

Lesson 20: Jacob's son, Joseph: Sold Into Slavery

For a couple of years, I visited prisoners in the New Hampshire state prison where I conducted Bible studies with them. I know that some prisoners are in prison unjustly because of false testimony and being railroaded by local law enforcement. The book, **The Innocent Man**, by John Grisham, chronicles the true story of a young man who was falsely accused and charged with the rape and murder of a young cocktail waitress which he did not commit. He ends up on death row due to deceit on the part of local law enforcement that withheld and mishandled evidence, junk science, and experts that didn't even know what they were talking about, and dream confessions.

Well the story of Joseph is about a young man who is falsely accused of a crime and sentenced to prison. But it is also the story of the providential hand of God who is at work behind the scenes orchestrating his will and good pleasure. As we will see, God knew that Joseph was in prison and God was in control.

Before we look at the story of Joseph, which is probably my favorite story in the Bible, let's do a review of last week's lesson.

- 1. Before Jacob and Esau were even born, what did God tell Rebecca about the two brothers who were inside the womb?** *God told her that her two sons in her womb would become two nations, and that from the very beginning, they would be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other, and the older son will serve the younger son.*
- 2. What was the big difference between Esau and Jacob?** *Esau despised his birthright and the spiritual promises of God. Esau was living just for instant gratification whereas Jacob valued the birthright and the promises of God. Jacob believed that God had a great future in store for him.*
- 3. Which son was his father's favorite? Why?** *Esau, because he liked to be outdoors and hunt like his father.*
- 4. What did Esau do with his birthright?** *He despised his birthright and sold it or gave it away for a bowl of stew, because he was hungry.*
- 5. How did Jacob deceive his father into giving him the blessing that was intended for Esau?** *With the help and directions of his mother, Rebekah, Jacob cooks a meal of domestic livestock, then puts on Esau's gamy-smelling clothing to make his blind father think he is speaking to Esau.. Rebecca also puts goatskin pieces on Jacob's arms because he has smooth skin and his brother is very hairy-so his father will feel the arm and think he is blessing Esau. Finally, when Isaac asks Jacob directly, "Are you really my son Esau?" Jacob lies and says "I am."*
- 6. What did Jacob see in the dream given to him by God?** *He saw a stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching to Heaven. God's angels were walking up and down the ladder, and God stood above the ladder.*
- 7. What did this dream mean?** *It meant that the Deliverer, who would be the descendant of Jacob, would be like the stairway connecting the earth to Heaven. Through the Deliverer, people could be brought back into oneness with God.*
- 8. Later on, Jacob himself is on the receiving end of deception. Which relative deceived him and how did he deceive Jacob?** *Jacob flees from his brother Esau to Haran where he stays with his Uncle Laban for the next 20 yrs. His uncle manipulates and deceives Jacob into working for 14 yrs in exchange for his daughters Rachel and Leah. Laban's first deception was tricking Jacob into marrying Leah when he thought he was marrying Rachel. We also learn that Laban changes Jacob's wages ten times.*
- 9. In Gen. 32, Jacob wrestles with God all night long. Jacob would not let the angel go until he did what? Until he blessed him.**
- 10. What was the blessing that Jacob received?** *He was given a new name, Israel, the one who perseveres with God, and was destined to become the father of 12 tribes and the nation of Israel.*

11. Who are Esau's descendants? The Edomites who built their cities in Arabia, and are the Middle-eastern people who live today in Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon.

12. What were the two sons that Rachel gave birth to? Joseph and Benjamin

13. What happened to Rachel during the birth of her second son, Benjamin? She died giving birth to Benjamin.

Joseph is the fourth generation, the great grandson of Abraham, and yet again, he is not the eldest. There is a clear pattern here: the natural heir does not receive the blessing. God chooses in his grace who receives it. The pattern has been for it to be one of the younger sons.

In one important way, however, the pattern does not continue. There is a great difference between Joseph and the previous three generations. God never calls himself 'the God of Joseph'. Angels never appear to Joseph and his three brothers are not rejected like those of the other three. His brothers are included in the Godly line of Seth, so there is not the same contrast to be seen in that respect. Furthermore, Joseph is never spoken to directly by God. He receives dreams and is given the interpretation of dreams, but he never actually receives communication from God as the other three patriarchs do.

So it seems that somehow Joseph stands on its own. Why is he different, and why are we told his story?

In part, the reason is obvious, for his story links in naturally with the very next book in the Bible. In Exodus, we find this family in slavery in Egypt, and somehow we need to explain how they got there. The story of Joseph is the vital link, explaining how Jacob and his family migrated down to Egypt for the same reason that Abraham and Isaac had gone down to Egypt earlier: because of a shortage of food. (Egypt does not depend on rain since it has the River Nile flowing down from the Ethiopian highlands, whereas the land of Israel depends for its crops totally on rain brought by the west wind from the Mediterranean.) At the very least, therefore, the story of Joseph is there to link us with the next part of the Bible.

Actually, the story of Joseph begins before [Genesis 37](#). The twelve sons of Jacob were the offspring of four mothers.

POINT TO THE TWELVE SONS OF JACOB (ISRAEL) ON THE CHRONOLOGICAL CHART.

God changed Jacob's name to Israel. The land of Canaan, the Promised Land, is still called by his name.

A. Joseph, Jacob's favorite son

Genesis 37:1-11 (NLT)

¹ So Jacob settled again in the land of Canaan, where his father had lived as a foreigner.

² This is the account of Jacob and his family. When Joseph was seventeen years old, he often tended his father's flocks. He worked for his half brothers, the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. But Joseph reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing.

³ Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe.

⁴ But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn't say a kind word to him.

⁵ One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever.

⁶ "Listen to this dream," he said.

⁷ "We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!"

⁸ His brothers responded, "So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.

⁹ Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. "Listen, I have had another dream," he said. "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!"

¹⁰ This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. "What kind of dream is that?" he asked. "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?"

¹¹ But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant.

POINT TO JOSEPH ON THE CHRONOLOGICAL CHART.

