

Adult study of Jesus Christ

We continue with the study of the providence of God as far as Jesus Christ is the gatherer and preserver of the church.

In particular, we looked those things that God provides and found that God provides both good and evil, yet, we cannot reconcile the provision of evil with God's character and holiness. We discovered that when Scripture speaks of God providing evil, or calamity, it refers to the evil of punishment, which God authored specifically to punish the wicked and reveal his righteous judgment to the believer.

We also found that the elect experience the effectual presence of the Holy Spirit in varying degrees, as the Holy Spirit manages and directs the sanctification of the believers.

We also dealt with the two ways in which God works, namely, immediately and over time.

His immediate work results in miracles, which occur outside the order of nature. Num 20:10. (Moses struck the rock and it produced water). It is not always the elect who are the objects of God's immediate work, the wicked are also subjected to God's immediate work, not to produce evil (for that their evil natures are overwhelmingly sufficient) but for the wellbeing of mankind in general, a climate of peace and liberty for the church, and those blessings and gifts that believers receive from the hands of unbelievers.

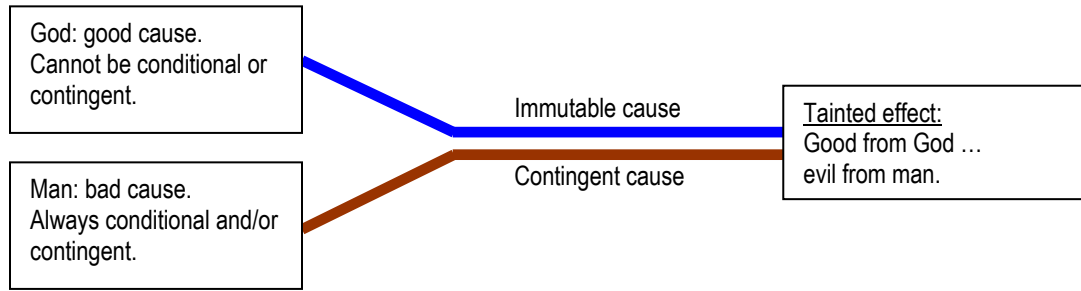
The good that unbelievers do is counted to them as sin by association. They not only witness and recognize the good that they do, but they experience God as the origin of the good that they do. Instead of ascribing to the Almighty God that which they are incapable of providing, they honor and reward themselves or their false gods.

God's works over time are always according to the order of nature, which includes the order of the evil nature of men. The Holy Spirit manages and directs our actions according to the general rule of the effectual presence of the Holy Spirit, which is to be near us when we need illumination of God's will and protection from the evil one, and to be far from us when we are handed over to our own evil desires.

We also looked at a graphic illustration of the First Cause (God) of things, and the second cause (man) of things in a situation where God works over time and not immediately.

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Causes and effects



In this graphic, we see the top line representing God's purpose that the effect on the right would come to pass. It can never fail because that would impeach God's omnipotence.

The bottom line represents man's purpose, which is tainted and requires varying degrees of the Holy Spirit's effectual presence to effect God's purpose, which is why the effect is called a tainted effect.

Let us now peel back the layers of the history of Joseph and his brothers and view it through the prism of cause and effect, paying particular attention to God's immutable purpose, man's fickle and evil intent, and the Holy Spirit's effectual presence to accomplish God's purpose without immediate and miraculous work.

As one of the four golden strands of the integrity of Scripture, salvation history, we must see Jesus' bloodline as God's immutable purpose through Abraham and Sarah (remember where God protected Sarah from Abimelech when they said they were brother and sister); Jacob the younger were blessed instead Esau; Judah the father of Peres by Tamar, who deceived him by posing as a prostitute because Judah didn't give Shelah (Judah's sons: Er, died – evil; Onan, died – refused to raise an offspring for Er with Tamar; and Shelah too young to marry Tamar.) his son to her as husband. Peres is an ancestor of Jesus.

Therefore, to preserve the bloodline of Jesus, an immutable purpose of God, it was inevitable that God would send someone ahead of the famine to ensure that Israel would survive. God could have intervened immediately but then where would Joseph's brothers' remorse have come from? Where would they have had the opportunity to repent from their latent evil – harboring a hatred for their little brother that drove them to believing murdering him is a doable solution? How far have they strayed from God's precepts that they would conceive such an evil deed from which they properly repented in Egypt? How would we have learned about the providence of God without this account of the history of the preservation of the church?

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One cannot but wonder whether they would still have sold Joseph into slavery if God had revealed to them the outcome of all this? The amazing thing is that God did reveal to them the outcome: through Joseph's dreams, which, as we know now, were prophecies.

But, they did not view Joseph's revelations as prophecy; they looked at Joseph and his utterances through the prism of their hatred and their pride.

