

## GenZ – Generation of Purpose

### People & Places

#### Joseph (Zaphenath-Paneah)

##### Sermon Reference

Joseph is the central Old Testament figure discussed in the sermon as the 'Z-character' representing Generation Z. Known in Egypt as Zaphenath-Paneah, Joseph's life is used as a model for discovering purpose by embracing identity, dreams, enduring process, resisting temptations, forgiving enemies, and engaging one's finish.

##### Background Context

Joseph, the son of Jacob (also called Israel) and Rachel, is a towering figure in the Old Testament narrative, whose story unfolds primarily in the book of Genesis chapters 37 through 50. Born in Canaan and favored by his father, Joseph was given a richly ornamented coat, symbolizing his favored status. However, this favoritism stirred jealousy and hatred in his older brothers. They sold Joseph into slavery, leading him into a complex journey of suffering and triumph in Egypt. The Egyptian pharaoh bestowed upon him the name Zaphenath-Paneah, a title meaning 'Giver of Nourishment' or 'Revealer of Secrets,' signaling his divine role as interpreter of dreams and sustainer of a nation during famine.

Raised in the pastoral background of Canaan, Joseph was uniquely positioned at the intersection of God's covenantal promises to his forefathers and the unfolding history of Israel. His experience as a shepherd and dreamer shaped his identity and destiny. When betrayed by his brothers and enslaved in Egypt, Joseph endured false accusation and imprisonment, yet his faith in God endured, leading to his unprecedented rise to the position of vizier — the second-highest authority in Egypt under Pharaoh. Joseph's narrative transcends personal success; he became a pivotal figure in preserving the lineage of Israel and shaping the geopolitical landscape of the ancient Near East.

Joseph's marriage to Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, signifies integration into Egyptian society, aligning with ancient customs where political authority often fused with priestly and familial alliances. This union not only secured his position but also resulted in the birth of two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who would become foundational tribes in Israel's later history. The naming of these sons reflects Joseph's recognition of God's providential care ('fruitful' and 'making to forget'), indicating a personal and theological reclaiming of his journey from hardship to divine favor.

Historically, Joseph lived during a time when the Hyksos, a Semitic people from the Levant, ruled Egypt; this context provides a backdrop for Joseph's acceptance and prominence in the Egyptian administration. The Hyksos rulers are known for introducing advanced military and administrative innovations, and Joseph's role as a foreign-born advisor aligns with this dynamic. His stewardship during a seven-year famine preserved the Egyptian economy and surrounding nations, underscoring his significance not only in biblical history but in the broader history of ancient civilizations.

### Importance in the Bible

Joseph is vital to the biblical narrative as a figure demonstrating God's sovereignty and providence in the midst of human suffering and injustice. He embodies the principle that God can elevate and use even the most adverse circumstances to fulfill His greater purpose. Joseph's story is a bridge from the patriarchal era to the formation of Israel as a nation, as his preservation of his family during famine sets the stage for the Israelites' migration into Egypt and eventual enslavement — a prelude to the Exodus. Spiritually, Joseph represents faithfulness, integrity, and forgiveness, serving as a model for believers on how to fulfill God's purpose despite trials, resist temptation, and embrace forgiveness, which propels purpose forward. His prophetic insight and political wisdom highlight divine revelation working through human agency, emphasizing that God's plan for His people encompasses both spiritual destiny and temporal provision.

## Jacob (Israel)

### Sermon Reference

Jacob, Joseph's father, is referenced as the source of Joseph's favored identity, having bestowed upon him the coat of many colors. His relationship with Joseph establishes the foundation of Joseph's identity, which is critical for fulfilling his purpose.

### Background Context

Jacob is a patriarch of the Israelite people in Genesis 25–50. The son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, Jacob's life is marked by complex family dynamics, divine encounters, and the unfolding of God's covenant promises. His name, meaning 'he supplants' or 'holder of the heel,' reflects his birth grasping his twin brother Esau's heel, a portent of the struggle for birthright and blessing that characterizes his early life. Jacob's pursuit of God and his covenant is transformational, including his legendary wrestling with an angel and subsequent renaming to Israel, meaning 'strives with God.' This event symbolizes the spiritual journey of the nation that would emerge from his descendants.

