

Joseph

Read Genesis 37; 45:1-10; 50:20

Jacob grew up in a family where parents had a favorite child; and it caused many problems including jealousy, anger, plotting and deceit, and plans of murder. Jacob should have known the importance of trying to treat all your children equally; but at this, Jacob was a total failure. Jacob had twelve sons. He had a favorite son, Joseph, who received more love, special treatment and superior gifts. The cycle of jealousy, anger and plans of murder repeated itself.

Joseph did not help matters. Joseph had a dream that he and his brothers were binding sheaves of grain in a field. Joseph's sheaf stood up, and the sheaves of his brothers bowed down to his sheaf. Joseph told this dream to his brothers. By their verbal reaction, it was evident that this dream made them angry. Perhaps Joseph was naïve, or perhaps he was very poor at reading the reactions of others, or maybe he was so secure in his position of the favorite child that he just didn't care; but when Joseph later dreamed a similar dream, he again described it to his brothers and father.

Joseph's brothers began to think of murdering Joseph. One day the brothers were watching flocks very far from home. Joseph was sent by his father, Jacob, to check on his brothers. When his brothers saw Joseph coming they began to plot his murder. Reuben, the eldest brother, felt responsible for Joseph and persuaded them to shed no blood. Joseph was stripped of his coat and put into a pit. When Ishmaelite traders passed by, the brothers saw an opportunity to get rid of Joseph and make some money. Joseph was sold for twenty shekels of silver, less than the usual price for a slave.

In Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar who was captain of Pharaoh's guards. This was an important position. Potiphar's household would have been large. When Potiphar saw that God helped Joseph to be successful in all he did, Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his entire household. Even though Joseph was a slave, this would have been a position of authority.

When Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of trying to seduce her, Potiphar has Joseph thrown into Pharaoh's prison. Here God caused the person in charge of the prison to notice Joseph. He sees that everything Joseph does, Joseph is successful. The keeper of the prison puts Joseph in charge of all the prisoners.

In prison Joseph meets Pharaoh's cupbearer (butler) and baker. In ancient courts, these were not roles of menial servants; but important officials of the court. Both officials have dreamed dreams and they ask Joseph's help in interpreting the dreams. Joseph tells the officials that it is God who interprets dreams. At that time in Egypt, a person would have sought out the services of "magicians" and "wise men" to tell them what the dream meant. The cupbearer and the baker tell Joseph their dreams. God tells Joseph the meaning of the dreams.

Joseph tells the cupbearer that in three days, Pharaoh will forgive him and restore him to his former position. Hearing the cupbearer's good news, the baker asks for the meaning of his dream. Sadly, the baker's dream foretold that in three days Pharaoh would have the baker hanged. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when the cupbearer was restored to his position, but the cupbearer forgot.



Two years pass, and Pharaoh has troubling dreams which the magicians and wise men cannot interpret. The cupbearer remembers Joseph, and tells Pharaoh how Joseph told him and the baker the meaning of their dreams. Pharaoh commanded Joseph to appear before him with haste.

Joseph had a beard. Among the Israelites the beard was considered a mark of distinction. Shaving it was a gesture of mourning or disgrace. Joseph was required to shave before appearing before Pharaoh as the Egyptians were clean-shaven.