Joseph was the 11th son of Jacob, and he was a 17-year-old shepherd, Joseph father sort of turns Joseph into a tattler, bringing a bad report about his brothers to their father in [Genesis 37:2](#). This behavior, combined with Jacob's overt favoritism towards Joseph, causes his older brothers to resent him to the point of hatred (37:3-4).

Because of Jacob's open love for Joseph, his brothers seeing their father playing favorites with Joseph started to despise him. And when Jacob presented Joseph with a highly decorated coat, he was hated and resented by his brothers all the more ([Genesis 37:3](#)).

To make matters worse, Joseph displays a lack of wisdom when he begins relating his dreams—prophetic visions showing Joseph one day ruling over his family ([Genesis 37:11-15](#)). The sun, moon and the eleven stars represented his parents and his brothers. His entire family would one day bow down before him. Now, how would you respond if one of your brothers told you he'd had a dream like this? You'd probably think he was either deluded or an ego-maniac. Eventually, Joseph's brothers could not speak to him in a civil manner (37:4).

Theme: God is everywhere all the time; He knows everything.

For some reason, Joseph was kept at home when his brothers took their father's flock to graze near Shechem. Israel became somewhat uneasy about how things were going in Shechem, and his fears were not ill-founded. This is where Jacob had purchased some land (33:19). It is also the place where Jacob's two sons, Simeon and Levi, killed Shechem (who had raped their sister, Dinah) and the men of the city, taking the women, children, and cattle of Shechem as spoil ([Genesis 34](#)). It could certainly be a dangerous place for these sons of Jacob to remain, and so Israel sent Joseph to Shechem to check on his brothers.

Genesis 37:12-17 (NLT)

¹² Soon after this, Joseph's brothers went to pasture their father's flocks at Shechem.

¹³ When they had been gone for some time, Jacob said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing the sheep at Shechem. Get ready, and I will send you to them." "I'm ready to go," Joseph replied.

¹⁴ "Go and see how your brothers and the flocks are getting along," Jacob said. "Then come back and bring me a report." So Jacob sent him on his way, and Joseph traveled to Shechem from their home in the valley of Hebron.

¹⁵ When he arrived there, a man from the area noticed him wandering around the countryside. "What are you looking for?" he asked.

¹⁶ "I'm looking for my brothers," Joseph replied. "Do you know where they are pasturing their sheep?"

¹⁷ "Yes," the man told him. "They have moved on from here, but I heard them say, 'Let's go on to Dothan.'" So Joseph followed his brothers to Dothan and found them there.

As it turns out, Joseph's brothers had moved on to Dothan, nearly 20 miles further to the north and thus that much more distant from Jacob's watchful eye.⁸⁹ Providentially, a man saw Joseph wandering about in the fields around Shechem. He just happened to overhear Joseph's brothers saying that they were moving on to Dothan, so Joseph set out to find them. When his brothers looked up and saw someone approaching from a distance, there was no question who it was. That distinctive multi-colored tunic, with sleeves, gave Joseph away.

B. Joseph sold into slavery

Genesis 37:18-36 (NLT)

¹⁸ When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him.

¹⁹ "Here comes the dreamer!" they said.

²⁰ "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"

²¹ But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. "Let's not kill him," he said.

²² "Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him." Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.

²³ So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing.

²⁴ Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? His blood would just give us a guilty conscience.

²⁷ Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed.

²⁸ So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled

him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.

²⁹ Some time later, Reuben returned to get Joseph out of the cistern. When he discovered that Joseph was missing, he tore his clothes in grief.

³⁰ Then he went back to his brothers and lamented, “The boy is gone! What will I do now?”

³¹ Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph’s robe in its blood.

³² They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: “Look at what we found. Doesn’t this robe belong to your son?”

³³ Their father recognized it immediately. “Yes,” he said, “it is my son’s robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!”

³⁴ Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time.

³⁵ His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “I will go to my grave mourning for my son,” he would say, and then he would weep.

³⁶ Meanwhile, the Midianite traders arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard.

Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.

Joseph’s brothers had plenty of time to agree among themselves that this was their golden opportunity to get rid of him. At least some of the brothers wanted to kill Joseph and end it then and there.

Reuben did not agree with this plan. He wanted to spare Joseph’s life, but it would seem that his motives were self-serving. He, after all, was the eldest of Israel’s sons, and he would be held responsible for not looking after Joseph.

Because of this, he sought to spare Joseph’s life. He convinced his brothers to throw Joseph into a nearby cistern, thinking that he would return and free the lad later on. Fortunately, the cistern was dry so that Joseph did not drown. This is God’s providence at work. God was working behind the scenes to make sure that they threw Joseph into a well that was totally dried up.

Reuben was gone – perhaps taking his turn watching the flock – when his brothers sat down to eat, somewhere near the cistern, probably well within hearing distance, so that as they ate they could hear his cries for help.⁹⁰ Dothan was on the trading route to Egypt, and it “just so happened” that as they were eating, they looked up to see a caravan of Ishmaelites drawing near. Their camels were carrying spices, balm, and myrrh.

It was at this point Judah proposed a more profitable solution to their problem. Rather than killing Joseph, why not sell him as a slave? They would be rid of him, yet they would not be guilty of shedding his blood. And, to make this an even more tempting opportunity, they could make a little money for themselves at the same time. This seemed to accomplish all of their objectives better than killing Joseph. Since Reuben was not there to object, Judah’s suggestion was adopted. They pulled Joseph out of the cistern and handed him over to the Ishmaelites, who paid them twenty pieces of silver (37:28).

After initially plotting murder against him, his brothers settled for selling him to a caravan of traders bearing goods through Canaan to Egypt. The merchants, in turn, sold Joseph to Potiphar, “the captain of the guard” who was “an officer of Pharaoh” in Egypt

Sometime later, Reuben returned to the cistern to release Joseph, only to find that he was gone. Reuben reported this to his brothers, and we are not told that they confessed what they had done. They all tore up Joseph’s tunic and dipped it in goat’s blood, to make it look as though Joseph had been killed and eaten by a wild animal.

