



# JOSEPH

## ▣ GOD IN THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

The story of Joseph (Genesis 30–50) teaches about faith and trust, and God's power in times of suffering. It's also a thrilling story of a 17-year-old boy who was ...

- + Favored by his father
- + Resented by his ten older brothers
- + Thrown into a pit in the wilderness
- + Sold into slavery and never returned home

Later — just when it appeared his life was improving — he was:

- + Stalked by someone powerful and vengeful
- + Falsely accused and imprisoned
- + Abandoned in jail without friends or supporters to defend him
- + Forgotten by people who owed him a favor

But throughout the misery, God was there with Joseph.

### Joseph's story gives hope on four levels:

1. Personal: God has a purpose in our suffering. God grew Joseph from immaturity to strength and mercy.
2. Family: God used bad circumstances to save Joseph's family and change attitudes.
3. Nationally: God used Joseph's misfortunes to save many lives and set up the rest of the biblical story that leads to the saving of the world through Christ.
4. Beyond: God used this event to bring blessing to the world long past biblical days. We, too, are part of God's larger plan that calls for patience and trust during times of suffering. Just as God blessed Joseph's faithfulness, God will bless our faithfulness.

## ▣ BEGINNING OF THE PROMISE (Read Gen. 12:1–3)

This story begins long before Joseph's birth. It begins with his great-grandfather, Abraham, a nomadic sheep and goat herder who lived in the dry, hot region of the Middle East known then as Canaan and today as Israel.

Although Joseph is the main character, the story is really about God's promise to Abraham's descendants.

### *God appeared to Abraham and made two promises:*

- *I will make you a great nation.*
- *All the nations of the earth will be blessed by you. (Gen. 12:1–2)*

God's promise to Abraham changed the direction of humanity. Human disobedience and rebellion turned God's creation upside down. Instead of being a good and blessed creation, human rebellion resulted in a cursed creation and a cursed history (see Gen. 1–3).

God promised Abraham to start a new history of blessing with him and his family.

God's promise lies with a family; it is not an ideal family—it resembles many families today, with struggles, deep problems, sadness, and grief.

*Question: God gave Abraham some specific promises. What are some promises in the Bible that God gives to everyone who believes in him?*

## ▣ A DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

The story of Joseph begins in Gen. 37:1, with his father Jacob “in the land of Canaan.” This simple statement is a reminder that God is implementing his promise to Abraham. Then the biblical story introduces Joseph and his brothers. It is immediately clear that their relationships are broken and that the potential for conflict is great.

## ■ PLAYING FAVORITES (Read Gen. 37:1–4)

Joseph is Jacob's youngest and favorite son. This favoritism is evident in a few short lines in the story.

Two main clues of this favoritism:

1. The "coat of many colors," or "richly ornamented robe," was a gift from Jacob to Joseph. Whatever the robe was, it was a special and precious garment indicating that Joseph was not meant for a life of fieldwork like the other sons.
2. The other telling comment is of "a bad report" (see box) Joseph brings about his brothers. Jacob foolishly sends the favored son to check on his brothers. By this time, Joseph's actions and attitudes have hurt his relationship and angered his brothers.

## ■ JOSEPH'S DREAM (Read Gen. 37:5–11)

Joseph's ten older brothers resent their father's favoritism as much as Joseph's attitude. Young Joseph fails to understand the depth of his brothers' loathing toward him. With little tact and wisdom, Joseph shares his dreams with his family. One night, Joseph dreams that his brothers and parents bow before him. The Bible does not say that Joseph's dreams come from God. In fact, we do not know that is the case until the end of the story, when the dreams become reality. It is also the straw that breaks the camel's back for his brothers.

### The Wages of Deceit

Jacob's relationship with his sons reflects a lifetime of deceit. Jacob deceived Isaac, his father, for his blessing—cheating his brother Esau out of a blessing that was rightfully Esau's. Jacob fled his brother's anger and traveled to Haran to live with his uncle Laban (Gen. 27). There, Jacob fell in love with Laban's youngest daughter, Rachel. However, Laban tricked Jacob into working seven years for his daughter, but he gave his oldest daughter, Leah, to Jacob in marriage. Jacob had to work another seven years for Rachel.

Jacob's love for Rachel was always greater than his love for Leah. However, God granted Leah many sons from Jacob, whereas Rachel was not able to give birth. Rachel finally bore a son to Jacob, Joseph (Gen. 29:31–30:24). Jacob's love for Joseph became an extension of his love for Rachel.

