

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON #12  
**‘FRUITFUL IN THE LAND OF MY  
AFFLICTION’**

By Ted L. Gibbons

**INTRODUCTION:** The story of Joseph makes me think about what it really means to be free. During the early years of Joseph’s life, while he was experiencing the viciousness of murderous brothers and the solitude of slavery and the pain of imprisonment, his brothers were (1) committing murder [Genesis 34]; (2) committing immoral acts [Genesis 35, 38]; (3) plotting murder [Genesis 37]; and lying to their father [Genesis 37]. Which of all the sons of Jacob was most free? There are some lessons to be learned here. Part of the answer to this question comes as we consider who bows to whom, and who sits on a throne, and who lives with decades of guilt and remorse.

**1. JOSEPH INTERPRETS THE DREAM OF THE BUTLER, THE BAKER,  
AND PHARAOH. PHARAOH MAKES JOSEPH RULER OVER ALL  
EGYPT.**

Last week we watched Joseph prosper in the house of Potiphar. His commitment to the commandments enabled the Lord to bless him continuously, although the blessings were not always visible. In fact, the matter of Potiphar’s wife led to imprisonment.

And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. (Gen. 39:20)

But even in the course of this unjust incarceration, Joseph was faithful to his covenants and was blessed of the Lord.

But LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him,

and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper (Gen. 39:21-23).

Reading this account reminded me of the promise the Lord made to the Nephites in Helam when they were overrun and placed in servitude by the Lamanites.

And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions. And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord (Mos. 24:114,15)

Joseph's burden was not a physical one like those carried by the Nephites, but it was an oppressive burden, and the Lord eased that burden by his blessings to Joseph, while Joseph did "did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord." It is one thing to be in prison, but it is a better thing to be in prison and in charge of the prison.

Joseph's righteousness is clearly demonstrated by his access to the Spirit. The butler and the baker were placed in the charge of Joseph. One day he noticed that they look sad.

And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison. And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad (Gen. 40:5,6)

Think about this. They are in prison, for goodness sakes. Why should it surprise Joseph or anyone else that they are sad? How many happy people do you expect to see in prison? But these prisoners are in the care of a man of God, a man who has apparently arranged things among the prisoners in

order to maximize the peace and joy of the inmates. Of course Joseph does more than notice. He tries to help.

And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day? And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you (Gen. 40:7,8)

There is a lesson hidden (hopefully not too deeply hidden) here. We ought, by our devotion to the Lord and the principles of his gospel, to make things better wherever we may be. Joseph's treatment of other prisoners reminds us of the requirements of the Lord in Matthew 25:40 and Mosiah 2:17.

The butler and the baker share their dreams and Joseph interprets them correctly. To the butler, who would survive prison and return to the service of the king, Joseph made this appeal:

But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon (Gen 40:14,15).

We must not fail to see the hand of the Lord at work here. Joseph may have had a premonition that his interpretation of the dreams would somehow bring him to the attention of Pharaoh, but he could not have known that the Lord had already begun to prepare a way for him to leave prison and to save his father's household and the covenant race of Abraham. I suspect that God is often invisibly at work in our lives. We may be certain that he has forgotten us . Even after his interpretation of the dreams, Joseph spent two more years in prison (see Gen. 41:1), waiting and praying and submitting. Part of the principle of faith in Jesus Christ must be faith in his timing, and also the conviction that he loves us and has our best interests at heart, whether we can see him at work or not.

Discerning the "overruling, almighty hand" of God . . . is not

always easy. Only he knows the end from the beginning and has all things present before him. If he can make provision for a needed second set of plates hundreds of years before Martin Harris's misfortune, who but the most spiritual knows at any given moment where he may be taking us? My own feeling is that it might be well for us to remember that although God's children are very important to the accomplishment of his purposes, we often are not unlike the young children at an amusement park who drive those little centrally controlled race cars that travel a circular course on a metal rail with their wheels several inches off the ground. The young, excited drivers furiously pump the gas pedals and spin the steering wheels, fully believing they are having some influence, but the cars go at a speed and in a direction that are largely determined by park management! (Elder Marlin K. Jensen, *Out of Obscurity: The LDS Church in the Twentieth Century* [29th Annual Sperry Symposium] pp. 2,3)