Coldly, the brothers thrust the blood-drenched tunic into their father’s hands, asking him if it was Joseph’s garment. They let their father draw his own false conclusion – that Joseph had been killed and devoured by a wild animal. I wonder if there was a certain satisfaction for these sons of Israel when they saw their father mourning the loss of his favorite son. They attempted to console him, but he was unwilling to be comforted.

C. The Price of Purity

Genesis 39:1-20 (NLT)

¹ When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

² The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master.

³ Potiphar noticed this and realized that the LORD was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did.

⁴ This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned.

⁵ From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master’s household and property, the LORD began to bless Potiphar’s household for Joseph’s sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished.

⁶ So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn’t worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat! Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man,

⁷ and Potiphar’s wife soon began to look at him lustfully. “Come and sleep with me,” she demanded.

⁸ But Joseph refused. “Look,” he told her, “my master trusts me with everything in his entire household.

⁹ No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God.”

¹⁰ She kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her, and he kept out of her way as much as possible.

¹¹ One day, however, no one else was around when he went in to do his work.

¹² She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, “Come on, sleep with me!” Joseph tore himself away, but he left his cloak in her hand as he ran from the house.

¹³ When she saw that she was holding his cloak and he had fled,

¹⁴ she called out to her servants. Soon all the men came running. “Look!” she said. “My

husband has brought this Hebrew slave here to make fools of us! He came into my room to rape me, but I screamed.

¹⁵ When he heard me scream, he ran outside and got away, but he left his cloak behind with me.”

¹⁶ She kept the cloak with her until her husband came home.

¹⁷ Then she told him her story. “That Hebrew slave you’ve brought into our house tried to come in and fool around with me,” she said.

¹⁸ “But when I screamed, he ran outside, leaving his cloak with me!”

¹⁹ Potiphar was furious when he heard his wife’s story about how Joseph had treated her.

²⁰ So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king’s prisoners were held, and there he remained.

[Genesis 39](#) is a refreshing example of sexual purity. Joseph was purchased from the Ishmaelites by Potiphar, a powerful and prosperous man. Potiphar was a servant of Pharaoh. He owned what appears to be a large and lucrative ranch. Initially, Joseph was probably acquired to work with the flocks. Over a period of time, it became apparent to Potiphar that God’s hand was on Joseph – everything he touched seemed to turn to gold. Before long, Potiphar had put Joseph in charge of everything that he had. The only decisions Potiphar made concerned what he would have for dinner (39:6).

After a time, Potiphar’s wife took a sexual interest in Joseph because he was young, around 17 yrs old and very good looking([Gen. 39:7](#)). Joseph’s refusal of the wife’s advances was articulate and reasonable. She tried in various ways to seduce him, but Joseph did everything he could to avoid her.

One day she managed to trap Joseph in the house alone, where she once again sought to seduce him. He found it necessary to flee half-naked, leaving his outer garment in her grasp (notice how Joseph’s coats always seemed to get him into trouble). She then accused Joseph of attacking her, and Potiphar, her husband, had Joseph thrown into prison.⁹³ Joseph did not have far to go from the “executive suite” to the prison, because they were all in the same house. In those days prisons were really dungeons, under the house of an official like Potiphar. Potiphar was, in fact, the “captain of the guard” (39:1; 40:3). In prison, as in the executive suite, God’s hand of blessing continued to be upon Joseph.

Theme: Man must have faith in order to please God and be saved.

The sexual harassment by this woman took place in a power relationship that disadvantaged Joseph. Although she believed that she had the right and power to use Joseph in this way, her words and contact were clearly unwelcome to him. Joseph’s work required him to be at home where she was, yet he could not call the matter to Potiphar’s attention without interfering in their marital relationship. Even after his escape and arrest on false charges, Joseph seems to have had no legal recourse.

We can learn a lot about Joseph’s character. He’s an incredible example of godly character to any teen or adult today. First of all, notice his reactions as he sinks down the social ladder are first class--there is no trace of resentment, no complaining, no questioning of God, no sense of injustice that he should find himself in prison, on death row in Pharaoh’s jail.

Furthermore, even though he was far from home and totally unknown, he maintained his integrity when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. You realize that he could've rationalized everything and made a strong case that God has allowed all this to happen, being sold as a slave and now being seduced by Potiphar's wife. He could've said to himself: "I'll never know what it's like to have sex and maybe God has arranged this opportunity for me, and I should take advantage of it. No, he trusted in God and did not want to break his promise to Potiphar who put his trust in Joseph. Joseph was not about to break that trust, or to violate his conscience by sleeping with another man's wife.

Even at rock bottom, languishing in jail, his concern seems to have been primarily to help others as he seeks to comfort Pharaoh's cup bearer and baker. Joseph is a man who seems to have no concern for himself, but a deep concern for everyone else.

D. From Prison to the Palace

Genesis 39:19-23 (NLT)

¹⁹ Potiphar was furious when he heard his wife's story about how Joseph had treated her.

²⁰ So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were held, and there he remained.

²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love. And the LORD made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden.

²² Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison.

²³ The warden had no more worries, because Joseph took care of everything. The LORD was with him and caused everything he did to succeed.

Theme: God is faithful; He never changes.

Theme: God is the God of Forgiveness. We forgive others even as we have been forgiven.

In prison, it would have been very easy for Joseph to wallow in self-pity. Thrown into prison, it would have been so easy for Joseph to become embittered and hard-hearted toward his brothers who tried to kill him and ended up selling him into slavery. Joseph also could've held great hatred in his heart toward Potiphar and his wife who lied and was responsible for his being thrown into prison on trumped up charges. Joseph could've held all these things in his heart and become full of anger and bitterness, but he chose to forgive. He knew that all these people were only being used by God to fulfill His purpose in his life. He could well have said to himself, "What's the good of trusting God and doing what's right? So far, it has only gotten me into trouble."

