

Autumn 2023

Bible Studies on the Life of Joseph



Peter Breckwoldt
ST JOHN'S CHURCH WIMBORNE

Contents

GROUP BIBLE STUDY.....3

 PRAY.....3

 ASK.....3

 PLAN.....4

 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS.....5

Bible Studies on the Life of Joseph.....7

 Introduction.....7

 Books to help with studies:8

Bible Study 1. Joseph’s Dreams and Nightmare Genesis 37:1-3610

Bible Study 2. Joseph and Potiphar’s wife Genesis 39v1-2315

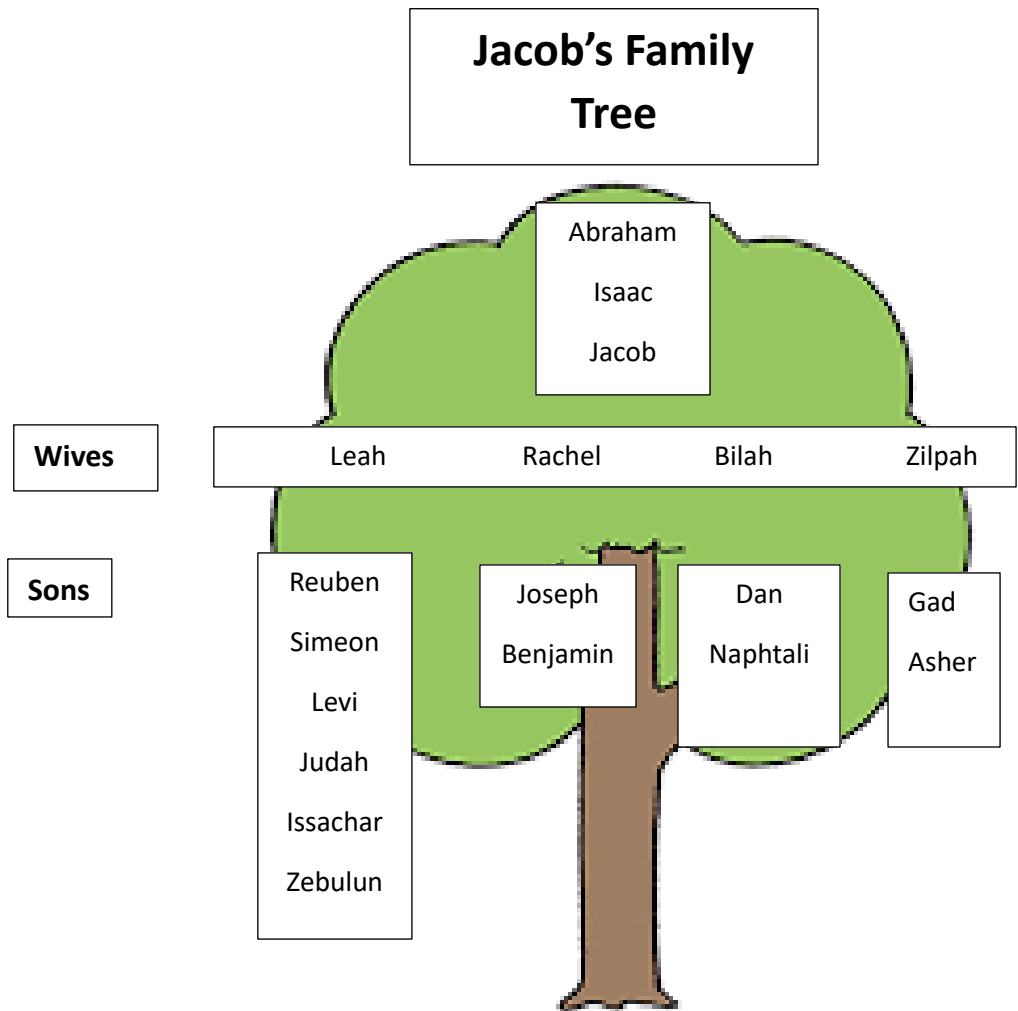
Bible Study 3. Joseph, the Cupbearer, and the Baker Genesis 40v1-2318

Bible Study 4. Joseph interprets Pharoah’s dreams Genesis 41v8-40.....22

Bible Study 5. Joseph’s brothers come to Egypt for food Genesis 42:1-2826

Bible Study 6. Joseph’s Brother returns Genesis 43:1-30.....30

Bible Study 7. This is not the End of Joseph’s Story Genesis 45:1-28 (*added later for online version*)34



GROUP BIBLE STUDY

The priority of any Bible study is to seek to understand what the Bible is saying to the people to whom it was first written as well as to understand it for our particular day and generation. So, the top priority is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. Here are some pointers to help you as you study the Bible:

PRAY

Our preparation for any Bible study should begin and end with prayer. We need to ask God, through the help of the Holy Spirit, to guide us as we read the Bible and prepare for a study.

ASK

In order to understand the Bible properly, we need to keep in mind six important questions:

1. **Who is speaking?** Everything in the Bible was written by men who were inspired by God. Though God inspired every writer of the Bible, sometimes the writers record words which come from the hearts of evil men. So, dealing with the question “Who is speaking?” will help us to know whether the words we are reading are words that we should obey today.
2. **Who is spoken to?** We need to realise that not every command that comes in the Bible is a command for us today. For example, the command by God to Noah to build an ark is obviously pertinent and relevant for Noah, but not for us.
3. **When is the Bible writer speaking?** In answering this question, we will need to make a distinction between those who are living under the law and those who live under the guidelines and principles as outlined to us in the New Testament, the way of Christ. Therefore, the principles we see with regards to worship in the Old Testament have a relevance to us, but we need to read them in the light of the New Testament. It is always important to bear in mind that one part of the Bible can often help us to understand another part.

