



JOSEPH

DISCOVERING & DOING GOD'S WILL



THE STORY OF JOSEPH

The story of Joseph is located in the final major section of the book of Genesis. It acts as a transitional story, moving the larger story of the Bible forward. Within the story, the reader is reminded to look back to the creation account in Genesis 1-3. But the reader is also prompted to look forward to the next movement of God found in the story of the exodus from Egypt.

The opening section of Genesis sets the stage that God has created the universe to reflect his character and goodness. Not only that, but God chooses to dwell with humanity in the Garden in Eden. However, Adam and Eve try to gain knowledge of good and evil (wisdom) in a way that is contrary to God's instruction. Because of that, they are exiled from the Garden in Eden. The rest of the Bible follows this larger story of God working through humanity to defeat Satan (Genesis 3:15) through Jesus Christ.

As the story unfolds, humanity chooses to walk in the ways of evil rather than God's goodness. It seems as if God's plan to defeat Satan is going to fail. This is what makes the stories of Genesis so fascinating. Throughout the shortcomings and failures of individual people, God continues to bring about His redemptive plan.

In Genesis 12, God establishes a covenant with Abraham to bless the world through him (Genesis 12:3). Genesis 12-37 tells how God continues to reestablish His covenant with Abraham's son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. Far from being perfect, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob give us a glimpse of what it looks like to walk with God through the ups and downs of life.

The story of Joseph continues to point readers toward the faithfulness of God despite the twists and turns of life. Even more so than his forefathers, Joseph shows us what living faithfully and trusting God looks like.

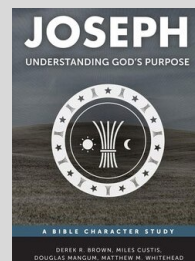
RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT



What To Watch

In this compelling six-part video series, Andrew Ollerton peels back the layers of Joseph's astonishing life as told in Genesis, encouraging us to live the dream even when life's a nightmare. Learn from Joseph how to triumph over temptation and how to flourish when you feel stuck. Be inspired by the power of forgiving the unforgivable, stewarding influence for the greater good, finishing strong, and leaving a legacy that lasts.

Scan the code to create your free account on RightNow Media. Then click on the Christ's Church logo to find the Joseph series.



What To Read

At the beginning of Joseph's story, his life seems ideal. However, Joseph's life would quickly turn tragic. Through it all, Joseph remained faithful to God, and God never abandoned him. Joseph's story teaches us a profound lesson: No matter our circumstances or others' actions, God will accomplish His purpose. In *Joseph: Understanding God's Purpose*, you'll walk through life with Joseph and his family—learning along the way how their story is like your story.

Scan the code to buy your copy. Select *Print (Paperback)* if you want a physical book. Select *Logos Edition* if you want a digital copy through Logos Bible Software.



WEEK 1: Genesis 37:1-11



Before You Read

- Familiarize yourself with the story of Jacob and his family. Genesis 12-25 tells the account of Jacob's granddad. Genesis 21-28 tells the account of Isaac, Jacob's dad. Finally, read the account of Jacob's life in Genesis 28-35. Don't forget that when God blesses Jacob at Peniel, He changes Jacob's name to Israel (Genesis 32:28).
- Explore why Canaan is important to Abraham's family. In Genesis 12:1-7, God first promises the land of Canaan to Abraham and his future descendants. In Genesis 15, God enters a covenant with Abraham, promising him that one day his descendants will take possession of the land of Canaan. However, they won't take possession of it until they spend 400 years in another land and experience slavery in that foreign land.
- Understand the complexity and strained relationships of Joseph and his brothers. Genesis 29-30 tells the details surrounding the birth of 12 of Jacob's children with four different women.



Read To Understand

- Jacob's love for Rachel is evident in his relationship with his children. Jacob loved Rachel the most, manifesting itself as showing favoritism to Joseph over his other brothers.
- The ornate robe Jacob gave Joseph doesn't just designate his place of honor but probably also conveys his father's intention to bless Joseph more than his other brothers. Joseph has been elevated to firstborn status even though Reuben was first. But also notice the irony woven throughout Genesis. Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, by wearing Esau's clothing. Joseph's blood-stained robe will deceive Jacob. Potiphar's wife will use



Egyptian painting of travelers from Canaan traveling to Egypt wearing ornate robes. Dated to around 1900 BC.

Joseph's cloak against him in Egypt. Even Pharaoh would dress Joseph in Egyptian clothes, hiding his true identity from his brothers when they visited Egypt.

- The bad report that Joseph gives Jacob of his brothers along with the two dreams that Joseph tells his brothers fuel a hatred towards him. Even Jacob rebukes Joseph after the second dream is revealed.



