

# A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM



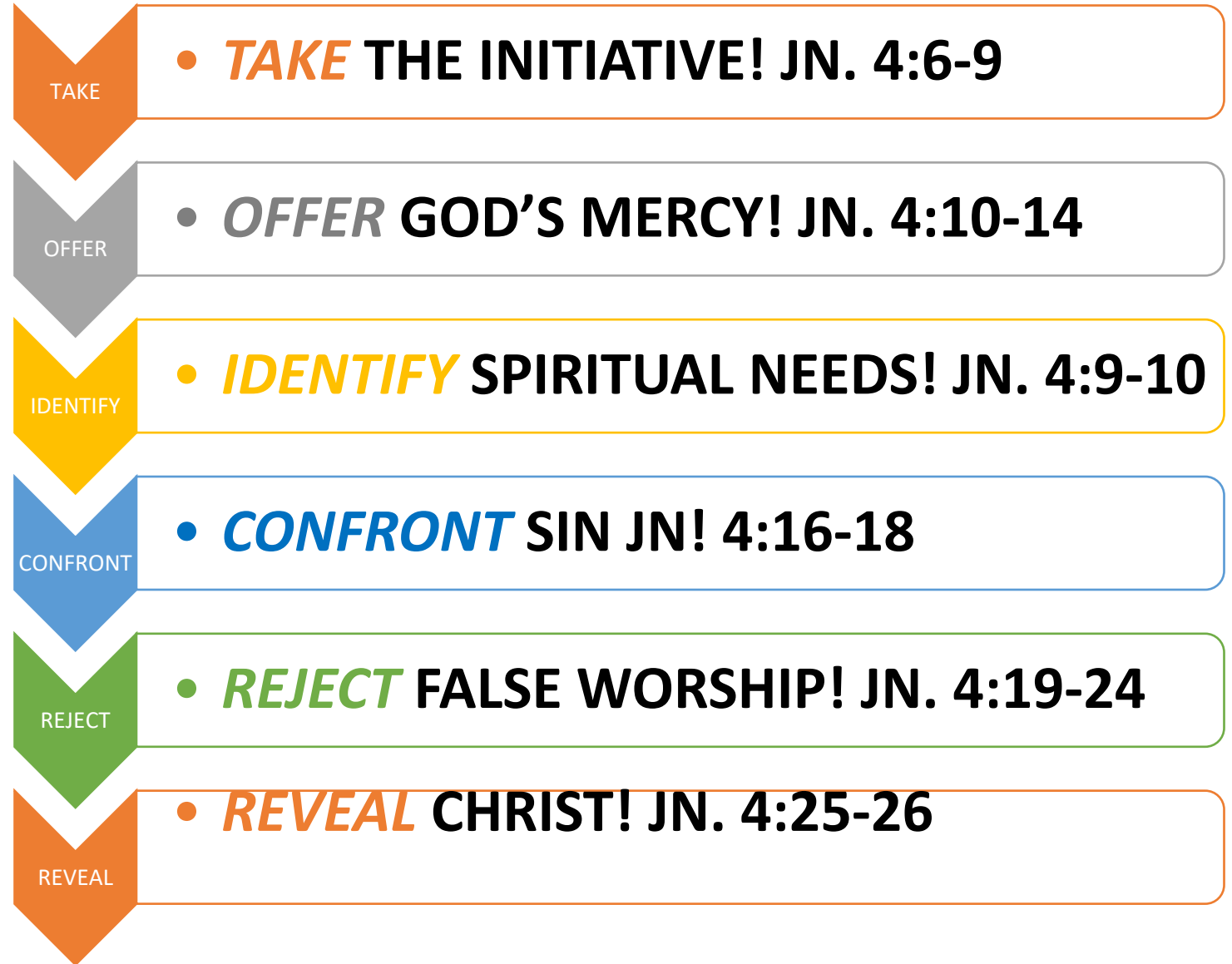
A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's roots are massive and spread out, some resting on the ground and others draped over the stone walls of an old building. The stone is dark and weathered, with some green moss or lichen visible. The background shows more of the ruins and some green foliage. The overall scene is one of nature reclaiming old human structures.

THE FRUIT OF  
THE RIGHTEOUS IS A  
TREE OF LIFE,  
AND HE WHO IS WISE  
WINS SOULS.

