

JOSEPH: HIS FATHER'S HOME; POTIPHAR'S HOME

Genesis 37, 39-50

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Joseph

Key-locations: Canaan, Egypt

Key-repetitions:

- Reasons Joseph was hated by his brothers: he tattled on them (37:2); he was his father's favorite son (37:3-4); he shared his dreams about ruling over them (37:5-8, 9-11).
- Clothes (cloak, coat, clothes): Jacob made a coat for Joseph (37:3-4); Joseph's brothers stripped him of his coat (37:23); Reuben tore his clothes (37:29); the brothers dipped Joseph's coat in blood and took it back to their father (37:31-33); Potiphar's wife caught Joseph by his cloak, he left it with her and she used it to falsely accuse him (39:11-18).
- Joseph in a position of authority: in his dreams (39:5-11); at Potiphar's home (39:1-6); in prison (39:20-23).
- Joseph defeated and then raised up: from slave to administrator (39:1-6); from prisoner to one responsible for other prisoners (39:22-23).
- Joseph suffering injustice: his father loved him more than he loved his other sons (37:3-4); his brothers sold him into slavery (37:12-36); Potiphar's wife falsely accused him (39:11-19); Potiphar put him in prison (39:20-21).
- "The Lord was with Joseph" (39:2, 3, 21, 23).
- Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything he owned (39:4, 5, 6, 8).
- Potiphar's wife invited Joseph to lie with her (39:7,10,12).
- Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of trying to have sex with her: to the servants (39:14-15) and to his master (39:17-18).

Key-attitudes:

- Jacob's preference for Joseph.
- Young Joseph's arrogance.
- The brothers' hatred for Joseph.
- Hope in the midst of despair is expressed each time Joseph was defeated and then recovered.
- Potiphar's wife's obsession to have sex with Joseph.
- Potiphar's anger when he heard his wife's accusations.

Initial-situation:

God promised Abraham that he would give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan. He renewed his promise to Abraham's son Isaac who had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob deceived his father in order to obtain the blessing promised to his brother Esau. To escape Esau's vengeance, Jacob fled to Laban, his mother's brother. After spending 20 years with Laban, Jacob returned to Canaan with two wives, two concubines, eleven sons and one daughter. God changed Jacob's name to Israel and said that the land promised to Abraham and Isaac would be passed on to Jacob's descendants.

Initial-problem:

When Joseph was 17 years old, he gave his father a bad report on his brothers (37:2).

Final-Situation:

The Lord was with Joseph in prison and gave him success in everything he did.

BIBLE STORY

Joseph and His Brothers

Jacob lived in the land of Canaan where his father Isaac had lived. Joseph was 17 years old when he tended flocks with his half-brothers, the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. Joseph reported to his father the bad things his brothers were doing (37:1-2).

Jacob loved his son Joseph more than any of his other sons because Joseph was the son of his favorite wife Rachel, and he was born when Jacob was old. Jacob made for Joseph a brightly-colored long-sleeved coat. Joseph's brothers noticed their father's partiality; they hated Joseph and couldn't speak a kind word to him (37:3-4).

One day, Joseph told his brothers what he had dreamed and they hated him even more. He announced, "Listen to this dream I had. We were binding bundles of grain out in the field. Suddenly my bundle rose and stood up; your bundles gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

His brothers asked, "Do you think you will rule over us? Will you actually boss us?" They hated Joseph even more because of his cocky attitude when he described his dream.

Joseph told his brothers about another dream, "I had another dream. I saw the sun, moon and eleven stars bow down to me!"

His father criticized him, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother, your brothers and I actually bow down to you?" His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept wondering about the dream (37:5-11).

Joseph's brothers went away from home to pasture their father's flocks. A few days later, Israel told Joseph, "Go and see how your brothers and the flocks are doing, and bring word back to me" (37:12-17).

Joseph tracked his brothers down. When they saw him in the distance, they plotted to kill him. They said to each other, "Here comes that dreamer! Let's kill him and throw his body into a well and say that a wild animal killed him. We'll see what comes of his dreams."