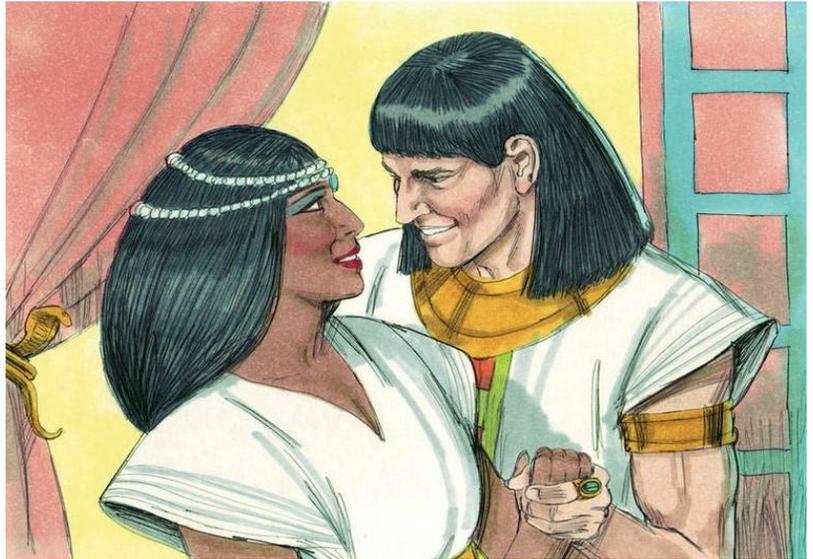
Pharaoh told Joseph his dreams, and God gave Joseph the meaning of the dreams. Joseph tells Pharaoh that both dreams have one and the same meaning. To Pharaoh, the doubling of the dreams meant that the thing was fixed by God. After telling Pharaoh that there would be seven years of abundant harvests followed by seven years of famine, Joseph suggests that Pharaoh find someone to supervise storing up food during the years of plenty so that there would be food during the years of famine.

And Pharaoh believed that the Spirit of God was in Joseph, so he appointed Joseph to be in charge of this enormous task. Pharaoh told Joseph, "I have set you over all the land." Joseph

was put in the position similar to a viceroy or vizier of Pharaoh. There would be a typical Egyptian ceremony of investiture in which he was given symbols of his office - 1) Joseph was given the official signet ring, 2) Joseph was robed in the distinctive garment of his position, 3) A golden chain, a mark of his authority, was hung around Joseph's neck, and 4) a royal chariot was put at Joseph's disposal.

And Pharaoh arranged a marriage for Joseph with Asenath, the daughter of a priest. By his marriage, Joseph, a slave, became a recognized member of the highest caste. They had two sons named Manasseh and Ephraim.

Joseph worked hard to store up food during the years of plenty. In the second year of famine, ten of Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food. Joseph recognized his brothers right away, but the brothers did not recognize Joseph. Joseph was now in his thirties, and they had last seen him when he was a teenager.



Joseph tested his brothers to see if they had changed, and to find out if they were sorry for how they had treated him. On the brothers' second trip to Egypt a year later to purchase more food, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. His brothers are filled with fear realizing that they are now at the mercy of a powerful Egyptian authority. But Joseph wished them peace and said, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

By Pharaoh's invitation, Joseph's family moves to Egypt to live by Joseph. Joseph and Pharaoh see to it that they are well cared for during the last years of famine. Joseph came to realize that being sold into slavery was just the beginning of a long journey that enabled him to save the Egyptians and his family from starvation. In Romans 8:28 God tells us, "that for those who love God all things work together for good."

Prayer: God, sometimes I feel like my life is like Joseph's. It has highs and lows, ups and downs. Help me to remember that you are always with me. You will stand by my side, support and strengthen me in hard times. Thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus, whose death and resurrection washes away my sins and gives me eternal life. Amen.

Picture credits: Joseph Interprets the Dream of Pharaoh, painting by Jean-Adrien Guignet, 1800's.

Potiphar's Wife by Jim Padgett, 1984. CC BY-SA 3.0

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Joseph

Joseph was one of 12 brothers. Joseph was Jacob's favorite son. Jacob treated Joseph better than his brothers. This made Joseph's brothers jealous. Jacob gave Joseph a special coat. This made Joseph's brothers angry. Joseph had two dreams that symbolized that his brothers were bowing down to him. Joseph bragged to his brothers about his dreams, and it made them furious. His brothers were so mad that they wanted to kill him. Instead, Joseph's brothers sold Joseph to traders for money. The traders took Joseph to Egypt and sold him as a slave.

