

11. Defining Joseph's Descent Phase (Genesis 37–41)

The story of Joseph forms a classic pattern of Isaiah's theology of descent and ascent phases that are an essential part of ascending God's ladder to heaven. The story of Joseph speaks especially to the Ephraimite Gentiles of today—his descendants—who are called to emulate him in their end-time callings. As saviors of their sibling peoples of the house of Israel—the Jews, Ten Tribes, and Lamanites of today—the Ephraimite inheritors of Joseph's birthright have a one-time chance to minister as saviors to the house of Israel: "For they were set to be a light unto the world, and to be the saviors of men; And inasmuch as they are not the saviors of men, they are as salt that has lost its savor, and is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden underfoot of men" (Doctrine & Covenants 103:9–10). Indeed, the house of Israel's end-time restoration today rests in the hands of the Ephraimite Gentiles. If Isaiah's prophecies and Book of Mormon prophecies haven't taught them that key idea, then they have learned very little from them.

When the youth Joseph told his family his dreams, his brothers envied and hated him. After he had walked many miles from home to find them, when he was alone with them, they conspired to kill him. Only through Judah's intervention they instead sold him as a slave to traveling Ishmaelite merchantmen. The trauma this caused him and his father Jacob as God tested them with these trials was unimaginable. Even his "garment of stripes" (Hebrew *ketonet pasim*; mistranslated in the KJV as "coat of many colors") they tore up, causing all the more grief to their father Jacob who had likely made it for Joseph as a special garment of protection.

In contrast to his brother Judah, who married a Canaanite woman and went in to whom he supposed was a harlot, Joseph resisted the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife in Egypt and for that was incarcerated in prison. Instead of playing the victim, he managed the prisoners for the prison guard and gained a name for himself. Throughout his descent phase of suffering and humiliation, "the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed into 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 anything that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper" (Genesis 39:21–23).

After Joseph correctly interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker, two more years went by in prison. One would think Joseph might have lost hope of ever seeing his family or of tasting freedom again. But then Pharaoh himself had a dream that no one could interpret: "Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day: Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker: And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. And there was there with us a young man, a Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh" (Genesis 41:9–14).

Joseph's descent phase comes to an end when he interprets Pharaoh's dream and Pharaoh makes him ruler of Egypt under his hand: "Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God? And Pharaoh said to Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, and there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him *ruler* over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh King of Egypt" (Genesis 41:38–46).

Because of Joseph's righteousness before God and men, two nations were saved from perishing, the people of Egypt and his father's family who took refuge in Egypt during the seven-year famine. In like manner, the Lord is with those who love him through their trials and trust in him to deliver them from them. According to this same pattern of descent before ascent, the Lord raises up saviors to his people—in the end-time as anciently—all who willingly offer up an acceptable sacrifice to him of their trials.