PROVERBS 11:30 NASB



# PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLICAL *EVANGELISM* FOUND IN JOHN 4, “THE WOMAN AT THE WELL.”



# Profiles *of* Godliness

JOSEPH + THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

## JOSEPH, GOD'S *SOVEREIGNTY* IN OUR TRIALS.

- Dressed in royal garb fitting his office and flanked by guards and servants, the prime minister looked down on these herdsman as they stooped before him. His long history with these men included vivid memories of pain and rejection.
- In the past they had wronged him in unthinkable ways. Now the tables were turned. With a word, he could enact severe retribution on those who betrayed him.
- ***IS THAT THE ACTION *JOSEPH* WOULD TAKE AGAINST HIS BROTHERS?*** Their father *JACOB* was dead and buried. Now they bowed before their brother, fearful that he might finally seek revenge for their severe cruelty decades earlier.

- Minutes felt like hours in the somber anticipation of **JOSEPH'S** decision. The brothers braced themselves for the worst. **REUBEN**, the oldest, had long blamed himself for what had happened to **Joseph**. **JUDAH**, too, felt the sting of guilt; he was the one who initially suggested selling Joseph into slavery. But all the brothers—except **BENJAMIN**, the youngest—had been involved in that treacherous act. They were all guilty. Was this the day their crimes had finally caught up with them?
- When the silence broke, it was not with a voice of angry threats or harsh punishment. Instead, it was the unexpected sound of weeping. Struggling to maintain his composure, **JOSEPH** collected himself long enough to release the compassion that was in his heart. The **GENESIS** account records his words:



***“DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR AM I IN GOD’S PLACE? AS FOR YOU, YOU MEANT EVIL AGAINST ME, BUT GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD IN ORDER TO BRING ABOUT THIS PRESENT RESULT, TO PRESERVE MANY PEOPLE ALIVE. SO THEREFORE, DO NOT BE AFRAID; I WILL PROVIDE FOR YOU AND YOUR LITTLE ONES.” SO, HE COMFORTED THEM AND SPOKE KINDLY TO THEM.” (GEN. 50:19–21)***

# THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

- Unlike those who breed a *seething hatred* and *desire for vengeance*, **JOSEPH** treated his brothers with **UNDESERVED FAVOR**. But how are kindness and love cultivated in the heart of one so wickedly mistreated? The answer is found in **JOSEPH'S THEOLOGY**—he had a clear understanding of God's **PROVIDENCE**. In that moment, with his trials behind him and his brothers before him, **Joseph** articulated the perspective that summarized the story of his life: **GOD IS IN CONTROL AND WE CAN TRUST HIM FOR THE OUTCOME**.
- As New Testament believers looking back on **JOSEPH'S** example, we can see the principle of (ROM. 8:28) fleshed out in his life: **"AND WE KNOW THAT GOD CAUSES ALL THINGS TO WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, TO THOSE WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE."**



- AS **JOSEPH** HIMSELF ARTICULATED, **GOD INTENDED** THE **TRIALS** OF HIS LIFE FOR THE GOOD OF HIS PEOPLE. **JOSEPH'S** SUFFERING WAS **NOT** A PUNISHMENT FOR SIN, BUT THE MEANS THROUGH WHICH **GOD** WOULD PREPARE **JOSEPH** FOR A SPECIFIC ROLE IN **HIS DIVINE PLAN TO SAVE SINNERS**.

## GOD'S DIVINE *PURPOSES*

- *JOSEPH COULDN'T SEE IT AT THE TIME*, but there was *PURPOSE* in his *SUFFERING*. Betrayed by his brothers, he had the joys of home and the security of his father's love violently ripped away from him. Without warning, he had become a victim of human trafficking. *SURELY, HE WONDERED WHY GOD PERMITTED THIS TO HAPPEN. HOW DID THIS FIT WITH THE DREAMS GOD HAD GIVEN HIM?*
- *JOSEPH* was taken down to *EGYPT*, where he was sold as a slave to *POTIPHAR*, a chief servant of *PHARAOH*. However, in the *PURPOSES OF GOD* and through *JOSEPH'S FAITHFULNESS*, he quickly rose to a position of prominence in Potiphar's house. *JOSEPH* was so capable and trustworthy that his master gladly put all his possessions in Joseph's care.