The Bible describes a similar robe in only one other place, 2 Sam. 13:18. There Tamar, King David's daughter, wears a similar robe and we read, "for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore" (2 Sam. 13:18).

The expression "*bad report*" is also used in Ps. 31:13, Jer. 20:10, and Ezek. 36:3, where it is used for the whispering of hostile people.

## ■ DECEIVING THE DECEIVER (Read Gen. 37:12–36)

The strained relationships among family members anticipate a potentially tragic ending. Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers who are herding sheep far away—an unwise decision considering the previous "bad report" from Joseph and the already weak relationships among his children. Joseph's brothers find a perfect opportunity to be rid of their youngest brother. The brothers throw Joseph in a pit and want to kill him. Reuben hopes to rescue Joseph, but Judah, one of two eldest brothers, argues that it is better to make some money from the deal. Instead of killing him, they sell Joseph to a trading caravan going to Egypt. Joseph, although alive, ends up as a slave in Egypt. Jacob is cruelly deceived by his sons, who return with a bloodied coat/robe and a terrible lie: Joseph is dead.

*Question: Perhaps Joseph's brothers felt they had gotten away with a clever deception. But the Bible tells us that God is the Lord of Justice. Can you think of another story from the Bible that illustrates God's eventual triumph over wicked actions?*

### The Promise in Danger

*Can God's promise to Abraham (or any other promise) ever be in danger? Absolutely not. God is always faithful to his promises. However, in times of trouble, it is difficult to remember this truth and easy to assume the worst. No, the promise is not in danger; though Joseph might find it difficult to believe while being dragged away from his family and into slavery. As readers, we can do nothing but weep along with Jacob: weep for Jacob's pain, for Joseph's fate, and for the brothers' hardness.*

## ■ A STORY WITHIN A STORY (Read Gen. 38)

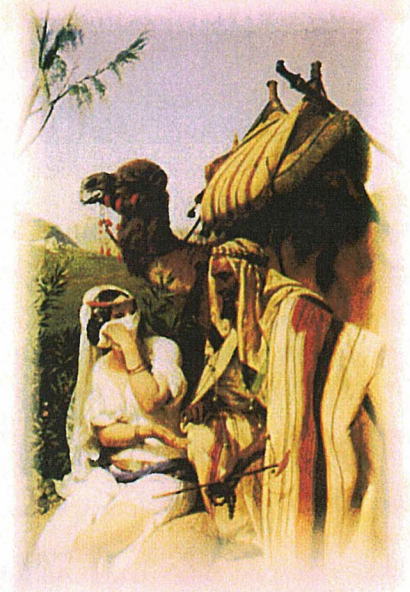
Right in the middle of the story of Joseph, the Bible pauses and tells a separate story.

Joseph's brother Judah, now a grown man with three sons, tries to deceive his daughter-in-law, Tamar, by promising to follow the biblical laws that will protect her but actually refusing to carry them out. As time goes by, Tamar realizes she has been denied her proper rights; she turns around and deceives Judah.