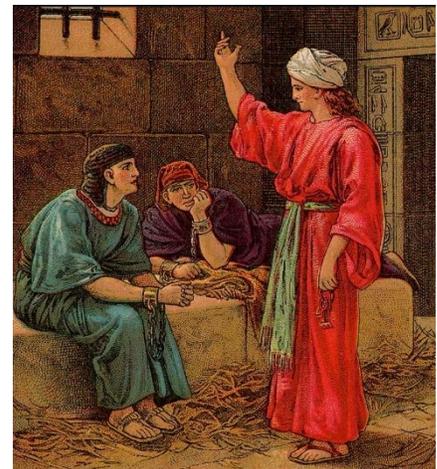


The brothers took Joseph's special coat, tore it and dipped it in goat's blood, and told their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Joseph was sold to a man named Potiphar. The Bible says that Potiphar could tell that God was with Joseph, and that God caused everything that Joseph did to be successful. Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything he had. After some time, Potiphar's wife wanted Joseph to do something wrong. Joseph said he could not do such a great wickedness against his master and God. When Potiphar's wife did not get her way, she lied to her husband that Joseph had done a great wrong; and in his anger, Potiphar had Joseph thrown in the Pharaoh's prison.



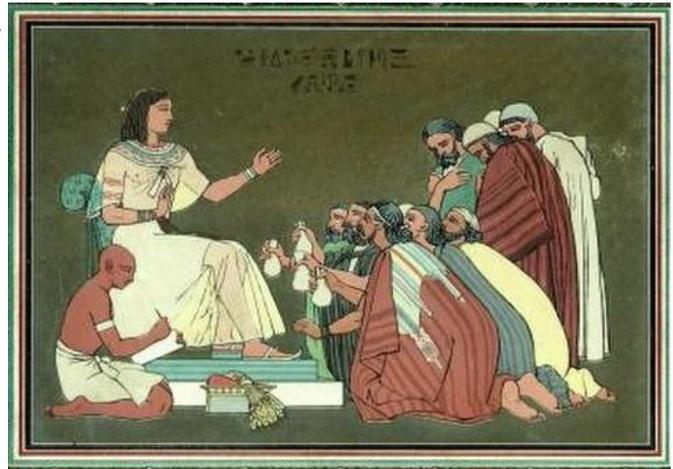
Even in prison, God was with Joseph. God caused the keeper of the prison to notice Joseph. The keeper of the prison saw that everything Joseph did, he was successful because God was with him. The keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners in the prison. One day Joseph saw that two of the prisoners were very troubled. One prisoner was Pharaoh's (the king's) cupbearer. The other prisoner was the Pharaoh's baker. They asked Joseph if he could tell them the meaning of their dreams. Joseph told them that the interpretations belong to God. The prisoners told Joseph their dreams, and God told Joseph the dreams' meanings.



The dream of the cupbearer showed that in three days time Pharaoh would forgive the cupbearer and give him back his position at the palace. Upon hearing the good interpretation, the baker also wanted to hear the meaning of his dream. Sadly, the baker's dream was not happy. In three days Pharaoh would have the baker hanged. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when he returned to the palace, but the cupbearer forgot.

Two years went by, and Pharaoh was troubled by two very strange dreams. Pharaoh called all the magicians of Egypt and all the wise men of Egypt; but none could interpret the dreams. Then the cupbearer remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh how Joseph had interpreted his dream and the baker's.

Pharaoh had Joseph quickly brought out of prison. When Pharaoh told Joseph his dreams, God gave Joseph the meaning of the dreams. There would be seven years of good harvests with abundant food. The next seven years no food would grow and there would be a famine. Joseph told Pharaoh to appoint someone to oversee collecting and storing food during the seven years of plenty so that there would be food during the seven years of famine. Pharaoh saw that God was with Joseph, and put Joseph in charge of all the people in Egypt, with only Pharaoh having more authority.



For seven years, Joseph had food collected and stored. Then came the seven years when food did not grow. Joseph had the food storehouses opened to pass out food to all the Egyptians. There was famine also in the land where Joseph's family lived. Jacob told ten of his sons to take money and buy food in Egypt. The brothers came to the warehouse where Joseph was overseeing the distribution of food. Joseph recognized his brothers right away. The brothers did not recognize Joseph who was dressed like a wealthy Egyptian of high authority. Joseph set some tests for his brother to learn if his brothers were sorry for what they had done.

