

Joseph and Scooby Doo **August 20, 2023**

I grew up watching Scooby Doo cartoons. They were true classics. Last year, my wife Becca and I watched a few of the new episodes of Scooby Doo. They are still entertaining. But I had a realization watching them.

You really only need to watch the beginning and the end, the first 5 minutes and the last 5 minutes of the show. There you learn about the problem, you'll meet the possible suspects and the monster, and then you find out who the culprit is.

The rest of the show consists of Shaggy and Scooby running around and eating, Velma finding enigmatic clues, a hare-brained plan to catch the monster, and the gang bribing Scooby to risk his life for a few Scooby snacks. Poor Scooby.

That is the disappointing realization I had watching Scooby Doo as an adult. Watch the first 5 minutes and the last 5 minutes, and you've gotten the full story.

Unfortunately, not all stories work like that. I think the people who chose our Bible readings last week and this week were Scooby Doo fans. They gave us the introduction to the story of Joseph last week, and today they give us the resolution. Maybe they figured that was enough, but unfortunately, the story of Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat is NOT an episode of Scooby Doo. We need a little more.

So today I'd like to put a little flesh on the bones of this story. In my view, the story of Joseph is one of the greatest in the Old Testament, and it doesn't often get a whole lot of publicity. So I'd like to give you the full story, not the Scooby Doo version.

Last week, we were introduced to Joseph. He was 17 years old, and he was the favorite of his father's sons. That was saying something, because his father Jacob (also called Israel) had 12 sons. They would become the 12 tribes of Israel that formed the genealogical foundation for the Jewish faith.

Everyone knew that Joseph was his father's favorite. In fact, the father gave Joseph a gift – a special coat. No one can quite interpret the Bible verses that describe this coat. Some say it was a coat of many colors. Others say it was an “richly ornamented” coat, with lots of decorations. Our translation says that it was a coat with long sleeves. In any case, it was a special coat that must've been expensive, and it was a tangible reminder that Joseph was the favorite.

As if that weren't enough, Joseph also had a gift from God. He could interpret dreams. When he was 17, he started having these prophetic dreams. In one, he saw his brothers and himself binding wheat in the field into bundles. All of his brothers' bundles bowed down to his own.

Then Joseph had another dream. He was a star in the night sky. And 11 other stars, along with the sun and moon, bowed down to him.

Joseph told these dreams to his brothers, and you can imagine how much they liked hearing it. So, as we heard last week, the brothers saw Joseph strolling up to them in the field, wearing his colorful or long-sleeved coat, and the brothers decided then and there to kill Joseph. Thankfully, Joseph had one ally, the oldest of the 12 brothers, Reuben. Reuben convinced the brothers not to kill Joseph but just to throw him into a pit. The plan was for Reuben to sneak back later and help Joseph out of the pit.

The brothers stole Joseph's coat and tossed him into this hole. Right after that, before Reuben could rescue Joseph, some traders passed by. The brothers took the opportunity to make a few bucks, and they sold Joseph into slavery to the traders.

Then the brothers took the coat, dipped it in animal blood, and took it to their father. They said, "A wild animal must've killed Joseph." And Jacob, their father, wept.

But Joseph's story didn't end there. He was taken to Egypt and sold to the captain of the guard. Joseph served the man faithfully for several years. Unfortunately, he was falsely accused of wrongdoing and thrown in prison.

Even in prison, though, God was with Joseph. Two of the prisoners came to Joseph and told him their dreams. One of the men was the cupbearer for the Pharaoh himself, and the other man was the Pharaoh's baker. Joseph interpreted their dreams, and then said, "When you are reinstated and are serving the Pharaoh again, please remember me."

The cupbearer was soon reinstated and began to serve the Pharaoh. But he forgot about Joseph. He never told the Egyptian ruler about the man in prison who interpreted his dreams. For two more years, Joseph lived in jail.

Then, one morning, the Pharaoh woke up with a puzzle on his mind. He had a dream, and he knew that it was important, but he didn't know what it meant. He sent for all his advisors and wise men, but no one could interpret the dream.

Finally, that lousy cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "Oh right. When I was in prison a couple years ago, there was a man, a Hebrew, who could interpret dreams. Maybe he could help you!"

So Pharaoh sent a messenger and had Joseph brought before him. The ruler said to Joseph, "I've had troubling dreams, and I hear that you have the gift of interpreting them."

Joseph, to his credit, said, "It's not me, but God who gives this gift. God will help you."

Satisfied, the Pharaoh told Joseph his dream. He saw 7 fat, healthy cows walk out of the Nile River and come onto the banks. Then 7 sickly thin cows came out of the river and ate up the 7 healthy cows.

Joseph listened and then responded without hesitation. "Your dream tells the future. There will be seven years of great harvests. Then, after the seven years of plenty, there will be seven years of famine. So here is my advice, Pharaoh: during the next seven years, store away as much grain

and food as you can. That way, when the famine hits, you'll have plenty for you and your people to eat."

The pharaoh was very impressed. He thanked Joseph and made him one of his highest officials. Overnight, Joseph went from a prisoner to the right-hand man of the king. And thankfully, the ruler listened to Joseph's advice, and for the next seven years, extra grain was stocked away in storehouses.

And then, as Joseph predicted, the famine hit. Everyone in the world went hungry... except for the people of Egypt. And word got out that the leaders of Egypt had huge storehouses of grain, so people came from all over to buy food from Joseph. And because such care had been taken, there was enough grain for Joseph to sell.

After just 2 years of famine, Joseph was surprised that who should walk through his doors, but his dear sweet brothers, who had traveled all the way from the Middle East, from Canaan. Joseph recognized them, but they didn't recognize Joseph, because instead of the 17-year-old boy they had sold, they saw a 30-year-old man, and an Egyptian leader.

What would you do, if you were Joseph in that situation? Your brothers, who planned to kill you but only ended up selling you into slavery, come to you, needing your help.

Joseph, I think, did better than most of us would. The brothers bowed down to them, and Joseph had to have a little fun. As they bowed, he said, "You are spies, and you have come to scout out this land!"

The terrified brothers said, "No, no, we are honest men! We promise!"

After yanking their chain for a few days, though, Joseph sold them the grain and ordered servants to load up the donkeys of the brothers with the food. And then Joseph took the money that the brothers had paid and secretly put it back in with the grain, so that the brothers would essentially take the grain for free.

The brothers traveled all the way back home to Canaan, in the Middle East. When they looked in their packs and saw not only the grain but their money too, they were terrified! They said, "Oh no! That Egyptian thought that we were spies, and now he's going to think that we are thieves!"

So the brothers went back to Egypt. They met with Joseph again and told what had happened.

And that is where today's reading picks up. Joseph listens to this, and he breaks down weeping. He tells his brothers, "I am Joseph." And his brothers are dumbfounded. They're speechless. They're probably wondering if this is the end for them.

But Joseph says, "Don't worry, and don't be angry with yourselves. If you hadn't done what you did, I wouldn't have ended up in Egypt. And no one would have predicted the famine, and

thousands of people would've starved, if I haven't been here and interpreted the dream of Pharaoh."

It's stunning. This man has had his life ruined, and not only does he forgive his brothers, but he tells them how God has been at work in their treachery! "If it weren't for you meddling kids, none of this would've happened... and what a gift that it did!"

What a story of forgiveness. Of trust that God is working, even in the most difficult and frustrating moments of our lives. A story of using the gifts God has given us for the good of the world.

May we be as faithful as Joseph.

Amen.