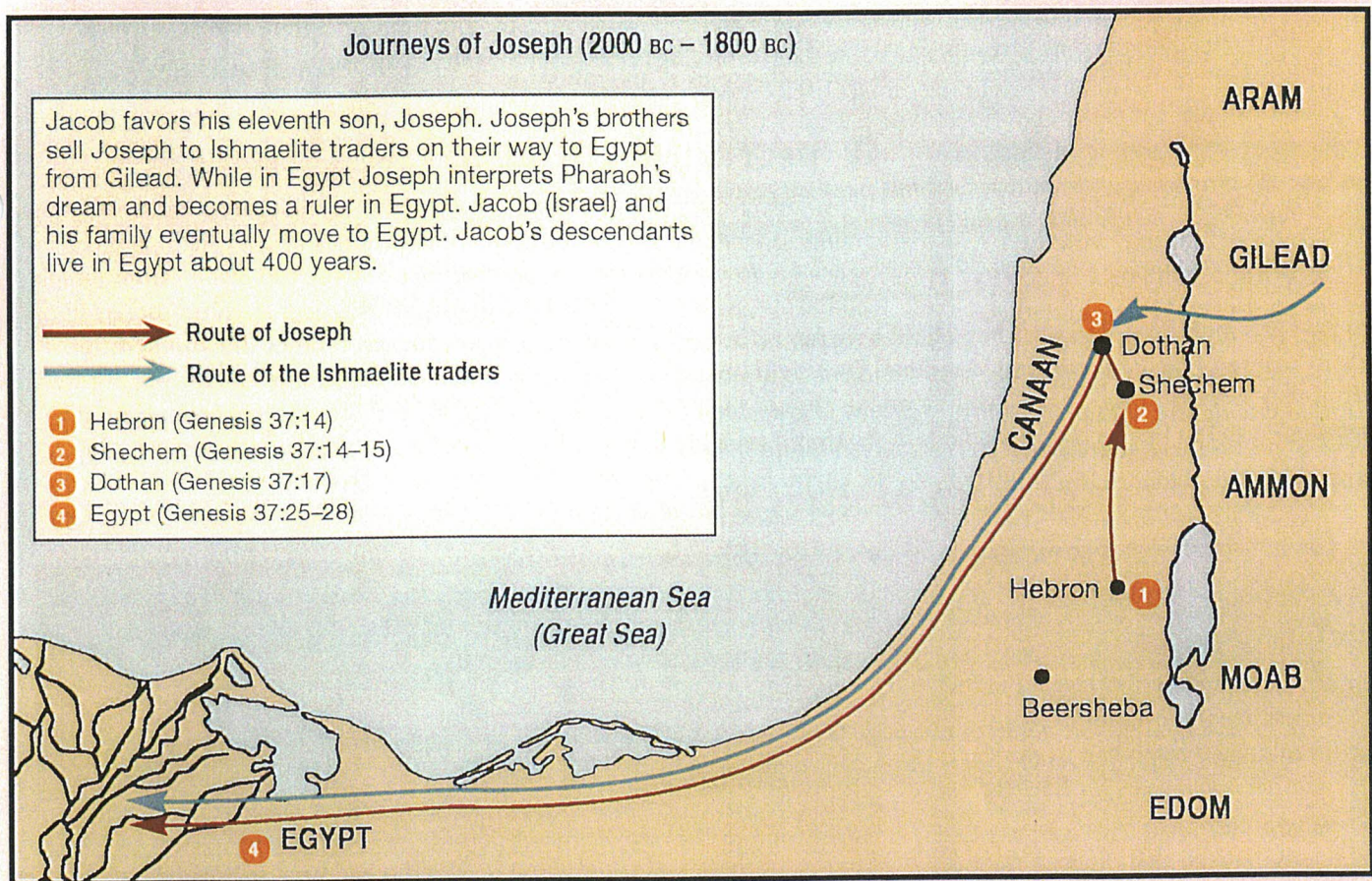
In a family with a history of lying and violence, betrayal and hatred, how did God change Judah's heart? Judah had to admit that his actions had been wrong—far worse than his daughter-in-law's. He admitted that Tamar was more righteous than he was. Judah, a man unable to regret his mistreatment of his brother Joseph and his father, who lies and does injustice to his daughter-in-law, is a changed man. He is finally able to confess his error and make things right for Tamar.

While Joseph is in Egypt, God starts the change in Joseph's brothers.

*Question: Joseph probably had no idea that God was working in the lives of his family members, but God knew what he was doing. What is an example from your own experience in which God was working in a way that was hidden from you at the time?*



*Judah and Tamar by Horace Verriet*



## ■ FROM POWERLESS TO POTIPHAR'S (Read Gen. 39:1–6)

Joseph goes from being the beloved son to being sold as a powerless slave in a powerful Egyptian officer's home. Potiphar is the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. In spite of this terrible reversal of fortunes, Scripture tells us, "The Lord was with Joseph." We do not know if Joseph, the shepherd boy, knew the language. It is unlikely that he was educated at the level of Egyptian upper class, but the Bible is clear that Joseph does not give up. He works hard and contributes to Potiphar's household. Every small responsibility he handles is successful. Over time, Potiphar realizes that the Lord is with this slave, and Potiphar puts Joseph in charge of everything he owns.

## REJECTION AND REVENGE (Read Gen. 39:7–19)

Potiphar's wife wants Joseph to sleep with her, but Joseph refuses, calling her proposed actions

- + a breach of his responsibilities
- + a betrayal of Potiphar who has trusted him
- + a sin against God

She will not take no for an answer, so she stalks him. Day after day she talks with him, trying to seduce him. But one day, they are in the house alone and she grabs his clothing. Her grip must have been strong, because to get away he had to shed that garment and run outside. This final rejection leads her to revenge. She calls out to the men in the household and claims she has been attacked. When Potiphar hears, he is angry and throws Joseph in jail.

*Question: Even when Joseph did what was right, he still received punishment as though he were guilty! Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10). How do you understand Joseph's story in light of these words? How do you understand your own story?*

## FROM POTIPHAR'S TO PRISON (Read Gen. 39:20–23)

Joseph is not given a trial; he is unfairly thrown into a jail for the king's prisoners. Scripture says he was there for many years. It was another reversal of fortunes. A good man treated wrongly, framed, betrayed by his employer's wife despite his flawless performance.

