they will not be aware that he understands their every word. During the course of the interrogation, Joseph hears Reuben scolding his brothers and telling them, See? Didn't I tell you that we shouldn't harm the lad? Now look what God has brought upon us in return? At that point, Joseph himself is overcome with emotion, and so he turns away and exits the room to his private chambers. He washes his face and regains his composure. Then he puts on the mask of severity again, comes back before them, and in the end, he tells them that Simeon will be kept in prison as collateral so that the rest of them will return with their youngest brother Benjamin.

Continuing our review, remember how Joseph ordered his overseer to make sure each brothers' silver was put back into the sacks of grain that each of them were carrying home? Then when they get home and find it, their fear is aggravated even more. Now they think that Joseph will not only believe them to be *spies*, but thieves as well. The brothers wanted to return to Egypt immediately with Benjamin so they could obtain Simeon's release. But Jacob was adamant in his resolve. He would not even consider allowing Benjamin to leave his side.

At that time, it was Reuben who offered to protect Benjamin on the journey. Reuben even went so far as to offer that Jacob could slay Reuben's own two sons if Reuben did not return Benjamin safely to his father. But such an irrational promise only strengthened Jacob's resolve not to entrust precious Benjamin to the unstable son, Reuben. And so they did not return to Egypt with Benjamin immediately.

But in about a year or so, when their food reserves were once again almost exhausted, father Jacob, is once again confronted with the decision he had been avoiding. As the days dragged on and the food supplies dwindled, Jacob is feeling the intense pressure from his clan to do something. At this time, Judah steps up and makes his father an offer he cannot

refuse, and let's repeat this verse which we read last time.

Genesis 43:8 And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, *and also our little ones.*

9 I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever:

Do you notice the difference between Reuben's offer and Judah's offer? Reuben offered his two sons. Judah offers himself to bear the blame. Jacob-Israel has no argument left in him. Thus, under almost unbearable anguish over Benjamin, he finally relents and allows him to be taken under the protection of Judah. Whereas Jacob had no confidence in Reuben's bravado and promises of protection for Benjamin, he must have had somewhat more confidence in the leadership abilities of Judah; but in any case, Jacob really had no choice.

Circumstances forced him to make the decision that he did. And therein lies a lesson for all of us. How many times in our life has God orchestrated events so that what we *resist* doing at first, we gradually come to submit to, as being clearly His plan for us. But oftentimes, in our Jacob-like reluctance, circumstances force us into submission. Therefore, Jacob says:

Genesis 43: 13 Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man:

14 And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.

In other words, Jacob was submitting to the now *painfully* clear plan of God. So it is with any child of God. Sometimes when our heavenly Father wants to guide us to take a certain path, He closes all the doors, one by one, until there is only one path left to choose. Thus it came to be that Jacob now saw clearly that there was no alternative except to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt. Judah had stood up and offered to shoulder the responsibility for Benjamin.

So begins a very special relationship. It commenced between the half-brothers, Judah and Benjamin. But it continued through their respective descendants down through the many centuries, and one has to wonder if it does not still continue to this very day! Hundreds of years later, after the tribes had entered the Promised Land, the territories of Judah and

Benjamin were adjacent to each other. After the death of Solomon, when the nation broke in two, the bond was even closer as the ten northern tribes formed the House of Israel, but the tribes of Judah and Benjamin united to form the House of Judah.

Then, over 17 centuries after the lives of the brothers Judah and Benjamin, the Savior came from the tribe of Judah, and with the exception of Judas, all the other apostles were from the tribe of Benjamin. Thus the surety role was fulfilled on a much greater scale. Because Judah (in the person of Jesus) offered Himself to bear the blame for our sins. But first, He acted as the surety, the warrantor, the guarantor, for the safety and salvation of Benjamin. Because it was the Benjaminites who first believed in Jesus, and it was they who carried the good news across the Roman Empire. What a story! A theme which commenced with two individuals now is carried out on a grand scale!

In fact, if you have read the book *Parthia* by Steven Collins (see pg. 4), you know that the disciples did not stop at the borders of the Roman Empire, but they went to reach lost Israel where ever they were dispersed.

And now, according to the account in the book of Jasher, as Judah, Benjamin and the other eight brothers prepared to leave on their journey, Jacob prayed to Almighty God, and it says in ...

Jasher 52:27 And all the wives of the sons of Jacob and their children lifted up their eyes to heaven and they all wept before the Lord, and cried unto him to deliver their fathers from the hand of the king of Egypt. 28 And Jacob wrote a record to the king of Egypt and gave it into the hand of Judah and into the hands of his sons for the king of Egypt, saying, ...

And that is where we stopped last time insofar as the text in Jasher is concerned, so we will now continue and read this very interesting letter from Jacob to this fearsome Zaphnath-paaneah, ruler of Egypt.

