

Starlight Bible Class

Genesis 37-40

Joseph--God's Chosen Vessel



Genesis was written to show: 1) why the Jews moved to Egypt; 2) why their nation was destined for the Promised Land; & 3) why God revealed Himself so dramatically to them in the wilderness. We begin now the study of Joseph.

I. Joseph the Favored Son

A. Jacob's love (37:1-4).

Joseph's mother was Rachel, Jacob's favorite. Parental favoritism always causes trouble. Jacob gave Joseph a tailored coat of many colors. As a result, his brothers hated Joseph (v. 4). The Bible does not tell us anything about Joseph's early

life. But it does tell us what happened to Jacob, during those years.

Jacob's 10 older sons had grown up seeing their father scheme & trick others to get what he wanted. It never mattered to Jacob that he hurt others. In those days, Jacob was not interested in what God wanted. They all remembered that morning when their father limped into camp. After wrestling with an angel, Jacob was a changed man! Instead of scheming, Jacob talked about God's will for his life. For the first time, they saw their father build an altar & worship God.

Every time they saw their brother Joseph, their hatred grew. The ten older brothers were jealous of the position their father had given him. Joseph loved his father & tried to please him. He also loved God & wanted to please Him.

The sinful ways of his older sons were a heartache to him. The very purity of Joseph's life made them feel guilty! James 3:16

B. Joseph's dreams (37:5-11).

Joseph fanned the fire of his brothers' hatred with his immature attitude & boasting. Our talents & gifts come from God;

better to thank God for them than brag about them. Later, Joseph will give God the credit.

C. Judah's scheme (37:12-28).

God overruled their plot to kill him, & he was sold into slavery.

D. Jacob's sorrow (37:29-36).

Jacob had slain a kid to deceive his father (27), & now his sons deceived him the same way.

We reap what we sow. Jacob spent the next 22 years in sorrow, thinking that Joseph was dead.

He thought that everything was working against him, when in reality everything was working for him. God had sent Joseph ahead to prepare the way for Israel's preservation as a nation.

II. Joseph the Faithful Steward (39)

A. The discipline of service (39:1-6).

Joseph was forced him to learn how to work. This way, he learned humility & the importance of obeying orders. Because Joseph was faithful in the small things, God promoted him to greater things. Pro 22:29 & 12:24. 1 Pet 5:5-6

B. The discipline of self-control (39:7-18).

Satan hates God, & he hates the family of God — especially those who obey & honor God. Satan knew that Joseph trusted God. If Satan could cause Joseph to sin, he could bring dishonor to God. And Joseph's good life would be ruined. Joseph did not yield. "Flee youthful lusts!" Paul admonished (2 Tim. 2:22)—& that is just what Joseph did.

C. The discipline of suffering (39:19-23).

Potiphar saw to it that Joseph was put in the king's prison. Joseph's faithfulness & devotion again brought him favor with the officers. Prisons were grim places & conditions were horrible. They were used to house slave laborers & those awaiting trial. As a prisoner & slave, Joseph could have viewed his situation as hopeless. Instead, he did his best with each small task given him.

Prov 16:7

This suffering put "iron" in Joseph's soul. It made a man out of him. Certainly Joseph learned patience, as well as a deeper faith in God. This suffering was not enjoyable, but it was necessary, & one day it turned into glory.

2 Cor 4:8-9

As we go through difficult times, God wants us to follow Joseph's example by taking each small task & doing our best. Remember, God turned Joseph's situation around. He will see our efforts & can reverse our situation.

III. Joseph the Forgotten Servant (40)

Joseph was now a servant in the royal prison (41:12), faithfully waiting for the day when his dreams would come true. One day two new prisoners were added—the cupbearer to Pharaoh & the chief baker. God arranged their arrest for Joseph's sake. Joseph had been treated unjustly, but he knew that one day God would fulfill His Word.

As he interpreted the two dreams, (v. 8) Joseph has learned to give all the glory to the Lord. His interpretation of the dreams came true: the cupbearer was restored, & the baker was hanged. Yet Joseph was left in prison! We may wonder why others experience the blessings that we so desperately need; yet God has His plan & His time.

Joseph was seventeen years old when he went to Egypt & thirty years old when he was delivered from the prison (41:46). This means he spent thirteen years as a servant & a prisoner, years of discipline & training, & years of preparation for his life-long ministry as the second ruler of Egypt. God uses difficulties & suffering to prepare us for what He is preparing for us.

Rom 8:28

JOSEPH

As a youngster, Joseph was overconfident. His natural self-assurance—increased by being Jacob's favorite son and by knowing of God's designs on his life—was unbearable to his ten older brothers, who eventually conspired against him. But this self-assurance, molded by pain and combined with a personal knowledge of God, allowed him to survive and prosper where most would have failed. He added quiet wisdom to his confidence and won the hearts of everyone he met—Potiphar, the prison warden, other prisoners, the pharaoh, and, after many years, even those ten brothers.

Notice what Joseph did in each case. His positive response transformed each setback into a step forward. He didn't spend much time asking why. His approach was "What shall I do now?" Those who met Joseph were aware that wherever he went & whatever he did, God was with him. When you're facing a setback, the beginning of a Joseph-like attitude is to acknowledge that God is with you. There is nothing like his presence to shed new light on a dark situation.

REUBEN

Parents are usually the best judges of their children's character. Jacob summarized the personality of his son Reuben by comparing him to water. Except when frozen, water has no stable shape of its own. It always shapes itself to its container or environment. Reuben usually had good intentions, but he seemed unable to stand against a crowd. His instability made him hard to trust. He had both private & public values, but these contradicted each other. He went along with his brothers in their action against Joseph while hoping to counteract the evil in private. The plan failed. Compromise has a way of destroying convictions. Without convictions, lack of direction will destroy life. Reuben's sleeping with one of his father's wives showed how little he had left of the integrity he had displayed earlier in life.

How consistent are your public & private lives? We may want to think they are separate, but we can't deny that they affect each other. What convictions are present in your life at all times? How closely does Jacob's description of his son—"unruly as a flood"—describe your life?

JUDAH

People who are leaders stand out. They don't necessarily look or act a certain way until the need for their action is apparent. Among their skills are outspokenness, decisiveness, action, & control. These skills can be used for great good or great evil. Jacob's fourth son, Judah, was a natural leader. The events of his life provided many opportunities to exercise those skills. Unfortunately Judah's decisions were often shaped more by the pressures of the moment than by a conscious desire to cooperate with God's plan. But when he did recognize his mistakes, he was willing to admit them. His experience with Tamar & the final confrontation with Joseph are both examples of Judah's willingness to bear the blame when confronted. It was one of the qualities he passed on to his descendant David.

Whether or not we have Judah's natural leadership qualities, we share with him a tendency to be blind toward our own sin. Too often, however, we don't share his willingness to admit mistakes. From Judah we can learn that it is not wise to wait until our errors force us to admit to wrongdoing. It is far better to admit our mistakes openly, to shoulder the blame, & to seek forgiveness.