No one would blame Joseph for becoming angry and bitter, but he didn't. However, "the Lord was with Joseph" (Gen. 39:2). Joseph used his administrative skills to help, and over time was put in charge of all the prisoners and the prison organization. He found favor with the chief jailer, whose confidence in Joseph was so high that he didn't even supervise Joseph.

*Question: What are some common reactions and emotions people have when they suffer injustice? How is it possible to avoid becoming bitter when treated unfairly?*

## MORE HOPES DASHED (Read Gen. 40)

Two new prisoners from Pharaoh's household were placed in the jail for offending their master. Joseph was put in charge of them and took care of them for a long time. One night both men had troubling dreams, and in the morning Joseph noticed they were sad because there was no one to explain the dreams to them. Joseph told them that interpretations of dreams belonged to God and if they told him, he would explain it.

## THE CUPBEARER AND BAKER'S DREAM

	Dream	Interpretation from God
Cupbearer	A vine with three branches producing grapes. Grapes were squeezed and the juice given to Pharaoh.	In three days Pharaoh will give you back your job.
Baker	Carrying three baskets of bread for Pharaoh on his head. Birds came and ate them.	In three days Pharaoh will have you executed.

Interesting points:

- + Joseph noticed that the men were troubled in the morning and asked about it. He who had been insensitive to his brothers' feelings now cared about others.
- + Joseph gave credit to God rather than to himself, despite having a reputation as a clever man.
- + Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him and asked for help to get him out of jail.

Within three days both predictions come true. The cupbearer is restored to his place of privilege and the baker is executed. But the cupbearer forgets about Joseph, and Joseph continues to live in a dungeon several more years.

*Questions: Even in prison, Joseph used his gifts to bless others. What are some difficult circumstances in your life in which you can use your gifts to bless others?*



## PHARAOH'S DREAM (Read Gen. 41:1-36)

One night Pharaoh has two dreams that none of his magicians and wise men can interpret.

<b>Dream 1</b>	Seven cows come out of the Nile River. They are sleek and fat and grazing. Seven more cows come out of the Nile. These are ugly and gaunt. They eat the sleek fat cows.
<b>Dream 2</b>	Seven ears of plump good grain appear on one single stalk. Then seven thin and scorched ears sprout up and swallow the plump ears.

Suddenly the cupbearer remembers Joseph and tells about the Hebrew slave who interpreted his own dream two years before. Pharaoh calls for Joseph. Joseph has to shave and change clothes from his prison garb. Pharaoh says, "I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph replied, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

When Joseph hears the dreams, he calls them parallels having the same message.

### Interpretation

After seven years of abundance in the land of Egypt, seven years of famine will ravage the land. The double dream means that God will surely do this and do it soon.

### Recommendation

Pharaoh should find a wise supervisor to put in charge. Then appoint overseers who will collect and store one fifth of the annual food harvests in Egypt for the seven good years. This reserve will keep the people of Egypt from perishing.

*Questions: It is easy to become overly confident and start taking credit for the good that happens in our lives. In what ways can a person give credit to God?*

## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES

(Read Gen. 41:37-57)

Pharaoh sets Joseph over all Egypt, gives him his signet ring of authority, clothes him in fine linen and emblems of power, and puts him in a chariot and makes him his second-in-command.

For 13 years, Joseph has been a slave in Egypt and now he is second in command, and given every honor of status and fame and a notable marriage. At age 30, he is given the responsibility to travel through Egypt and supervise the storage of grain in locations owned by Pharaoh. He is so successful and the abundance is so great that even he can no longer keep track of the massive amounts of harvest.

## JOSEPH'S BROTHERS IN EGYPT (Read Gen. 42:1-44:34)

Just then, Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt on a mission to save their family from starvation. This surprise encounter sparks a series of events that transforms Joseph and his brothers' lives forever.

As his brothers arrive and bow down to the Egyptian lord, Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him. The statement reminds the readers of the brothers asking their father to *recognize* (the Hebrew word means *recognize*, "examine" in the NIV) Joseph's bloodied garment (Gen. 37:32). This recognition brings Joseph's memories back like a flood. As his son Manasseh's name reminds us, Joseph had been able to forget his difficult past (see Gen. 41:51; Manasseh probably means "to forget"). Now, the memories, the pain, the anger, and the doubts arise with renewed impetus.

### Of Dreams and Gods

Dreams were important in the ancient world, especially in Egypt. The Egyptians had texts that priests would use to interpret dreams. Dreams were windows into the world of the gods. For this reason, priests were the people who could best interpret them.