Instead, Joseph set out to minister to others, and before long, the hand of God was once again evident in Joseph's life. The warden gave Joseph a free hand, putting him in charge of all the prisoners. He virtually ran the prison. Joseph is a good example to you and me that we need to forgive others and not hold bitterness or anger in our hearts. We need to forgive others, even as God has forgiven us. We cannot be judge and jury over others. We need to see that we, you and I, are sinners and we need a deliverer. We need to be delivered from our sins, from our unforgiveness. This is why Joseph shines as a bright light, because he was abused and mistreated every step of the way, but he still chose to forgive. Can we do any less?

Genesis 40:1-19 (NLT)

¹ Some time later, Pharaoh's chief cup-bearer and chief baker offended their royal master.

² Pharaoh became angry with these two officials,

³ and he put them in the prison where Joseph was, in the palace of the captain of the guard.

⁴ They remained in prison for quite some time, and the captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, who looked after them.

⁵ While they were in prison, Pharaoh's cup-bearer and baker each had a dream one night, and each dream had its own meaning.

⁶ When Joseph saw them the next morning, he noticed that they both looked upset.

⁷ "Why do you look so worried today?" he asked them.

⁸ And they replied, "We both had dreams last night, but no one can tell us what they mean." "Interpreting dreams is God's business," Joseph replied. "Go ahead and tell me your dreams."

⁹ So the chief cup-bearer told Joseph his dream first. "In my dream," he said, "I saw a grapevine in front of me.

¹⁰ The vine had three branches that began to bud and blossom, and soon it produced clusters of ripe grapes.

¹¹ I was holding Pharaoh's wine cup in my hand, so I took a cluster of grapes and squeezed the juice into the cup. Then I placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."

¹² "This is what the dream means," Joseph said. "The three branches represent three days.

¹³ Within three days Pharaoh will lift you up and restore you to your position as his chief cup-bearer.

¹⁴ And please remember me and do me a favor when things go well for you. Mention me to Pharaoh, so he might let me out of this place.

¹⁵ For I was kidnapped from my homeland, the land of the Hebrews, and now I'm here in prison, but I did nothing to deserve it."

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given the first dream such a positive interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I had a dream, too. In my dream there were three baskets of white pastries stacked on my head.

¹⁷ The top basket contained all kinds of pastries for Pharaoh, but the birds came and ate them from the basket on my head."

¹⁸ "This is what the dream means," Joseph told him. "The three baskets also represent three days.

¹⁹ Three days from now Pharaoh will lift you up and impale your body on a pole. Then birds will come and peck away at your flesh."

²⁰ Pharaoh's birthday came three days later, and he prepared a banquet for all his officials and staff. He summoned his chief cup-bearer and chief baker to join the other officials.

²¹ He then restored the chief cup-bearer to his former position, so he could again hand Pharaoh his cup.

²² But Pharaoh impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had predicted when he interpreted his dream.

²³ Pharaoh's chief cup-bearer, however, forgot all about Joseph, never giving him another thought.

In prison, Joseph met two of Pharaoh's officials who were incarcerated, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. It would have been so easy for Joseph to overlook the suffering of others, especially if you are suffering. Joseph noted that both the butler and the baker were despondent one morning, and he asked them what was troubling them.

Many Egyptian texts mention the role of cupbearers, who not only tasted wine for quality and to detect poison but also who enjoyed proximity to those with political power. They often became confidants who were valued for their counsel (see [Nehemiah 2:1-4](#)).^[1] Like chief cupbearers, chief bakers were also trusted officials who had open access to the highest persons in the government and who may have performed duties that extended beyond the preparation of food.^[2]

Theme: God is everywhere all the time; He knows everything.

They informed Joseph they both had different dreams in the night, but no one could tell them what they meant. Joseph reminded them that interpretations belong to God, and encouraged them to tell him their dreams. (Surely this suggests that they were well aware of Joseph's relationship with God.) The butler went first, and Joseph told him that God was about to restore him to favor with Pharaoh. Joseph then asked the butler to remember his unjust treatment and to speak kindly for him with Pharaoh, but the butler forgot all about him for two full years. The baker's dream was different, as was its outcome. His dream indicated that Pharaoh would execute him. Needless to say, Joseph didn't ask this fellow to remember him before Pharaoh.

Genesis 41:1-36 (NLT)

¹ Two full years later, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing on the bank of the Nile River.

² In his dream he saw seven fat, healthy cows come up out of the river and begin grazing in the marsh grass.

³ Then he saw seven more cows come up behind them from the Nile, but these were scrawny and thin. These cows stood beside the fat cows on the riverbank.

⁴ Then the scrawny, thin cows ate the seven healthy, fat cows! At this point in the dream, Pharaoh woke up.

⁵ But he fell asleep again and had a second dream. This time he saw seven heads of grain, plump and beautiful, growing on a single stalk.

⁶ Then seven more heads of grain appeared, but these were shriveled and withered by the east wind.

⁷ And these thin heads swallowed up the seven plump, well-formed heads! Then Pharaoh woke up again and realized it was a dream.

⁸ The next morning Pharaoh was very disturbed by the dreams. So he called for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. When Pharaoh told them his dreams, not one of them could tell him what they meant.

⁹ Finally, the king's chief cup-bearer spoke up. "Today I have been reminded of my failure," he told Pharaoh.

¹⁰ "Some time ago, you were angry with the chief baker and me, and you imprisoned us in the palace of the captain of the guard.

¹¹ One night the chief baker and I each had a dream, and each dream had its own meaning.

¹² There was a young Hebrew man with us in the prison who was a slave of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he told us what each of our dreams meant.

¹³ And everything happened just as he had predicted. I was restored to my position as cup-bearer, and the chief baker was executed and impaled on a pole.”

¹⁴ Pharaoh sent for Joseph at once, and he was quickly brought from the prison. After he shaved and changed his clothes, he went in and stood before Pharaoh.

¹⁵ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream last night, and no one here can tell me what it means. But I have heard that when you hear about a dream you can interpret it.”

