

#7 - Joseph - Genesis 37-46

Engage:

- The story of Joseph covers the most text in this series of stories. In order to cover it in one time, you will need to boil the story down. If you listen to the CD version, you will see that the story can be told in 6 minutes.
- One way of doing this would be to frame the story of Joseph and how God's redemptive plan was continued around the following four different "relational environments" that were part of Joseph's life:
 - 1) Joseph and his family
 - 2) Joseph and Potiphar's household
 - 3) Joseph, the prisoners and the warden
 - 4) Joseph and Pharaoh's household

- The character of a godly person will always be strengthened when the test, whatever it may be, is met. Abraham passed the test of faithfulness when he was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. In this story, Joseph's character is tested when he endured the suffering brought about by his brothers selling him into slavery, the false accusation of Potiphar's wife which led to his imprisonment, the forgetfulness of the cupbearer after he was released from prison and the years of separation from his father. Throughout the Bible we see that even when circumstances seem unfair, if they are faithfully endured, God's blessing will follow.

Thoughts about the story:

Genesis 37 – Joseph and his family

- 37:1-4 – The story begins with Joseph as a 17 year old shepherd. He was the favorite son of his father Israel (Jacob), the first son of his favorite wife Rachel. Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colors which caused his other brothers to hate Joseph.
- 37:5-11 – Joseph had two dreams. In both dreams Joseph said that his family would bow down to him: 1) the bound sheaves of his brothers are pictured as bowing down to Joseph's sheaves, and 2) the sun, moon and stars bowing down to him is a picture of his whole family bowing down. His father rebuked him for having such a dream – but nevertheless kept in mind what he had heard (much like Mary concerning Jesus - Luke 2:19, 51)
- 37:12-28 – Joseph is sent by Israel (Jacob) to check on his brothers who were grazing their sheep at Shechem (approx. 60 miles away), but he found them at Dothan (approx. 13 miles further). When his brothers saw him coming they plotted first to kill him. Both Reuben and Judah came forward to rescue Joseph from being killed. Instead Joseph was sold for 20 shekels of silver to some Ishmaelites / Midianites (both refer to the same people) who took him to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. When they returned home they led their father to believe that a wild animal had devoured Joseph.

Genesis 38 - Skip the story of Judah and Tamar since it not about Joseph.

Genesis 39 - Joseph and Potiphar's household

- Joseph proved himself to be faithful to Potiphar because God blessed him. So Potiphar put

Joseph in charge of everything he had. There was a problem though. It was not Joseph, but Potiphar's wife. She tried to seduce him. On one occasion, Joseph ran from her because he knew that he would be sinning against God. Potiphar's wife lied to her husband about what Joseph was doing. Potiphar believed his wife and had Joseph put into prison.

- Even though Joseph was in prison, the Lord continued to be with Joseph. The warden noticed this and made Joseph responsible for all that was done with the other prisoners.

- Key similar phrases – “the Lord was with” (39:1, 2, 3, 21, 23); “the Lord gave him success” (39:3, 23). Application: Is God blessing an unbeliever because of you as He did Potiphar because of Joseph? If so, how? If not, what could this mean?

Genesis 40 - Joseph, the prisoners and the warden

- The cupbearer and the chief baker of Pharaoh made Pharaoh angry and they were placed in prison. The warden assigned them to Joseph. They both had dreams on the same night. Joseph interpreted each dream. The cupbearer would be restored to his previous position. Joseph asked him to remember him before Pharaoh after he was restored. On the other hand, Joseph said that the chief baker's head would be lifted off and he would be hung from a tree till the birds cleaned the flesh off his bones. Both dreams came true, but the cupbearer forgot about Joseph after he was restored.

Genesis 41 - Joseph and Pharaoh's household

- It wasn't until two years later when Pharaoh had two dreams that no one could interpret that the cupbearer remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about his ability to interpret dreams correctly.

In Pharaoh's first dream, he saw seven gaunt (thin and bony) cows eat seven fat cows. In his second dream he saw seven healthy heads of grain be scorched by an east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the full heads.

The cupbearer then spoke up and told Pharaoh about Joseph. Joseph was called to come to Pharaoh. Joseph knew that he could not interpret the dreams, but God could! (Joseph was admitting his dependence upon God - and so should we!) Joseph interpreted the dreams as one in the same. He said that they meant that there would be seven good years of harvest followed by seven years of famine.

Pharaoh showed his confidence and appreciation for Joseph by placing him in charge of properly storing the grain in the years of plenty to have during the years of famine. Joseph was given a new name - Zaphenath-Paneah (roughly means savior of the world or sustainer of life) and a wife named Asenath. Joseph was 30 years old at this time. Before the years of famine began Joseph had two sons: 1) Manasseh - “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household” and Ephraim - “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.”

Genesis 42 - Joseph and his family

- There was also a famine where Jacob lived in Canaan. He heard there was plenty of grain in Egypt. He sent 10 of his sons (not Benjamin) to Egypt to buy food for his family. Joseph recognized them when they came, but they did not recognize him. Joseph also remembered

the dream he had about them (Gen 37). He called them into question by accusing them as spies. He found out from talking to them that his father was still alive and so was Benjamin.

