

JOSEPH SUFFERING AND THRIVING IN EGYPT

Genesis 40 - 50

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Joseph and Pharaoh

Key-locations: Canaan and Egypt

Key-repetitions:

- Clothes (cloak, coat, clothes): Joseph changed clothes before going to Pharaoh (Gen 41:14); Pharaoh dressed Joseph in robes of fine linen (Gen 41:42).
- Joseph in a position of authority: in his dreams (Gen 39:5-11); at Potiphar's home (Gen 39:1-6); in prison (Gen 39:20-23); as governor of Egypt (Gen 41:37-44); Joseph's brothers bowed down to him (Gen 42:6).
- Joseph defeated and then raised up: from slave to administrator (Gen 39:1-6); from prisoner to one responsible for other prisoners (Gen 39:22-23); left prison to become governor (Gen 41:14-44).
- Dreams/Visions: Joseph (Gen 37:5-11); chief cupbearer and chief baker (Gen 40:1-23); Pharaoh (Gen 41:1-7); Israel (Gen 46:1-4).
- Joseph suffering injustice: his father loved him more than his other sons (Gen 37:3-4); his brothers sold him into slavery (Gen 37:12-36); Potiphar's wife falsely accused him (Gen 39:11-19); Potiphar put him in prison (Gen 39:20-21); the cupbearer forgot Joseph (Gen 40:1-23; 41:9).

Key-attitudes:

- Pharaoh troubled by his dreams.
- Joseph's courage when he told Pharaoh that it is God who gives interpretations to dreams, and when he gave counsel to Pharaoh.
- Despair of Israel's family because of the famine.
- Joseph's caution when he saw his brothers in Egypt.
- Israel's fear of losing another son.
- Brothers' fear when they realized the governor of Egypt was their brother Joseph.
- Jacob's desire to be buried in Canaan.

Initial-situation:

Israel loved Joseph more than all his other sons, but Joseph's brothers hated him. Joseph's brothers sold him to slave merchants. Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar's wife tempted Joseph to go to bed with her. Joseph refused and she falsely accused him of trying to rape her. Potiphar had Joseph thrown into the prison where Pharaoh kept his prisoners.

Initial-problem:

Pharaoh was angry with his chief cupbearer and his chief baker. He put them in the same prison where Joseph was confined.

Final-situation:

Joseph, his brothers, and their families continued living in Egypt after Israel's death. Before dying, Joseph requested that his brothers carry his bones with them when they returned to the land promised to Abraham.

BIBLE STORY

Some time after Potiphar put Joseph in prison, Pharaoh (*the king of Egypt*), was angry with his chief cupbearer and his chief baker. Pharaoh put them in the same prison where Joseph was confined. In prison, Joseph interpreted dreams for both Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and his chief baker. After that, the cupbearer was restored to Pharaoh's service (Gen 40:1-23).

Joseph in a High Position in Egypt

Pharaoh had a dream. In his dream, he was standing by the Nile River and seven cows, healthy and fat, came out of the river and grazed on the marsh grass. After them, seven other cows, all skin and bones, came up out of the Nile. The skinny cows ate up the seven healthy, fat cows, but remained skin and bones. Then Pharaoh woke up.

No one could interpret Pharaoh's dream. The chief cupbearer told Pharaoh that when he had been in prison, Joseph had interpreted his dreams. Pharaoh sent for Joseph. Joseph told Pharaoh that it is God who gives interpretations. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream: God was going to send seven years of bumper crops, then seven years of famine. Joseph suggested that Pharaoh appoint someone to prepare for the famine (Gen 41:1-45).

Pharaoh made Joseph governor of Egypt and gave him an Egyptian wife. Joseph and his wife had two sons (Gen 41:45-52).

Joseph was thirty years old when he went to work for Pharaoh. During the seven years of bumper crops, Joseph traveled throughout Egypt stockpiling huge quantities of grain (Gen 41:46-49).

Egypt's seven years of bumper crops came to an end; seven years of severe famine began. Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain. All the people in that part of the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph (Gen 41:53-57).

The land of Canaan also experienced famine. Israel told his sons, "There is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy grain, so that we may live and not die."

Joseph's ten half-brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain. These half-brothers had sold Joseph into slavery. Israel didn't send Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother (Gen 42:1-5).

Joseph was the one in charge of selling grain to all the people. Joseph's brothers arrived and bowed face-down to him. They didn't recognize him. However, Joseph recognized them, but treated them as strangers and spoke roughly to them. Joseph accused them of being spies. They answered that they were all sons of one man and that their younger brother was at home with their father.

Joseph sold them food, but told them not to return without their younger brother (Gen 42:1-23).

Nine brothers returned to Canaan; Joseph kept one in Egypt as a hostage. The returned brothers told their father everything. Israel said that Benjamin, his younger son, wouldn't return with them. When they were out of food, Israel told his ten sons to return to Egypt to buy food. The ten sons refused to return until Israel agreed to send Benjamin with them (Gen 42:29 - 43:14).

