

Joseph, Fulfilling Dreams

Introduction:

Jacob had settled in the land of Canaan. He had 12 sons now: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun (by Leah), Dan, Naphtali (by Bilhah), Gad, Asher (by Zilpah), Joseph, and Benjamin (by Rachel). Jacob's sons herded their father's flocks. Joseph brought a bad report on his half-brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, to his father.

Jacob or Israel loved Joseph more than all his other sons because he was the son of his old age. He made him a fancy tunic of many colors. His brothers realized that Joseph was their father's favorite and grew to hate him. They wouldn't even speak to him.

Story:

Joseph had a dream and told it to his brothers. This was his dream: "We were out in a field gathering wheat. My bundle stood up straight and your bundles circled around mine and bowed down to it." This made his brothers so angry. They said, "So now you think we're going to bow down to you and serve you?" They hated him all the more.

Joseph had a second dream: "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to me!" He told this to his father and his brothers. His father corrected him and said, "Are you saying that I, your mother, and all your brothers are going to bow down to you?" His brothers became very jealous of Joseph, but his father pondered the dream.

Joseph's brothers went to Shechem to take care of the flocks. So Israel sent Joseph to see how they were doing and how the flocks were doing and bring him back a report.

At first Joseph had trouble finding them, but a man directed him to Dothan where they were. The brothers saw Joseph coming in the distance and began to plot how they would kill him—**"Here comes that dreamer. Let's kill him and throw him into one of these old cisterns (wells); we say that a vicious animal ate him up. We'll see what his dreams amount to."** (Genesis 37:19-20)

Reuben overheard their plotting and tried to stop them. He said they could throw him in the well, but they shouldn't hurt Joseph. He planned to go back later, get Joseph out, and return him to his father.

When Joseph got to his brothers, they ripped his tunic off him, grabbed him, and threw him down the well. It was a dry well without any water in it.

As they sat down to eat their dinner, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt to sell their spices, perfumes, and ointments. Judah spoke up and said that they shouldn't kill Joseph. They wouldn't gain anything from doing that. He suggested that they sell him to the Ishmaelites. The brothers agreed.

The brothers pulled Joseph out of the well and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. The Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt.

In the meantime, Reuben returned to rescue Joseph and found the well empty. He asked his brothers where Joseph was. They told Reuben that they'd sold Joseph into slavery. He was very upset.

The brothers came up with a plan. They took Joseph's tunic, ripped it up, and dipped it in animal blood. Then they told their father that they'd found the tunic and asked if it was Joseph's. Immediately, Israel recognized it and decided that a wild animal had torn Joseph to pieces and eaten him!

Israel tore his clothes, dressed in rough burlap, and mourned his son for a very long time. No one could comfort him in the loss of Joseph.

In Egypt, Joseph was sold to a man named Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and a captain of the guard. God was with Joseph. He became very successful in Potiphar's household. Potiphar realized that God was with Joseph and that God worked for good in everything Joseph did. So he turned all his personal affairs over to Joseph's care. God began to bless Potiphar's house, his fields, and everything he owned.

Joseph was very handsome. After some time, Potiphar's wife developed a crush on Joseph and asked him to sleep with her. He refused saying, **“Look, with me here, my master doesn't give a second thought to anything that goes on here—he's put me in charge of everything he owns. He treats me as an equal. The only thing he hasn't turned over to me is you. You're his wife, after all! How could I violate his trust and sin against God?”** (Genesis 39:8,9)

She tempted him day and night, but Joseph continued to refuse her. One day when he came into the house and all the servants were out, she grabbed his cloak, begging him to sleep with her. He ran from the house, leaving his cloak in her hands. Potiphar's wife ran outside and told the servants that Joseph had tried to seduce her, but she fought him. She said he'd run away, leaving his cloak behind. She repeated the story to her husband when he returned home.

This made Potiphar furious. He had Joseph thrown in prison. This was where all the king's prisoners were locked up. God was still with Joseph. Joseph got along well with the head jailer. The head jailer put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners. Joseph became the manager of the whole operation. The head jailer never even checked up on Joseph because God was with him.

After some time, Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker were put in prison. The captain of the guard put Joseph in charge of meeting their needs. These two men had dreams on the same night. The next morning when Joseph arrived he realized that the men seemed down. So he asked them what was wrong?

They told him that each of them had a dream and there was no one around to interpret them for them. Joseph said that dream interpretations come from God and asked them to tell him their dreams.

