

Bible Studies

Joseph - The Immature Years

¹⁶ He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food;
¹⁷ and he sent a man before them— Joseph, sold as a slave.
¹⁸ They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons,
¹⁹ till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true.
²⁰ The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free.
²¹ He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed,
²² to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom.
²³ Then Israel entered Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.
²⁴ The LORD made his people very fruitful; he made them too numerous for their foes,
²⁵ whose hearts he turned to hate his people, to conspire against his servants.
Psalms 105:16-25

Read Genesis 37 v 1-10

In Hebrew culture sibling order was very important. It was the oldest son who owned the inheritance. Other received only on the good will of their father. It was always the oldest son who took precedence and would head the family. The first-born belonged to God and had to be redeemed with silver.

Where was Joseph in the sibling order?

Benjamin was the last of the brothers but he was quite a bit younger than Joseph, effectively Joseph was the youngest.

What would his place be in the family?

Can you think of any other occasions when God chose the youngest?

Why do you think God chose the youngest? 1 Corinthians 1v27-29

Verse 2 immediately separates Joseph from his brothers.

Why did he bring a bad report about them?

It appears that Joseph was cut from different cloth than his brothers. A lot of what we know about them does not put them in a very good light.

Why was Joseph loved by his father?

Why does Jesus love us ?

We all know of Joseph's 'Coat of many colours' but the Hebrew does not describe the striped jacket most of us assume. The NIV translates it *richly ornamented robe*. This is a good translation. To die a coat may colours would indeed have been an expensive exercise. The important thing is that it was a token of his fathers love and set him apart from his brothers.

Why did his brothers hate him? v11

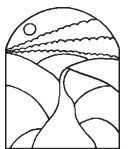
It is obvious that Joseph's brother thought he was a swell head.

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Joseph had two dreams, the first of 3 sets of dreams that run through the story.

What is the significance of there being two dreams? Genesis 41:32

What was the meaning of the two dreams?

God has promised him a great promise. **What should Joseph do?**

- Demand from his family the position God had given him
- Reject the dream because it was impossible
- Trust God and let Him do it.
- Make plans to force the dream to happen.
- Just forget the whole thing because God would do it all.

Was Joseph wrong in sharing his dreams with his brothers ?

Helpful hint Romans 12:9-15

How would you have reacted if you had been one of his brothers?

It is a hard lesson for us to learn that not everything that God tells us is for public disclosure. Much damage has been done because of this. It is hard to say, Joseph should not have done it, but it certainly looks that way!

Joseph did tell his brothers, they hated him for it, but God used this unhappy situation and turned it for good. Romans 8v28

What evidence is there in this passage of Joseph's immaturity?

What are some of the immature things we as Christians should overcome?

If someone was jealous of you how would you handle it?

We usually react negatively, but a positive approach, reaching out to the person. Complementing them on the things they do well, finding reasons to praise them, works a lot better. Maybe they are jealous because they feel inferior. Jealous people can be quite dangerous (as the story points out). Best to disarm the jealousy.

Read 37v12-36

What was the brothers motive in wanting to kill him? v19

What was Reuban's motive in trying to save him? v21-22

Why did the brothers change their minds about killing him? v26-27

Why was Reuban frantic when he found the boy missing?v29-30

What was Jacob's response? v34-36

How do you think Joseph felt

Towards his Brothers?

Towards God?

Does the promise of God mean that everything will go straight?

God had a call on Joseph's life, Joseph obviously had a different set of standard to his brothers. This put him in a difficult position.

John 15v18-19

1 John 3v13

2 Timothy 3:12

Why do you think this is?

Could Joseph have avoided this grief?

Can you avoid grief?

If Joseph had avoided the pit what else would have avoided?

Why did it have to be this way?

Bible Studies

Joseph - Potihar's house & Prison

Things started well for Joseph, God made him a promise that he would be the head of his family. Unfortunately instead of being recognised as the boss, his brothers hate him so much that they fake his death and sell him as a slave to some traders heading for Egypt.

Would you say God's plan had gone awry? Genesis 15v13-14

In Potiphar's house

Read Genesis 39v1-6

In Egypt things are looking up for Joseph he has been sold into a rich family and is doing very well for himself.