4. **What type of language is the writer using?** The languages used are usually one of two types: either literal or figurative. Sometimes both will be mixed together in one passage – for example, Jesus is spoken of as the Lamb of God, which is clearly a figurative form of speech. However, he is also described as the one who takes away the sin of the world, which is true for those who believe. So, Jesus was not an actual lamb, but he was the one who became the offering for our sins.

5. **What are the conditions or circumstances in which this writing is given?** If we can get to grips with the particular circumstances the writer is facing when he writes, it helps us to understand what he is saying.

6. **What is the context of the Bible passage?** Think about what has just been said and what is about to be said in the particular book of the Bible as well as the context of the Bible passage within the whole of the Bible.

The Bible is indeed God's inspired word – it is his revelation to all humanity. So, in order for us to understand the Bible we must seek to study it properly. Only then can we "*correctly handle the word of truth*". And if we keep these six simple questions in mind as we prepare our study, we will find that we can indeed get to grips with God's word.

PLAN

For those who are preparing and leading a study, the following steps should prove helpful:

1. Try to break the passage into parts or sections so that you can clearly divide up the passage you are looking at.
2. Think about what you do not understand in the passage and therefore what others might not understand as well. About which parts do you need to gain more background and information? Be prepared and ready to deal with puzzles that people have regarding the passage. So, for example, when studying John 3, people might ask 'What is the kingdom of God?', 'What is a

Pharisee?'. These are some of the obvious things where your group might need more information from you.

3. Having broken the passage up into sections, we can then think about questions. You can use the questions that are in this book. However, you may want to write your own, which is of course perfectly all right. Questions can be one of three types.

A **Understanding.** The first type of question should be aimed at trying to draw out our understanding of what the passage is saying.

B **Significance.** Only once we have begun to understand the passage can we move on to questions that try to highlight the significance of the passage in the light of the particular book or letter, and of course against the backdrop of the whole Bible.

C **Application.** Then we move on to questions which apply to the situations we are facing today.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- Do make use of clergy and commentaries and other Christians who have a maturity which you can rely upon when you are seeking to tackle Bible passages.
- It will sometimes prove helpful to have more than one translation as this will give you some fresh insights into the verses on which you are focusing.
- As we come to study the Bible, we need to keep in mind that all the books of the Bible have one great theme: that is God's plan to save mankind from his sins through Jesus Christ.
- Fundamentally, make sure that whatever you do, you seek to do it to honour and glorify God.

Let us not forget:

***“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,
rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness,
so that the man of God may be
thoroughly equipped for every good work.”***

2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Bible Studies on the Life of Joseph

Introduction

Here is a famous story that is loved by many. The timeless story of Joseph is one of the best-known Bible stories. During our studies this term, we may find that one or two of the passages are sometimes longer than usual, so try and find ways to break it up with imagination, but do not lose the sense of the story.

The refrains in the story of Joseph are betrayal, family, deception, reconciliation, heart break, triumph, and forgiveness. These are also themes that we know in our generation. Optimistically, the story of Joseph will give us a chance to ask the deeper questions about the role and part played by God and his word in the larger work of salvation, not just for a family but for a people. For those with eyes to see, you will glimpse time and again the story of Jesus being told in a shadow-like form.

Joseph's story charts the continuing story of God and how he made a people from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and now to Joseph. This family were in the Promised Land but famine was coming and God had plans for them to survive and flourish with the help of a saviour. As God keeps his promise to Abraham, he will also keep his promise to us.

This is a dramatic story filled with deep biblical truths that are both fulfilling and difficult at the same time. From faithfulness in the midst of rejection to walking with God when you have been forgotten by those closest to you, Joseph's life will provide encouragement, hope, and reassurance of God's presence from the cradle to the grave! For those who look we can glimpse both death and resurrection, and judgment to glory.

These studies are from the end of the first book of the Bible. Genesis itself is filled with beginnings and endings right from the start to the end of the book. We will look at one such story: the life of Joseph. It begins in chapter 37 and goes on to chapter 50. Repeatedly in the story we will see God's faithfulness to himself, his promises, and his people! As we study Joseph's

life collectively, we will notice the greatness of God's glory, the presence of his love and be staggered with his careful attention to every detail in the life of his people. This term we will only cover part of the story ending with the arrival of his family in Egypt.

Books to help with studies:

The first five books of the Old Testament are called Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy - collectively they make up the Torah. Sometimes they are also called the Pentateuch. Looking again at Vaughan Roberts "Bible Overview" would be helpful.

The first part of the Pentateuch is one of the most well-known books of the Bible. It is believed that Moses wrote the book to help explain why God's people are indeed God's people and why they are being led to the Promise Land. Understanding this first book, the book of Genesis, is crucial to understanding the Old Testament and the entire Bible. There is a wealth of commentaries on Genesis.

Genesis (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 1967) by Derek Kidner. This commentary is older and shorter, but for those who are looking for a concise and helpful introductory commentary, this is the best place to begin.

The Message of Genesis 12–50 (Rev. ed.) in Bible Speaks Today series, by Joyce G. Baldwin. In this series of commentaries in Bible Speaks Today, the author shows how the intense stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph still have a message for today. They focus on God's ways of dealing with normal, imperfect people in completing his great project for the whole world.

