

Seeing God's Perspective on Evil: Genesis 45:1-15

^{ESV} **Genesis 45:1** Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. ⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. ¹⁰ You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty. ¹² And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.' ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Seeing God's Perspective on Evil

The only three constant purposes in the story are that . . .

1) How does God's sovereign power overrule/control human motives?

Overrules motives of Joseph's brothers: God sent me here, NOT YOU"

"⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life." "⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So *it was not you who sent me here, but God.*"

^{ESV} **Genesis 50:20** As for you, you *meant evil against me, but God meant it for good*, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Overrules motives in other Bible examples: humans choose to do evil but the effect is not as they intended. Human motives in choosing and acting are not determinative of actual outcomes.

^{ESV} **Psalm 2:1** Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, ³ "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." ⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

- a) Jewish leaders wanted Jesus crucified to quell the Jesus movement, but it only got bigger.
- b) Saul and other Jewish leaders persecuted the church and stoned Stephen, but the only scattered the disciples away from Jerusalem and began the outward expansion of Christianity.

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- c) Egyptian armies intended to slaughter Israel at the Red Sea or bring them back alive, and God used their pride to destroy the entire army in the Red Sea.
- d) David's son Absalom intended to overthrow his father as king, and destroy the royal family, but he came to ruin and evil counselors were thwarted.
- e) Desire for salvation must be given from the Lord because we would naturally choose evil (John 1:12-13; Rom 9:11)

The Lord controls the motives of men's hearts by giving men up to the lusts (Rom 1:20-28) or to the Devil (John 13:26-30) to turn their hearts in directions that he has foreordained. Where Scripture speaks of the Lord hardening the heart, as Pharaoh did to the warnings of Moses (Exod 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8) we should see this as removing his gracious presence and influence, another way of saying he gave them up to their lusts.

Thus we should interpret Joseph's statement that 'God send him to Egypt,' not his brothers sale of Joseph into slavery, as God giving the brothers up to their anger and envy for a time, until the evil deed was done as merely a local cause, a minor agent, but *not ultimately causing* Joseph to be sent to Egypt.

^{ESV} **Romans 1:26** For this reason *God gave them up to dishonorable passions.* For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;

^{ESV} **John 13:27** Then *after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him.* Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."

The Lord over-rules evil motives by turning the heart to choose his purposes (by salvation and heart change to submit to the Word and its principles)

^{ESV} **Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

OBJECTIONS: **Some will say,** "Then we are robots! What is the point of life if we are mere slaves to the sovereign will of God?" A true Christian will not object to being the servant of the Lord in any way he chooses to direct us and use us, because we know that submission to the sovereign will of God is the best possible way to live in preparation for heaven.

Others will say, "Then how can God hold us accountable for our sin if he also directs our hearts?" Romans 9:19-21 answers that very question, saying that God as potter can make the clay for any use he pleases. We must humble ourselves under his sovereign will.

2) What is God's purpose in overruling evil?

Locally in this narrative:

a) Preserve human life (many beyond Israel were saved from starvation)

⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you *to preserve life.*

^{ESV} **Genesis 50:20** As for you, you *meant* evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about *that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

b) Keep his people from poverty through a wealthy family member

¹¹ There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, *so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.*¹

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Qualifiers:

- 1) Not all suffering will have these positive earthly results. This biblical story/example **is not** a promise that all our earthly experiences of other's sinning against us will end in reconciliation, and in earthly comfort (wealth, power, family reunion). In fact, most situations of family tragedy and evil do not end this way. However, often we can see that God permits some short term evil to remove us from a bad situation in order to protect us from further evil.
- 2) The years of time between Joseph's abuse by his brothers and selling into slavery until they meet again while Joseph is in power seem to allow Joseph time to see the positive overall purpose in going to Egypt and the fulfillment of his dreams about his family bowing down to him. His greater good is very significant in comparison to his suffering, far exceeding his suffering. Job's suffering was eased by a greater good (twice as much) in his latter days than he had experienced before the suffering came (Job 42:10-12). *In some cases you may see/experience a greater good that happened as a result of someone's evil, allowing you time to soften in your anger and bitterness, making it easier (from a human perspective) to forgive.* **Example:** Ashley (before she became a Christian) was sinned against by a former fiancé by leaving her for another woman, breaking off a public engagement and creating personal emotional pain and family shame. However, through the pain Ashley finds Christ and hope. Also years later Ashley meets a fine Christian husband and get married, saving her from greater suffering in the first bad relationship. She could look back and say, "her former fiancé meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." *Experiencing a greater good outcome of someone's evil in this life is not always possible as a motive for reconciliation.* In this case we must look to the heavenly reward and glory as far outweighing this light and momentary affliction (2 Cor 4:17-18) so we can continue to do what is right without expecting greater good to happen in this life.
- 3) Sometimes we misunderstand another's motives and think someone is doing evil against us, but they are not. We develop a feeling of being injured or sinned against when in fact, we have not been sinned against. We can develop a false sense of being persecuted and act improperly in response.

