

The Story of Joseph

Changing Clothes

Part 51 – June 23, 2013

I told you I often approach God's Word like a puzzle or a riddle. And we looked for a solution to the mystery of Benjamin's 300 shekels. But, we had to leave off at the riddle of the five sets of clothes.



King Tut's Chariot, c. 1323 BC

So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, [Royal carts would've been the cultural equivalent to landing a fleet of presidential helicopters in someone's backyard. It's the stuff of neighborhood legends] and he also gave them provisions for their journey. To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes. – Genesis 45:21-22 NIV

Ever noticed how Jesus enjoys riddles than rules? Or, that He's more apt to leave someone with a question than an answer? The disciples were constantly asking Him to explain His parables. Know why that is? *It's a riddle!* **If the Bible was a rule book, you'd learn it, get bored with it, feel superior for knowing it. But a riddle book! That requires pursuit. Allows for revelation. Creates an actual conversation between you and God.** And, like a great sport or video game, the more you learn the better it gets! Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. And, look what the Lord said to his brother and sister about Moses.

"... When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles ..." [But, with every other prophet, God's style choice is riddles!] – Numbers 12:6b-8a NIV

Why not Moses? Did God love him *more*, and His riddles are a kind of punishment? No. Did God love him *less*, and ban him from the adventure? Nope. Was he *dumb*? **"No riddles for Moses."** I don't think so. So, why didn't God speak to Moses in riddles? *It's a riddle!*

If God's Word is a riddle, how many questions are you asking?

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. – Jeremiah 33:3 NIV

If God's Word is concealed, how eagerly are you seeking?

... anyone who comes to [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. – Hebrews 11:6b NIV

If His Word is a scavenger hunt, how many doors are you knocking on?

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. – Matthew 7:7-8 NIV

[Back to Joseph] And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey – Genesis 45:23 NIV



Funerary models, 1990 – 1786 BC

That’s the riddle of the loaded donkeys: How many total? $10 + 10 = 20$. Why’d Joseph send 20 loaded donkeys?

[A few verses earlier, He said to his brothers] ... do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, **[How much did they sell him for? 20 shekels]** because it was to save lives **[What are the donkeys loaded with? Lifesaving provisions. He concluded]** that God sent me ahead of you. – Genesis 45:5b NIV

The 20 loaded donkeys (one for each shekel of betrayal) declare that **God has turned his suffering into blessing. Actually, it was God’s blessing all along; he just didn’t fully see it till now.**

Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, “Don’t quarrel on the way!” – Genesis 45:24 NIV

He doesn’t want ‘em wasting their time, and tarnishing his gifts by focusing on who’s to blame for which part of what they’ve done. **He doesn’t want them to squander the joy of their salvation. We’re spoiling the journey when we stop focusing on God’s grace.**

So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob **[Who’d been anxiously awaiting any sign of his returning sons, ‘constructively’ using his time to consider every conceivable calamity, catastrophe, and casualty]** in the land of Canaan. **[And, over the horizon came a pageant of security-attended, gilded, royal Egyptian wagons paraded in to the jubilant shouts of the brothers many children, who had never, ever, seen their fathers arrayed, in such elegantly tailored attire and ornamented finery, impeccably manicured, and groomed, and perfumed, and followed by a train of 20 decorated donkeys, pulling garlanded carts, led by imperial servants, and laden with magnificent gifts. All 11 sons were alive and well and they stood in their regal carriages and excitedly shouted out to their astonished, stupefied, dumbfounded father]** They told him, “Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.” Jacob was stunned; **[he couldn’t comprehend what they could mean; and, when he finally did]** he did not believe them. **[Even though he’d never, ever seen ‘em so overjoyed and jubilant!]** – Genesis 45:25-26 NIV

You see, when you’re focused on the grace you’ve received, **the joy of redemption overshadows the shame of forgiven guilt.** I don’t care what the world thinks; I was lost, but now I’m found! This is the joy Joseph wants ‘em to know: “Look at us! Look how we’re dressed! We betrayed our brother and buried his memory; but, he has risen, and he’s filled with forgiveness! And He’s blessed us, dressed us, cleansed us, covered us, and paid our debt!”

But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, **[they saw something in their father they hadn’t seen for 22 years: hope!]** the spirit of their father Jacob revived. **[When the true story of Joseph came through, Jacob’s faith found the strength of ten brothers, plus two!]** – Genesis 45:27 NIV

Without riddles, there’s no reveals. And, **it’s the reveals that revive!** It’s not about secret information, or even salvation, it’s about rejuvenation, invigoration, and stimulation! God throws down the challenge, “See if you can find what those five sets of clothes might represent!”