Genesis 1–15 and Genesis 16–50 by Gordon J. Wenham — (Word Biblical Commentary).

The layout of the Word Biblical Commentary series is not that reader-friendly, but it is worth the trouble to have a go if you want to go deeper. The Wenham book was written from a conservative evangelical viewpoint. His handling of the text is careful and ordered.

Be Authentic (Genesis 25-50) by Warren W. Wiersbe. Revealing real faith in the world in the early days of Genesis. It reveals a family saga that has the making of a motion picture. (This is part of the BE Series Commentary).

Bible Study 1. Joseph's Dreams and Nightmare

Genesis 37:1-36

Introduction

Joseph's life is more than moralistic lessons. The lesson of Genesis 37 is not that parents should not have favourites or cause hatred between their children. It is not about bragging about dreams. I do not believe this is what God wanted us to learn. The writer of Hebrews says about the faith of Joseph, "By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones" (Hebrews 11:22). The key question is "What do we learn about God and what is God doing through these people?" In these studies, let us focus on God so as to discover how to overcome life's struggles and difficulties by God's grace.

Joseph grew up as his father Jacob's favourite. He was the firstborn of Rachel, Jacob's favourite wife, who had passed away giving birth to her second child, Benjamin. In a dramatic show of love for Joseph, Jacob gave him an extraordinary coat of many colours. Joseph's ten half-brothers despised his special position. These brothers were born to Leah, Bilah and Zilpah. (see the diagram at the end of the booklet). You may recall that Jacob had been cheated into marrying by Laban, the father of Rachel and Leah. Jacob also had children with Bilah and Zilpah. Unfortunately, Jacob did not love Leah and the others as much as he did Rachel. Let us see how the story unfolds...

The Dreams (37:1-11)

Joseph is 17 years old. The tension begins when Joseph gives his father, Jacob, a bad report concerning his brothers. Joseph seems to be the one to give messages to Jacob. Jacob loved Joseph more than the other sons and made him a robe of many colours. The robe was an indication that Joseph was special to Jacob. Therefore, the brothers hated Joseph.

Now Joseph has two dreams. The first dream was that the sheaves of the brothers bowed down to Joseph's sheaf which stood upright. The brothers

understand this dream to mean that Joseph is going to rule over them. The next dream was of the sun, moon, and eleven stars bending down to him. No one is pleased with these dreams. Remember it is God who is giving Joseph the dreams. The dreams were messages from God where today God has given us the Bible. Then and now people rejected God and his message.

The Crisis (37:12-36)

Jacob now sends Joseph to find out what the brothers are doing around Shechem. It is here that Joseph's nightmare appears to begin. Joseph, after significant effort, finds his brothers. As Joseph comes, we are told in v18-20 that his brothers are plotting to kill him, and they discarded his dreams. These brothers hated the thought that Joseph would be superior. So here was their plan: they will kill Joseph! Here are people who have rebelled against God. (Psalm 2) Like Jesus Joseph was delivered into the hands of evil men. People constantly strive against God. Sin makes us blind to hope.

What we witness is how God intervenes. Rather than killing Joseph, they throw him into a pit. The brothers strip Joseph of his robe and throw him into the pit. These brothers hated him so much they can eat lunch while he screams! Next comes the Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt. Judah decides to sell him into slavery for twenty shekels. What are they going to do? The plan is simple; take Joseph's robe, dip it in the blood of a goat, and present it to Jacob. The conclusion is that an animal has killed Joseph. Jacob mourns greatly that no one could comfort him. What we learn is that Joseph had been sold by the Midianites to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

The Relevance

1. **Obedience does not guarantee success.** See how faithfulness brings suffering from the disobedient. Remember Joseph suffered because of the dreams God gave him. God works for his glory. He did this with Joseph. God constantly challenges our life plans. God's goal is to bring glory to himself. Think shipwreck!

2. We cannot see round the corner. Remind yourself that God is accomplishing his purposes. Joseph was told that he was going to rule over his family twice in the dreams given by God. How can Joseph be exalted over his brothers when he has been sold by his family into slavery? The promise of God looks impossible. Joseph was now sold by his brothers as a slave to the Midianites. (Psalm 105:17–19)

Joseph does not know how God is working things out. But we see that God is using the evil of others to accomplish his plans. God's victory happens through sin and suffering. Jesus is the ultimate example of this truth. Look what God can overcome when we have sinned against Him. People make plans against God in vain because God will be victorious. We learn to wait on the Lord.

With his beautiful coat, preferential treatment and dreams of greatness, Joseph was a marked man by both his brothers and God.

Bible Study Questions Genesis 37:1-36

Ice Breaker: Before you start; summarise what you remember from the story of Joseph.

Q1. How can we see that the situation is difficult between Joseph and his brothers? v1-11

Q2. Does Jacob (Israel) help the situation and why should he have known better? (See Genesis 25:28 for the story of his Father's favouritism)

Q4. What is the main message of the dreams? (Has God spoken in dreams elsewhere in the Bible?)

Q5. Should Joseph have kept his dreams to himself so as not to alienate his brothers? Or did he recognise that the dream was from God, and the proclamation of God's word always produces hostility? Was it wise for Joseph to share God's revelation or should he have kept it to himself for the sake of peace?