When Pharaoh asks Joseph to interpret his dreams, Joseph replies, "I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires" (Gen. 41:16). Joseph claims that his God, the God of the Bible, can do something Pharaoh's gods have failed to do. Joseph is confident because, as he said before, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (Gen. 40:8). It is an astonishing claim. Although the Egyptians were quite open to other people's gods, they were confident their own gods were superior. Joseph's claim suggests that the interpretation of dreams belongs to God because revelation through dreams comes from God! Joseph is proclaiming God's superiority over the Egyptians gods.

*Part of God's promise to Abraham finds fulfillment through Joseph here. However, another important part of God's promise was that Abraham's descendants would make a great nation. This part of the promise implies a people and a land. The story is not over, the promise is still incomplete.*

## Joseph Accuses His Brothers

Joseph speaks harshly to the brothers and accuses them of being spies. This is not a light issue; the brothers understand immediately that they are in mortal peril. The Egyptian lord does not have to offer proofs for his accusation and could execute them at any moment with a simple command. Sheer terror makes them tell the truth about themselves: "We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies." Their claim is another way to say they have clan responsibilities.

Joseph tests their claim of being honest men and accuses them again of being spies. The brothers insist, "Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more" (Gen. 42:13). Joseph learns more about his family—his father is still alive and there is a new member of the family, Benjamin.

In this brief episode we can imagine a divided Joseph: a man full of anger and overwhelmed with memories but also full of wisdom and responsibility. Joseph is a changed man. However, if Joseph is changed, have his brothers changed at all? Are they still the same foolish men, willing to destroy a person's life to quench their anger?

*Question: Joseph had the opportunity and the means either to take revenge or to hope for reconciliation. Whether a person chooses to get even or seek peace will make all the difference. How have you seen these different choices play out in real life situations?*

## Joseph Tests His Brothers

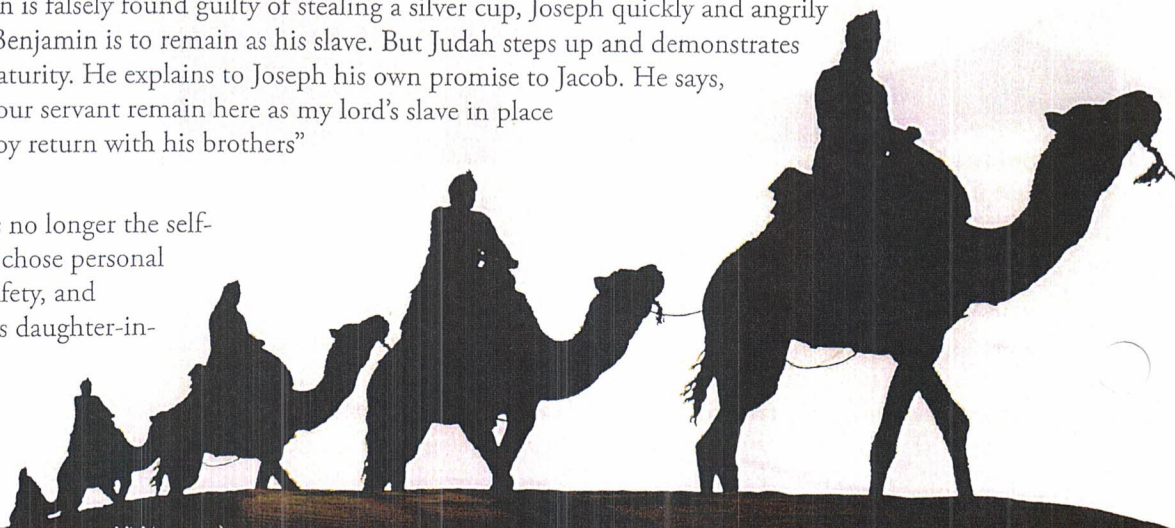
Joseph tests his brothers more than once, first by hiding his true identity, then by making them leave Simeon as a guarantee that they would return with their youngest brother. The brothers fail to persuade their father to let them bring Benjamin with them to Egypt. Jacob, a broken man, bitterly reminds them of Joseph—Jacob refuses to trust them with Benjamin's life for he fears the ending will be as tragic as that of Joseph's. Reuben makes a proposal: the lives of his two children for the life of Benjamin. Jacob has already lost two children (Joseph and Simeon). Why would he risk losing Benjamin and two grandchildren? Reuben's proposal is reckless. Jacob decides not to send Benjamin with them.