Read To Apply

- Reflect on the negative impact favoritism had on Joseph's family. How can you work to overcome jealousy and strife in your own relationships?
- In what ways do we show favoritism in our relationships? How can we correct this?
- Has God given you a vision for what he wants to do in your life? How can we discern His will for our lives by studying Scripture?



Notes

Week 2: Genesis 37:12-36



Before You Read

- Leaving his home, Joseph makes the four to five-day journey from the Valley of Hebron to check on his brothers near Shechem. After the roughly 50-mile journey, Joseph must continue to Dothan, another 14 miles away, to find his brothers. Joseph's brothers see him coming from a distance and have time to plot their evil plan. After selling Joseph, the brothers would have made the roughly 64-mile journey back to their father, carrying the weight of their evil plan.
- Cisterns were very important in the land of Canaan since most of the rainfall happened within four months. It would be expected that once the water was used up from the cistern, it would sit empty until the next rainy season.
- Joseph was sold to the traders for 20 shekels, a typical price for slaves in that period. Although it represented two years of wages for shepherds, it wouldn't have amounted to much after it was split between the nine remaining brothers.



Read To Understand

- God's sovereignty is a constant theme woven throughout the story of Joseph. God ensured Joseph would find his brothers by sending a man who knew that his brothers went on to Dothan (Gen. 37:15). Not only that, but Dothan was a large city that was near the International Coastal Highway and a regular route for caravan merchants. While Joseph's brothers meant harm to Joseph, God ensured he would be sold to the merchants rather than killed. Even upon reaching Egypt, God was with Joseph and had him enter into the service of Potiphar, the captain of the guard. God is orchestrating Joseph's life to bring about His goodness and blessing to the world (Genesis 12:3; 50:20)
- In Genesis 37:21-22, Reuben suggests putting Joseph in a cistern instead of killing him. The text says that Reuben wanted to return Joseph to his father. It is unclear if he was motivated by the responsibility of being the firstborn or if he was trying to regain some favor from Jacob

after the incident with Bilhah (Gen. 35:22). Either way, he expresses the challenge of recovering his father's favor once he discovers that Joseph has been sold (Gen. 37:29-30).

- While it was Reuben who suggested putting Joseph in a cistern, it was Judah who suggested that they sell Joseph instead of killing him. Often overlooked in the story of Joseph, Judah plays a vital role. As the story unfolds, we will see how God builds Judah's character, and it will be Judah, not Joseph, will receive God's promise of royalty and kingship. Both King David and Jesus will come from the lineage of Judah, not Joseph (Gen. 49:10; Ps 78:67-72).



Read To Apply

- Recall a time when you felt nothing good could come from your situation. How did you respond? How did God act?
- What stories of God's faithfulness might Joseph have recalled while in prison? What stories in Scripture can we draw on when we need help looking beyond our limited perspective?



Notes

Week 3: Genesis 39-40



Before You Read

- We were first introduced to Potiphar at the end of chapter 37 as one of Pharaoh's officials and the captain of the guard. Although it is a little unclear what exactly that title referred to, it seems that it referred to guarding the prison of political prisoners. Genesis 40:3 says that this prison is in the house of the captain of the guard. So even though Potiphar imprisons Joseph, he still would have had close access to Joseph.
- After Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of trying to sleep with her, Potiphar burned with anger. While it seems he was mad at Joseph, a closer reading shows that his anger was probably directed towards his wife for her lack of integrity. When she makes her accusation, she blames her husband for bringing Joseph to the house (Gen 39:17). Further evidence is that he imprisons Joseph in the King's prison, located somewhere on his property (Gen. 40:3). He could have had Joseph executed but chose to imprison him instead. It is the least severe punishment that he could carry out while still maintaining his family's honor.
- Genesis 39-40 spans 11-13 years. While it is unclear how many years he spent in prison, it is important to understand that Joseph was 17 when he was sold into slavery (Gen. 37:2) and was 30 when Pharaoh elevated him from prison.



Read To Understand

- The reader must keep the larger story of God's redemption in view when reading Genesis. Remember that the concept of God's blessing is woven throughout the Genesis account (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). God's blessing is manifested on a small scale through Joseph. Notice how Genesis 39:2-6 and Genesis 39:20-23 are full of blessing language. The phrase "*Lord was with*" Joseph is mentioned four times. Other words used to describe the things under Joseph's care are *prospered*, *successful*, *favored*, *kind*, *entrusted*, and *in charge*. Even though Joseph has been mistreated by his brothers and accused by

Potiphar's wife, all of this has accomplished the ultimate plan of God. God has been taking the evil and injustice in Joseph's life and working it for his good to bless the world through Abraham's family (Gen. 45:5-8; 50:20).

