

# JOSEPH: SUFFERING AND THRIVING IN EGYPT

Genesis 40 - 50

## STRUCTURE

**Key-person:** Joseph

**Key-locations:** Canaan, Egypt

**Key-repetitions:**

- Clothes (cloak, coat, clothes): Joseph changed clothes before going to Pharaoh (41:14); Pharaoh dressed Joseph in robes of fine linen (41:42).
- Joseph in a position of authority: in his dreams (39:5-11); at Potiphar's home (39:1-6); in prison (39:20-23); as governor of Egypt (41:37-44); Joseph's brothers bowed down to him (42:6).
- Joseph defeated and then raised up: from slave to administrator (39:1-6); from prisoner to one responsible for other prisoners (39:22-23); left prison to become governor (41:14-44).
- Dreams/visions: Joseph (37:5-11); chief cupbearer and chief baker (40:1-23); Pharaoh (41:1-7); Israel (46:1-4).
- Joseph suffering injustice: his father loved him more than 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 cupbearer forgot Joseph (40:1-23; 41:9).

**Key-attitudes:**

- Pharaoh was troubled by his dreams.
- Joseph's courage when he told Pharaoh that it is God who gives interpretations to dreams, and when he gave counsel

to Pharaoh.

- The despair of Israel's family because of the famine.
- Joseph's caution when he saw his brothers in Egypt.
- Israel's fear of losing another son.
- The brothers' fear when they realized who Joseph was.
- The desire of Jacob to be buried in Canaan.

**Initial-situation:**

Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, but Joseph's brothers hated him. Joseph's brothers sold him to slave merchants. Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar's wife tempted Joseph to go to bed with her. Joseph refused and she falsely accused him of trying to rape her. Potiphar had Joseph thrown into the prison where Pharaoh kept his prisoners.

**Initial-problem:**

Pharaoh was angry with his chief cupbearer and his chief baker, and put them in the same prison where Joseph was confined.

**Final-situation:**

Joseph, his brothers, and their families continued living in Egypt after Israel's death. Before dying, Joseph requested that his brothers carry his bones with them when they return to the land promised to Abraham.

## BIBLE STORY

Some time after Potiphar put Joseph in prison, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was angry with his chief cupbearer and his chief baker. Pharaoh put them in the same prison where Joseph was confined. In prison, Joseph interpreted dreams for both Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and his chief baker. After that, the cupbearer was restored to Pharaoh's service (40:1-23).

### Joseph in a High Position in Egypt

Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile River and seven cows, sleek and fat, came out of the river and grazed on the marsh grass. After them, seven other cows, all skin and bones, came up out of the Nile. The skinny cows ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

No one could interpret Pharaoh's dream. The chief cupbearer told Pharaoh that when he had been in prison, Joseph had interpreted his dreams. Pharaoh sent for Joseph. Joseph told Pharaoh that it is God who gives interpretations. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream: God was going to send seven years of bumper crops, then seven years of famine. Joseph suggested that Pharaoh appoint someone to prepare for the famine (41:1-45).

Pharaoh made Joseph governor of Egypt and gave him an Egyptian wife. Joseph and his wife had two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim (41:45-52).

Joseph was 30 years old when he went to work for Pharaoh. During the seven years of bumper crops, Joseph traveled throughout Egypt stockpiling huge quantities of grain (41:46-49).

Egypt's seven years of bumper crops came to an end; seven years of severe famine began. Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain. All the people in that part of the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph (41:53-57).

The land of Canaan also experienced famine. Israel told his sons, "There is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy grain, so that we may live and not die."

Joseph's ten half-brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain. These were the same half-brothers who had sold him into slavery. Israel didn't send Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother (42:1-5).

Joseph was the one who sold grain to all the people. Joseph's brothers arrived and bowed face-down to him. They didn't recognize him. However, Joseph recognized them, but treated them as strangers and spoke roughly to them. Joseph accused them of being spies. They answered that they were all sons of one man and that their younger brother was at home with their father.

Joseph sold them food, but told them not to return without their younger brother (42:1-23).

The ten brothers returned to Canaan and told their father everything. Israel said that Benjamin, his younger son, would not return with them. When they were out of food, Israel told his ten sons to return to Egypt to buy food. The ten refused to return until Israel agreed to send Benjamin with them (42:29 - 43:14).