Q6. What advice might we give to Jacob about sending Joseph to report on his brothers, bearing in mind all that has already gone on? (v12-14)

Q7. How desperate do you have to be to commit the deception in v31-32? This is a passage that reminds us how quickly a situation can spiral out of control. What lessons can we learn about God from the story? Did Pilate make the same mistake? (Luke 23 v1-16)

Q8 How does the story help us think about Jesus and the plots he faced?

Q10. What are the big lessons from this chapter for us to take away?

Genesis 38

This little story is an account of wickedness seen and judged by God. It is a story to help us see a sharp contrast with the story of Joseph that continues in chapter 39 with the story of Judah. It begins after Joseph had been sold to the Midianites. Judah now leaves his family and goes to Adullam. Here he marries a Canaanite woman named Shua and together they have three sons. The last son is called Kezib. When Judah's first son grew up, who was named Er, he married a woman named Tamar. But the Bible tells us that Er, was so wicked that the Lord put him to death; reminding us of God's judgement of sin.

Now Onan, who is the second son of Judah, is ordered to sleep with Tamar because it was the requirement in those days to produce successors for the family to continue. However, Onan rejected this command and the Lord killed him as well.

Tamar left the area and went to live in her own father's house until the third son, Shelah, was grown up. But when the time came, Shelah was not asked by Judah to father children with Tamar. At this stage in the story Tamar dresses as a temple prostitute in order to lure Judah into sleeping with her. Judah does sleep with her, and she becomes pregnant with twin boys. Tamar cleverly keeps his seal, cord and staff so as to establish that Judah is the father and to prevent herself from being accused of prostitution and executed. Judah's evil is uncovered and he confesses he was wrong in not giving her Shelah so spares her life. Her children's names were Perez and Zerah. As we return to Joseph, we will see an upright man living for God. But do not forget that it was through the line of Judah that Jesus would come. This story points us to God's amazing grace.

Bible Study 2. Joseph and Potiphar's wife

Genesis 39v1-23

Introduction

This is a difficult story. Let us be praying for each other and ask for sensitivity in the issues it raises. Can we see that God had his hand on Joseph's life during his time in Potiphar's household?

Things are looking up in Egypt v1-6.

The story returns to Joseph, sold into slavery (Genesis 37:26–28). Joseph is purchased by the captain of the guard, Potiphar from the Midianites. The good news is that the Lord is with Joseph. Joseph has not been abandoned.

Potiphar, Joseph's master, soon realises that Joseph is successful. This Hebrew slave works hard, has integrity, and is blessed by God. So, with no surprise, Potiphar puts Joseph in charge of his household. As a result, everything thrives. Potiphar's household grows in wealth and happiness, and the God of Joseph is given the credit. All is looking good for Joseph, even if he is a slave in Egypt (Gen. 39:1–6).

Temptation Comes v6-12.

However, Joseph is handsome, and Potiphar's wife decides she will seduce him. On one occasion she commands him, to "lie with me." (Genesis 39:7). Joseph realises his tricky situation. Normally he would obey his master's wife in everything. Yet he knows that sleeping with her would be a clear betrayal of trust. Joseph refuses and he tries to explain that he cannot betray Potiphar. Joseph also sees that this would be a sin against God (Gen 39:8–10).

Potiphar's wife is determined to get him into bed. He refuses. Then a day comes when the house is empty, she grabs him by the cloak and demands that he sleep with her. Instead of arguing, Joseph runs! Joseph leaves his cloak behind as he runs to safety. This is the only way he can escape and avoid being accused of acting improperly (Gen. 39:11–12).

All going Wrong? v13-20.

With his cloak in her hand, Potiphar's wife is furious. She no longer feels passion but anger. After calling the other servants, she tells them that Joseph had tried to rape her. Her story is that once she screamed, he ran away. Her lie works. (Gen. 39:13–15).

Potiphar is enraged by his wife's story, and he has Joseph thrown into the prison. Joseph must have wondered what more could go wrong. Potiphar's reaction is remarkably subdued because he could have had Joseph killed. What saved him? Was it his reputation, or did he think his wife was not telling the whole story. (Gen. 39:16–20).

Flourishing in Prison Gen v20-23

Now Joseph had been wrongly accused. But had Joseph missed God's blessings? Had he failed to follow God's will? The Bible makes it plain that God was still with Joseph. He says this four times in the chapter. In fact, this was God's route of service for Joseph to follow. Remarkably God showed Joseph his love when he was in prison. Joseph was in prison for a crime he did not commit. But Joseph knew that God had not abandoned him. So once again God causes the jailer to see Joseph in a new light, as a man who brought blessings! The chapter closes with the news that Joseph is put in charge of much of prison life. Once again Joseph continues to succeed (Genesis 39:21–24).

Bible Study Questions Genesis 39:1-23

Ice Breaker

What are the main temptations facing Christians today?

Questions

Q1. What were the marks of God's blessings on Joseph at the start of the chapter as he served in his new home in Egypt?

Q2. How did Joseph show his faithfulness to the Lord while serving in the house of Potiphar? (v6-9)

Q3. Why does Potiphar's wife's attitude to Joseph change from wanting to have an affair to wanting to have him arrested?

Q4. What are the links in verses 2, 3, 21 and 23 revealing to us? Why are they important to the story?

Q5. What does it say about how we can commit our working lives to the Lord? And how do we feel if we face false accusations? Is it a comfort to remember that God sees and knows the truth?