Jacob's family life set much of the stage for biblical Israel's national narrative. His twelve sons would become the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. The favoritism shown to Joseph, born of his beloved wife Rachel, ignited sibling rivalry with historic and theological repercussions, including Joseph's eventual descent into Egypt. Jacob's experience blends human frailty and divine grace, illustrating God's ability to work through imperfect people to fulfill His plans.

Culturally, Jacob's life reflects the complexities of ancient Near Eastern family and covenant traditions, including inheritance rights, blessings, and the role of divine promises in the formation of identity. His journeys between Haran and Canaan reveal God's faithfulness to His promises despite Jacob's moral and familial challenges. He embodies the interplay between human action and divine purpose, a motif central to the biblical story and its unfolding history. Jacob's importance extends beyond his familial role; his covenantal relationship with God reinforces the theological foundation of the Israelite identity as God's chosen people. The promises made to him anchor the narrative trajectory towards redemption, nationhood, and God's ultimate plan for His people.

### Importance in the Bible

Jacob is essential to Scripture because he is the direct link between the patriarchal promises given to Abraham and Isaac and the history of Israel as a nation. His life demonstrates God's faithfulness despite human weaknesses and family conflict. The complex relationship between Jacob and Joseph illuminates how God's providence works through relational challenges to accomplish His purposes. Theologically, Jacob's transformation into Israel represents the spiritual wrestling and perseverance that God desires from His people, making him a foundational figure in both Jewish and Christian traditions.

## Potiphar

### Sermon Reference

Potiphar is the Egyptian official and master of Joseph when he was sold into slavery. It is likely he was a Hyksos soldier, maybe general, often away serving in the military. Potiphar plays a significant role in Joseph's early Egyptian experience, representing a connection to the Egyptian ruling class and faith system.

### Background Context

Potiphar is introduced in Genesis 39 as an Egyptian official, described as the captain of the guard for Pharaoh. His role as a high-ranking figure in Egyptian society places him within the courtly and military life of the time. The name Potiphar means 'he whom Ra gave,' linking him culturally and religiously to Egyptian deity worship. This situates Joseph's service within the idolatrous context of his captors, emphasizing the contrast and tension between Joseph's faithfulness to the God of Israel and the pagan society in which he found himself.

As Joseph's master, Potiphar entrusted him with all the affairs of his house, indicating Joseph's exceptional character and administrative skill. His household was large and apparently well ordered, as seen by Joseph's supervisory authority. The significance of Potiphar's household extends beyond the personal; the household seems to represent Egyptian political power indirectly. When Joseph resists Potiphar's wife's advances, Potiphar's reaction to Joseph's alleged wrongdoing results in Joseph's imprisonment, setting in motion the divine orchestration of events leading to Joseph's rise, yet highlighting the vulnerability and injustice Joseph endured.

Historically, Potiphar represents the Egyptian political elite during the Hyksos period, a time when Semitic rulers held sway over the power centers of Egypt. His household's role in the narrative encapsulates the power and challenges of living as a foreign servant in Egypt, and his interactions with Joseph reveal the complexity of loyalty, injustice, and providence during this era.

#### Importance in the Bible

Potiphar's importance lies in his role as an early test of Joseph's faith and integrity in a foreign land. He represents the secular authority that provides both opportunity and trial for Joseph. The betrayal through Potiphar's wife's false accusation and Joseph's resulting imprisonment exemplify how adversity can be part of God's process for fulfilling divine purpose.

## Pharaoh (King of Egypt)

#### Sermon Reference

Pharaoh is the Egyptian ruler who bestowed upon Joseph the Egyptian name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath as a wife. Pharaoh's recognition of Joseph's abilities and his elevation to a position of authority was pivotal for Joseph's purpose and for Egypt's survival during the famine.

#### Background Context

In the narrative of Genesis and the broader biblical account, Pharaoh represents the political and religious sovereign of Egypt, the most powerful nation of the ancient Near East at the time. While the exact identity of this Pharaoh is not stated explicitly, historical context suggests he ruled during the period of Hyksos domination, a Semitic dynasty that controlled Egypt. Pharaoh's role as king was not merely political but also religious, embodying divine authority as a god-king in Egyptian culture. Such a position gave Pharaoh immense influence over societal, economic, and religious life.

