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A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

JOSEPH'S SLAVERY AND GOD'S PROMISES (36:1-41:57)

The Place of the Passage

Perhaps the message from this lesson is, coming from a dysfunctional family does not mean that you will necessarily turn out badly. God used Joseph greatly, and there is no denying that he came from such a family. His brothers planned to kill him until one of them decided that it would be more profitable and less impious to sell him into slavery instead. So, the dreamer Joseph is sold into slavery and forgotten in prison, but God providentially preserves him and his family.

Gospel Glimpses

JUDAH: Judah is clearly the black sheep of the family of Israel—intermarrying with the Canaanites, failing to care properly for Tamar his daughter-in-law, and inadvertently sleeping with her and having twins by her. Against the shining story of Joseph's integrity, Judah's compromise appears heinous. However, Judah's failure does not remove him from the activity of God's grace. Later, Jacob blesses him: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Genesis 49:10). In the ensuing story line of Scripture, the tribe of Judah emerges as the line that would produce King David and ultimately King Jesus. Here again, God's grace rules over and even defies human merit as he uses people in his redemptive purposes.

FROM SLAVES TO KINGS: Joseph makes the unexpected journey from slavery to second in command of the entire nation of Egypt. This journey precipitates Israel's journey from slavery in Egypt to become God's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22) and "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Similarly, Christ rescues us from slavery to sin so that we might be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). Born into spiritual slavery, we are graced with undeserved royal dignity as God's own children, all through the work of Jesus on our behalf.

Biblical Connections

AFFLICTION AND FRUITFULNESS: Joseph names his second child Ephraim (which means "fruitfulness"), "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (Genesis 41:52). This fulfills God's original command in Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." While the children of Israel do not fill the earth, Joseph's fruitfulness paves the way for the Israelites to fill the land of Egypt (Exodus 1:7). Affliction sets the context for Joseph's fruitfulness (Exodus 1:11–12), just as Genesis 3:16 had predicted. His affliction as a slave of Potiphar and prisoner in Egypt foreshadow the affliction of Israel as slaves of Pharaoh in

Egypt. Just as God makes Joseph fruitful in the land of his affliction, so he “has taken [Israel] and brought [Israel] out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day” (Deuteronomy 4:20). The supreme and ultimate instance in the Bible of God bringing fruitfulness out of affliction is Christ himself, whose affliction at the cross was the means of the most glorious fruit the world has ever known—glory for himself and eternal life for sinners.

SOJOURNING: This is a clear motif for the patriarchs. Genesis 37:1 begins, “Jacob lived in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan.” At the end of his life, Jacob tells Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years” (Genesis 47:9). Similarly Abraham (Genesis 23:4) views himself as a sojourner in the land. As sojourners, they have settled in the land for some time and have a certain status but are not permanent residents. Israel is repeatedly referred to as a stranger and sojourner before the Lord (Leviticus 25:23; I Chronicles 29:15; Psalm 39:12; 119:19). One consequence is that land is seen as perpetually belonging to the Lord and must not be sold permanently (Leviticus 25:23). In the New Testament, Peter picks up this theme in his call for holiness: “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (I Peter 2:11). We are enabled to do this knowing that Christ left his home in heaven to sojourn among us, dying for us, so that we might be fully restored to our true home, God himself (John 6:51).

Theological Considerations

SPIRIT OF GOD: Joseph is clearly seen by Pharaoh to be a man “in whom is the Spirit of God” (Genesis 41:38) because of his ability to interpret dreams. The Spirit (=breath) of God was breathed into all humanity at creation (Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4) and frequently is the means by which supernatural revelation is made through human vessels (Numbers 24:2; II Samuel 23:2; Nehemiah 9:30; Isaiah 61:1-4; Ezekiel 2:2; 11:24; 37:1; Micah 3:8; Zechariah 7:12). Also, the Spirit of God brings an anointing for leadership to Joseph (Genesis 41:38), the seventy elders of Israel (Numbers 11:16-29), Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Saul (I Samuel 11:6), and David (I Samuel 16:13). In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit mediates knowledge of Jesus after he ascends into heaven (John 14:15-26; 16:13-14; Ephesians 3:2-6), unites us with Christ to share in his kingdom (Romans 14:17) and be a part of his body (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 4:13-16), assures believers that they are children and heirs of God (Romans 8:12-17; Galatians 4:6; I John 3:24), gives gifts for ministry (Romans 12:3-13; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:7-16), and prays for the believer (Romans 8:26-27). The Spirit comes down upon the church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3) and lives within every believer (Romans 8:9).