¹⁶ “It is beyond my power to do this,” Joseph replied. “But God can tell you what it means and set you at ease.”

¹⁷ So Pharaoh told Joseph his dream. “In my dream,” he said, “I was standing on the bank of the Nile River,

¹⁸ and I saw seven fat, healthy cows come up out of the river and begin grazing in the marsh grass.

¹⁹ But then I saw seven sick-looking cows, scrawny and thin, come up after them. I’ve never seen such sorry-looking animals in all the land of Egypt.

²⁰ These thin, scrawny cows ate the seven fat cows.

²¹ But afterward you wouldn’t have known it, for they were still as thin and scrawny as before! Then I woke up.

²² “Then I fell asleep again, and I had another dream. This time I saw seven heads of grain, full and beautiful, growing on a single stalk.

²³ Then seven more heads of grain appeared, but these were blighted, shriveled, and withered by the east wind.

²⁴ And the shriveled heads swallowed the seven healthy heads. I told these dreams to the magicians, but no one could tell me what they mean.”

²⁵ Joseph responded, “Both of Pharaoh’s dreams mean the same thing. God is telling Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do.

²⁶ The seven healthy cows and the seven healthy heads of grain both represent seven years of prosperity.

²⁷ The seven thin, scrawny cows that came up later and the seven thin heads of grain, withered by the east wind, represent seven years of famine.

²⁸ “This will happen just as I have described it, for God has revealed to Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do.

²⁹ The next seven years will be a period of great prosperity throughout the land of Egypt.

³⁰ But afterward there will be seven years of famine so great that all the prosperity will be forgotten in Egypt. Famine will destroy the land.

³¹ This famine will be so severe that even the memory of the good years will be erased.

³² As for having two similar dreams, it means that these events have been decreed by God, and he will soon make them happen.

³³ “Therefore, Pharaoh should find an intelligent and wise man and put him in charge of the entire land of Egypt.

³⁴ Then Pharaoh should appoint supervisors over the land and let them collect one-fifth of all the crops during the seven good years.

³⁵ Have them gather all the food produced in the good years that are just ahead and bring it to Pharaoh’s storehouses. Store it away, and guard it so there will be food in the cities.

³⁶ That way there will be enough to eat when the seven years of famine come to the land of Egypt. Otherwise this famine will destroy the land.”

POINT TO THE NILE RIVER ON MAP 1.

Theme: God is Supreme and Sovereign

Joseph's words were of great comfort and encouragement to Pharaoh, who must have sensed something ominous about his dreams. The dreams referred to the same events. There would be seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of severe famine. The years of famine would consume the abundance of the years of plenty. The fact that there were two dreams confirmed that this would most surely come to pass.⁹⁵ Joseph now goes beyond the interpretation of these dreams to recommend a solution to the problem they predicted. Here we can see Joseph's administrative gifts in action. The king should appoint someone to prepare for this disaster, before the years of famine came upon the land of Egypt. Let this person store up grain from the bountiful years, and then distribute it during the lean years.

I don't think Joseph ever imagined he would be chosen for such a task. Once again, Joseph was simply trying to serve his king. Notice that Joseph did not seek to bargain with Pharaoh for his release: "Well, Pharaoh, I know that I can interpret your dreams, but you're going to have to help me out as well... "

Genesis 41:37-44 (NLT)

³⁷ Joseph's suggestions were well received by Pharaoh and his officials.

³⁸ So Pharaoh asked his officials, "Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?"

³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are.

⁴⁰ You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours."

⁴¹ Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the entire land of Egypt."

⁴² Then Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and placed it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in fine linen clothing and hung a gold chain around his neck.

⁴³ Then he had Joseph ride in the chariot reserved for his second-in-command. And wherever Joseph went, the command was shouted, "Kneel down!" So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all Egypt.

⁴⁴ And Pharaoh said to him, "I am Pharaoh, but no one will lift a hand or foot in the entire land of Egypt without your approval."

God's presence with Joseph was so obvious that Pharaoh promoted Joseph to second-in-command of Egypt, especially to take charge of preparations for the coming famine ([Gen. 41:37-45](#)). God's word to Abraham was bearing fruit: "I will bless those who bless you...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" ([Gen. 12:3](#)).

Joseph's promotion brought him significant accoutrements of leadership: a royal signet ring and gold chain, fine clothing appropriate to his high office, official transportation, a new Egyptian name, and an Egyptian wife from an upper class family ([Gen. 41:41-45](#)).

-Compare: Whenever we make something, it belongs to us; and we make the choices about how our belongings will be used.

If you make a batch of cookies, they're yours to:

- Keep
- Give
- Take to a bake sale.

If you erect an apartment building, you decide whether to:

- Rent it out
- Make it into condominiums
- Sell it to another owner.

God is the Creator of all people. He is the giver and sustainer of life.

- He has made us, and we rightfully belong to Him.
- God can do whatever He wishes with us.
- And because God is righteous, everything that He ever does to people is right.

God was working through the lives of an Egyptian pharaoh and an Israelite prisoner on behalf of all of His people. Even there in prison, Joseph believed that God's purposes were right for him. Though he did not know at the time how God was going to work, Joseph trusted God and lived by faith, believing that God would do what was best.

E. Joseph Provides For His Family and the Future Israel

Genesis 41:53-57 (NLT)

⁵³ At last the seven years of bumper crops throughout the land of Egypt came to an end.

⁵⁴ Then the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had predicted. The famine also struck all the surrounding countries, but throughout Egypt there was plenty of food.

⁵⁵ Eventually, however, the famine spread throughout the land of Egypt as well. And when the people cried out to Pharaoh for food, he told them, "Go to Joseph, and do whatever he tells you."

⁵⁶ So with severe famine everywhere, Joseph opened up the storehouses and distributed grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout the land of Egypt.

⁵⁷ And people from all around came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe throughout the world.

Genesis 42:1-20 (NLT)

1 When Jacob heard that grain was available in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why are you standing around looking at one another?"