Reuben intervened to rescue Joseph by saying, "Let's not kill him. Shed no blood. Throw him alive into this dry well, but don't hurt him."

When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped him of his fancy coat and threw him into a dry well.

Then Joseph's brothers sat down to eat. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites. Judah said, "Brothers, what will we gain if we kill our brother and hide his body. Let's sell him to the Ishmaelites; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood."

The other brothers agreed. They pulled Joseph up out of the well and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt (37:18:29).

Reuben was not with his brothers when the traders came by. When Reuben returned to the well and saw that Joseph was not there, he ripped his clothes in despair. He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! What am I going to do?"

The brothers took Joseph's coat, slaughtered a goat and dipped the coat in its blood. They took the fancy coat back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it, do you think this is your son's coat?"

Israel recognized it and said, "It is my son's coat! A wild animal has torn Joseph to pieces." Israel refused to be comforted and said, "I will go down to my grave mourning for my son" (37:30-35).

Joseph in Potiphar's House

Meanwhile, the Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. The kings of Egypt were called Pharaoh. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard (37:36; 39:1).

The Lord was with Joseph, and helped him have success in everything he did. Potiphar realized that the Lord gave Joseph success in everything he did. Therefore, Potiphar made Joseph his personal assistant. Potiphar entrusted all his property to Joseph's care. The Lord blessed Potiphar's household because of Joseph. With Joseph in charge, Potiphar did not concern himself with anything, except to decide which food he wanted to eat (39:2-6).

Joseph was well-built and handsome. Potiphar's wife became infatuated with Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

Joseph refused and replied, "My master has put me in charge of everything he owns. He does not concern himself with anything in the house. He has turned everything over to me except you; you are his wife! I won't sin against God by doing such a wicked thing!" The woman pestered Joseph every day, but he refused to go to bed with her or even to go near her.

One day when Joseph went into the house to do his work, none of the household servants were inside. His master's wife grabbed hold of his coat saying, "Come to bed with me!" But Joseph left his coat in her hand and ran out of the house.

She realized Joseph left his coat and ran outside. She screamed for her house servants. Crying hysterically, she told them, "This Hebrew came to make fools of us! He tried to rape me, but I screamed. My scream scared him and he ran away, but he left his coat beside me."

She kept Joseph's coat until her husband returned home. Then she told him her story, "That Hebrew slave of yours tried to use me as his plaything. But as soon as I screamed for help, he fled, leaving his coat."

Potiphar was furious; he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were confined (39:7-20).

The Lord was with Joseph in prison. The Lord caused the prison warden to like Joseph. The warden put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners and let him manage the whole prison operation. The Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in everything he did (39:21-23).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were some of the reasons why Joseph was hated by his brothers?
2. What injustices did Joseph experience?
3. How did God manifest his presence when Joseph was suffering injustice?
4. How did Joseph resist the seduction of Potifer's wife?
5. What can you learn from Joseph's story that will help you face conflict, injustice and temptation?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. A person who is despised and rejected by his own family can be a servant of God. Joseph was despised by his brothers (37:2-11).
2. One who faithfully serves God may experience difficulties; however, God is in control. Joseph faced many difficulties: he was despised in his own home (37:1-11); sold as a slave (37:12-28); tempted (39:6-13); falsely accused (39:14-19); and imprisoned because of false accusations (39:19-20).
3. God is present with his servants when they suffer injustice because of their righteousness. God was with Joseph when his brothers sold him into slavery (39:2) and when he was imprisoned (39:23). God is an ever-present help in trouble (Ps 46:1).
4. It is important to consider one's relationship with God as a positive reason for resisting temptation instead of only considering an action as prohibited. Joseph's

motivation for resisting temptation was, "How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (39:9).

5. The person who tempts others to do wrong often

resents those who resist temptation and may seek revenge. Potiphar's wife sought revenge when Joseph resisted her seduction (39:14-19).