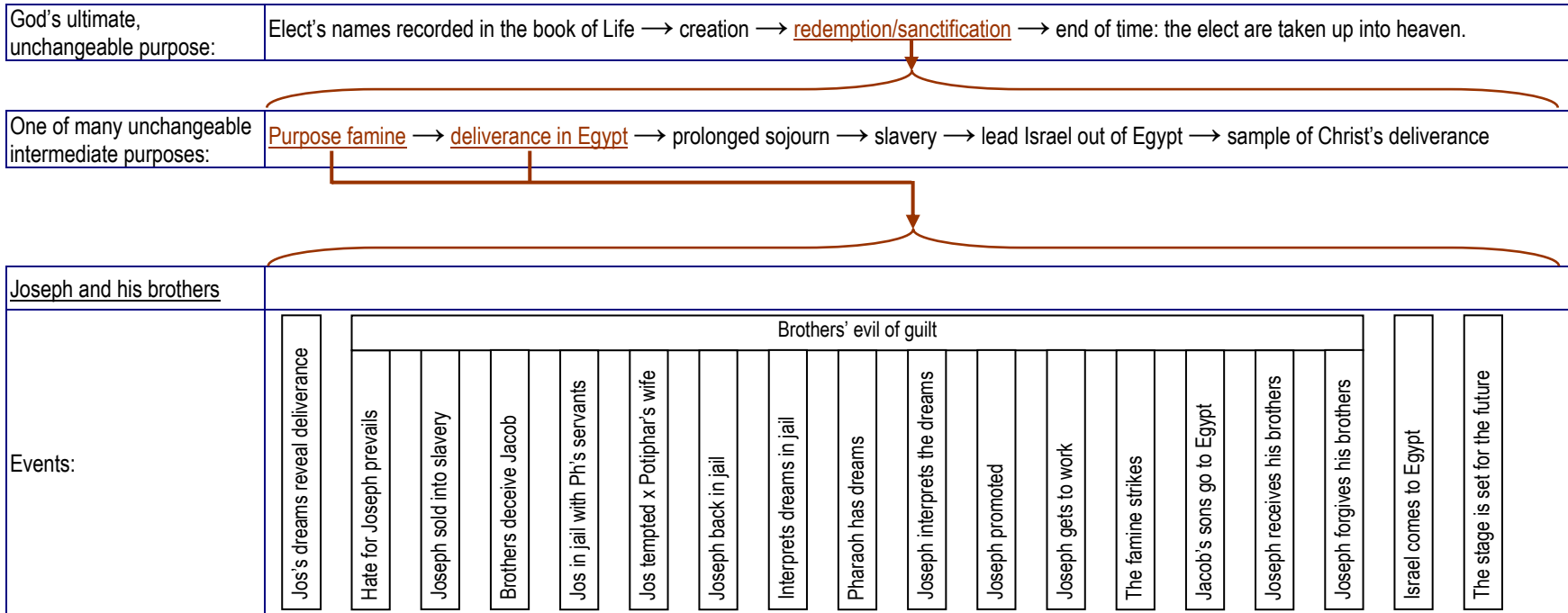
Similarly, God spoke to Cain in Gen 4:7 to warn him that, "...sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Cain did not listen because his hatred for his brother was greater than the fear of God's warning. It was only after he killed Abel that he cried out, "My punishment is too great to bear!" (Gen 4:13). But, God was merciful and gave him a sign by which he would not be killed. (Gen 4:15).

Similarly, God showed mercy towards Joseph's brothers when they realized the gravity of their evil and have repented of it.

Similarly, we too, should learn, through the law, the gravity of our sins, which demands the extent of the gratitude we ought to show towards God for having been set free from that evil.

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Chart of God's immutable purpose and how man interacts with it through good and evil intent.



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Events:

Joseph's dreams reveal the deliverance of the famine that will befall the world. Granted, the revelation was given in a rather cryptic form and without a warning of the coming famine, one can hardly blame the brothers for being irritated with their little brother's ranting about dreams in which they would bow down to him.

Hate for Joseph prevails.

Nevertheless, if the brothers had trusted in the Lord, they would have sought direction from God but they were so far away from a righteous path that their hatred for Joseph, fueled by the favor that Jacob bestowed upon him, overwhelmed and choked their faith and reasoning. At the core of their sin was their pride – the same pride that caught Adam and Eve.

Joseph sold into slavery.

If it hadn't been for Reuben, Joseph would have been killed and that would have thwarted God's purpose, so the Holy Spirit effectually moved closer to Reuben to show compassion to his little brother and also closer to the other brothers so that they would concur with Reuben. In this manner, God intervened.

Reuben, on the other hand, wanted to come back later and rescue Joseph after his brothers threw him into the pit (37:22) and "restore him to his father". But, this, too, would have threatened God's purpose, so, when the Ishmaelite caravan approached, the deliberate movement of the Holy Spirit on the brothers can be clearly seen.