2 I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there, and buy enough grain to keep us alive. Otherwise we'll die."

3 So Joseph's ten older brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain.

4 But Jacob wouldn't let Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, go with them, for fear some harm might come to him.

5 So Jacob's sons arrived in Egypt along with others to buy food, for the famine was in Canaan as well.

6 Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of selling grain to all the people, it was to him that his brothers came. When they arrived, they bowed before him with their faces to the ground.

7 Joseph recognized his brothers instantly, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where are you from?" he demanded. "From the land of Canaan," they replied. "We have come to buy food."

8 Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him.

9 And he remembered the dreams he'd had about them many years before. He said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become."

10 "No, my lord!" they exclaimed. "Your servants have simply come to buy food.

11 We are all brothers—members of the same family. We are honest men, sir! We are not spies!"

12 "Yes, you are!" Joseph insisted. "You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become."

13 "Sir," they said, "there are actually twelve of us. We, your servants, are all brothers, sons of a man living in the land of Canaan. Our youngest brother is back there with our father right now, and one of our brothers is no longer with us."

14 But Joseph insisted, "As I said, you are spies!

15 This is how I will test your story. I swear by the life of Pharaoh that you will never leave Egypt unless your youngest brother comes here!

16 One of you must go and get your brother. I'll keep the rest of you here in prison. Then we'll find out whether or not your story is true. By the life of Pharaoh, if it turns out that you don't have a younger brother, then I'll know you are spies."

17 So Joseph put them all in prison for three days.

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, "I am a God-fearing man. If you do as I say, you will live.

19 If you really are honest men, choose one of your brothers to remain in prison. The rest of you may go home with grain for your starving families.

20 But you must bring your youngest brother back to me. This will prove that you are telling the truth, and you will not die." To this they agreed.

- The dreams which God had given him as a youth were about to be fulfilled. God always does what He plans.

Theme: God is faithful; He never changes.

CHRONOLOGICAL PICTURE NO. 22, "JOSEPH'S BROTHERS BOW BEFORE HIM"

All the sons of Jacob make their way to Egypt, minus Benjamin. Jacob had lost one of Rachel's sons while he was out of his sight and in the care of his brothers; he is not willing to run the risk of losing another. When the ten sons of Jacob come before Joseph, the "ruler of the country" (42:6), they fall down before him, unwittingly fulfilling the prophecy of Joseph's earlier dreams (37:5-11).

Many are tempted to see Joseph's response as pure revenge. His harshness is thought to be his ways of making his brothers pay for their previous sins against them. This view simply cannot be accepted, because the text is just too clear on this matter.

First, if Joseph really wanted to make his brothers suffer, he would have immediately made his identity known to them. If Joseph had wanted to terrify his brothers, he would have let them know that it was he who was the ruler of Egypt, and then he would have made them suffer.

Second, we are told that while his brothers did not recognize Joseph, he recognized them, and he remembered his dreams (42:7, 9). I understand this to mean Joseph not only realized God had made him the leader of his family, but that this leadership should seek the best interests of the family. It was not revenge Joseph sought, but repentance.

Third, we are told his harsh treatment of his brothers was a disguise:

When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; but he pretended to be a stranger to them and spoke to them harshly. He asked, "Where do you come from?" They answered, "From the land of Canaan to buy grain for food" ([Genesis 42:7](#)).

Fourth, on several occasions, we find Joseph's true feelings toward his brothers revealed. Twice Joseph had to go aside to weep privately (42:24; 43:30). Fifth, Joseph's actions toward his brothers were not vindictive, but gracious. Twice he sent them home with the grain they purchased and with their money refunded in their sacks. The meal he prepared for them was another gift of grace. Even the suffering he caused his brothers was benevolent in its goal of bringing his brothers to repentance, so they could be reconciled.

Joseph's actions toward his brothers, in their first and second visits to Egypt, are very carefully planned and orchestrated to bring about his intended result. When Joseph accused his brothers of being spies, they were terrified and blurted out information about Joseph's father and younger brother he yearned to know, yet without his brothers realizing who he really was. Joseph could carefully interrogate his brothers about "family" matters, under the guise of protecting the land of Egypt from spies.

Having learned that both Jacob and Benjamin were alive, Joseph set out to accomplish the next phase of his plan – bringing Benjamin down to Egypt. The purpose for this will soon be evident. Joseph's brothers had insisted they were ten brothers, and not spies, and they had yet another brother at home. Joseph caused it to appear he was merely putting the truthfulness of their words to the test. They said they had a younger brother, so let them prove it by bringing him with them the next time they came. And to assure they did return, he would keep one brother prisoner. Initially, Joseph threatened to keep all of the brothers in prison and to send back just one brother. He knew this would not allow them to transport a sufficient quantity of grain, and so he eventually reduced the number of prisoners held to one – Simeon (42:24).[97](#)

The response of Joseph's brothers to their incarceration and to Joseph's words is most important to the story:

21 They said to one other, **“Surely we’re being punished because of our brother, because we saw how distressed he was when he cried to us for mercy, but we refused to listen. That is why this distress has come on us!”** 22 Reuben said to them, **“Didn’t I say to you, ‘Don’t sin against the boy’, but you wouldn’t listen? So now we must pay for shedding his blood”** ([Genesis 42:21-22](#)).

More than 20 years after they had sinned against their brother Joseph, the events of that day were vivid in their minds. They recalled his pleading with them and their total lack of mercy. They understood this was a kind of “day of reckoning” for their sin. I would submit they were genuinely sorry for what they had done, but they were not yet fully repentant. This would come in time.

Joseph was standing nearby and heard their words, but they had no idea that he could understand what they were saying. He was deeply touched by their words and had to leave their presence so that he could cry (42:23-24). Joseph bound Simeon before their eyes to impress them with his resolve about seeing Benjamin when they returned. He then ordered for their sacks to be filled with grain and for provisions to be supplied for their journey.