The second time Israel's sons went to Egypt, Joseph identified himself. He told his brothers, "I am Joseph!" His brothers were speechless with terror! Joseph told them, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold as a slave to go to Egypt! God sent me ahead of you to preserve your lives. There will be five more years of famine. God made me a counselor to Pharaoh and ruler of all Egypt. Hurry back to my father. Tell him, 'Your son Joseph says: God made me ruler of all Egypt. Come to me. I will provide for you, because there will still be five more years of famine.'"

Then Joseph hugged his brother Benjamin and wept. Then Joseph kissed all his brothers and cried as he hugged them. Only then were his brothers able to talk to him (45:1-15).

Joseph gave his brothers carts and provisions for their journey (45:21-24).

### **Israel's Family in Egypt**

The brothers arrived in Canaan and told their father, "Joseph is still alive! He is ruler of all Egypt!" Israel was stunned. After seeing the carts Joseph had sent, Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die" (45:25-28).

Israel and his sons set out with all their livestock and possessions. Seventy members of Jacob's family went to Egypt (46:1-29).

Joseph went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. Joseph threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time. Israel told Joseph, "Now I am ready to die; I have seen for myself that you are alive" (46:30-34).

The Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen and they acquired property. They had many children and increased in number. Jacob lived in Egypt 17 years. Israel called for his son Joseph and requested, "Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried."

Joseph replied, "I will do what you ask" (47:27-31).

Some time later Joseph learned that his father was very sick. So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him to see his father.

Israel told Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and told me, 'I will give you many children. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting inheritance to your descendants'" (48:1-7). Israel continued, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers" (48:21-22).

Then Jacob called for his sons and said, "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come." Then he pronounced blessing and prophecies for each son and their descendants. The descendants of each son became a tribe of Israel. There are twelve tribes of Israel (49:1-28).

Jacob gave these instructions, "Bury me with my fathers in the cave which Abraham bought as a burial place." When Jacob finished instructing his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and died (49:29-33). He lived to be 147 years old. Jacob was buried in the cave which Abraham bought as a burial place.

After the funeral, Joseph's brothers talked among themselves, "What if Joseph pays us back for what we did to him?" They sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left this command before he died, 'Tell Joseph to forgive his brothers the great evil they did to him.' Joseph, we beg you to forgive our wrong. We are servants of your father's God." When their message arrived, Joseph wept.

His brothers came to him in person, threw themselves down before him and said, "We are your slaves."

Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God? You intended evil for me, but God intended good for me and to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children" (50:15-21).

Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. Before his death, Joseph told his brothers, "I am about to die. God will certainly come to your aid and take you out of this land and back to the land he promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Make sure you carry my bones when you leave this place."

Joseph died when he was 110 years old. Doctors embalmed him and placed his body in a coffin in Egypt (50:22-26).

## 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. How did Joseph transform defeat into victory over defeat?
2. How did dreams play an important part in Joseph's life?
3. In Joseph's life, how was God able to use the evil intentions of others for good?
4. When the brothers who had mistreated Joseph came to Egypt to buy food, how did Joseph interact with them?
5. Have you experienced God using the evil intentions of others for good in your life?

## LIFE-LESSONS

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. One who faithfully serves God may experience difficulties; however, God is in control. Joseph faced many difficulties: he was despised by his own brothers (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).</li> <li>2. God can use people's evil intentions for the good of his servant and his kingdom. God used the evil intentions of Joseph's brothers to take him to Egypt where he would be responsible for saving many lives (50:20; see Rom 8:28).</li> <li>3. God, who has all knowledge, knows the future. God gave Joseph dreams about ruling over his brothers (37:5-11). Through dreams, God advised Pharaoh that he was going to send seven years of bumper crops and then seven years of famine (41:1-32).</li> <li>4. It is better to suffer because of making the right</li> </ol> | <p>choice than to deserve punishment for one's sins. Joseph suffered because he resisted the woman's immoral advances (39:13-20; see 1 Pet 3:14-17). Joseph's brothers knew they deserved to be punished (Gen 42:21-22).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. One should walk with God in both the mountains and the valleys of his life. God was with Joseph in slavery (39:2) and in prison (39:23). Joseph recognized God's action in his life when he rose to power (41:16, 52; 45:4-5; 50:20; see Phil 4:12).</li> <li>6. God can bring good out of bad situations. God brought good from the evil actions of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery. Many lives were saved (50:20). God brought good from the bad situations in Joseph's life: Joseph was raised in a dysfunctional family; his brothers sold him into slavery; Potiphar's wife falsely accused him; he was imprisoned under false accusations; the cupbearer neglected to remember him; and he went through seven years of famine.</li> </ol> |
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