This Pharaoh's decision to elevate Joseph reflects practical recognition of divine wisdom working through Joseph's God-given gift of dream interpretation. By entrusting Joseph with managing Egypt's resources, Pharaoh empowered a foreigner to administer the nation's welfare, especially as the interpreted dreams foretold seven years of plenty followed by seven years of severe famine. Pharaoh's acceptance and elevation of Joseph underscore a theme of God's providence transcending national and religious boundaries. This act not only secured Egypt's survival but also set the stage for the eventual preservation of Jacob's family and the unfolding of Israel's national destiny. Pharaoh's role is symbolic of earthly authority that is susceptible to recognizing divine intervention. His acknowledgment that there is 'no one like Joseph' who can interpret dreams elevates Joseph's status and demonstrates that God's wisdom can work through secular rulers. Pharaoh's gift of Asenath in marriage to Joseph further integrates Joseph fully into Egyptian aristocracy. This partnership also politically ties foreign lineage to the Hyksos rule, consistent with the practice of dynastic and political alliances through marriage in the ancient world.

Theologically, Pharaoh illustrates how God's plan for redemption and preservation often involves pagan rulers and worldly powers. His leadership during the famine highlights the intersection of divine revelation and political stewardship, where God uses even those outside the covenant community to accomplish His sovereign purposes and safeguard His chosen people.

### Importance in the Bible

Pharaoh holds critical importance as the authority who enables God's plan for saving Israel from famine and sets the stage for the nation's future in Egypt. His cooperation with Joseph attests to God's sovereignty over all rulers and nations. Pharaoh's recognition of Joseph elevates the theme of God's providence working through human agency and political structures. However, the later Pharaohs who enslaved the Israelites, as mentioned in Exodus, contrast this initial benevolence with hostility, reminding readers of the complex and dynamic relationship between God's people and earthly powers.

## Asenath

### Sermon Reference

Asenath is given as wife to Joseph by the Pharaoh. She is the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Asenath represents Joseph's integration into Egyptian society and provides the lineage through which Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh are born.

### Background Context

Asenath's significance within the biblical narrative centers on her role as Joseph's Egyptian wife, marking a crucial cultural and spiritual juncture in Joseph's life. She is identified as the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On, one of Egypt's foremost religious centers dedicated to the sun god Ra. This connection places Asenath within the highest echelons of Egyptian religious aristocracy, highlighting the blending of Joseph's Hebrew lineage with Egyptian social structures. Marrying into a priestly family further embeds Joseph into Egypt's political-religious elite.

From a historical perspective, Asenath represents the political and familial alliances common in the ancient world that cemented and legitimized the status of ruling officials. Her marriage to Joseph reflected not only a personal union but a symbolic and strategic fusion of distinct cultures and religious traditions. Some traditions claim that she converted to Judaism before marrying Joseph, but the Bible does not mention conversion of any kind and since Judaism as we understand it did not exist, this assertion is likely a fabrication. Despite her pagan background, her role in the biblical narrative acts as a vessel through which the promised blessings of Israel were preserved and expanded—through her sons, who became two of the tribes of Israel.

Theologically, Asenath's story is often viewed as an illustration of God's ability to work through and redeem even those outside the covenantal community. While the Bible does not detail her personal faith, later Jewish and Christian traditions sometimes interpret her as a symbol of Gentile inclusion in God's plan. Through the marriage of Joseph and

Asenath, God's providence extends beyond Israel, foreshadowing the eventual inclusion of the Gentiles in God's redemptive purpose.

Culturally, Asenath's priestly background contrasts with Joseph's servant origins but complements his ascent to power. This union enforces the narrative's emphasis on God elevating the lowly and uniting diverse peoples under His sovereign plan. It also highlights the complexity of identity and purpose—Joseph retains his God-given identity even as he embraces his role within a foreign society through this marriage.