The brothers then set out on their journey, no doubt discussing what they would tell their father. One of the brothers opened his sack of grain when they stopped for the evening and was shocked to find his money in his sack of grain. You would think that any son of Jacob would have rejoiced. It would be like putting money into a vending machine, getting what you had selected, and then finding your money in the coin return. But the brothers were greatly dismayed. Looking at one another, they said, “What in the world has God done to us?” (42:28). They completely failed to see the kindness of Joseph in this and saw only the judgmental hand of God. God had not done something for them; He had done something terrible to them.

They returned home and told their father all that had happened to them in Egypt. Jacob had certainly noticed that Simeon was not with them, and they explained why the ruler of Egypt had kept him prisoner. This discussion took place as the bags of grain were being unloaded. When the bags were opened, the brothers discover that every one of them had their money in their sacks, and they were most distressed. Jacob could only think of himself:

Their father Jacob said to them, “You are making me childless! Joseph is gone. Simeon is gone. And now you want to take Benjamin! Everything is against me” ([Genesis 42:36](#)).

Ruben now comes through with these comforting words of assurance:

“You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my care and I will bring him back to you” (42:37).

There was nothing more to be said regarding this matter at the moment, because Jacob flatly refused to allow them to take Benjamin with them. In Jacob’s mind, there would be no more discussion of this matter.

When Joseph arrived, his brothers bowed before him, once again fulfilling the dreams he had years earlier ([Genesis 37:5-11](#)). Joseph seems not to have even noticed their gift, so carefully arranged to

capture his attention and win his approval. Joseph only had eyes for his younger brother, Benjamin. Joseph was so touched by the sight of his brother, he had to leave the room to weep in private. He then washed his face and returned, giving the order, “Set out the food” (43:31).

The servants set out three separate tables: One for Joseph, one for his brothers, and one for the Egyptians who ate with Joseph. Joseph seated his brothers according to their birth order, which must have both amazed and puzzled them: “How could he know?” It was a royal feast, and I’m sure that Joseph’s brothers (who had run out of grain some time earlier) would have appreciated it. I’m also certain they had all they could eat. But Joseph did something that was most unusual – he made Benjamin’s portions five times greater than those of his other brothers.

In preparation for the test ahead, Joseph was not going to minimize the fact that Benjamin was the favorite son of Jacob; indeed, he wanted to emphasize this fact. By the time the meal was over, they had their fill of both food and drink. I have a feeling this was to give his brothers an artificial sense of confidence and to dull their senses for the moment.[99](#)

Joseph then gave very careful instructions to his servant. He had him fill his brothers’ sacks with grain, once again placing their money in each man’s sack. This time, however, one more item was included – Joseph’s “silver cup.” This cup was to be placed in Benjamin’s sack, along with his money. After the men were sent on their way, Joseph’s servant was to pursue and overtake the brothers as they were leaving Egypt. They were to be accused of stealing Joseph’s cup, the one that he “used for divination” (44:4-5).

There is no need to be distressed over what we read here. Joseph did not actually use this cup for divination. This was part of the servant’s “script,” which Joseph instructed him to say. It was a part of Joseph’s disguise. When Joseph instructed his servant to hide this cup in Benjamin’s sack, he simply referred to it as “his silver cup” (44:2). But for the sake of his brothers, his servant was to call it the cup that his master used for divination. Joseph wanted to continue the masquerade a little while longer, and this line helped maintain his disguise.

When Joseph’s servant overtook the brothers, he did just as his master had instructed him – he accused these men of returning evil for good by stealing his master’s divining cup. The brothers were shocked that they would be accused of such a crime. They were confident that none of them had stolen this cup, and so they overreacted to these charges. They prescribed the punishment for themselves, should any one of them have stolen this cup:

“If one of us has it, he will die, and the rest of us will become my lord’s slaves” (44:9).

Joseph’s servant then responded to this statement, prescribing what the punishment would be for stealing the cup:

He replied, “You have suggested your own punishment. The one who has it will become my slave, but the rest of you will go free” (44:10).

I’m sure that each of these men was extremely confident as he lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. What a shock it must have been for each man to find his money in the mouth of his sack, just

as they had before. It would be something like being pulled over by a policeman, and having him search your trunk for money that was stolen in a bank robbery. Confident you did not have the money in your car, you pop open the trunk, to see it filled with automatic weapons. I would imagine fear began to grip the heart of each of these men as they discovered their money in their sacks.

The worst was yet to come. When Benjamin's sack was opened, not only was his money found, but also Joseph's silver cup. These brothers tore their clothes in anguish, loaded their animals, and made their way back to face the music before "the ruler of Egypt." When they arrived, Joseph continued his disguise:

"What did you think you were doing? Don't you know that a man like me can find out things like this by divination?" (44:15).

Joseph wanted these men to think that there was nothing about them he did not know, or could not find out. (After all, he had already arranged their seating according to their birth order.) And now he had a silver divining cup, by which he could discern the truth (or so he claimed). The message was clear: It would do them no good to lie.

Judah assumes the leadership, and speaks on his brothers' behalf:

16 Judah replied, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves? God has exposed the sin of your servants. We are now my lord's slaves, we and the one in whose possession the cup was found." 17 But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do this! The man in whose hand the cup was found will become my slave, but the rest of you may go back to your father in peace" (44:16-17).

Judah's answer is most interesting and most encouraging. I am convinced that Judah knew that Benjamin had not stolen this cup, just as each of them had not stolen the money they had paid for their grain. Judah rightly discerned that this was God's way of dealing with them.

Thus he says, "God has exposed the sin of your servants" (verse 16). I don't think Judah meant to say, "We stole the money, and we stole the silver cup; God knows it, and He has exposed our sin." I think Judah's words really mean: **"We sold our brother into slavery (something you would not know about or appreciate, ruler of Egypt, so I won't go into this in detail), and God is now bringing about our punishment for that sin. We didn't do what you are accusing us of doing, but we did something far worse, and so we will plead guilty."** Thus, Judah both confesses for all of his brothers and submits to the penalty of slavery for all.