On the brothers' second trip to Egypt to buy food, Joseph revealed that he was their brother that they had sold into slavery. The brothers were afraid, but Joseph told them, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Joseph's whole family and all their animals came to Egypt to live with Joseph.

Prayer: God, you were with Joseph in good times and in hard times. Thank you for being with me in happy times and in sad times too. Thank you for sending Jesus who died on the cross and rose again so that I can live in Heaven with you. Amen.

Picture credits: Joseph and His Brethren, Oil painting, 1665-70, Bartolome-Esteban Murillo.
Potiphar's Wife by Jim Padgett, 1984, CC-BY-SA 3.0. Joseph Faithful in Prison, 1907, Providence Lithograph Co.
Joseph is Governor by Owen Jones, 1869.

Joseph

Joseph was thrown into a pit while his brothers discussed his fate.
Their thoughts were filled with jealousy, anger, murder and hate.

Pulled out of the pit, then sold as a slave
Joseph's future was looking grave.

The hard times that happened was all part of God's plan
to save every Israelite child, woman and man.

Sold as a slave to Potiphar's estate.
Do as you're told. There is no debate.

Framed for a crime, and caste into Pharaoh's jail.
Cold and dark, listening to prisoners wail.

The hard times that happened was all part of God's plan
to save every Israelite child, woman and man.

Explaining the meaning of dreams good and bad.
The cupbearer was happy. The baker was sad.

Two dreams by Pharaoh spoke of seven abundant years,
followed by seven years of drought, famine and fear.

The hard times that happened was all part of God's plan
to save every Israelite child, woman and man.

In Egypt to buy food Joseph and his brothers meet.
The brothers shake and tremble, and bow at his feet.

You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.
God saw into the future. God understood.

The hard times that happened, was all part of God's plan
to save every Israelite child, woman and man.



Joseph and Pharaoh by Owen Jones, 1869.

Important Words to Remember

Joseph's life had many ups and downs. Joseph's brothers feared Joseph's anger because of the way they had treated Joseph when he was young, and because they had sold Joseph into slavery when he was a teenager. Joseph told his brothers in Genesis 50:20

You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

All through Joseph's life, God was watching over him. The spoiled, pampered, self-centered teenage Joseph would probably never have opened the storehouses of Egypt to feed the poor. That young Joseph would never have sold food to starving people in neighboring countries. Going through hard times gave Joseph empathy and compassion for other persons going through hard times.

God tells us in Romans 5:3-4

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

Joseph would have had a hard time seeing "the good" in being sold into slavery. He would have found it difficult to believe that "good things" would happen as a result of being thrown into Pharaoh's prison. We see only what is happening now, but God sees what is coming in the future. We think of our earthly life, but God knows it is our eternal life that is important. God's plan is for our souls, and for the soul's of others our lives touch.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9.