Who was Potiphar?

Why did Joseph prosper?

Why did Potiphar prosper?

Potiphar recognised Joseph's potential and began to trust him. We are not entirely sure what position Potiphar held, other than it was a high one. Obviously he was a man who knew talent when he saw it and was not afraid to delegate.

What areas did Potiphar entrust to Joseph?

Perhaps we can see signs of maturity in Joseph. Joseph no longer tries to talk himself to the top, instead he trusts God and works himself to the top.

Our ideas of slavery are dominated by the African slavery of last century. Slaves in the ancient world could have a much higher degree of freedom and could rise to be quite influential, even wealthy.

Read Genesis 39v6b-20

Once again it seems just as Joseph can begin to see the fulfilment of God's promise the bottom falls out of his world.

What did Joseph do wrong?

Did Joseph's innocence protect him?

What enabled Joseph to withstand the temptation of his boss's wife?

Did you notice that not only did Joseph refuse Potiphar's wife's advances he also avoided her v10. **Why do you think that was?**

How can you resist temptation?

What is the difference between sin and temptation?

What does Joseph mean when he talks about *a sin against God*?

The scripture makes it clear that sin is primarily against God.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, Psalm 51:4

The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.' Luke 15:21

What was Joseph's motivation?

- I must do what is right because it is the Law.
- I will get into trouble if I am found out.
- My master trusts me I should not betray that trust.
- I must do what is right before God.
- If I do right God will bless me.

It seems to me that Joseph was more concerned with being right before God than anything else.

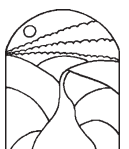
Why do you do what is right?

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In Prison

Again, Joseph is at the wrong end of a crime that calls out to God for justice. All the more so since he had been so careful. It seems to me there is at least some chance that Potiphar, knew or suspected the truth, but even so Joseph would have to go to jail to save face. This was a truly unjust situation.

Read Genesis 39v20-23

Both in the success of Potiphar's house and the failure of the Jail, the Scripture tells us that the Lord was with Joseph and prospered him, 39v2; 23. (Hebrew same word for prosper/succeed = מצליח *matzleach*) God was not there in the good times and gone in the bad, He was there the whole way through.

Do you think God uses bad times?

Do you think we grow more when times are hard?

I want you to imagine for a moment that you are sitting in an Egyptian prison cell, being punished for what you did not do. How would you react?

How would you feel?

What would you do?

How did Joseph react?

The passage does not tell us in detail. But there are several things that we can conclude from it.

- * Joseph kept his faith in God. We know this because God stayed with him.
- * Joseph made the best of the situation he was in. He did not wallow in self pity.
- * There is no hint of bitterness about him instead he makes the best of a bad lot.
- * He does not just mark time waiting to be released so he can get on with being called. He was active where he was. He served God where he was. Consequently we read *the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden.* Genesis 39:21

I believe that this time in prison was the key phase in Joseph's life. He stood at a cross-roads. This was make or break for the promises God had given him. How he reacted now would determine his future.

How does this apply to us?

Did you notice in both places people were watching Joseph and what he did?

There is a persistent undercurrent among Christians that says:

If I was _____ then I could serve the Lord.

If I wasn't _____ then I could serve the Lord.

Joseph tells us that we serve the Lord where and as we are.

Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. John 4:35

What did the warden do?

the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. Genesis 39:23

Joseph even prospered in Prison.

What kind of prisons might we find ourselves in?

How do we prosper in prison?

There are different kinds of prisons. We need to remind ourselves that in Joseph's life the road to the palace ran through the prison. Many of the 'prisons' we find ourselves in are of our own creation, our disobedience, our unforgiveness, the Enemies tricks and deceptions. God wants us free from those. Other 'prisons' are things we cannot avoid. But we can prosper in.

We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. Psalm 124:7
You get the distinct impression that Joseph was free even in prison.

Bible Studies

Joseph and the Dreams

The roller coaster of Joseph's life and call continues. In prison he has found favour with prison warder. He is still a prisoner but makes him responsible to run the prison. This promotion is more remarkable than the first. Joseph must have been a remarkable man.