- **IT WAS *GOD'S PROVIDENCE* THAT PLACED *JOSEPH* IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE.** *Potiphar* served in *Pharaoh's* court, which exposed *Joseph* to royalty and the noble customs of Egypt. Such knowledge would later prove essential.
- ***JOSEPH* was also given a unique opportunity to DEVELOP HIS LEADERSHIP QUALITIES.** As a boy he merely reported on his brothers' activities, but now he was directly managing his master's resources. That administrative experience would likewise prove invaluable for Joseph's future.
- In addition to his *exposure* and *experience*, **JOSEPH'S PLACEMENT in *Potiphar's house* ensured that, if he were ever found guilty of a crime, he would be sent to the same place where Pharaoh's own prisoners were confined (GEN. 39:20). THAT, TOO, WAS CRUCIAL TO THE *DIVINE PLAN*.**

## A **FALSE** ACCUSATION

- **POTIPHAR'S WIFE** began to take an illicit interest in her husband's *Hebrew slave*. Scorned by his refusal as he fled from her advances, her sensual desires for **Joseph** immediately turned into vicious animosity as she grabbed onto his clothing. Her fury raged against Joseph, and she shouted to the other servants in the house. When they found her, she accused Joseph of attempted rape, holding up his garment as proof.
- **FOR THE SECOND TIME IN HIS LIFE, HE WAS STRIPPED OF HIS CLOTHING.** Years before, when his brothers grabbed his robe, he was thrown into a pit. This time, his garment in the hands of Potiphar's wife would result in his being thrown into prison.
- **JOSEPH MUST HAVE WONDERED HOW ALL THESE THINGS COULD BE HAPPENING TO HIM WHEN HE HAD DONE NOTHING TO DESERVE SUCH TREATMENT.**

- IN SPITE OF WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN ***GREAT TEMPTATION*** TO ***GRUMBLE***, ***COMPLAIN***, AND ***GET ANGRY***, HE CONTINUALLY RESPONDED BY ***HONORING THE LORD AND DOING WHAT WAS RIGHT***. WHILE HE COULDN'T HAVE UNDERSTOOD WHY, ***JOSEPH WAS CONTENT THAT SITTING IN THAT PRISON WAS EXACTLY WHERE GOD WANTED HIM.***



- WHAT ABOUT **YOU**?
- AS YOU LOOK AT YOUR LIFE—IN BOTH **GOOD TIMES** AND **BAD**—**CAN YOU SEE** HOW THE LORD **HAS PREPARED YOU** FOR CERTAIN **TASKS** AND **RESPONSIBILITIES**—HOW HE HAS USED **CIRCUMSTANCES** TO **ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES** **IN YOUR LIFE?**

# JOSEPH: THE *PRECISION* OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

- It sounds strange, but even in prison *JOSEPH* experienced the *LORD'S BLESSING*. His *ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS* were noticed by the warden, and soon he was placed in charge of all prison operations. *JOSEPH WAS SO COMPETENT AND EFFICIENT THAT "THE CHIEF JAILER DID NOT SUPERVISE ANYTHING UNDER JOSEPH'S CHARGE BECAUSE THE LORD WAS WITH HIM; AND WHATEVER HE DID, THE LORD MADE TO PROSPER"* (GEN. 39:23).
- After some royal intrigue, *PHARAOH'S CUPBEARER* and *CHIEF BAKER* arrived at the prison. Whatever the nature of their crimes, *THE BAKER* and *THE CUPBEARER* were put in prison to await *Pharaoh's verdict*.

- One night, each man had a dream so troubling and extraordinary that they were still upset the next day. When **JOSEPH** asked the cause of their consternation, each recounted **HIS DREAM**. In response, **JOSEPH** correctly interpreted each dream—a life-changing message of restoration for the **CUPBEARER** and a life-ending message of condemnation for the **BAKER**.
- The **GENESIS** account makes it clear that God was the one who **gave** the men their dreams and **gave** Joseph the accurate interpretations. Like **DANIEL** centuries later, **JOSEPH** knew that he had no natural ability to tell the future (**DAN. 2:27–30**). The Lord revealed the true interpretation so that His power might be displayed and His purposes fulfilled.
- After interpreting the cupbearer’s dream, **JOSEPH SPECIFICALLY ASKED THE MAN NOT TO FORGET ABOUT HIM:**