Since the famine is so severe, Jacob's sons need to return to Egypt. Judah steps forward and makes a wise suggestion. If something happens to Benjamin, Judah accepts the guilt and responsibility himself. It is a wise and mature proposal. In the ancient world, a verbal promise was not a thing lightly taken. Verbal commitments were a guarantee of action. Because of Judah's promise, Jacob reluctantly accepts; the twelve brothers are on their way back to Egypt.

Joseph continues the charade. He knows his brothers will return for his brother Simeon; but would they do the same for Benjamin?

Through yet another test, Joseph forces his brothers to demonstrate the kind of men they have become. When Benjamin is falsely found guilty of stealing a silver cup, Joseph quickly and angrily issues the punishment: Benjamin is to remain as his slave. But Judah steps up and demonstrates his moral quality and maturity. He explains to Joseph his own promise to Jacob. He says, "Now then, please, let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers" (Gen. 44:33).

Judah has changed; he is no longer the self-centered man who once chose personal gain over his brother's safety, and personal security over his daughter-in-law's righteous claim.



## RECONCILIATION IN EGYPT (Read Gen. 45:1–50:26)

Joseph cannot control himself and reveals his identity. While Joseph is moved to tears, his brothers are terrified when they finally recognize him. Joseph makes the wise and powerful statement: “But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God” (Gen. 45:7–8). Joseph and Pharaoh invite Jacob and everyone in his family to come to Egypt.

Before leaving Canaan, the land God had promised to Abraham, Jacob has a dream. In the dream, God tells him, “I am God, the God of your father.... Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again” (Gen. 46:3–4). God is renewing his promise to Abraham. God will make Abraham’s descendants into a great nation *in* Egypt. Then, God will give this new nation a land where God will dwell with them.

Years later, after Jacob’s death, Joseph’s brothers still wonder if now Joseph will take revenge against them. Instead, Joseph says, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:19–20).

*Question: Why is forgiveness often so difficult? What are the benefits of forgiving someone who has hurt you?*

## THE GOD WHO WAS THERE

<b>Joseph</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Joseph moved from Canaan to Egypt.</li> <li>+ He moved from being a spoiled, foolish young man to being a wise man.</li> <li>+ He moved from anger and forgetfulness to forgiveness and restoration.</li> <li>+ He is redeemed from his sufferings in Egypt.</li> <li>+ He is redeemed from being the victim of violence and injustice from his brothers.</li> <li>+ He is redeemed from his own anger and memories.</li> <li>+ He is redeemed by learning wisdom and trusting in God.</li> </ul>
<b>Jacob</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Jacob moved from being the deceiver to being deceived.</li> <li>+ He moved from the joy of his favorite son to the tragedy of his supposed death.</li> <li>+ He moved from being a man defeated to being a man with a future.</li> <li>+ He is redeemed by receiving God’s renewed promise.</li> <li>+ Though he had become a broken man, God’s gracious acts through Joseph allow Jacob to have a renewed sense of hope for the future.</li> <li>+ This hope includes the promises that God made to Abraham.</li> </ul>
<b>Joseph’s Brothers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ They moved from their wicked deeds to willingness to accept their responsibility.</li> <li>+ They are redeemed from their early, evil ways.</li> </ul>
<b>Judah</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Judah moved from being a man merely concerned with his own well-being to one willing to accept the consequences of his actions.</li> <li>+ Later, when Jacob blesses his children, Judah receives this blessing: “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet” (Gen. 49:10).</li> <li>+ From Judah, King David would be born, and later, Jesus, the promised Messiah, the one who fulfilled God’s promises.</li> <li>+ Judah is redeemed from his previous egotism.</li> <li>+ He becomes the leader of the children of Israel.</li> <li>+ Through him, the Messiah is born.</li> </ul>

Through Joseph’s life, we can learn how God moves in the lives of his people. Throughout the story, we find God at crucial moments. He is not always acting directly, but his presence is constant, causing or enabling all possible movement: geographic, moral, from foolishness to wisdom. Through the movement in Joseph’s story, God redeems a broken family.

Although this story does not explain every case of suffering and grief, it instructs us on how to acquire the necessary wisdom that will allow us to face such experiences. The Bible recognizes that doctrinal statements are not enough to deal with suffering and grief. Wisdom allows us to see life from God’s perspective. When we can see life through wisdom, we can trust that God will allow “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39) and that “all things God works for the good of those who love him...” (Rom. 8:28).