Q6. How did Joseph's time in prison serve to prepare and coach him for the next stage of God's plans for his life? See Gen 39:20-23

Q7. What does Genesis 39:2-4 and 20-23 tell us about the Lord's faithfulness to Joseph and how did it shape his life? Is it comforting that even when things are messed up by our own or other people's actions, God is still in control?

Q8. How does Joseph reflect Jesus and his life and ministry?

Bible Study 3. Joseph, the Cupbearer, and the Baker

Genesis 40v1-23

Introduction

In these twenty-three verses, God seems to be missing. Like Esther, this is one of the chapters where God is invisible and hidden and cannot be seen. He does not speak directly and obviously. This passage reminds us that sometimes God chooses to keep silent, but his silence does not mean his absence, as we will see.

This chapter covers one of the darkest moments in Joseph's life. He is in prison. It is time to wait, pray and continue to serve God. Clearly, if you are reading this and struggling, you will be able to relate to Joseph. If that is not you, then this is here to help you be prepared for the times of struggle you may yet face and remind you also to help those who are struggling at present.

Joseph Prison with a Purpose v1-8

The chapter starts by telling us time has passed and this reminds us that these events are linked together. The chapter introduces us to the cupbearer, the baker, and the Pharaoh. God has put two of Pharaoh's servants in prison alongside Joseph. This is an unfolding story. Think of the small steps in your life journey. What we are seeing is that God has each event in our lives planned and each has a purpose.

In these verses (v2-7) we see how Joseph becomes enmeshed in the lives of these men. In the prison he is promoted (v4) and he gains new responsibilities. These new prisoners become part of his life and he learns about their dreams (v6-8). We also discover that the dreams are from God, and that they have both meaning and purpose. Joseph also knows that God can communicate through them. (Gen 37) Joseph has not given up on God nor God on him. Joseph claims that through him God will speak and explain the dreams. Joseph saw himself as an ambassador for God. But wait a minute, are we not also ambassadors for God today? (Matt 28). Having the

Bible means we do not just live by it but need to be ready to share its message! Joseph is serving people, loving people, and seeing God at work.

God gives Joseph understanding (v9-18)

Joseph interprets the dreams of the cupbearer and baker (v9-18). What do you notice about the way he does it? Joseph explained the dreams in a factual manner. Joseph believes that the interpretation has come from God, both the good news and the bad.

Then in v14-15 we see that Joseph did not remain inactive. He received the cupbearer's kindness and knew he needed the power of Pharaoh to free him from prison. He also continues to maintain his innocence. Joseph, it seems can save others but cannot save himself. (Think Jesus). Joseph, though helpless and fearful, continued to extend help to others.

Joseph feels forgotten but God remembered him v19-23.

After all these verses, we expect a successful conclusion, a God who comes in and rescues immediately. Yet, this chapter ends without hope as human salvation has let him down. The cupbearer had forgotten Joseph. Isa 49:13-16 reminds us that God is a God who does not forget. The Bible itself describes sin as falling short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). God is all powerful and all knowing. This means God cannot forget. So, when we forget we are dropping short of God's perfection. God is holy, we are not.

It's true that the consequences of forgetfulness differ, if I forget to put my jumper on before leaving the house, the outcome might mean I catch a cold. All forms of poor memory reveal that we are falling short of God's perfection. His instruction to us is to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48)."

In this story we see that God was at work in all things for his glory. God is sovereign. Gen 40 shows us the immortal, invisible, God only wise (1 Tim 1:17). This story is here to remind us of God's faithfulness to His people.

Bible Study 3 Questions Genesis 40v1-23

Ice Breaker: Have you ever had a really bad boss? How did you feel about the person and what was your attitude? What did you hope would happen?

Q1. Thinking about the first part of Joseph's life, what stands out to you most? Can you relate to any part of Joseph's life and what part is extremely difficult for you to understand?

Q2. Name each person in the story and describe their role. Who can share the content of the cupbearer's dream and the content of the baker's dream?

Q3. What do you think the cupbearer and the baker thought about their own prospects when they were put in custody?

Q4. In v8 does Joseph take the glory of interpretation for himself? Why is this attitude important?

Q5. What is the meaning of the cupbearer's dream and how does Joseph see this as part of God's plan for his own life?

Q6. The Baker's dream tells a horrific story of what the Pharaoh will do. Was Joseph right to warn him? How do we feel when we need to tell someone bad news?

Q7. This chapter ends with Joseph forgotten by the man he had helped. If we are honest, do we sometimes feel forgotten? What does that feel like? Are we in danger of forgetting others and is there forgiveness from Jesus when we do?

Q8. What do you find helpful as a reminder that God will never forget you? How are you seeing Jesus in this story?

Bible Study 4. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams Genesis 41v8-40.

Two years have passed since Joseph explained the cupbearer's and the baker's dreams. Now Pharaoh has had a dream about seven cows that come out from the Nile River. Seven cows are fat and seven are gaunt and they ate up the fat cows. The King has a second dream where seven heads of healthy grain grew on a stalk. After them seven thin grains sprouted and ate up the healthy grains.

No one could interpret Pharaoh's dreams. At this point, the cupbearer finally remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh how he had successfully interpreted their dreams. Pharaoh called for Joseph to see him.

Pharaoh spoke to Joseph saying that he had understood he could interpret dreams. Joseph immediately said he could not, but God could.

Pharaoh shared his dreams with Joseph who then explained to Pharaoh that God had revealed to him what was about to happen. The seven good cows and the seven good grains represent 7 years and the seven lean cows, and seven worthless grains are 7 years as well. They represent 7 years of good crops and then 7 years of famine. God gave Pharaoh the dreams. God had decided the issue.

