



BIBLE STORIES EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW

**Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ ^ Adult Bible Studies ^ Winter-Spring 2010
February 14, 2010
Joseph, Genesis 37-50**

Getting Started

The story of Joseph is familiar to most Christians. The story, which spans most of Joseph's life, demonstrates the importance of having patience with God. This story shows the glory of God's plan and how God can use misfortune and difficulties to bless faithful believers.

What is the Story?

Abraham's grandson, Jacob, has twelve sons. Joseph is the eleventh and Jacob's favorite. Jacob's favoritism makes his ten older sons jealous, and Joseph's prophetic dreams concerning their worship of him aggravate his brothers' jealousy. At age 17, Joseph's brothers take their father's sheep to Shechem to graze. Jacob sends Joseph to check to see that they are all right. The brothers, motivated by jealousy, seize Joseph and sell him to slave traders. They tell Jacob that wild animals killed Joseph.

Joseph is taken to Egypt and becomes the slave of Potiphar, an official in Pharaoh's court. In Potiphar's service, God blesses Joseph so that his master makes him the manager of the household. However, when Potiphar's wife falsely accuses Joseph of attempted rape, Potiphar throws Joseph into prison. In prison, God again blesses Joseph so that the prison warden looks kindly on Joseph and puts him in charge of other prisoners. Joseph has charge of two of Pharaoh's servants, the baker and cupbearer, recently thrown in prison by Pharaoh. Each man has strange dreams that Joseph interprets. The cupbearer promises that if restored to Pharaoh's household he will remember Joseph. Yet, the cupbearer forgets to mention Joseph when he gains back his position.

Two years later Pharaoh has some dreams that worry him greatly. None of his wise men can interpret them, but the cupbearer tells Pharaoh about Joseph. Joseph is brought to Pharaoh and interprets the dreams. There will be seven years of great harvests in Egypt, followed by seven years of famine so great that everyone will forget the good years. Joseph recommends that Pharaoh appoint a wise man to gather grain during the good years in order to save for the bad years so the famine will not bankrupt Egypt. Joseph so impresses Pharaoh that he appoints Joseph to be the administrator in charge of the grain collection, second only to Pharaoh himself. Again, God blesses Joseph. Joseph's prophecy comes true; there are seven years of prosperity followed by a severe famine. Pharaoh expands Joseph's duties to include food distribution as well as selling surplus grain to the countries around Egypt that are also affected by the famine.

The famine also hits Jacob's family. He sends the ten older sons to buy grain in Egypt. When the sons meet an Egyptian official to try to purchase food, they do not recognize that it is Joseph although he recognizes them. Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies, but eventually Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and rejoins his family.

What does this Story say about God?

In the story of Joseph, God is very active but is unseen by anyone except Joseph who affirms that only God can interpret the dreams. To the reader, Joseph's life seems one of hardship mixed with blessings. His brothers sell him into slavery, yet he manages his master's household. Potiphar throws him into prison, but becomes an overseer of his fellow inmates. Through these events, God blesses Joseph and guides him in order to accomplish God's will. As Joseph says to his brothers during their reconciliation, "Do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here...God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives" (45:5-7).

The story shows that God has plans that can span a lifetime—plans that people often do not understand. God's plans may include hardship and disappointment; yet, however difficult for the believing servant, God's plan will lead to personal fulfillment and glory in God's Kingdom.

Now, what about our faith?

The story of Joseph shows that God will be faithful to the believer who is faithful to Him. Although several terrible things happen to Joseph, God finds ways to bless him in the bad circumstances. In the same way, believers today can be confident that even when surrounded by troubles God will bless us in ways we may not see or understand.

Joseph was very successful. By the end of the story, he is Pharaoh's second in command. This seems an unlikely result during his time in prison. The story shows that God's plans for our lives are impossible to predict, but as Christians, we can have hope that God will not abandon us to the evil forces in the world. Our God is mighty, and He is on our side!

Monday: Read *Getting Started* and Genesis 37 and 39.

1. Joseph's brothers reacted negatively when they heard of Joseph's dreams. Have you ever had someone resent you when you talked about how God blessed you?
2. Do you think Joseph could see the hand of God moving in his life when he was sold into slavery? Do you see God's hand when bad things happen to you?
3. What do you think of Reuben's plan to save Joseph's life?

Tuesday: Read *What's the Story* and Genesis 40 and 41

1. Joseph used his gift of interpreting dreams to help others. Will God always bless the person who uses God-given talents for others?
2. How did God bless Joseph while in prison?
3. Notice in chapter 41 how often Joseph mentions God's power and control. How important is it to acknowledge God's control when dealing with others?

Wednesday: Read Genesis 42 and 43

1. Why did Joseph give his brother's "the runaround"? Was this revenge-taking on his part?
2. Did Joseph abuse his power over his brothers?

Thursday: Read Genesis 44 and 45

1. Joseph never gloated over his success to his brothers, but gave the credit to God. Is it important to give God glory over our success, or is it just false modesty?
2. Joseph was able to see and understand God's plan at the end of the story. Are God's plans always visible at their completion?

Friday: Read *What does this story say about God* and *Now, what about our faith?*

1. What does this story say about God's ability to use sinful actions to accomplish a Godly plan?
2. God consistently blessed Joseph through the bad times. Does God bless us today in the same way?
3. Do you feel that God has a plan in your life?