

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #106: THE TEARS OF JOSEPH

By John Temples

Genesis 45:1-2 says, "Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, 'Make everyone go out from me!' So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. *And he wept aloud*, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it."

Joseph was one of the most remarkable men in Bible history. We marvel at his faith in God, a faith which remained steadfast through all that happened to him. He exhibited a moral standard that many cannot equal today. But there is another thing about Joseph we should appreciate. It is a quality that we normally do not think about: *the ability to shed tears*.

The text above records one of the most emotional and poignant scenes in the Bible: the moment that Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers. But this is not the only occasion on which Joseph wept. In fact, the Bible records seven such occasions. Let us look at and learn from the tears of Joseph.

The first occasion was when he heard the confession of his brothers because they had betrayed him. Genesis 42:21-24 describes the scene: "Then they said to one another, 'We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.' And Reuben answered them, saying, 'Did I not speak to you, saying, Do not sin against the boy? And you would not listen. Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.' But they did not know that Joseph understood them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter. *And he turned himself away from them and wept.* Then he returned to them again and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes."

These were tears of relief upon seeing the remorse of his brothers. For twenty years he had kept inside all his feelings toward his brothers. Now, he could release all that hate and disappointment.

What can we learn? When others have wronged us, and are genuinely remorseful and confess their wrongs, it is a time for forgiveness and release of anger.

The second occasion was when he saw his brother Benjamin after twenty years. “Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, ‘Is this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?’ And he said, ‘God be gracious to you, my son.’ Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to weep. *And he went into his chamber and wept there.*”

These were tears of tender brotherly affection. Some tears are experienced only within the bonds of family. One of the most terrifying marks of the increase of sin in the world is Paul's description of people who are “without natural [familial] affection” (Romans 1:31 and 2 Timothy 3:3, KJV). The disintegration of the family has hastened the moral decline of our age, and we are paying for it.

The third time Joseph cried is when his brothers passed the test of true repentance. Joseph tested his brothers by hiding his silver cup in one of their grain sacks. They discovered the cup after leaving for home. What would they do? Genesis 45:1-2 records their response. Instead of “throwing their brother under the bus,” they all returned and pleaded with Joseph for mercy. “Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, ‘Make everyone go out from me!’ So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. *And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it.*”

These were tears of reconciliation. They signified the triumph of love over hate--sorrow over sin--and patience over revenge. Precious are the times when we can cry these kinds of tears.

The fourth time was at his brothers' departure for Canaan. Joseph had assured his brothers that though they meant him evil, God meant what happened to him for good. Then he commanded them to go and bring his father and the whole family down to Egypt. Genesis 45:13-15 reads, “So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hasten and bring my

father down here.' Then *he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept*, and Benjamin wept on his neck." These were tears of sadness, tears of parting. Joseph was sad at the knowledge that there would be five more years of famine, and he would not see his brothers for a long time until they returned to Egypt. We too often experience these "parting is such sweet sorrow" tears. One day there will be no more such tears!

The fifth time Joseph cried was at his reunion with his father. Genesis 46:29-- "So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and *fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while.*"

These were tears of joyful reunion. Many times in this life, we experience such tears of joy when we see loved ones we have not seen for a long time. Think about the ultimate joyful reunion that awaits us in heaven! But somehow, on that day there will be no tears--God will wipe them away.

The sixth occasion was at the death of Joseph's father. "And when Jacob had finished commanded his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people. Then *Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him*" (Genesis 49:33 - 50:1).

These were tears of grief and sorrow. We also know these tears; they come to us all. When they come, do not restrain them or hold them back. They are a gift from God as an outlet for our sorrow.

The seventh time Joseph cried was after Jacob's death, when his brothers feared that Joseph would take revenge on them. Genesis 50:15-21--"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.' So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, 'Before your father died he commanded, saying, "Thus you shall say to Joseph, I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." Now please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.' *And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.* Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, 'Behold,

we are your servants.’ Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; 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. Now therefore, do not be afraid. I will provide for you and your little ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”

These were tears of disappointment. Joseph was deeply hurt to think that his brothers misunderstood him and did not trust him. We will also be misjudged by others--people will think we are “out to get them.” And we will cry at their lack of understanding and faith in us. Let it not defeat us.

So yes, some of the greatest lessons of the Bible are found in tears--specifically, the tears of Joseph. There are many different kinds of tears, and he cried them all:

- Tears of relief.
- Tears of affection.
- Tears of reconciliation.
- Tears of sadness.
- Tears of joy.
- Tears of grief in the face of death.
- Tears of disappointment when others misjudge us and let us down.

Let us learn from the tears of Joseph. Let us not be afraid to cry. It is an essential part of our human experience. Remember these Biblical admonitions:

- “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8).
- “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).
- “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).

We can’t leave this lesson without thinking of the tears of another Person, of whom Joseph was a type. Twice, our Lord is said to have wept: at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35), and on His way to the cross. “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known, even you, especially in

this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you and your children within you to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation'" (Luke 19:41-44). These tears may be the saddest ever cried in all history--God came to rescue His people, and His people turned Him away. But God persevered and purchased our pardon. That ought to cause us to cry tears of gratitude. --John Temples