



In Genesis, chapters thirty-nine to fifty, the Bible tells a remarkable story about a young man on a roller coaster ride. And a wild ride it was, plunging him from great heights to the lowest depths, up again, down again, and finally up again to a victorious grand finale.

Along the way, seventeen-year-old Joseph would have had good reason to question God's goodness. Just imagine how you would feel if you were the favourite child of rich and influential parents and your siblings sold you into slavery because they were jealous of you? And how would you feel if you had worked your way up in your career, and suddenly you were thrown into prison for something you didn't do?

Joseph was his father's favourite, and his brothers hated him for it. But when he told them of a dream in which they were all binding sheaves in the field, and then his sheaf arose and stood upright while all of their sheaves stood around and bowed down to Joseph's sheaf, they hated him even more. "Shall you indeed reign and have dominion over us?" they said in derision. One day, when they were far from home tending their father's flock and Joseph came to see how they were doing, they plotted to kill him. But at just that moment, a caravan of traders passed by, and one of the brothers seized the opportunity to make money. He convinced the others to sell Joseph instead of killing him, and Joseph ended up as a servant in the house of Pharaoh's chief of police.

Reaching an all-time low, Joseph may well have felt that God had deserted him, but God's plan was right on track. And in spite of his troubles, Joseph remained faithful. Then God prospered everything Joseph did, even blessing the Egyptian's house for his sake, and Joseph was promoted to a position of oversight. The roller coaster was moving upward, but not for long. All of a sudden Joseph plunged downhill again – and this time because of his faithfulness. He was a particularly handsome young man, and his master's wife had cast her eyes upon him. She repeatedly tried to seduce him, but Joseph was honourable and kept resisting her advances. Feeling scorned and angry, she falsely accused him before her husband, who promptly sent him to prison. This was the second time Joseph was stripped of all that he had, but he was still in God's will.

While Joseph was in prison, God prospered whatever he did there, giving him favour in the eyes of the prison keeper and eventually promoting him to be in charge of prison activities. God works in remarkable ways. One day, Pharaoh became displeased with his chief butler and baker, banishing them to Joseph's prison. Then God gave these men dreams they could not interpret. And when Joseph saw their downcast faces and enquired as to their sadness, they told him what they had dreamt. Joseph explained that only God could interpret the meaning of dreams and through God's Spirit he was able to tell each man what lay ahead of him: the baker was to lose his life, while the butler would be reinstated to service. Joseph asked the latter to remember him before Pharaoh so that he might be set free himself. After the butler was released, he waited and waited, but nothing happened for two whole years. It must have been a real challenge for Joseph not to become discouraged, but God's plan required for Joseph to be exactly where he was.

The servant had forgotten about Joseph, but God had not. Two years later, Pharaoh himself had two dreams that none of his magicians could explain. Suddenly, the butler remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about his ability to interpret dreams by the power of God. So Joseph was called out of prison, and God gave him the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams: Egypt would experience seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph also outlined a strategy by which Egypt could be saved, and Pharaoh was so impressed that he gave him charge over all the land, except for the throne. Joseph was thirty years old when he became governor of Egypt and the second most powerful man of his time. Finally, the roller coaster ride had taken him all the way to the top.

It would have been easy to forget God when there was no need for His help, but Joseph never did. During the years of plenty that followed, Joseph made wise provisions for the land so that the Egyptians had bread when the famine settled in while the surrounding countries soon ran out of food. People began travelling to Egypt for grain, and Joseph's brothers also came to buy provisions. As they bowed down before the governor with their faces to the earth, as was the custom, they did not realise that they were bowing before their own brother, the one they had sold into slavery. And thus the dream of the sheaves that Joseph had dreamt so many years ago was being fulfilled. The same dream that had fanned his brothers' hatred and had landed him in Egypt. God's plan was all encompassing.

When Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers, they were overwhelmed by his faith, insight and forgiveness:

*"Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life...God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt... Do not be afraid [of me], for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive." (Genesis 45:7-8 and chapter 50:20)*

Joseph's life had certainly been like a roller coaster ride, but God had been in control at every turn. After being humbled, Joseph became the saviour of many people including his own family, who then settled in Egypt and became known as the people of the children of Israel. Does this mean that God has a plan for all of mankind? The answer is a definite "Yes":

*"He [God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said... Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." (Paul's speech on Mars Hill in Acts 17:26-31)*

Whether we realise it or not, all of God's plans come to fruition. He is just as much in control of world affairs today as He is in control of personal lives. We may not be a Joseph, but God's love for us is infinite. He loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for our sins, that whosoever believes in Him should not be condemned but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Those who have trusted Jesus for their salvation can therefore say with total confidence,

*"We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, for neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.." (Romans 8:37-39)*

If God is for us, who can be against us? No one – what perfect security!