Reuben's guilt causes him to speak up. He believed the brothers were having to pay for what they did to Joseph. Joseph then had Simeon taken from his brothers and then allowed the other 9 brothers to go back to Canaan. When they returned they were to bring Benjamin. On the way home they opened their bags of grain and found their money pouches of silver. They became frightened!

Genesis 43 – Joseph and his family

- The famine continued and they needed to go back to Egypt for grain. Judah finally got Israel to agree to let them take Benjamin with them. They also took a double amount of silver to pay for both the first and the last amount of grain plus extra gifts. When Joseph saw that they had brought Benjamin, he had his steward to prepare a big dinner. In addition, he had the steward bring them to his house. Again, they were frightened! When Joseph arrived at his house, his brothers bowed down to him (Gen 37).

Genesis 44 – Joseph and his family

- In this chapter Joseph puts his brothers to the test one more time. Joseph had each of his brother's silver payment put back in their grain sack. In Benjamin's sack, Joseph had his own silver cup placed. (This kind of cup was used in divination by people like the Egyptians, Although God spoke to Joseph without this practice of divination, Joseph was not ready to reveal himself to his brothers.) The brothers were sent back to Canaan. Joseph then told his steward to go after his brothers and accuse them of stealing. They were first told that whoever stole the cup would be punished by death. The brothers welcomed the search. Joseph's cup was found in Benjamin's sack. They all went back to Joseph's house. There the brothers bowed down before him again! Joseph said that the man who stole the cup would become his slave and the rest could return home. Judah steps forward and tells the story of selling their brother Joseph into slavery. He pleads with Joseph to allow him to take Benjamin's place for the sake of their father Israel. This is a repentant Judah in contrast with what is seen in Genesis 38. This is another example of a changed life!

Genesis 45 – Joseph and his family

- Joseph then made himself known to his brothers. When he did, his brothers were terrified and not able to answer Joseph about the health of their father. Joseph clearly said to his brothers to not be afraid or angry with themselves. He knew that God had been with him – and that it “was to save lives that God sent” him “ahead of you” (v. 5). “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God” (v. 8).

- Joseph then sent his brothers back to bring his father and their families to Egypt – to the region of Goshen. Pharaoh was pleased when he found out that Joseph's family had been reunited. He joined in helping them return to Canaan so that they could bring Jacob / Israel to be reunited with Joseph.

- When the brothers told Jacob about Joseph, he did not believe them at first. When he became convinced that Joseph was alive, his spirit was “revived” (v. 27).

Genesis 46 – Joseph and his family

- Israel / Jacob stopped at Beersheba on the way to Egypt to offer a sacrifice to God. God then spoke to Jacob. Jacob was reassured that God was behind all that happened and that there was no reason to be afraid.

- There were 66 family members who made the trip to Egypt. With the addition of Joseph's family of 4, there were 70. Their reunion must have been quite a spectacle.

Application:

- About God – We learn that He blesses those who remain faithful even when unfairly treated. We see that his plans sometimes have bumps along the road, but eventually His purpose is fulfilled.

- About man – We see Joseph having an impact on the lives of others wherever he was: with his father, his brothers, Potiphar's household, other prisoners and the warden, and Pharaoh's household. No doubt a high point in Joseph's life was seen in his willingness to forgive his brothers. He believed that God had used the situations of his life for the good of all. Joseph knew what it meant for God to be with him.

It would be easy to recognize that Joseph, his father and his brothers could have each asked the question: "What if I . . . ?" (For example: what if I (Joseph) had not been so cocky? What if I (Jacob) had not sent Joseph to Shechem? What if we (the brothers) had not sold Joseph into slavery? This is a question we often ask ourselves, but we must accept the result of our choices and realize that God will still accomplish His will – no matter what we choose. But it does make sense to choose His ways over what Satan would lead us to do (see Adam and Eve in the garden).

- It does not seem that Joseph had the answer to the age old question: "Why was he being unfairly mistreated?" – at least at first. But he did in the end. The same is most likely what we will experience – if we remain faithful when having to suffer unjustly.

- Joseph was just one of many biblical characters who was willing to remain faithful to God no matter what happened. See Hebrews 11 for others. In each case we see the need to recognize that God had a purpose even in the unpleasant moments of life for His faithful followers

Note: Suffering offers either a time to **grow** or **groan**, depending on whether you are **faithful** or **faithless**.

- When have you seen God bring something good from a bad situation? Would you like to see this happen? How could you and the rest of the group partner with God to help bring this about?

- Think about the ways Joseph had grown during the 13 years from the time he was sold into slavery until he became second only to Pharaoh. How have you grown in the past 13 years?

- Has God given you the opportunity to confess a past wrong doing like Judah did? See Genesis 38.

- What is one thing that you have learned from the story of Joseph that you would want to share with a friend who is going through a tough time? Why not do so this week!