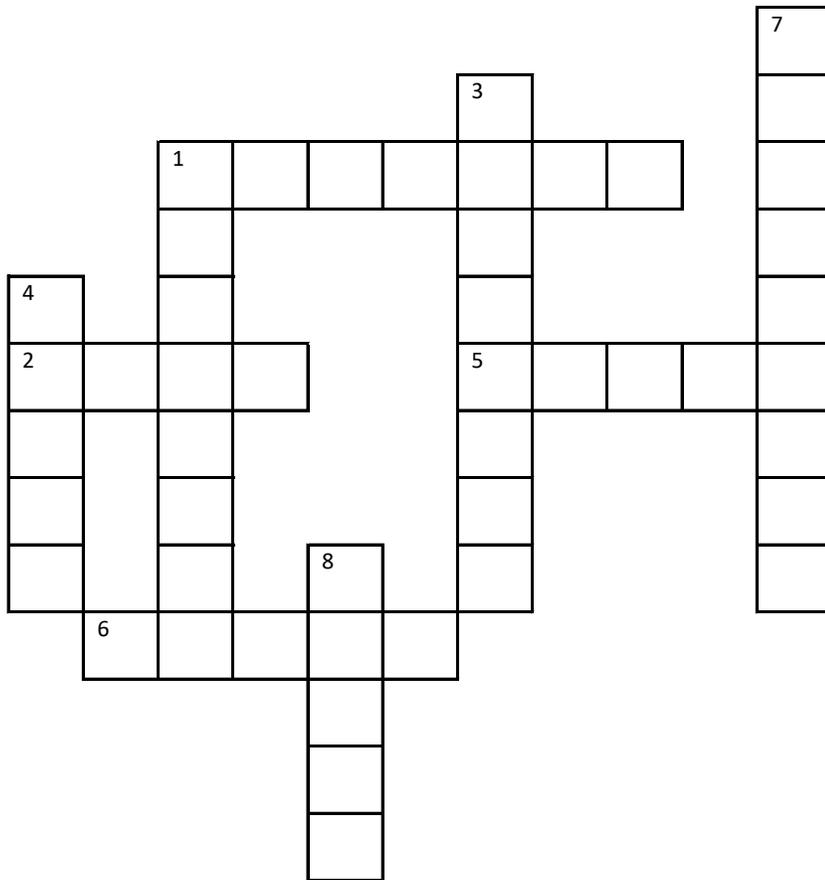
We may never find out until we are in Heaven why some hard things have happened to us. Some difficult things we encounter are the result of poor choices we make. God has the power to make even our poor choices help us grow into better persons.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good. Romans 8:28.

It might not make sense, we might not understand how God can make all things work together for good. However, this is a promise that God gives to those who follow him, who walk in his ways. The most important plan God has for our good is our eternal life in Heaven which God bought and paid for through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: God you were with Joseph in easy times and in hard times. Be with me in hard times. Help me to grow stronger in my faith and closer to you when times are tough. Help me to learn compassion for others. Help me to remember, "For lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Amen.

Joseph



Across

1. When Joseph lived in Egypt, the king of Egypt was call the _____.
2. When talking about being sold as a slave, Joseph told his brothers, "You meant _____ against me, but God meant it for good." Gen 50:20.
5. After Joseph tells Pharaoh the meaning of his dreams, Pharaoh appoints Joseph to a position of high authority in Egypt. One of the symbols of this office of viceroy or vizier to Pharaoh was a gold _____ that was hung around Joseph's neck. Gen 41:42.
6. Joseph told his brothers about a _____ he had. Joseph and his brothers were binding sheaves in the field. Joseph's sheaf stood up, and his brother's sheaves bowed down to it. Gen 37:5-7.

Down

1. The Ishmaelite traders sold Joseph to _____ when they reached Egypt. Gen 39:1.
3. During the time Joseph lived in Egypt, if an Egyptian wanted to know the meaning of a dream, they would seek out the help of a _____ or a wise man. Gen 41:8.
4. According to the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, how many good years would there be when the harvests were plentiful? Gen 41:29.
7. When Potiphar had Joseph put in Pharaoh's prison, God was with Joseph. God had the keeper of the prison look favorably upon Joseph. The keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the _____. Gen 39:22.
8. What was the name of Joseph's father? Gen 37:29-34.

Review

1. When Joseph was a young boy and a teenager, his brothers were mad, angry and jealous of him. Below write three reasons (things that happened) that would make Joseph's brothers feel this way. Discuss how you would feel if these things happened in your family.
2. In Egypt during the time of Joseph; if an Egyptian had a dream that troubled them, they would seek out the meaning of the dream from a magician or wise man. While in prison, Joseph interprets the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker. Later Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh. Joseph tells the cupbearer and the baker that "it is God who interprets dreams." What did Joseph mean? How was Joseph able to tell the cupbearer, the baker and Pharaoh the meaning of their dreams?
3. Pharaoh's dreams told of seven good years and seven bad years. What did Joseph do during the two sets of seven years?
4. The second time Joseph's brothers came to buy food in Egypt, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. His brothers were afraid, but Joseph told them, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." What did Joseph mean? How could being sold into slavery be something meant for good?