REVELATION: Time and again in the story of Joseph we see that God reveals things through dreams (Genesis 37:5-9; 40:5-19; 41:14-36). Prophecy is later linked with dreams but can be either accurate or misleading (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Dreams could be valid means of revelation (e.g., I Samuel 28:6), or invalid (Jeremiah 23:25-32). The outpouring of God’s Spirit would give revelation through dreams (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). In Matthew, five dreams are given

in connection with Christ's birth and infancy (Matthew 1:20; 2:12-13, 19, 22). Revelation through dreams is decidedly secondary, however, to the final and clear revelation through the person, teachings, and saving action of the Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3).

GENESIS 36 ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Question:

Genesis 36:1 begins, "These are the generations of Esau (that is, Edom)," and Genesis 37:2 begins, "These are the generations of Jacob." This is a common refrain throughout Genesis. While we usually think of the story of our life in terms of our own accomplishments, the story of Esau is told in the generations of those who follow him and the story of Jacob is primarily told in the life of Joseph. What implications might this have for us? Who will tell your story?

Please answer the following questions:

1. What was Esau's other name — 36:1, and where else do we read about it?
2. What promise had been given to Esau (27:39,40)?
3. How does this chapter relate to the fulfillment of that promise?
4. What were the names of Esau's wives — 36:2,3.
5. What were the names of Esau's sons — 36:4,5.
6. Where did Esau move — 36:6-8? Why?

7. What was the name of the concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz — 36:12?

8. What was the concubine son's name? What significance does a nation with this name have in later Bible history?

9. Whose descendants are recorded beginning in 36:20? What is his significance?

10. What information is given beginning in 36:31?

GENESIS 37 ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Question:

Read Genesis 37:1-11. Joseph's dreams will turn out to be prophetic and accurate. Yet what do we learn of Joseph here, early on? Does he display relational wisdom?

Please answer the following questions:

1. How old was Joseph? What job did he have — 37:2?

2. What lessons can we learn from Joseph's age in this study?

3. What did Joseph do in 37:2 that would have angered his brothers?

4. How did Jacob feel about Joseph, and how did he show this feeling — 37:3,4? How did Joseph's brothers react?
5. Describe Joseph's first dream and explain its meaning — 37:5-8.
6. Describe his second dream and explain what it meant — 37:9,10.
7. What purpose did Joseph's dreams have? How do modern dreams differ from these dreams and why?
8. Describe how Joseph's brothers and father reacted to his dreams — 37:11.
9. List three things from this reading that led Joseph's brothers to be angry with him.
10. Where had Joseph's brothers gone and why — 37: 12-14? What did Jacob ask Joseph to do?
11. What problem did Joseph have, and who helped him — 37:14-17?
12. Where did he find his brothers?
13. What plan did Joseph's brothers make as he approached — 37:17-20? What does this show about the brothers?

14. Who protected Joseph, and what did he convince his brothers to do — 37:21-24?

15. Describe the people who passed by — 37:25. What do we know about these people?

16. Who suggested another alternative regarding Joseph, what reason did he give, and what was done to Joseph — 37:26-28?

17. How did Reuben react when he learned of it — 37:29,30? Why?

18. What did the brothers do to conceal their guilt — 37:31,32?

19. What conclusion did Jacob reach, and how did he react — 37:33-35?

20. Where did Joseph end up — 37:33-35?

GENESIS 38 ASSIGNMENT

Discussion Question:

While the story of Joseph is dominant in the closing sections of Genesis, Judah makes an unexpected entrance on the scene in Genesis 38. In the conspiracy against Joseph, Judah took the initiative to sell Joseph into slavery rather than kill him (Genesis 37:26-27). Yet in chapter 38, we see that the sin of the Canaanites infiltrates the family of Israel through Judah. What compromises do you see by Judah and his family here?

Please answer the following questions:

1. Whom did Judah visit — 38:1,2?
2. Whom did Judah marry — 38:1,2?
3. Name his 3 sons. Where did he live at the time — 38:3-5?
4. Whom did Judah's first son marry — 38:6?
5. What happened to Judah's first son, and why — 38:7?
6. What was the next son told to do — 38:8?
7. What sin did Onan commit — 38:9,10?
8. What happened to Onan as a result?
9. Catholicism says Onan's case proves contraceptives are sinful. How would you respond?
10. What promise did Judah make to Tamar — 38:11?

11. Who else died — 38:12? Where did Judah go?
12. Describe Tamar's plan and tell what she did — 38:13,14.
13. Why did Tamar do this?
14. What agreement did Judah make with the "harlot" — 38:15-18?
15. What happened when Judah sent payment as agreed — 38:20-23?
16. What was Tamar accused of — 38:24?
17. What punishment did Judah decree — 38:24?
18. How did Tamar respond to the accusation — 38:25?
19. What conclusion did Judah reach — 38:26?
20. Describe the births that resulted. What were the boys named — 38:27-30?