Read Genesis 40v1-8

Do all dreams have meanings?

What does Solomon attribute dreams to? Ecclesiastes 5v3

For God does speak—now one way, now another— though man may not perceive it. 15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, Job 33:14-15

There are many times recorded in Scripture where God spoke through a dream, Jacob and his ladder, Gideon and the loaf of bread, in the New Testament, An Angel spoke to Joseph twice in a dream.

God also specifically says He will speak through dreams;

Numbers 12:6

Acts 2:17

How do you recognise a dream that comes from God?

Why do you think the two prisoners were so disturbed that there was no one to interpret the dream?

It seems to me there are two main possibilities. Either they were very disturbing dreams or they were deeply reliant on their superstitions.

What does Joseph means do not interpretations belong to God?

Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. Isaiah 46:9-10

When God does speak though a dream or a vision often the meaning is far from clear and we must be careful we do not put our own interpretation on it. The two dreams were similar but the interpretations quite different.

Read Genesis 40v9-23

What did the dreams mean? - notice the symbolic interpretation.

Why was the baker keen to have his dream interpreted? v16

These were prophetic dreams they foretold the future

For what other purpose might God send a dream?

Matthew 2:12	<i>Warning</i>	<i>Joseph about Herod</i>
Acts 16:9	<i>Guidance</i>	<i>Paul to go to Macedonia</i>
Genesis 28:12	<i>Encouragement</i>	<i>Jacob's ladder</i>
Judges 7:13	<i>Conformation</i>	<i>Gideon loaf of bread</i>
1 Kings 3:5	<i>Communication</i>	<i>Solomon asks for wisdom</i>
Joel 2:28	<i>Inspiration</i>	<i>Holy Spirit.</i>

Is there a difference between a dream and a vision?

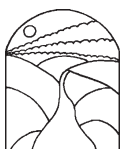
Do you have to be asleep to dream?

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Joseph thought this dream was going to be his deliverance from prison. Often we think we can see how God is going to answer a prayer, we are usually wrong! But Joseph was right that this was no coincidence. God planned to use it in a way Joseph never even dreamt about.

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

The Bible says we must be faithful in small things if God is to use us in big things.

How did that apply to Joseph?

Read Genesis 41

What were the two dreams?

Did the cup bearer take a risk in speaking out?

Most of us try to cover our faults and mistakes but the cup bearer owned up to his failings. Even though it meant reminding himself and Pharaoh of something best forgotten by all.

What were the dreams and what were the meanings?

The agriculture of the Nile delta was (up until the building of the Aswan dam) reliant on the annual flooding of the great river. The flooding brought life but it was also very destructive, bringing death and disease. (Big contrast here to the promised land which was watered by streams and rain.)

Egypt's two main staples were grain and cattle. The dreams indicate that both will fail. When Pharaoh describes the cows as ugly, a literal translation of the Hebrew is bad or evil. רַחַהּ (rah)

What solution did Joseph suggest?

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." Genesis 41:16

What does this say to us?

So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" Genesis 41:38

What did God's Spirit have to do with it?

Isaiah 11v2

John 14v16-17

John 14v26

John 16v12-15

In what way did Joseph seize the moment?

Should he not have waited until God did it all?

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. Genesis 41:39

What risk did Joseph take?

Did you notice how sudden Joseph's rise to power was?

Was it really all that sudden?

The ground work for this 'sudden act' had taken much time to lay. God had worked inside Joseph and Joseph had co-operated with God. Too often we are not at all concerned with the development of our character and spirituality we just want the position.

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. Romans 5v3-5

What will happen if you have the position without the Character?

Bible Studies

Joseph and the famine

From this point on the Bible continues the account of the famine, but this is secondary to the narrative, which turns back to Jacob's family.

Read Genesis 41v41-57

Pharaoh makes Joseph the equivalent of a Prime Minister. The signet ring Pharaoh puts on Joseph's finger was the symbol of Pharaoh's authority. - So Joseph begins his task of gathering food from the abundant harvest.