*Question: Everyone has experienced some sort of trouble in life. What has happened to you that has later turned into a benefit?*

### Joseph's Family

Egyptians did not marry Hebrews, and Hebrews did not marry Egyptians. Joseph's marriage to Asenath was extremely unusual. It clearly reveals how highly he was esteemed

by Pharaoh. In fact, Pharaoh gave Asenath to Joseph, and neither had a choice about the marriage.

Although Asenath had grown up at the very center of the worship of the Egyptian sun



god, Joseph never lost faith in his one God who remained invisible.

Joseph had two sons by Asenath—Ephraim and Manasseh. Though raised by an Egyptian mother and surrounded by the Egyptian culture, they both continued in their father's faith. Later on, they became the ancestors of two of the tribes of Israel.

#### JOSEPH

After twenty barren years, Rachel named her first child Joseph, which meant "He [God] Will Add." Since he was the first son of Jacob's favorite wife, and also the child of his very old age, Joseph was the favored child. Jacob protected him as much as he could, gave him a special cloak, and made him his principal heir.

Tricked into slavery in Egypt by his jealous brothers, he prospered as a steward for one of Pharaoh's officers. He finally became advisor to Pharaoh, who named him Zaphnath-paaneah which meant "The God Speaks, and He [Joseph] Lives."

#### ASENATH

The name of Joseph's Egyptian wife was Asenath, which meant "Belonging to Neith." Neith had come to be the goddess of war or the chase in the time of Joseph, but centuries before in Egypt she was believed to be the daughter of Ra, the sun god. Asenath's father, Potiphera, was a powerful priest of the sun god, and Asenath may have served in the temple as a priestess, possibly as a musician.

Very little is known about Asenath. Jewish legends of later years say that she left her Egyptian religion and worshiped the God

#### EPHRAIM

Joseph named his younger son Ephraim, which meant "To Be Fruitful;" for Joseph said that God had made him fruitful in the land of his affliction—the land of Egypt, where he lived because of his brothers' trickery.

Ephraim's grandfather Jacob was also the younger of two sons. Before Jacob died he gave Ephraim a greater blessing than his older brother, Manasseh, though he adopted both. Many years later, the tribe of Ephraim's descendants gave Israel such leaders as Joshua and King Jeroboam I.

#### MANASSEH

Joseph's older son was Manasseh, which meant "He Who Causes to Forget." His birth helped Joseph forget the pain of being in Egypt away from his home. Although he received a lesser blessing than Ephraim, his tribe, like that of Ephraim, later became "a great people." The tribe of Manasseh brought forth some of the greatest Israelite warriors and judges, among them Gideon and Jephthah.



“Why did so many people in the Bible do such bad things?

Was it okay that God’s people had multiple wives?” a newly saved young mom asked me. I told her the Bible portrays humanity’s sinfulness honestly, but its record of such behavior does not indicate God’s approval of it.

Hebrews 11, the so-called Hall of Faith, praises Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph as role models for trusting God. Yet, though men of faith, they were also sinners who displayed such moral failures as polygamy, dishonesty, and dysfunction in family life. That’s why the real hero on every page of Scripture is God—not man. The story of Jacob and Joseph shows how a gracious, loving God brings glory to Himself through imperfect people who are rich in faith.

### GOD’S CHASTENING

Jacob loved Joseph more than his other children because he was the child of his old age and the firstborn son of his beloved wife Rachel. When Rachel died, Jacob lavished Joseph with favor, giving him the famous “tunic of many colors” (Gen. 37:3). Consequently, Joseph’s brothers hated him. Their hatred grew even worse when Joseph told them about his dreams, which implied they would someday bow down to him (vv. 5–11).

One day Jacob, perhaps unwisely, sent the 17-year-old to check on his older brothers and their flocks (v. 14). Despising Joseph and showing no concern for their aged father’s feelings, they sold their brother into slavery (v. 28), soaked his tunic in goat’s blood (v. 31), and deceived Jacob into assuming a wild beast had killed the boy (v. 32).

As Jacob held the bloodstained tunic, he wailed, “A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces. I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning” (vv. 33, 35).

Surely God was chastening Jacob. Hebrews 12:6

says, “For whom the LORD loves He chastens.” God had begun a good work in Jacob (cf. Phil. 1:6) and was refining him and his family for God’s glory and Jacob’s good. When God disciplines us, He does so out of love, not cruelty.

### GOD’S SILENCE

Jacob heard nothing more about Joseph for 22 years. As far as Jacob knew, his favorite son was dead; and he would have to carry on without him.

Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, a key military leader in Egypt. But God was with Joseph, and Potiphar promoted him to chief steward of his estate (Gen. 39:5). Potiphar’s wife then tried to seduce the young Israelite. When Joseph rejected her advances because of His love for God, she lied to Potiphar and said Joseph had tried to sleep with her (vv. 7–14).