#### Importance in the Bible

Though a secondary character, Asenath is crucial as the matriarchal figure through whom the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh descend, both integral to the Israelite nation's composition. Her presence in Joseph's life symbolizes God's work across cultural and ethnic boundaries. Finally, her marriage reinforces the reality that God's purposes often unfold through historical and social integration, especially amid diasporic experiences. Asenath exemplifies the intersection of divine providence and human history in the biblical storyline.

## Ephraim and Manasseh

#### Sermon Reference

Ephraim and Manasseh are Joseph's two sons, born to his Egyptian wife Asenath. Their names symbolize fruitfulness and forgetting sorrow, marking Joseph's fulfillment and restoration. They became tribal leaders in Israel.

#### Background Context

Ephraim and Manasseh are unique among the twelve tribes of Israel as they are the two sons of Joseph, rather than sons of Jacob directly. Genesis 41:50-52 records their birth in Egypt during Joseph's rise to power. Their names carry theological and emotional significance. 'Ephraim' means 'fruitful,' representing God's blessing and the flourishing Joseph would experience despite hardship. 'Manasseh,' meaning 'making to forget,' reflects Joseph's desire to leave behind the painful trials of his past. These names express God's deliverance and provision, reinforcing the theme of restoration that permeates Joseph's story.

Historically, these two tribes became prominent within the northern kingdom of Israel, with Ephraim, in particular, often regarded as a leading tribe. Both tribes inherited separate territorial allotments rather than being grouped with Joseph's brethren, highlighting the special status conferred upon Joseph's lineage. This double portion underscores Joseph's unique legacy, as one of Jacob's sons was effectively 'split' through Joseph into two tribes, fulfilling his father's blessing and prophetic dreams.

The birth of Ephraim and Manasseh in Egypt during a time of both divine providence and foreign captivity symbolizes God's sustaining grace amid displacement. Their existence continued the covenantal promise to Abraham's descendants despite Egypt's foreign context. Moreover, Joseph's adopting his sons into Israel's tribal structure served as a

unifying gesture, weaving his Egyptian experience back into Israel's national identity and future.

### Importance in the Bible

Ephraim and Manasseh are critical to Israel's tribal system and national identity, representing the fulfillment of God's promises through Joseph. Their emergence marks a theological statement about God's power to transform sorrow into fruitfulness and to establish a people despite difficult circumstances. Ephraim, due to his size and influence, becomes synonymous with the northern kingdom, and the blessing of Joseph's descendants is foundational for Israel's tribal and spiritual history. Their story underscores the continual theme of God turning suffering into hope and blessing.

## The Hyksos

### Sermon Reference

The Hyksos, a Semitic people, are referenced as rulers of Egypt during the period in which Joseph rose to power. Their presence explains the sociopolitical context allowing Semitic foreigners like Joseph to hold high rank in Egypt.

### Background Context

The Hyksos were a group of mixed Semitic peoples originating from the Levant region who, during the Second Intermediate Period of Egypt (circa 1650–1550 BCE), gained control over parts of Egypt including the Nile Delta. The name Hyksos means 'Rulers of Foreign Lands' in Egyptian. They introduced innovations such as the horse-drawn chariot and composite bow, giving them military advantage. Their rule marked a significant departure from native Egyptian dynasties, creating a unique environment where foreign leaders held sway in Egypt's governance.

Historically, the Hyksos influence explains how Joseph, a Semite, could ascend to prominent political authority in Egypt. Their dominance facilitated a favorable climate for Semitic integration and promoted Semitic officials to high offices. The Hyksos presence in Egypt also helps elucidate enigmatic biblical references that depict Israelites' familiarity and relatively favorable status in Egypt prior to later oppression.

Culturally, the Hyksos introduced new customs, religious practices, and social structures, blending Semitic and Egyptian traditions. This dynamic interaction created a cosmopolitan environment rife with cultural exchange and tension. The Hyksos period is significant as it bridges the narrative tensions in biblical history concerning foreign oppression and highlights early examples of diaspora and cultural assimilation, themes critical to the Israelite experience.

Theologically, the Hyksos era provides insight into the providential circumstances enabling God to place His people in Egypt for preservation without immediate oppression. Their rule sets the stage for the later phases of Israelite history, including the Exodus narrative. Understanding the Hyksos helps grasp the historical underpinnings of biblical events and God's sovereign guidance of world empires for His redemptive purposes.