On the issue of faith in the Lord's timing, Elder Oaks wrote:

The issue for us is trusting God enough to trust also His timing. If we can truly believe he has our welfare at heart, may we not let his plans unfold as he thinks best? The same is true with the second coming and with all those matters wherein our faith needs to include faith in the Lord's timing for us personally, not just in His overall plans and purposes (Dallin H. Oaks: *Even As I Am*, p. 93)

We must allow God to do things in his own way and at his own time. Joseph spent 13 years as a slave and as a prisoner. Could not the Lord have done things in a better, quicker way? Absolutely not. We only ask those kinds of questions because we do not know what things the Lord is doing. Who knows the influence Joseph had on Potiphar and his household, or on the keeper of the prison and the prisoners. How can we know what the other brothers learned in those years after the sale of Joseph. What we must know is that God will not permit these things without a purpose. Elder Scott explained it so well.

While you are passing through [your trials], the pain and difficulty

that comes from being enlarged will continue. If all matters were immediately resolved at your first petition, you could not grow. Your Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son love you perfectly. They would not require you to experience a moment more of difficulty than is absolutely needed for your personal benefit or for that of those you love (Richard G. Scott, "Trust in the Lord," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 17).

What the Lord said to the elders sent to Missouri to bear testimony of the land of Zion might just as well have been said to Joseph, or to any of us.

Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation. For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand (D&C 58:3,4)

Finally, Pharaoh had two dreams.

And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh (Gen. 41:8).

*Then* the butler remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh of a prisoner who could interpret dreams. You remember the dreams about the cows and the corn. President Hinckley has mentioned them a time or two in recent conferences. After quoting the scriptural text of the dreams in October of 1998, President Hinckley said,

Now, brethren, I want to make it very clear that I am not prophesying, that I am not predicting years of famine in the future. But I am suggesting that the time has come to get our houses in order.

So many of our people are living on the very edge of their incomes. In fact, some are living on borrowings.

We have witnessed in recent weeks wide and fearsome swings in the markets of the world. The economy is a fragile thing. A stumble in the economy in Jakarta or Moscow can immediately affect the entire world. It can eventually reach down to each of us as individuals. There is a portent of stormy weather ahead to which we had better give heed (Gordon B. Hinckley, "To the Boys and to the Men," Ensign, Nov. 1998, 53).

Pharaoh had enough faith in Joseph, a man he had just met, to give heed. Will we have enough faith in the Prophet for who we have such a great love to do the same thing?

## **2. JOSEPH MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO HIS BROTHERS AND FORGIVES THEM.**

After 7 years of plenty came the years of famine. Joseph had now been in Egypt for over 20 years. The famine was over "all the face of the earth" (Gen. 41:56) Finally, in Canaan, it became so bad that Israel was forced to send some of his sons to Egypt to buy food.

I have often wondered how Joseph felt when these 10 men who had betrayed him and sold him came in "and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth" (Gen. 42:6). Joseph could not have known when he saw this very event in a dream (see Gen. 37:55-9) that the fulfillment would take 20 years. Once again he had waited on the timing of the Lord. We are told that he remembered the dreams (Gen. 42:9).

His treatment of the brothers cannot be an act of vengeance. Joseph is too close to the Spirit to even consider such an attitude in him. Perhaps his careful manipulation of the circumstances is an attempt to learn about the character of his brothers. He locked them up as spies. After three days of prison (compared to years of prison for Joseph?) Joseph gave all but one of them leave to go home. Of course they did not know him, but he knew them and spoke through an interpreter even though he could understand them perfectly.

Notice the reaction of Joseph when he learned of the guilt that these men still felt over their treatment of him.

And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required. And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter. And he turned himself about from them, and wept . . . (Gen. 42:21-24).

Why did he weep? Almost certainly over the 20+ years of guilt these brothers had endured.