Joseph told Pharaoh to seek an astute and wise man to be in charge of the land of Egypt. To take a fifth of Egypt's harvest during the good years and store up the grain for the bad years so that the country would not be ruined by the famine.

Pharaoh chooses Joseph to put the plan into action for he was both perceptive and wise. The godly Joseph is made second in command in Egypt and in charge of all the land. The King gives Joseph his ring, dresses him in fine linen and gives him a gold chain. He rode in Pharaoh's chariot as his second-in-command to announce it to the people.

The King gives a clear command that no one will lift hand or foot without Joseph's word. The King gives Joseph the Egyptian name of Zaphenath-Paneah, and an Egyptian wife named Asenath.

Joseph was 30 years old when this happened. Joseph journeyed all over Egypt. As he travelled, he collected so much grain that it stopped Joseph from keeping records.

Joseph had two sons named Manasseh (forget) and Ephraim (fruitful).

The 7 years of famine began but Egypt had food and Joseph opened the warehouses and distributed the food. The famine was severe in all the world so many foreigners came to Egypt to buy grain as well.

After Joseph interpreted the dreams, do you think he was angling for the job he suggests in v33? What practical lessons can we take from this about how to manage our resources, and wider issues of distributing food fairly? Just how unlikely was it for this foreign slave to become so prominent in Egypt? What does that say about how God can use each one of us? How do you think Joseph would have felt, being given so much responsibility? Do we trust God with our responsibilities or are we tempted to look to our own strength to fulfil them?

Bible Study 4 Questions Genesis 41

Ice Breaker:

Joseph remains in prison. We know that God on no occasion spoke directly to Joseph. Strangely, God did speak to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Eight times in chapter 39 that "***the Lord' was with Joseph***". What links can we see between Cinderella and the story of Joseph? What attitude does she show that can also be seen in the story of Joseph?

Q1. Think about a period of your life that seemed pointless or monotonous, but looking back, you can now see God's hand shaping you for the future. Joseph is in jail and Pharaoh's having two vivid dreams. Why could the wisemen of Egypt not help the King understand his dreams? What did the cupbearer to the King recall?

Q2. What did Pharaoh do when he heard there was a Hebrew who had successfully interpreted dreams? Why, did Joseph say the interpretation of dreams belongs to God? What does this reveal about Joseph's perspective on life, gifting, and faith? v16?

Q3. How does Joseph make sure that God gets the glory for the gift he is given of interpreting dreams? How can we guarantee that God gets the glory from the gifts he has given each of us to use?

Q4. In what way do the names of Joseph's children reveal God's goodness in Joseph's pain? (41:51- 52) How does the goodness and Grace of God help you deal with afflictions and discouragements?

Q5. From Prison to Palace. Joseph's story is one of Humiliation to Exaltation. What does this teach us about the pattern of the Christian Life (See 1 Pet 5:6-7). How is this pattern revealed also in the Life of Jesus Christ? In your own life?

Q6. Was the solution to the famine something Joseph discerned because God revealed to him in advance, or is Joseph simply a wise economist?
v33-38

Q7. From the studies of Joseph, in what ways do they point us to Christ?

Q8. Take time to reflect on God's goodness and grace to you. What practical lessons has the Lord taught you from this passage? What lesson has the Lord taught you in hard times?

Q9. As we look across Joseph's life, notice how it has changed in the twenty years since we first met him in Genesis 37. What would you highlight? Also, if time, share specific ways God has changed your life. What Bible verses are important to you?

Bible Study 5. Joseph's brothers come to Egypt for food

Genesis 42:1-28

The famine strikes Egypt just as Joseph had said. God had sent the dreams, the interpretation, and the famine. This confirmed Joseph as a kind of prophet in Egypt. God had raised him from the pit to be a prince in Egypt. Pharaoh tells anyone who is hungry, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you" (Gen 41v55). Joseph controls the supply of food. Now the famine reached Canaan, and Jacob's family are hungry. The crisis is deeper. This crisis brings the family of Jacob back to Joseph. However, Joseph's identity is hidden from his brothers. This chapter comes in three sections: In Canaan (v1-5), then in Egypt (v6-28), and then back in Canaan (v29-38).

Going Hungry v1-5

Trading between Egypt and Canaan was not unusual. It is no surprise that they hear that Egypt is doing well in the time of famine. When Jacob hears that food is available, he says, "Why are you sitting around? Go and buy some food for us!" Food is running low.

His sons go to Egypt, but Jacob keeps Benjamin with him. Benjamin is not only the youngest son, but he is also the only surviving son of Rachel, his favourite wife. Could Jacob be wondering if his other ten sons know more about Joseph's disappearance than they have said? So, Jacob keeps Benjamin at home.

Hunger forces Jacob's sons to Egypt in search of food. The famine impacts everyone but God will save his people.

The First Test v6-17

V6 is a summary verse showing that Joseph is a true *prophet*, ruler, and *provider*. We are being given a hint about Christ here. Consider what

this meant: Joseph now controls, directly or indirectly, the political and economic well-being of many peoples.

Joseph identifies his brothers, but they do not identify him. They think he is dead. Joseph was dressed like an Egyptian, and he used a translator. The ten brothers bow down to him as ruler and provider. Joseph recognizes them. And we recall his dreams from years earlier.