Judah, the ancestor of Christ, suggested that they rather sell Joseph than kill him, "...for he is our brother, our own flesh." (37:27). The Holy Spirit moved closer to Judah and he realized that it would be wrong to kill their brother. The brothers "... listened to him." We must infer from that, that the Holy Spirit moved closer to the other brothers, too, which took killing Joseph off the table right away.

So, when the Medianite caravan showed up, they concluded the transaction. The brothers concocted the evil plot of their own accord fueled by their hatred while God's immutable purpose to effect Israel's deliverance was set in motion. God directed and restrained their evil, and even subjected Reuben's good intention (to restore Joseph to his father) to his brothers' evil plan.

Brothers deceive Jacob.

Their evil plan succeeded and, whether they killed Joseph or pretended that he was killed, their explanation to their father was the same and Jacob's reaction was the same.

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A measure of their heartlessness, the depth of their evil, was the terrible agony that they had brought onto their father without any remorse or compassion. Their hate for their brother was indeed very deeply rooted.

Jacob is partly to blame for the root of that evil. (37:3, 4) His preferential treatment of his children he had with Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin) seeded the hatred between the brothers. Jacob favored his children with Rachel above the others, children of Leah and her and Rachel's maids. Laban deceived Jacob into marrying Leah, which put her children at a disadvantage and the children from the maids even more so. Since Rachel was the one Jacob loved and worked for 14 years to marry, her children were the ones he favored. When Rachel died in childbirth with Benjamin, he showered the boy with his love and affection.

One can see how far back in the past God planned the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, which, in itself, is only a part of God's larger purpose.

Joseph in jail with Pharaoh's servants.

Since the Pharaoh would not buy slaves from merchants, a lower ranked officer, Potiphar, the captain of the bodyguard, bought Joseph and became his charge. But, for Joseph to end up in a position of absolute authority, so that Israel's deliverance from the coming famine could be secure, Potiphar was merely a stepping-stone to the top.

Joseph tempted by Potiphar's wife.

God was with Joseph and he prospered to the extent that Potiphar appointed him overseer of his house. There was no need for the Holy Spirit to have moved away from Potiphar's wife to get her to approach Joseph with such an evil proposal. Joseph considered jail and perhaps death preferable to adultery, or as he put it, rebuking Potiphar's wife, "there is no one greater in this house than I," said Joseph, "and [Potiphar] has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9). There is the key, "sin against God," that prevented Joseph from considering her proposal. She, of course, acted perfectly according to her evil desires as an unbeliever would and faked a rape attempt to punish Joseph, who was unceremoniously thrown in jail again.

Why, then, did God bring this calamity over Joseph? Knowing God's character to the extent we are allowed and revealed to us, we can see that Joseph required to pass the test (a beautiful woman and an opportunity to receive favor at the hand of the master's wife) to remain faithful to God and not the flesh.

Why? The power and wealth that Joseph was about to receive are fiercely corrupting elements and only experiencing first-hand the right and wrong way of doing things could solidify and reinforce his faith and God's will in his

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mind. It was the only way in which Joseph could receive sufficient protection from corruption during the time that was to follow.

Joseph back in jail.

Once again, Joseph prospered in jail and the years he spent incarcerated, could easily have broken his spirit and faith in the Lord, but he prevailed, knowing that he is not guilty of any crime but he was rather a victim of his brothers' evil deed.

He remained steadfast in his faith in God. We, as spectators of history, can see the next step to the final goal unfold before our eyes. Joseph was not thrown into any jail but Potiphar put Joseph in the jail where the king's prisoners were held. (39:20).

Joseph interprets dreams in jail.

The link between Joseph and the king was about to be connected. God laid dreams into the sleep of the baker and the cupbearer so that they asked Joseph to interpret it for them, which he did, but not before ministering to them that "interpretations belong to God" (40:8).

It was important that Joseph give more than mere interpretations of the dreams because the dreams were prophecies that immediately had to come to pass, so that Joseph's resume, so to speak, had to be impeccable when the time comes to refer Joseph to the king. The king must have no doubt that Joseph speaks with the authority of God.

Pharaoh has dreams.

It was two years since Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him to Pharaoh, in which Joseph patiently waited for God to deliver him from the evil that his brothers had committed. As a mortal human, Joseph could not have guessed what was in store for him, but he must have waited on the right of that wrong. Finally, at the proper time, Pharaoh had his dreams, given by God in his sleep as prophecies.

It is no accident that Pharaoh's counselors could not interpret these dreams, neither could they spin the dreams to sound like something the Pharaoh would want to hear. The opportunity for Joseph to enter center-stage was at hand.

Joseph interprets the dreams.