## Importance in the Bible

The Hyksos era is vital to understanding the historical context of Joseph's rise and the Israelites' early sojourn in Egypt. Their rule allowed for Semitic access to power, directly influencing the biblical narrative and theological themes of God using foreign rulers and circumstances to advance His plan. The fall of the Hyksos and the rise of native Egyptian dynasties explain the transition to oppression that Israel later suffered, framed as God's unfolding plan to form His covenant people through deliverance and covenant.

## King Ahmose

### Sermon Reference

King Ahmose is mentioned as the Egyptian ruler who eventually drove the Hyksos out of Egypt about 100 years after Joseph's time, marking a significant change in Egypt's political landscape and affecting Israel's status.

### Background Context

King Ahmose I was the first ruler of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt, credited with expelling the Hyksos from Egypt around 1550 BCE. His military campaigns reunited Egypt and inaugurated the New Kingdom era, a period of unprecedented Egyptian power and influence. Ahmose's reign marked a decisive turning point from foreign domination back to native Egyptian sovereignty, reshaping the political and social landscape.

The expulsion of the Hyksos under Ahmose had significant implications for the Semitic peoples living in Egypt, including the Israelites. While Joseph's time under Hyksos rule was one of elevation and favor, the dawn of native Egyptian rule later led to harsher treatment and eventual enslavement of Israel, as recorded in Exodus 1. Ahmose's military achievements symbolize the revival of Egyptian nationalism and the reclamation of cultural and political control, against a backdrop of regional upheaval and shifting power dynamics.

Culturally, Ahmose's reign was marked by consolidation of religious practices, monumental building projects, and military innovation. His victory over the Hyksos reinforced the ideology of Pharaoh as divine ruler and protector of Ma'at (cosmic order), reinforcing the nationalism that defined subsequent generations. The political climate transitioned from multicultural Semitic influence to assertive Egyptian dominance, an atmosphere hostile to Israel's identity.

### Importance in the Bible

King Ahmose is important as a historical figure bridging Joseph's genealogy and early Egyptian sojourn with the later story of Israel's enslavement and redemption. This context reinforces the broader biblical themes of God's sovereign control over empires and rulers as He advances His covenantal purposes through trials and deliverance. Ahmose's reign frames the narrative tension that culminates in the Exodus, a foundational event in the biblical story of God's salvation.



## Oral Roberts University (ORU)

### Sermon Reference

Oral Roberts University is referenced as a contemporary institution nurturing 'whole leaders for the whole world,' highlighting the teaching about purpose, the promise to Generation Z, and the ministry launching point of the sermon's host, Dr. Billy Wilson.

### Background Context

Oral Roberts University is a private evangelical university founded in 1963 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, by evangelist Oral Roberts. It is dedicated to promoting Christian faith, integrating spiritual development with education across academic disciplines. The university attracts students from around the world, emphasizing leadership, ministry, and the concept of 'whole person' education — addressing mind, body, and spirit.

ORU has played a significant role in contemporary Christian education by preparing students to live purposeful lives rooted in faith and equipped to impact society globally. It emphasizes Spirit-empowered leadership, encouraging students to become transformative agents in diverse fields including missions, social service, business, and arts. The university's curriculum incorporates biblical principles with practical applications, aligning with scripture's call to serve God with all aspects of life.

Culturally, ORU functions as a hub for evangelical engagement with contemporary societal issues, hosting programs and media ministries, such as the television program 'World Impact,' from which this sermon is drawn. The institution represents the ongoing lineage of Christian thought that connects biblical foundations with present-day challenges and opportunities faced by emerging generations, including Generation Z, who seek purpose and identity.

Theologically, ORU embodies the biblical mandate to teach and disciple young believers in fulfilling God's calling, equipping them to be leaders who impact their communities and the world. Its emphasis on purpose echoes scriptural themes seen in Joseph's life — embracing identity, enduring trials, and living out divine calling. The university's role situates it as a modern facilitator of spiritual formation and Kingdom advancement.

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