Joseph sent them home but kept Simeon to insure their return. He refused to see them again, however, unless they brought their brother, Benjamin (Joseph's only full brother) with them. Perhaps Joseph wondered if they would return, or if they would sacrifice another brother for their own safety. His return of their money to their grain sacks was a way to determine something about their integrity.

When Israel heard the story of Simeon and the demand for Benjamin, we was devastated. His language is interesting:

And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me (Gen 42:36).

*All these things are against me*, he said, but he was wrong. Actually, they were all too be turned into blessings for him. This is often the case with our trials. Remember that when Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, God cursed the ground *for their sakes*.

Just when all seems to be going right, challenges often come in multiple doses applied simultaneously. When those trials are not consequences of your disobedience, they are evidence that the Lord feels you are prepared to grow more (see Prov. 3:11–12). He therefore gives you experiences that stimulate growth, understanding, and compassion which polish you for your everlasting benefit. To get you from where you are to where He

wants you to be requires a lot of stretching, and that generally entails discomfort and pain (Elder Richard G. Scott: "Trust in the Lord," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 16–17).

Finally, Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He wept and told them who he was and forgave them in a moment's time.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt (Gen. 45:3-8).

But guilt is an awful taskmaster. Years later, at the time of the death of Jacob, the brothers are still worried about Joseph's feelings for them. They appeal to him again, in the name of their departed father, to forgive them.

And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? (Gen. 50:15-19)

This is, after all, what it is all about. In matters of trial and difficulty and forgiveness we must not demand for ourselves privileges that belong only in



the place of God. We must forgive, and we must wait patiently for him and for his will to be made known.

**CONCLUSION:** I had the opportunity to learn an important, Joseph-like-lesson about trials and the timing of God. I would like to share it with you here. My experiences were much less difficult than Joseph's, but the lessons seem to be similar.

Nineteen years after the death of my father, my mother remarried. Within three years her second husband was dead and she was living alone with her advancing blindness in the house he had left her. Even though I had a sister living near her, I felt a need to move to the city where she lived in order to be of assistance. I told those in charge of assignments for the Church Educational System, my employer, that I wanted to be moved to the Logan Seminary if possible. I explained my concerns about my mother and was told that every effort would be made to accommodate my request. My wife and I prayed often about this, keeping the Lord informed of our hopes. No selfish desires clouded this request. Even though my wife and I met and married in Logan, we had no desire to live there again, except that my mother was there and she clearly needed me.

When assignments were made in April for the following school year, I was informed that I would not be moving to Logan to teach. There were no openings for me in the seminary there. I was disappointed—profoundly disappointed, but I resigned myself to the circumstance and resolved to apply again the following year.

In the summer before the new school year began I attended a meeting of CES personnel at BYU. While there, I encountered the principal of the Logan Seminary, a dear friend and former bishop. He had a question for me.

"Ted, why did you decide not to come to Logan?"

"I didn't decide," I said. "You didn't have any openings."

"No openings?" he replied. "Ted, we put three new teachers in the Logan Seminary for next year. They could have gone anywhere."

Suddenly my feelings about the situation changed. I could not understand why my request—my righteous request—had not been granted. Why had the Lord not intervened to get me to the place where I was needed? I *knew* what was best. Didn't he?

These were my feelings on the day I met the principal from Logan, and for several weeks after that. What had happened made no sense at all to me. Everything I could see with my *natural eyes* specified that I should be moving to Logan that summer.

But just weeks after school started, my mother, who had always been fiercely independent and who loathed the thought that she might become a burden to one of her children, surrendered her independence. She gave her home to the children of her second husband and moved to Orem, where I live, and into the home of an older sister one half mile down the street from my own home. Wouldn't I have had fun in Logan?

And just a few months later, my sister and her husband accepted a call to preside over a mission beginning the following summer. Mom needed a new home for three years. When the time came for the move, we only needed one half hour to move her and her belongings to my home.

How grateful I was and continue to be that the Lord did not give me what I had pled for. How thankful I am to worship a being who can see

the wide expanse of eternity and allow things to work together for the good of his children (Ted L. Gibbons, *This Life is a Test*, pp. 39-41).

I think Joseph and his family must also have been grateful that the Lord gave them what they needed rather than what they wanted.

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