1. Jacob gave his son favored status with a **robe of family authority**, and sent him to his brothers in Shechem. But, they'd left Shechem and gone to Dothan, a remote area by a trade route.
2. In Dothan, they trapped him, ripped off his robe, and sold him to the Ishmaelites. He wore the **undergarment of a slave** all the way into Egypt, at the slave market, and on Potiphar's plantation.
3. Potiphar, Captain of the palace guard, saw something in Joseph, and gave him the **house-wrap of a Chief Steward**. That didn't last long. Mrs. Potiphar tempted and abused him, again and again, finally tearing off and keeping his garment, in order to see him dead.
4. But, he was issued **prison clothes**, and descended into the royal dungeon to serve the captives of the king, (39:22) which led to a meeting with the king, requiring a quick change on the way. (41:14)
5. Pharaoh raised Joseph to the highest position, in the most powerful nation, and presented him in **royal robes of total authority**. (41:42)

And that's the riddle of the five sets of clothes. **Benjamin's garments represent Joseph's journey!** I wonder if each suit was made to symbolize each stage, and if Benjamin used the clothes to tell the story to their father. **If God's Word is a game, are you ready (and willing) to play?**

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. – 1 Corinthians 9:25 NIV

If God's Word is a mystery, how many clues have you gathered?

[Paul says he wants the Colossians to have] ... the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. – Colossians 2:2-3 NIV

Look what God had hidden right under Joseph's and *Moses'* noses: those five sets of clothes symbolize the One Benjamin foreshadows. The Father established Jesus at His baptism, saying, "This is my Son." (Mat 3:17) Jesus then ministered as a rabbi/teacher, and He wore the fringed prayer-shawl that God commanded. (Num 15:37-39)



They begged him to let them touch even the edge **[also hem, fringe, or tassels]** of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed. – Mark 6:56b NIV

One time His shawl healed a woman without His prior knowledge! (Luke 8:41-46) He was sent to His own with a garment of family authority. When the Jewish leaders beat Him, they wouldn't have struck the mantel; they would've taken it, to take His authority, and to expose his tunic, referred to as His undergarment. (John 19:23)



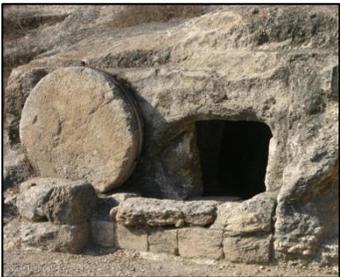
This is how he was taken to Pilate¹, the governor of Edom (the land of Esau, Jacob's brother, who married a daughter of Ishmael (Gen 28:8-9)), and Samaria, where Shechem and Dothan are located. **They sold Jesus out to the man who literally represented Shechem, Dothan, and the Ishmaelites!** Pilate then sent Him to Herod², who declared Him innocent (Luke 23:13-15) in a most astonishing way.



Dressing him in an elegant robe, they [Herod's palace guard, totally and incredibly paralleling Potiphar] sent him back to Pilate. – Luke 23:11b NIV



Just as Mrs. Potiphar repeatedly abused Joseph in the house of Potiphar, a gentile soldier, so the gentile soldiers repeatedly torment Jesus, at Pilate's, dressing him up for their own sport, showering him with false praise, and finally taking his garments, in order to see him dead. And, **when Pilate places the title, "King of the Jews" above Jesus' head, he unwittingly answers Isaiah's prophetic riddle that puzzles Jews to this day: how is it that the Messiah will be a Suffering Servant and a Conquering King?** Here's a hint: His prison clothes are *grave* clothes. And, when God called Him to His throne, He even changed on the way, leaving his grave clothes behind.



Three of His disciples got to glimpse His divine robe, on the Mount of Transfiguration, when His clothes became as white as light (Mat 17:2) and He was wrapped in the glory of eternal authority. **He took what we deserved, so we can have what He deserves.** And, this is what every riddle in the book is about: Jesus! So, why didn't God speak to Moses in riddles? God called him to *write* the riddle book! The first five books contain the stories, names, laws, feasts, sacrifices, and tabernacle design; and every jot and tittle is a revelation in a riddle about Jesus.

Is it a coincidence there are five books and five sets of clothes? In Genesis, God establishes His chosen people. In Exodus, they're enslaved. In Leviticus, become Chief Stewards of His Tabernacle. In Numbers, they're sentenced to 40 years in the wilderness. And in Deuteronomy, they're given authority over all the nations. But that's about 470 years *after* the brother's big announcement.

And Israel [Jacob] said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. [God's promise to Grandpa Abraham (Gen 15:13-14) that his descendants will be strangers in a foreign land is coming to pass! Come on, Israel, let's do this! "Now, now ... no need to rush. Grandpa also said we'd be enslaved for 400 years." Yes. But, it's a blessing in disguise, look at those 20 donkeys! Look at the clothes! He wants *you* to be part of something great and eternal! "Well, I don't know about moving in, but ..."] I will go and see him before I die." ["I think a little visit is *just* what's called for."] – Genesis 45:27-28 NIV

If God's Word is a foreign land, are you moving in or just visiting? *That's* a riddle only you can answer. Better make your decision, because this is where we have to close God's story for today.

¹ Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea, Idumea/Edom, and Samaria from AD 26 to 36.

² Herod Antipas was a 1st-century ruler of Galilee and Perea, and bore the title of tetrarch (i.e. ruler of a quarter).