- Throughout Genesis, Abraham and his family's lack of faith and integrity is evident. It starkly contrasts Joseph's integrity when tempted by Potiphar's wife. Although Joseph appeals to the level of trust that his master has found in him, Joseph sees this potential affair as sinning against God. Even though Joseph's life has not turned out like his dreams of Genesis 37, Joseph remains faithful to God.



Read To Apply

- Reflect on a time when maintaining your integrity had an unexpectedly high price. How did you respond? Were you discouraged by the result or encouraged because you knew you did the right thing?
- What boundaries in your life can you create to protect you from temptation? What boundaries might you be neglecting?
- Why do you think God allows us to experience struggles and tests of character? What benefit do they serve in the lives of His followers?
- Recall a time of suffering in your life that produced character and hope. How can you use that experience to prepare for future trials?



Notes

Week 4: Genesis 41



Before You Read

- Dreams play a vital role in Joseph's story. Often found in pairs (Gen. 37:5-9; Gen 40:9-17), it adds to the troubling effect when Pharaoh has similar dreams on the same night (Gen. 41:1-7). It was troubling enough that he sent for magicians and wise men to interpret them. This is unusual because Pharaoh was considered divine and should have been able to interpret it. However, the typical interpreters couldn't interpret the meaning. Because of this, Pharaoh seeks out Joseph. Joseph clarifies that he cannot interpret the dream, but only God (a generic name for God rather than a specific name of the God of the Bible) can give Pharaoh peace of mind about the interpretation.
- Because Egypt relies on the annual flooding of the Nile River instead of rainfall, famines were possible but rare in Egypt. The Egyptian gods who were believed to control the Nile were powerful, so the fact that Joseph says that God has decided to do it soon only adds to the trustworthiness of his interpretation and the power of the God Joseph serves.
- Once again, Joseph will be identified by the robe he wears. This time, Pharaoh dresses him in Egyptian attire, almost transforming him from being a Hebrew (Gen. 39:14, 17; 41:12) into an Egyptian. Pharaoh elevates his honor by arranging his marriage to the daughter of a prestigious priest. In essence, this masquerade will deceive his brothers and hide Joseph's real identity (Genesis 42-45).



Read To Understand

- So far in the Joseph story, Joseph has gone from a place of honor and prominence within his family to being enslaved and then falsely imprisoned. However, as the text will make clear, God's timing reveals His sovereignty. Even though the cupbearer forgot about Joseph in prison for two years (Gen. 40:23), he will remember Joseph at just the right time when Pharaoh has two dreams that trouble him (Gen. 41:9-13).

- Joseph is described as a *"wise man"* and one in whom the *"spirit of God"* dwells (Gen. 41:33,39; 41:38). Once again, this highlights that the story of Joseph is ultimately about God bringing about his blessing through the family of Abraham. The language in Genesis 41:49 recalls the blessing of Abraham in Genesis 12:3. It also points forward to future wise men such as Solomon and Daniel, whom God works through. Ultimately, it is a picture of the future Messiah (Jesus) who will bless the whole world.



Read To Apply

- Joseph was thankful and faithful during discouraging circumstances. How does discouragement present a challenge for our faith to overcome?
- Imagine yourself in Joseph's circumstances. Do you think you could have endured as he did?
- What verses remind you of God's providence and sovereign care when challenged by hardship and trial? Why?



Notes

Week 5: Genesis 42-45



Before You Read

- As the story of Joseph moves towards the climax, the reader is made aware of Jacob (renamed Israel in Gen. 32:28) and his sons once again. The famine has spread out over the land and has reached the land of Canaan. It is evident to the reader that Joseph will be reunited with his brothers, but the question is what that reunion will be like. Will Joseph respond in vengeance?
- Once again, Jacob favors the son of his favorite wife, Rachel. Benjamin has replaced Joseph as Jacob's favorite and is not allowed to go to Egypt.
- Joseph's dreams from Genesis 37 will be fulfilled when his brothers arrive in Egypt (Gen. 42:6; 43:26-28; 44:14). It has taken over 20 years for God's plan and timing to be revealed to Joseph.



Read To Understand

- Upon recognizing his brothers, Joseph speaks harshly to his brothers. This would not have been out of place culturally, for Egyptians were skeptical of people from other cultures. It also adds tension to the story to see how Joseph and his brothers respond. For Joseph, are his tests going to be motivated by revenge? For his brothers, will they show any change of character from when they were willing to kill their brother but then decided to gain a profit instead? Throughout the tests, the brothers will attribute their misfortune to divine retribution. But as the story reaches its climax in Genesis 45:5-8, the reader will discover that Joseph understood God's sovereignty in his life and chose to forgive rather than seek revenge.
- Once again, Reuben will speak in the narrative, but he fails to convince his father of Benjamin's safety during the second visit. Perhaps it was because Reuben still skirted around personal responsibility by jeopardizing the lives of his sons.
- Joseph can use Benjamin's position of honor to test his brother's character. Joseph wants to see how the brothers will respond when Benjamin is clearly shown favoritism. Will they

react in the same way as they did with Joseph? Ironically, the brothers became the caravan carrying goods from Canaan to Egypt with a son of Rachel, much like the caravan that carried Joseph 20 years before.