When the cupbearer finally remembered Joseph as the one who accurately interpreted his dream and that, which the dreams predicted, actually came to pass, the king sent for Joseph. The dreams of the cupbearer and the baker and their outcome were crucial in convincing the king to send for Joseph.

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Once again, an opportunity arises for Joseph to grasp the honor and glory that would come from being singled out by the Pharaoh as the dream interpreter (41:15). But, by this time, Joseph, confident in his faith in God, having been prepared for this kind of temptation, answered the most powerful man in the world, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." (41:16).

The lesser dreams of the cupbearer and the baker served as an on-ramp for the larger dream of the Pharaoh. The lesser dreams delivered quick results to set the stage for the larger dreams that would take at least seven years to come to pass. The years of prosperity could have been a good guess from Joseph, but the years of famine following gave Joseph's interpretation the accuracy it deserved. But, for Pharaoh to believe Joseph on a matter that would lie seven years into the future took impeccable credentials and what better than the actions of the Pharaoh himself – restoring the cupbearer and executing the baker.

God truly worked the minds of kings and men to serve His purpose.

Joseph promoted (again).

Joseph's promotion sets the stage for the deliverance of Israel. Here the testing of Joseph with Potiphar's wife started to pay off. He chose not to sin against God but rather suffer jail after having enjoyed Potiphar's favor and foregoing the intimacy of his wife. Comparing jail with life in the house of Potiphar must have been quite a contrast but Joseph considered suffering in jail an honor as opposed to a sinful life. Free meant free from sin, not free from incarceration.

His faith in God was stronger than ever now that he was second-in-command of all of Egypt, including Potiphar and his wife. Giving in to Potiphar's wife? What a mistake that would have been!

Joseph gets to work right away.

Being faithful to the prophecy of Pharaoh's dreams was crucial in the deliverance of Israel, so Joseph gets to work right away to fill the warehouses of Egypt with the abundant crops in the first seven years. It would have been easy for him to succumb to the duties, honor, glamour, and ceremony that, being the one second to the Pharaoh, would bring.

The famine strikes.

As predicted, the famine strikes "all the lands" (41:54) except in Egypt. What is peculiar is that Joseph sells its food to the nations, rather than giving it away. The point is, later the people ran out of money and Joseph lets them pay with their livestock. When their livestock ran out, they paid with their lands, so that by the end of the famine, the Pharaoh owned everything except the land allocated to the priests. At no point is food given away. They all had to pay for Egypt's bounty.

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Jacob's sons go to Egypt.

I found it rather typical the way in which Jacob rebuked his sons after he heard that there was grain in Egypt. He said, "Why are you staring at one another?" It is the typical thing that one would level at a good-for-nothing bunch. No wonder he had very little confidence in them.

He sent the 10 of them to Egypt having kept Benjamin behind in case calamity should befall him. He, obviously, had no confidence in his sons.

Joseph receives his brothers.

Joseph recognized his brothers while they did not recognize him. Well, to be fair, they did not expect him there in that position, so it is understandable that they would not have recognized him. Furthermore, he spoke to them through an interpreter (42:23) further lessening the chances that they would recognize him; but he understood what they were saying.

He heard Reuben giving his brothers the 'I told you so' routine (42:22) and their remorse for what they had done to him, still believing that he has died.

Joseph could not be sure that his brothers had honest intent coming to Egypt so he accused them of being spies to assure himself that they are there to buy grain. Their integrity did suffer from gross wrongdoing towards him.

Joseph forgives his brothers.

The brothers faced destruction at the hand of God, mediately, through the order of nature, which He established through the kidnapping of Joseph. They feared that God's punishment for their evil against Joseph would destroy them. Joseph engineered their misery by placing their money back in their sacks and when Benjamin was with them, his cup in Benjamin's possession.

They felt that nothing they do would have a good result since God is against them. Then Joseph could no longer contain himself and reveals himself to his brothers and forgives them.

Gen 45:7, 8 "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt."

Israel comes to Egypt.

God promised Jacob that Joseph "will close his eyes" (46:4). God gave Jacob more than just the return of Joseph; he saw Joseph's sons and had the opportunity to bless them, too.

The stage is set for the future.

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Israel's deliverance in Egypt had a sting in its tail as we know from history. Jacob and Joseph must have been under the impression of the foreignness of Egypt because they both requested that their bones be returned to the land of their fathers. Joseph prophesied to his brothers that they would return from Egypt to the land God promised to their fathers.

Gen 50:24 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob."

Even Joseph could not have known in what manner God would "bring them up from this land." Or, what the purpose of their great suffering in Egypt would be; and the glorious leading-out of the Israelites out of Egypt. Or, that Jesus Christ, the Messiah they were expecting would be foretold by that action and only the elect would recognize that it was so.

God's work "over time" require that the hearts of men would be changed to act according to their evil desires in a lesser or greater manner all to accomplish His immutable purpose.