Joseph turns on them by accusing them of being spies. He is humbling them and testing them. Is it a test or is it a punishment? Remember that murder is the desire to remove a person whom God has placed next to you. The brothers have never been held to account for their actions against Joseph. They now stand before Joseph and he has the power and the right to bring justice upon them!

The Second Test v18-28

The brothers think these severe circumstances are judgment for their treatment of Joseph earlier. In v21 they see themselves as "guilty". The treatment of Joseph years before still troubles Reuben. It was Reuben who had planned to rescue Joseph. It seems that Reuben's conscience has been tormented for years. It seems that "What goes around, comes around." Here is the idea of rewards and punishments, or we might say "He got what was coming to him." But we know the world is not governed by such forces. This world is a moral universe, overseen by a wise and just God.

Next Joseph singles out Simeon. Simeon, as the second oldest brother, would have been "in charge" while Reuben was gone. The brothers watch as Simeon is in prison. They are helpless. At the same time, they are given grain and provisions for the journey. On the journey, one of them opens his grain sack and discovers that their money is in the sacks along with the grain. They have escaped imprisonment in Egypt but are now filled with fear.

The brothers interpret this event as being directed by God Himself. As a father disciplines the children he loves, so Christ also disciplines Christian believers. Can we see the Spirit of Christ working through this "harsh lord of

the land," (v30) - not for destruction, but to produce a godly maturity that seeks God? Behind Joseph is God our Father in Jesus Christ.

Bible Study 5 Questions Genesis 42

Ice Breaker: Our supermarkets are full of food. "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" we pray, but in our hearts, we would rather have our favourite food and delicious treats. How easy is it to pray for "daily bread" when food supplies in the UK are accessible in such great quantity? How might it differ if we lived in South Sudan?

Q1. Read 42:1-5. What impression do you get of the brothers in v1? Why did Jacob send ten of his sons to Egypt? (1-5) How urgent was their problem in Canaan? Why did he not send Benjamin?

Q2. How do we see Joseph's earlier dreams fulfilled in this passage? (Gen37). And what lessons does Joseph need to learn? Has he learned any lessons?

Q3. Read 42:6-17 Describe, the initial meeting of Joseph with his brothers. Why did Joseph remember his dreams? What did he find out about his family by accusing them of being spies? How did he first propose to assess them?

Q4. Read 42:18-24. Which brother did Joseph keep as a hostage? What did he tell the others to do to prove their sincerity? When the brothers talked among themselves, what did they reveal about their burden of guilt? How did their confession affect Joseph?

Q5. Read 42:25-38. What additional anxiety did Joseph give his brothers? When they discovered money in one grain sack, what was their reaction? Why? What did they report to their father? What did they discover? What reveals the sorrow and fatalism in Jacob's heart?

Q6. Why do you think Joseph does not immediately introduce himself to his brothers? Do you detect any change in the brothers' attitude, has God been at work in their hearts? What is your impression?

Q7. What do you think Joseph is hoping to find out by assessing his brothers when he knows the truth? Does God ever evaluate us even though he knows our hearts? What is the testing for if God already knows the answer? Are we open to how the Lord might be at work in changing our hearts?

Bible Study 6. Joseph's Brother returns

Genesis 43:1-30

There are many misconceptions when it comes to forgiveness. Forgiveness is quite difficult, and in some ways impossible, if we believe we must first receive an apology from the person who offended us. Equally, we will have a problem forgiving someone else if we are expecting that person to show repentance or evidence of having changed. Showing trust to such a person can be very difficult.

Forgiveness has many more shades than that. It has been said that forgiveness is a one-way street and resolution a two-way street. In the story of Joseph, he chose to forgive his brothers regardless of how they might act in the future. However, forgiveness has many more degrees than that.

But his brothers showed true repentance for their actions and were reconciled to Joseph. Forgiveness is a choice and a difficult one at that. It allows us to forgive while seeing two things: God's sovereignty in the situation and secondly to bring about our good and how we are just like the offenders before God in need of his forgiveness for a sin.

We can forgive others of their offences towards us because we recognise how deeply we have been forgiven and loved by a perfect and holy God. The change that he brings about in our lives through his Spirit indwelling in us gives us the ability to forgive those we never thought we could forgive. This is a great story of forgiveness.

In verses 1-14 in Genesis 43 the focus of the conversation is between Jacob and Judah. They debate over the issue of the return to Egypt for grain to live. Jacob wants his nine boys to go but Judah says they must not leave behind Benjamin. Judah rejects Jacob's idea of going without Benjamin and seeks to persuade his father to let him go.

By this time, Jacob's household had grown to over one hundred people. This number would have included servants and his household. Consequently, it is questionable if the first lot of corn from Egypt would have lasted Jacob's family more than half a year. As the famine intensified the family was left with no other option than to go back to Egypt for more grain.

What best describes the Christian life in both the Old and New Testaments are the characteristics of humility and repentance. We get this from the stories about God's people in the book of Genesis, and we should not miss this point as we reach the final chapters of the book.

In verses 15-25 focus goes to Joseph's brothers. The major theme of this section can be summarised by two words, "**fear**" and "**works**." The brothers' fears, like their father's, are completely groundless. They sought by the actions of their hands to win Joseph's acceptance and favour. They still did not know that it was Joseph who was Prime Minister and Prince of Egypt. When Joseph brought them to his house for a feast, they feared that it was designed to be an opportunity to take them as slaves. Joseph, however, wished only to shower them with blessings.