c) Preserve his chosen people and fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob by sending a chosen representative head before them.

⁷ And God sent me before you *to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.*

^{ESV} **Genesis 50:20** As for you, you *meant* evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

We can expect is that God will always preserve a remnant of his people on the earth. *That is the overall purpose of the Joseph narrative, showing us that his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have not failed.* But that remnant may live in total poverty and suffer their entire lifetime without relief.

d) Preserve a remnant changed into his likeness: The confrontation/testing in Genesis 43-44 show that he likely will not be kind to them if they were still self-centered and abusive. His reconciliation *does seem to depend on* their humility in response to charges of theft, honesty in returning the money and *especially depends upon* Judah's willingness to replace Benjamin as the slave punishment for "stealing" Joseph's cup. Overall, we can say he gave them a chance to prove themselves different kinds of brothers.

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3) What is the purpose of the Joseph narrative in the flow of redemptive history?

ALL FOUR PURPOSES OF GOD TO OVERRULE EVIL REMAIN CONSTANT IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

a) Preserve human life in the world

Christ feeds the world's people every day. He answers the prayer, "Give us today our daily bread." His laws have brought much relief to the suffering peoples of the world. Nominally Christian countries have brought much relief from political and economic oppression. So the healthy church has always done deeds of compassion and mercy, and prevented wars, abortions, infanticides and murders. (*We recognize that wars have been fought selfishly in the name of Jesus Christ, using Jesus as an excuse for human greed. Christianity has been used as an excuse for slavery. However, the Bible contains corrective teaching that prevents the true church from continuing on those dehumanizing paths. We also know that many lives will face eternal suffering for rejecting Christ*)

b) Keep his people from poverty through a wealthy family member

Jesus is also the wealthy family member who will keep us from spiritual poverty *will provide for us all we need* in his giving us the Spirit and the Word and the church as our support and strength in the suffering to follow. He also gives the church the keep us from material and financial poverty (Acts 2, 4, 6; 1 John 3:16-18; Jam 1:27; 2:14-26; 1 Tim 3=deacons as stewards of physical needs of the members). The church has also been used by the Lord Jesus to *preserve human life* generally as Joseph did in famine relief (He formed the first *World Vision-Red Cross* international relief agency).

c) Preserve his chosen people and fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob by sending a chosen representative head before them.

The Joseph story is a **type of Christ**, in that *he is raised to the seeing eyes of the disciples and goes before us into heaven, overruling the evil motives of his Jewish "brothers" to preserve a remnant of God's people and keep them from eternal poverty.* The Jews intended to murder Jesus, but God brought about a great salvation from among all the nations (Acts 2:23-24; 36). God sent Jesus to the cross, not the Jews. He did it by hardening their hearts, removing his gracious influence from them, hiding the treasure-truths revealed in the OT about the Messiah from them (Matt 13:10-17, 44) until the field of God's people should be bought, until Jesus should be crowned exalted Lord and ruler of all the Father's house, until the Spirit should be poured out from on high. Jesus is also a type of *Judah-sacrifice who took our place* as the condemned Benjamin-criminal for the punishment we deserved.

^{ESV} **Matthew 16:18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

d) Preserve a remnant changed into his likeness:

The exalted Jesus (like the exalted Joseph to his bartering brothers Gen 42-44) also will test us with suffering to see if we will trust him and love him through all trials, to see if we are indeed a different kind of brother to him than before we were saved (Deut 8:2-3; James 1:2-4; Rom 5:4-5; 1 Pet 1:3-8). Passing the test does not depend on self-effort, but on union with Christ! Christ preserves a remnant changed into his likeness, willing to be honest, sacrificially loving, willing to suffer so others may find salvation and freedom from injustice.