Joseph given is the Egyptian name Zaphenath-Paneah

Joseph is married Asenath Potiphera's the priest of On Daughter. (Not Potiphar. The Hebrew is quite different).

Joseph has two sons Manessah which sounds like forgotten and Ephraim which sounds like fruitful.

These names are symbolic what do you think they suggest?

How did Joseph handle success?

Often it is when we succeed that we forget God and get ourselves into trouble.

Why is this?

The Hebrew for Joseph's rise to power is similar to that used of Adam when God put him over the earth.

Chapter 42

Read verse 1-2 It was most unusual for Egypt and Canaan to experience famine at the same time (one was watered by the Nile and one by rain fall). The famine must have been severe.

Read verse 3-4 Why did Jacob not send Benjamin?

Did Jacob suspect the truth about Joseph? *About Joseph's fate not a fact had come to light, about the brothers guilt little doubt remained. Under a father's eye their actual crimes might be covered up, but not their character.* Kinder.

Read verse 6-13 Why didn't the brothers recognise Joseph?

The most likely reason, apart from his adoption of Egyptian language and culture was that like most Egyptian officials he wore a ceremonial mask.

Why did Joseph treat them harshly?

Why did Joseph treat them the way he did?

The idea of Canaan invading Egypt was novel to say the least.

Joseph first demands that their brother be brought to Egypt then he agrees to let them go, however Simeon is left as security. Only if Benjamin comes will Joseph believe they are not lying. All but Simeon return home with the corn, but when they stop for the first night they find the silver they had used to purchase the corn is in each sack. They realised a conspiracy was afoot.

Why did Joseph want to see Benjamin?

Read verse 21-23 The brothers are correct in thinking this has to do with Joseph, but for the wrong reason. All this is reported to Jacob.

"Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, 'This is how I will know whether you are honest men. Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go. Genesis 42:33

Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. Genesis 42:3

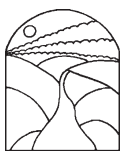
Against his better judgement Jacob allows Benjamin to go, Ruben vouches for his safety and they return to Egypt.

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Chapter 43

Read verse 11-14 This time Joseph invites his brothers to his house and provides a banquet for them. They are terrified believing they are being set up.

Read verse 26-31

When portions were served to them from Joseph's table, Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's. So they feasted and drank freely with him. Genesis 43:34

Chapter 44

Again the 11 brothers are sent on their way with both lots of silver in the sacks of corn. But Joseph's goblet is placed in Benjamin's sack. Joseph sends men after them and to the brothers horror the cup is found in Benjamin's sack! The brothers are distraught, their worst nightmares are coming true. They return to the city.

Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?" Genesis 44:15

Is Joseph endorsing divination?

Read verse 16-20 Judah makes a plea for Benjamin's freedom. He tells Joseph all about Jacob and his love for the boy.

"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. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father." Genesis 44:33-34

Joseph has bought his brothers full circle.

Do you see the irony in all this?

Do you think God ever brings us back to our failure again to see if we have learned from them?

Chapter 45

Read verse 1-7

Why did Joseph forgive his brothers?

How else could he have acted?

Did Joseph have the right to bear a grudge against them?

How well would you say Joseph handled all this?

How does all of this apply to us?

Why is it important to forgive

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Mathew 18:35

Unforgiveness hurts us, not the object of our unforgiveness.

How did Joseph understand all that had befallen him? v7-8

Jacob and his whole family move to Egypt into the care of Joseph, thus the dreams of Joseph were fulfilled. It was in Egypt that Israel grew to be a nation until the time God bought them out.

The most important verse in this whole narrative is found in chapter 50

But Joseph said to them, "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. Genesis 50:19-20

Even what the enemy means for evil in our lives God can turn to our Good.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

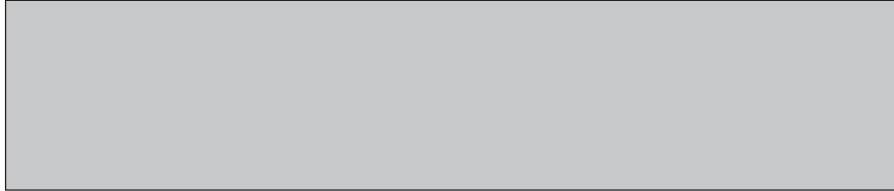
What do you think this means?