Potiphar believed his wife and sent Joseph to prison. But God was also with Joseph in prison and had him promoted to a position of authority (vv. 21–22). There he met Pharaoh’s butler and baker and interpreted their dreams. Joseph remained in prison two more years until Pharaoh had a disturbing dream and sought an interpreter. Then the butler told Pharaoh about Joseph. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream and gave full credit to God.

“God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do,” Joseph said (41:28). Egypt would enjoy seven years of plenty followed by seven years of severe famine. After working for 13 years in household and prison management, Joseph was quickly able to outline a life-saving famine-relief program. “And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?’” (v. 38). Pharaoh immediately promoted Joseph to second in command over Egypt.

Nine more years passed. The famine had struck as Joseph predicted. It grew so severe Jacob sent his older sons to Egypt to buy grain. Little did he know that, through the difficulty, God was about to bless him.

Do you ever feel forgotten by God or wonder why He keeps you in His waiting room? He always has a purpose. God’s silence is not inactivity.

### GOD’S HIDDENNESS

When Jacob’s sons returned from Egypt with food,

they brought bad news. The lord of the land (Joseph, whom they did not recognize) had accused them of being spies. To prove they were merely 12 brothers who had a father and their youngest brother back home, Joseph demanded they not return without the youngest brother (Benjamin); and he imprisoned their brother Simeon until then.

Benjamin was the only other child of Jacob's wife Rachel, and Jacob did not want to lose him as he had lost Joseph. Jacob refused to send Benjamin: "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him . . . you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave" (42:38). But hunger finally drove Jacob to acquiesce when his son Judah guaranteed Benjamin's safe return. So they traveled to Egypt again.

Joseph's strange treatment of his brothers seems harsh until one realizes he concealed his identity until he saw they had changed. He orchestrated a plan in which Benjamin faced imprisonment. Amazingly, Judah offered to be enslaved in Benjamin's place.

Then Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. He never rebuked them for what they had done to him 22 years earlier. Instead, he told them God had been at work all along: "God sent me before you . . . to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:7-8).

When they returned to Jacob, they told him Joseph was alive and governed all of Egypt. Jacob's heart "stood still, because he did not believe them" (v. 26). But when he saw the provisions and carts Joseph had sent to bring him to Egypt, Jacob declared, "It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die" (v. 28).

God's ways may seem strange to us, but they are always perfect because He is perfect. His hiddenness is not inability, and His timing is flawless.

### GOD'S PROMISES

God had told Abraham his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land for generations before returning to the land they were promised (15:13-16). He fulfilled this promise by bringing Jacob's family to Egypt.

Reunited with his son in Egypt, Jacob showed great faith during his final 17 years (47:28). He made Joseph promise to bury him at the family grave, demonstrating his belief that God would return his family to the Promised Land (v. 30). His blessing of Joseph's sons conveyed his faith in the Abrahamic Covenant (48:15-16). And his prophecies about

his sons revealed his certainty that God had a definite plan for all of the children of Israel (49:1-28).

Someone once said we often don't get answers to our *why* questions but that, as believers, we live not by answers but by God's promises. "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (1 Cor. 5:7). Jacob learned that God's promises are dependable.

### GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

After Jacob's death, Joseph's brothers worried he would finally seek revenge. Joseph's powerful response could be called the Romans 8:28 of the Old Testament: "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Gen. 50:19-20).

Joseph remained faithful throughout exile and suffering because he believed in God's sovereign plan. What a God! We can trust Him even when we don't understand because God's sovereignty brings certainty.

During World War II the Ten Boom family exemplified such trust in God's sovereignty. After their beloved Holland was overrun by Nazis, the Ten Booms rescued an estimated 800 Jewish people in 18 months. The Nazis eventually arrested the Ten Booms and sent them to concentration camps. Corrie ten Boom alone lived to tell about it. She endured unspeakable suffering and watched her sister Betsie die.

After the war, she traveled the world speaking about her experiences and how the gospel enables us to forgive our enemies. Corrie often used the example of a tapestry to demonstrate God's sovereignty in our lives. The underside may appear like a knotted mess. But the front reveals a beautiful design. One day we will see from God's perspective what He was making of our lives.

Corrie, like Jacob and Joseph, lived with certainty because she believed in God's sovereignty. God's work in our lives may involve chastening and times when He seems silent and hidden. But because of His promises, we can rest in His sovereignty and appropriate His matchless grace.

GOD'S  
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