This is real progress for Joseph's brothers, but they have not yet fully manifested true repentance. And so Joseph declines Judah's offer. Joseph's response can be roughly paraphrased in this way: "Oh no, it would not be fair to punish all of you for the crime one of you has committed. The punishment must be that the one in whose sack the cup was found shall be my slave, and the rest of you are free to go home to your families."

Here was the greatest test of their lives. They could seize upon Joseph's words, denounce Benjamin for stealing, and go home to Canaan free men, leaving Benjamin as one of Pharaoh's slaves. In effect, they could do to Benjamin exactly what they had done to Joseph. How easy it would have been to simply walk away and leave Benjamin, just as they had forsaken Joseph.

This is truly Judah's finest hour. He is the one who made himself surety for Benjamin (42:9). Now, he fulfills his promise to his aged father. Judah steps forward and asks to speak to the "ruler of Egypt."

Judah explained how it had come about that they had told him about their younger brother, Benjamin. Since his older brother is dead, Benjamin is now the only remaining son of their father's wife, Rachel. Because he insisted that they bring this younger brother to Egypt, they did so, but in spite of their father's strong protests. The boy's father is now elderly, and if this son does not return, it will kill their father. Judah told "the ruler of Egypt" that he had become surety for the lad with his father, and thus he begged him to allow the boy to return to his father, and to take him as his slave.

Judah begged to take the place of Benjamin, in order to spare his brother's life, as well as the life of their father. Judah, the one who cast the blood-drenched tunic at his father's feet so many years ago, now pleads with Joseph to have compassion on their father, as he does.

F. Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers

Theme: God is Supreme and Sovereign

Genesis 45:1-15 (NLT)

¹ Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, "Out, all of you!" So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was.

² Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace.

³ "I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them.

⁴ "Please, come closer," he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt.

⁵ But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.

⁶ This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

⁷ God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors.

⁸ So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.

⁹ "Now hurry back to my father and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately!

¹⁰ You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own.

¹¹ I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve.'"

¹² Then Joseph added, “Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph!

¹³ Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly.”

¹⁴ Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin did the same.

¹⁵ Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.

Theme: God is everywhere all the time and knows everything.

[Gen. 45:7](#), when he finally made himself known to his brothers after humbling and embarrassing them greatly. Having forgiven them for what they had done to him, he then said, 'But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.'

Joseph's brothers thought they had got rid of him by selling him to traveling camel traders as a slave and covering his special coat with the blood of a goat to trick their father into believing that his favorite son was dead. Yet Joseph could see that God's hand was in it. He could look back on his work in Egypt, having been elevated to high office following his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (i.e. there would be seven fat years with good harvest, and seven lean years to follow--By advising that food should be stored during the plentiful years, he had actually saved the whole nation of Egypt--and his own family when they also became short of food. He became their savior.

God's providence can also be seen in the movement of Joseph's family down to Egypt. Although God had promised the land to them, he had told Abraham many years previously that he would have to leave his family in Egypt for 400 yrs 'until the wickedness of the Amorites was complete'. God would not let the family of Abraham take the promised land from those living in it until they became so dreadful that they forfeited their right to both the land and their lives. God is a moral God: he would not just push one people out and his own people in. Archaeology has indicated to us just how dreadful these people were. Venereal diseases were rife in the land of Canaan because of their corrupt sexual practices. Eventually, they reached the point of no return, and only then did God say that his people could have their land. Those who complain about God's injustice in giving the land to the Jews are quite mistaken.

The key verse in the story of Joseph is found in Genesis 50:19-21--**19**But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? **20**"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. **21**"So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph then sent his brothers back home to bring their father and their families down to Egypt, informing them that there were yet five more years of famine ahead. The story goes on to describe the arrival of Jacob and his family in Egypt. God provided for them to have a place of their own in the land of Egypt – the land of Goshen – where they could keep their flocks. Eventually, they would purchase property there and prosper. In this way, God brought Israel (all 70 of them) to Egypt.

Questions for Review:

1. How did Joseph's older brothers react to their father's love for Joseph? **They were jealous, and they hated Joseph.**
2. What did Joseph dream? **Read Genesis 37:7-9.**
3. What did these dreams mean? **They meant that Joseph would be given a position of authority over all his family.**
4. Who knew Joseph's future and showed it to him through his dreams? **God did.**
5. How much of our future does God know? **God knows it all.**
6. What did Joseph's brothers do to him? **First they threw him down into an old well where he might have died. Then they sold Joseph to become a slave in Egypt.**
7. What happened to Joseph in Egypt? **The wife of Joseph's owner tried to seduce him and get him into bed with her. When her actions were rebuffed by Joseph, she lied about him, and he was put into prison.**
8. Who took care of Joseph in prison? **God did.**
9. Why did God take care of Joseph?
 - a. **Because, although Joseph was a sinner, he trusted in God and His mercy.**
 - b. **Because Joseph believed God's promises regarding the Deliverer.**
 - c. **Because God had a wonderful plan for Joseph's life.**
10. Who gave Joseph the understanding of Pharaoh's dreams? **God did.**
11. What did Pharaoh's dreams mean? **God was making known to the king that there would be seven years of very good harvest which would be followed by seven years of drought.**
12. Is God able to do whatever He wants to do even in places where the people do not know and worship Him? **Yes, God is able to do whatever He wants to do, for He is almighty.**
13. How did God fulfill the dreams which He had given to Joseph when he was a youth? **The Lord gave Joseph wisdom to interpret the king's dreams so that Joseph would be given the position next to the king.**
14. Why did Jacob take all of his family down to live in Egypt?
 - a. **Because Jacob his son Joseph was down in Egypt.**
 - b. **Because there was plenty of food in Egypt.**
 - c. **Because the king invited Jacob to live in Egypt.**
 - d. **Because God had planned for this to happen.**

15. What were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's descendants called? **The children of Israel, Israelites, or Israel.**

16. What motivated Joseph to act as he did? **His faith in God.**

Next week: Lesson 21: God Preserved Israel Enslaved in Egypt; The Providence of God in the life of Moses.