Bible Studies

Joseph - An alternative explanation

There is much that we can learn from the account of Joseph.

What would you say are the key things we have learned?



There is more to this story than first appears. Sometimes Scripture is written at different levels. The Old Testament contains pictures of the New. This story is a Type. A type means a story that points to something else.

A good example of this is, for instance Gilbert & Sullivan. Their operettas can be taken as a bit of fun, but behind them Gilbert was portraying what he thought was wrong with society, they were political satire. Books like Animal Farm, go even further giving a whole history in novel form- these are called allegories.

What does the Bible say these things represent?

Eg. the flood 1 Peter 3:20-21
Sinai & Jerusalem Galatians 4:24-26

This kind of interpretation is not always exclusive, there can be different meanings:

Luke 17:26

Jesus told us to look for him in the pages of the Old Testament.

John 5:39-40

Luke 24:27

Martin Luther said "*if you will interpret well and securely, take Christ with you, for he is the man whom everything concerns.*"

An example of this would be, *Abraham offering Isaac. Genesis 22*

At the same time, we must be very careful when we look for types in the OT. In the history of the Church all kinds of strange teachings were promoted by find types that were simply not there, so today we have some rules.

For example:

- * It is the basic meaning of scripture that is always most important.
- * We only teach them when they are clearly there, we never force them on scripture.
- * We do not base doctrine on types.
- * We only teach them when we can support what they say from other scriptures.
- * Do not force every element of a story to fit the parallel.

Even so we must be very cautious.

Behind the story of Joseph it is possible to see another story. A story of another person rejected by his brothers.

What points of comparison can you see in this story?

Joseph was to be the head of his family, but his brothers could not recognise him. So Jesus the Messiah, the head of the Jewish nation, was largely unrecognised.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. John 1:10-11

Many were indignant at his claims:

Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" John 8:53

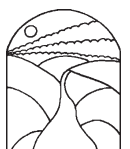
He was hated without cause and rejected by his brothers because of jealousy.

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*But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.' John 15:25
"Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out
of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. Mark 15:9-10*

Suffered unjustly in God's purpose.

*"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 1 Peter 2:22
Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age,
according to the will of our God and Father. Galatians 1:3-4*

Achieved glory through suffering

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured
the cross, scorned its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2*

In the account, Joseph made it very clear that all that had befallen him had a purpose

Read Genesis 45v5-11

What was the reason?

*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of
many lives. NIV (ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good KJV) Genesis 50v20*

How does this apply to Jesus and his death?

*You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation
perish." He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would
die for the Jewish nation. John 11:50-51*

So far, so good, all this is achieved, but perhaps the most interesting (and controversial) part of the story unfulfilled.

What happened next?

*"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land—
not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Amos 8:11*

In the end of the story Joseph's brothers are forced to go to Joseph for food. They do not recognise Joseph because he is in the guise of a gentile.

What need might today's Jewish people have of Jesus?

What is the gentile guise Jesus is wearing? Why might they not recognise Him?

Most Jews today think that Christianity is a gentile religion. They do not realise that, though culturally this may be true, it's founder was the long awaited Jewish Messiah and all it's first leaders were Jewish. They saw themselves as continuing the faith of Abraham and Moses, not establishing a new faith, they saw themselves as the true Judaism, and they were right. In a sense we Gentile believers are the 'other countries' that all went to Joseph to buy grain. Genesis 41:57. We are the "other sheep that are not of this sheep pen," that Jesus said He must gather that "there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

Finally he reveals himself to his brothers and they recognise him, a family reunion follows.

What do you think this might be saying?

*"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and
supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns
for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. Zechariah 12:10*

*For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without
ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their
king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days. Hosea 3:4-5*

*And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn
godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.".
Romans 11v26*

Many people have proposed many views of how and when this will be. Suffice to say, God has not finished with His ancient people, He has not abandoned them. Romans 11v1. There will come a day when there will be a wide spread revival among the Jewish people. They will accept Him and He will accept them.