The second time Israel's sons went to Egypt, Joseph identified himself. He told his brothers, "I am Joseph!" His brothers were speechless with terror! Joseph told them, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold as a slave to Egypt! God sent me ahead of you to preserve your lives. There will be five more years of famine. God made me a counselor to Pharaoh and ruler of all Egypt. Hurry back to my father. Tell him, 'Your son Joseph says: God made me ruler of all Egypt. Come to me. I will provide for you, because there will still be five more years of famine.'"

Then Joseph hugged his brother Benjamin and wept. Then Joseph kissed all his brothers and cried as he hugged them. Only then were his brothers able to talk to him (Gen 45:1-15).

Joseph gave his brothers carts and provisions for their journey (Gen 45:21-24).

Israel's Family in Egypt

The brothers arrived in Canaan and told their father, "Joseph is still alive! He is ruler of all Egypt!" Israel was stunned. After seeing the carts Joseph had sent, Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I'll go and see him before I die" (Gen 45:25-28).

Israel and his sons set out with all their livestock and possessions. Seventy members of Jacob's family went to Egypt (Gen 46:1-29).

Joseph went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. Joseph threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time. Israel told Joseph, "Now I'm ready to die; I've seen for myself that you are alive" (Gen 46:30-34).

The Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen and they acquired property. They had many children and increased in number. Israel lived in Egypt seventeen years. Israel called for his son Joseph and requested, "Don't bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they're buried."

Joseph replied, "I'll do what you ask" (Gen 47:27-31).

Some time later Joseph learned that his father was very sick. So Joseph took his two sons along with him to see his father.

Israel told Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and told me, 'I'll give you many children. I'll make you a community of peoples, and I'll give this land as an everlasting inheritance to your descendants'" (Gen 48:1-7). Israel continued, "I'm about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers" (Gen 48:21-22).

Then Jacob called for his twelve sons. Jacob pronounced blessings and prophecies for each son and their descendants. The descendants of the sons became the tribes of Israel. There are twelve tribes of Israel (Gen 49:1-28).

Jacob gave these instructions, "Bury me with my fathers in the cave which Abraham bought as a burial place." When Jacob finished instructing his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and died (Gen 49:29-33). He lived to be 147 years old. Jacob was buried in the cave which Abraham bought as a burial place.

After the funeral, Joseph's brothers talked among themselves, "What if Joseph pays us back for what we did to him?" They sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left this command before he died, 'Tell Joseph to forgive his brothers the great evil they did to him.' Joseph, we beg you to forgive our wrong. We're servants of your father's God." Joseph received their message and wept.

His brothers came to him in person, threw themselves down before him and said, "We're your slaves."

Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God? You intended evil for me, but God intended good for me and to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Don't be afraid. I'll provide for you and your children" (Gen 50:15-21).

Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. Before his death, Joseph told his brothers, "I am about to die. God will certainly come to your aid and take you out of this land and back to the land he promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Make sure you carry my bones when you leave this place."

Joseph died when he was 110 years old. Doctors embalmed him and placed his body in a coffin in Egypt (Gen 50:22-26).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Joseph experience defeat being transformed into victory?
2. How did dreams play an important part in Joseph's life?
3. How was God able to redirect the evil intentions of Joseph's brothers to bring about good results?
4. Have you observed God redirecting evil intentions of other people to bring about good results in a victim's life? Give an example.
5. When the brothers who had mistreated Joseph came to Egypt to buy food, how did Joseph interact with them?
6. How have you experienced God redirecting evil intentions of others to bring good results in your life?
7. How should we react toward someone who mistreated us?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **God can redirect people's evil intentions to bring good results for his servant and his kingdom.** God redirected the evil intentions of Joseph's brothers to bring good results. Joseph became responsible for saving many lives in Egypt (Gen 50:20). See Romans 8:28.
2. **God, who has all knowledge, knows the future.** God gave Joseph dreams about ruling over his brothers (Gen 37:5-11). Through dreams, God advised Pharaoh that he was going to send seven years of bumper crops and then seven years of famine (Gen 41:1-32).
3. **It is better to suffer because of making the right choice than to deserve punishment for one's sins.** Joseph suffered because he resisted the woman's immoral advances (Gen 39:13-20). See 1 Peter 3:14-17. Joseph's brothers knew they deserved to be punished (Gen 42:21-22).
4. **One should walk with God in both the mountains and the valleys of his life.** God was with Joseph in slavery (Gen 39:2) and in prison (Gen 39:23). Joseph recognized God's action in his life as he rose to power (Gen 41:16, 52; 45:4-5; 50:20). See Philippians 4:12.
5. **God can bring good out of bad situations.** God brought good from the bad situations in Joseph's life. Joseph was raised in a dysfunctional family. His brothers sold him into slavery. Potiphar's wife falsely accused him. Joseph was imprisoned under false accusations. The cupbearer neglected to remember Joseph. Also Joseph went through seven years of famine. But God used Joseph to do great good and to save lives (Gen 50:20).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

Have three participants dramatize Joseph's brothers returning from Egypt and explaining to their father that Joseph is alive and is governor of Egypt. The brothers are forced to confess how they betrayed Joseph and their father many years ago.