- Unlike Reuben, Judah convinces Jacob to let Benjamin go to Egypt. Already, Judah is starting to emerge as the leader of the sons of Israel (Jacob). His character transformation is apparent in his final speech, the longest in Genesis (Gen. 44:18-34). In Genesis 37, Judah is willing to profit off the enslavement of his brother. Now, he is willing to exchange his freedom for the redemption of his brother Benjamin. Not only that, but he also appeals to his father's well-being rather than his well-being. Judah's actions here will foreshadow the even greater actions of Jesus, who is from the lineage of Judah. Jesus, showing greater concern for his Father's will than his well-being, will give himself up to redeem the whole world (Phil. 2:1-11).



Read To Apply

- Have you ever repaid vengeance with grace and forgiveness? How were your actions received?
- Do your feelings of guilt or shame change or alter your view of God? If so, how do you think this influences your trust in Him?
- What is God's greatest act of deliverance in the New Testament? Can you note any similarities with the Joseph narratives or the exodus?
- What prevents you from showing mercy to others when you have the opportunity? Why is it difficult to show mercy when we willingly receive it?



Notes

Week 6: Genesis 46-50



Before You Read

- Jacob stopped at Beersheba and made sacrifices to God. This location has already played a prominent role in Genesis 21:31-32; 26:23,33; 28:10. It also shouldn't surprise the reader that God would appear to him in a vision, for Jacob's movement in and out of Canaan are marked with theophanies (Gen. 28:10-22; 31:11-13; 32:1, 24-30). Throughout the life of Jacob, God has continued to reveal himself in new ways to him. In Genesis 28, God reveals his divine name, *Yahweh*. In Genesis 31, God reveals his name as *El Bethel*. When God reveals his name in Genesis 35, he uses *El Shaddai* (God Almighty). Finally, in Genesis 46, God reveals himself as *the God of your Father*.



Read To Understand

- When God appears to Jacob in a vision, it assures Jacob that the covenant is still in place. Despite the famine, God will allow Jacob and his family to go to Egypt. This contrasts when God forbids Isaac from going to Egypt during a famine in Genesis 26:1-5. However, God is assuring Jacob that He will go with Jacob. The covenant blessing established with Abraham will continue to find its fulfillment during their time in Egypt. It also hints at the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:13. In Egypt, God will multiply the Israelites into a nation (Gen. 47:27). They will live in that land for 400 years before returning to the land of Canaan, that was promised to Abraham.
- Being reunited with his favorite son, Jacob continues to give Joseph the prominence and honor of a firstborn son. He charges Joseph to look after his body and return it to the land of Canaan after his death (Gen. 47:29-31). 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 retells that Jacob gave the firstborn rights to Joseph instead of Reuben. Even as the 12 sons grow into the 12 tribes of Israel, Joseph is given a double portion. Jacob adopts Ephraim and Manasseh as his own. Therefore, when the 12 tribes are listed, there isn't a tribe of Joseph, but rather a tribe of Ephraim and a tribe of Manasseh (the tribe of

Levi is not counted as one of the 12 because the Lord redeems them in Numbers 3).

- When Jacob blesses his sons in Genesis 48-49, it is essential to see the bigger picture. Once again, Jacob gives Ephraim greater honor than Manasseh, even though he is the firstborn. It carries on the theme throughout Genesis that the younger is blessed over the firstborn (Gen. 27-28). Not only that, but Jacob then gives prominence to Judah over Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, even though they are older. It will be from Judah that a king (scepter) will come. While Joseph saved Jacob's immediate family in Genesis 41-45, Judah's blessing carries the idea that all nations will be blessed through him. Eventually, King David will come from the line of Judah. Ultimately, it is Jesus, the Messiah, who will come from the line of Judah. In Jesus, the whole world experiences the blessing of God and experiences salvation.
- Once Jacob dies, Joseph's brothers are again fearful that he might get revenge. However, Joseph assures them that it was the plan and purpose of God to use their decision to harm Joseph to be able to save them and the whole region from the famine (Gen. 50:19-20). As the story of Joseph ends, it is important to see that, ultimately, God is the focus of the story. He is the one orchestrating the events of the story for His glory.



Read To Apply

- Do you have landmark events in your life that cause you to reflect on God's power and deliverance? What are they?
- Identify a negative or trying event from your past that God used for His good. How did you sustain a sense of God's presence throughout that time?



Notes