Jasher 52:29 From thy servant Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham the Hebrew, the prince of God, to the powerful and wise king, the revealer of secrets, king of Egypt, greeting. 30 Be it known to my lord the king of Egypt, the famine was sore upon us in the land of Canaan, and I sent my sons to thee to buy us a little food from thee for our support. 31 For my sons surrounded me and I being very old cannot see with my eyes, for my eyes have become very heavy through age, as well as with daily weeping for my son, for Joseph who was lost from before me, and I commanded my sons that they should not enter the gates of the city when they came to Egypt, on account of the inhabitants of the land. 32 And I also commanded

them to go about Egypt to seek for my son Joseph, perhaps they might find him there, and they did so, and thou didst consider them as spies of the land.

Well....! Jacob evidently felt compelled in this letter to confirm the story his sons had told, that they were seeking their long-lost brother in Egypt. This implies that the brothers must have persuaded their father that even though they had presented him with Joseph's coat of many colors splattered with blood those many years ago, that the brothers still held out the possibility that Joseph had somehow managed to escape the wild beast, and that somehow he might have ended up alive in Egypt. The letter continues:

33 Have we not heard concerning thee that thou didst interpret Pharaoh's dream and didst speak truly unto him? how then dost thou not know in thy wisdom whether my sons are spies or not?

Hmmm. We have to admit: Jacob makes a good point there, doesn't he? It's almost an insult, isn't it? Jacob is saying: if you're so smart and you can divine truth for the Pharaoh, how come you cannot tell whether or not my sons are spies?

34 Now therefore, my lord and king, behold I have sent my son before thee [he is referring to Benjamin], as thou didst speak unto my sons; I beseech thee to put thy eyes upon him until he is returned to me in peace with his brethren.

So Jacob is asking this ruler of Egypt to act as the protector of Benjamin all the while he is in Egypt. And now listen to the audacity, the boldness with which Jacob speaks, perhaps even *threatens* this powerful ruler of Egypt.

35 For dost thou not know, or hast thou not heard that which our God did unto Pharaoh when he took my mother Sarah, and what he did unto Abimelech king of the Philistines on account of her, and also what our father Abraham did unto the nine kings of Elam, how he smote them all with a few men that were with him? 36 And also what my two sons Simeon and Levi did unto the eight cities of the Amorites, how they destroyed them on account of their sister Dinah?

My friends, these threats are not even veiled, are they? Incidentally, do you remember anything in the Genesis account of the rape of Dinah about Simeon and Levi destroying eight cities? You might want to check out the story in Jasher.

37 And also on account of their brother Benjamin

they consoled themselves for the loss of his brother Joseph; what will they then do for him when they see the hand of any people prevailing over them, for his sake? 38 Dost thou not know, O king of Egypt, that the power of God is with us, and that also God ever heareth our prayers and forsaketh us not all the days? 39 And when my sons told me of thy dealings with them, I called not unto the Lord on account of thee, for then thou wouldst have perished with thy men before my son Benjamin came before thee, but I thought that as Simeon my son was in thy house, perhaps thou mightest deal kindly with him, therefore I did not this thing unto thee.

To put this in a modern perspective, imagine someone—let’s just say, he is a “businessman” over in Sicily, and he writes a letter to the president of the United States in a tone like that! Saying:

“Listen a-here, Mr. Presidente. Haven’t you a-heard about-a my family? Da Don Corleone family? How we took out our competition down in Palermo? How my boys took out our competition ovuh in Naples? and up in-a Rome? “Don’t ya know that all I gotta do is talk to da Man Upstairs, and hey, it’s all ovuh fuh ya!?” But I din’t talk to da Man Upstairs, because you gotta my boy, Sonny, dere in da penitentiary; and so I just wanna know dat you’re treatin’ himma okay, and dat you’re a-gonna senda himma back to me now, okay? Thank-a you for a-hearing me, Mr. Presidente.”

Jacob’s tone with the ruler of Egypt is just that strong, isn’t it? That is some kind of boldness, isn’t it? How he concludes the letter will be seen next month.

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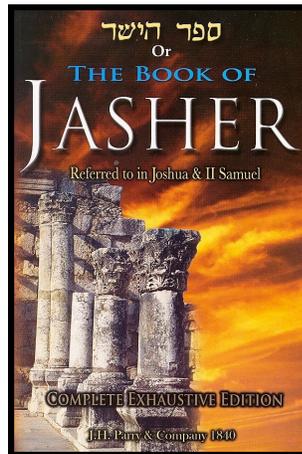
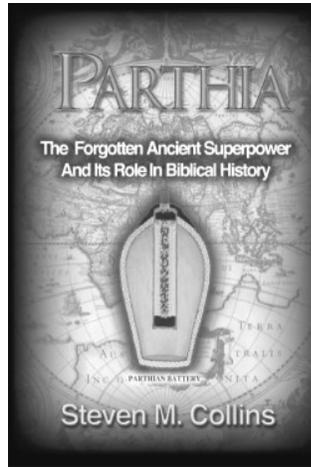
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