GENESIS 39 ASSIGNMENT

Discussion Question:

Against the darkness of Judah's compromise in Genesis 38, Joseph's strong resistance to temptation in chapter 39 shines brightly. How does Joseph deliberately respond to the temptations of Potiphar's wife in this chapter?

Please answer the following questions:

1. In whose house did Joseph serve, and what position did this man have — 39:1?
2. Describe the treatment Joseph received in this man's house, both by God and by his master — 39:2-6?
3. Who tempted Joseph, and what did she want to do — 39:7?
4. Describe two reasons Joseph gave for refusing — 39:8,9.
5. What does this teach us about the proper motives for our lives?
6. How did Potiphar's wife react to Joseph's refusal? What did he do about it — 39:10?
7. What final effort did she make to tempt him, and how did he react — 39:11,12?
8. What lessons can we learn about handling temptation from Joseph?

9. Describe what Potiphar's wife said had happened — 39:16-18.
10. What did Potiphar do to Joseph, and what happened to him there — 39:19-23?
11. What does Joseph's conduct teach us?
12. Define "providence" And what lessons can we learn from providence.

GENESIS 40 ASSIGNMENT

Discussion Question:

Despite God's wonderful plans for Joseph, he goes from slavery to prison. What marks of Joseph's integrity and ongoing trust in God are evident even while he is in prison, as narrated in Genesis 40?

Please answer the following questions:

1. Describe the problem two of the king's officers faced — 40:1-3.
2. How did these officers come in contact with Joseph — 40:3,4?
3. Why were the officers sad when Joseph found them one morning — 40:5-8?
4. What did Joseph explain regarding interpretation of dreams — 40:8?

5. Describe the butler's dream — 40:9-11. Why was the butler's job important?

6. What was the interpretation of his dream — 40:12,13?

7. What request did Joseph make after interpreting the dream — 40:14,15? What role did this request ultimately play in Joseph's life?

8. Describe the baker's dream — 40:16,17.

9. What was the interpretation of this dream — 40:18,19?

10. Tell how the dreams were fulfilled — 40:20-23. Did the butler fulfill Joseph's request?

GENESIS 41 ASSIGNMENT

Discussion Question:

Despite Joseph's integrity in Potiphar's house, he is imprisoned. Despite his integrity and interpretation of dreams in prison, he is forgotten. Yet God forges Joseph's character in the dungeon. Read Genesis 41:1-36. Even after years of being forgotten in prison, Joseph does not show any traces of bitterness. What evidence do you see of Joseph's humble dependence on God to interpret Pharaoh's dream? As a result, Pharaoh himself recognizes that Joseph has the Spirit of God in him and immediately promotes him to second in his land. Read Genesis 41:37-57. How is God's favor abundantly evident in Joseph's life here?

Please answer the following questions:

1. Describe Pharaoh's first dream — 41:1-4.
2. Describe his second dream — 41:5-7.
3. Whom did he ask to interpret the dreams? What happened — 41:8?
4. What does this prove about magicians and the occult?
5. Explain how Pharaoh found an interpreter — 41:9-13.
6. How had the dreams of the butler and baker helped those men?
7. What was the real reason why God sent those dreams?
8. How did Joseph prepare for his audience with Pharaoh — 41:14?
9. What explanation did Joseph give Pharaoh about interpretation of dreams — 41:15?
10. What does Joseph's explanation teach about God's power — 41:16?

11. Did Joseph take glory to himself? What should we learn?
12. What is meant by “the dream is one”?
13. What was the purpose of the dreams?
14. Why had the dream been repeated? Explain —41:25.
15. Explain the meaning of Pharaoh’s dreams — 41:25-32.
16. What advice did Joseph give Pharaoh — 41:33-36?
17. How did Pharaoh then view Joseph — 41:37-39?
18. Describe the position Joseph was given — 41:40-44.
19. Describe the honors Joseph received — 41:42-44. What is the significance?
20. What name was Joseph given, and whom did he marry — 41:45?
21. How old was Joseph at this time — 41:46? How long had he been in Egypt?

22. What preparations did Joseph make during the years of plenty? How much food was gathered — 41:47-49?

23. What children did Joseph have and what did he name them — 41:50-52?

24. Describe the famine. How bad was it — 41:53-56?

25. Which came first for Joseph: a period of trial or a period of blessing? What lesson should we learn?