Bible Study 6 Questions Genesis 43

Ice Breaker: Are you looking forward to being reunited with anyone again soon? How do you feel when at last you meet again? How do you feel when you meet someone who you have not seen for a long time?

Q1. What swayed Jacob to permit Benjamin to go with the other brothers? (Genesis 43:1-14)

Q2. What is life teaching Judah? Do you notice Judah becoming more prominent as the story goes on, why might that be?

Q3. Jacob produces a practical plan to take goods back with them, what is it? Do we see that Jacob is also praying for their safety? In what ways can you be both practical and prayerful over decisions and actions you take?

Q4. How did Joseph treat the brothers once he saw Benjamin had come along? (Genesis 43:15-25, 31-34)

Q5. Do you think they had any clue at all that it could be their long-lost brother in Egypt as the narrative progressed?

Q6. What was Joseph's reaction when he saw his brothers? (Genesis 43:29-30) What are the lessons God has been teaching Joseph as this part of the story unfolds?

Q7. As the story progresses are the brothers showing the reader a more honest and upfront character? How does Joseph steward's words about God show that Joseph is having an impact among Pharaoh's staff? How do his words help the brothers?

Q8. How do we see Joseph's love for his father and his brother in this passage? Joseph is moved and goes out to cry. Do you ever think about your emotions in terms of your faith? About how we express what is going on in our hearts to God?

Q9. Finally, what have we been learning from God in this amazing story of Joseph?

Bible Study 7. This is not the End of Joseph's Story

Genesis 45:1-28

Introduction

This story now enters the final stage. However, it is not that everyone lived Happy Ever After! Our chapter begins with Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers (v1-8). The vents start to get quicker. After hearing Judah's offer to redeem his brother Benjamin from slavery (44:33), Joseph became emotional and can no longer keep his secret. It is at this point that he tells all the Egyptians in the room to leave and then he reveals his true identity to his brothers.

A big question in Joseph's heart is around his father. He asked them if his father was still alive, but amazingly but surprisingly they were too stunned to answer. It is then that Joseph told his brothers not to be distressed or afraid because he believed it was God who sent him to Egypt to save innumerable people from the great famine. Think about how he shows us Christ. Egypt is often a picture of the world, but God sends a saviour to the world to rescue his people.

Joseph invites his family to live in Egypt (v9-15):

Did you notice that there were still 5 years remaining in the 7-year famine (v6). Joseph sees how important it is that the family are kept safe. So, he tells his brothers to bring their father (Jacob) and their families to live in Egypt.

They do not live in any old area of Egypt but Goshen. This is exceptionally good for looking after sheep. He invited them to live in the land of Goshen. And once again Joseph wept and talked with his brothers.

Pharaoh's Generosity (v16-20):

When the news reached the ears of Pharaoh's that Joseph's brothers had arrived, it pleased the king and all his servants. Pharaoh then made the

decision to give to the eleven brothers carts to use in transporting their wives and children to Egypt, along with Jacob, Joseph's father.

The King told them not to worry about their property because he would give them the best of Egypt. (God did something similar when Moses was born. He gave him a royal childhood!)

Jacob's sons return to Canaan with good news (v21-28):

Look what happen next. Joseph gave each of his brothers a new pair of clothes before they left, but he gave Benjamin 300 shekels of silver and five changes of clothes. This showed the special place in his heart he had for Benjamin. Joseph also sent twenty donkeys laden with gifts to his father.

When Jacob's sons arrived back in Canaan, they told their father Joseph the amazing news that Joseph was alive and had become prime minister in Egypt. The most powerful man next to the king. Initially Jacob did not believe them. A bit like the people on the day of resurrection. It is interesting to see how history does repeat itself in several ways.

But after talking to them further and seeing the wagons Pharaoh sent, the Bible says, "the spirit of their father Jacob revived." Jacob agreed to move to Egypt because he wanted to see Joseph before he died. This remarkable story teaches us again that God is always at work, even when it looks like He is absent or silent. By this point in the story Joseph can see deeper into the things of God. Looking back at his life, Joseph understood how God used his brother's evil actions to bring about something good. The implication to us is clear. We need to grasp that just because something bad happens to us does not mean God is no longer directing our lives or that He has abandoned us.

As the chapter closes it is encouraging to see that God cannot only take away our sins and forgive us, but he takes the sins we have committed against other people and turns them for the good of many.

Bible Study 7 Questions

Warm Up discussion: How can we forgive when we do not feel forgiving?
How can forgiveness move from the mental to the emotional level?

1. We might expect Joseph to respond to his brothers with vengeance. What had he gone through because of them? And yet how does he respond here as he sees that they have changed? (39:1-45:1)
2. How did Joseph's brothers respond to all this emotion? In fact, it is as if they do not even hear him. What does Joseph have to say next? (v2-6)
3. Ultimately, why did Joseph believe his brothers had sold him into slavery? Selling your brother into slavery is an evil act. But what does this statement Joseph makes tell you about God? (v4-7)
4. This seems impossible. It is time of famine, and yet God is using a pagan king to demonstrate his love to His people. What does Pharaoh do when he hears about Joseph's brothers? (v16-20)
5. What does Joseph have to tell his brothers not to do on their way back to get their father? How did Jacob respond to the report about Joseph at first? After they tell him again what happens and what decision does he make? (v25-28)

6. What does the transformation of Joseph's brothers tell us about change and repentance?

7. How does chapter 45 challenge us to consider God's role in our personal lives and in the broader story of history?