- ***“ONLY KEEP ME IN MIND WHEN IT GOES WELL WITH YOU, AND PLEASE DO ME A KINDNESS BY MENTIONING ME TO PHARAOH AND GET ME OUT OF THIS HOUSE 15, “FOR I WAS IN FACT KIDNAPPED FROM THE LAND OF THE HEBREWS, AND EVEN HERE I HAVE DONE NOTHING THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE PUT ME INTO THE DUNGEON.” (GEN. 40:14–15)***
- Twice before, **JOSEPH** had been unjustly treated by other people: **first**, by his own brothers and then by **POTIPHAR’S WIFE**. This time he entrusted himself to **PHARAOH’S CUPBEARER**. And again, he would be let down. The cupbearer was indeed restored to Pharaoh’s service, but he was indifferent to Joseph’s plight and **“FORGOT HIM”** (GEN. 40:23).
- ***BUT GOD HAD NOT FORGOTTEN OR ABANDONED HIM***. Nor would the Lord allow the cupbearer’s forgetfulness to last indefinitely. ***THE TIME WAS COMING WHEN PHARAOH WOULD NEED SOMEONE WHO COULD INTERPRET DREAMS***.

- ***RIGHT ON CUE***, in the unfolding of this ***DIVINELY ORDAINED DRAMA***, the ***CUPBEARER*** would remember his extraordinary prison experience. ***GOD'S PLAN FOR JOSEPH WAS COMING TOGETHER EXACTLY AS HE INTENDED.***
- One night ***PHARAOH*** awoke in a cold sweat, startled by the most vivid and terrible nightmare he had ever experienced. In his dream, Pharaoh found himself on the banks of the Nile River, with seven beautiful, healthy cows feeding in a meadow nearby. The scene was peaceful and serene. Suddenly, like something from a horror movie, seven skinny cows rushed into the field, attacked the fat cows, and ate them! Even after devouring the fat cows, the skinny cows remained as ugly and gaunt as before. The frightening images were enough to wake Pharaoh from his sleep. Later that night, a ***second nightmare*** repeated the same shocking pattern, except instead of cows, seven plump heads of grain were gobbled up by seven thin, withered heads.

- ***THE NEXT DAY***, the ***KING*** was deeply troubled. He was even more disturbed when none of his magicians or wise men could interpret the dream. The alarming situation was enough to jog ***THE CUPBEARER'S*** poor memory. ***PHARAOH*** wasted no time in securing ***JOSEPH'S RELEASE***. He was given a change of clothes and a quick shave and was rushed into Pharaoh's presence.
- After ***PHARAOH*** recounted his dream, ***THE LORD REVEALED ITS MEANING THROUGH JOSEPH***. Both dreams depicted the same future reality—there would be ***SEVEN YEARS OF PLENTY*** followed by ***SEVEN YEARS OF FAMINE***. If the Egyptians were to be ready for the coming catastrophe, they would have to begin storing up resources immediately. ***MOREOVER, A MAN WITH ADMINISTRATIVE SKILL AND MANAGERIAL EXPERIENCE WOULD BE NEEDED TO ORGANIZE THE COLLECTION AND STORAGE EFFORT.***



- **CLEARLY, GOD HAD ORCHESTRATED JOSEPH'S PAST EXPERIENCES AND TRIALS FOR THAT MOMENT.** If **HIS BROTHERS** had not sold him into slavery, he would not have been brought down to Egypt. **IF POTIPHAR** had not purchased him from the slave market, he would not have gained the experience he needed to manage people and commodities within an Egyptian context. **IF HE HAD NOT BEEN FALSELY ACCUSED** and sent to prison, he would not have interpreted the cupbearer's dream. And if that had not happened, he would not have been summoned by the Pharaoh on this divinely appointed day. **HIS RESPONSIBILITIES IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE AND IN THE JAILHOUSE PREPARED HIM FOR HIS NEW ROLE IN PHARAOH'S HOUSE.**
- **THE LORD HAD OVERSEEN ALL THOSE EVENTS TO BRING HIM** to this one moment—when **JOSEPH** would be ready to organize a national food drive, saving millions from starvation. **PHARAOH RECOGNIZED GOD'S HAND ON JOSEPH** and **IMMEDIATELY KNEW THE FORMER PRISONER SHOULD RUN THE FOOD-GATHERING OPERATIONS FOR HIS EMPIRE.**