This was the cupbearer's dream: **“In my dream there was a vine in front of me with three branches on it: It budded, blossomed, and the clusters ripened into grapes. I was holding Pharaoh's cup, and gave the cup to Pharaoh.” (Genesis 40:9-11)**

Joseph told him what the dream meant. He said that the three branches represented three days. In three days Pharaoh would release him from prison and put him back to work. He asked the cupbearer to remember him when he was released. He said he'd been kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews and had not done anything wrong to deserve being imprisoned.

The baker approached Joseph about his dream next. **“My dream went like this: I saw three wicker baskets on my head; the top basket had assorted pastries from the bakery and birds were picking at them from the basket atop my head.” (Genesis 40:16-17)**

Joseph interpreted his dream, telling him that the three baskets represented three days. In three days Pharaoh would take off his head, hang him on a tree, and the birds would pick his bones clean.

Three days later it was Pharaoh's birthday. He threw a feast for his servants. He released the cupbearer from prison. He hung the baker on a tree as Joseph had predicted.

Two years passed; the cupbearer had forgotten all about Joseph. Pharaoh had a dream. In the dream he was standing beside the Nile River. Seven cows came out of the Nile—all healthy and grazed on the marsh grass. Then seven other cows that looked like skin and bones came up out of the Nile. They stood next to the healthy cows and then they ate them. Pharaoh woke up.

He went back to sleep and dreamed again. This time he saw seven ears of grain growing from one stalk; they were plump and healthy. Then he saw seven more ears of grain that were thin and dried up. The thin ears of grain swallowed the healthy ears of grain. Then Pharaoh awoke.

He was deeply troubled by these dreams so he sent for his magicians and wise men to interpret them. Not one of them could help him understand the dreams.

Then his cupbearer spoke up. He told Pharaoh about Joseph and how he'd correctly interpreted his dream and the baker's dream when they were in prison. Pharaoh sent for Joseph right away. Joseph cut his hair, put on clean clothes, and reported to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh told Joseph that he wanted Joseph to interpret his dream. Joseph said that he couldn't, but God could. He promised Pharaoh that God would put his mind at ease.

Pharaoh repeated the two dreams to Joseph. He told Joseph that none of his magicians or wise men could interpret them.

Then Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams: **“Pharaoh’s two dreams mean the same thing. God is telling Pharaoh what he is going to do. The seven healthy cows are seven years and the seven healthy ears of grain are seven years—they’re the same dream. The seven sick and ugly cows that followed them up are seven years and the seven scrawny ears of grain dried out by the east wind are the same—seven years of famine. God is letting Pharaoh in on what he is going to do. Seven years of plenty are on their way throughout Egypt. But on their heels will be seven years of famine, leaving no trace of Egyptian plenty. As the country is emptied by famine, there won’t be even a scrap left of the previous plenty—the famine will be total. The fact that Pharaoh dreamed the same dream twice emphasizes God’s determination to do this and do it soon.”** (Genesis 41:25-32)

Joseph suggested that Pharaoh look for a wise man with experience to put in charge of the country. Then he said he should appoint managers throughout the country to get it organized during the years of plenty. They should collect all the food and the grain to be used during the seven years of famine and stockpile it.

Pharaoh and his officials were so impressed with Joseph's ideas that they discussed him among themselves saying, **“Isn’t this the man we need? Are we going to find anyone else who has God’s spirit in him like this?”** (Genesis 41:38)

So Pharaoh made Joseph second in command over all of Egypt. He gave Joseph his signet ring, outfitted him in fine clothing, and put a gold chain around his neck. He gave Joseph a chariot to ride throughout the country; as he did, the people cheered for him. Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name that meant God Speaks and He Lives. He also gave Joseph an Egyptian wife, the daughter of a priest. Joseph was thirty when he began to work for Pharaoh.

The land of Egypt produced bumper crops (larger than usual) over the next seven years. So Joseph stockpiled the surplus. There was so much grain that it looked like the ocean's sand!

During this time, Joseph's wife gave him two sons. He named the firstborn Manasseh (meaning “Forget” because God made him forget the hardships he'd been through and his homeland). He named the second Ephraim (meaning “Double Portion” because God made him so prosperous in the land of his sadness).

The famine began after the seven years of plenty, as Joseph had predicted. All the countries surrounding Egypt had famine. Only Egypt had bread. As the famine grew worse throughout Egypt, the people came to Joseph who opened the storehouses and sold food to them. Soon the whole world began to come to Joseph for supplies.

Israel heard there was food in Egypt. He decided to send his sons to buy food for the family so they wouldn't all starve to death. All of Joseph's brothers except Benjamin went to Egypt for food.

When they arrived in Egypt, Joseph was in charge of rationing the food. His brothers all bowed down to him and honored him. They didn't recognize him, but he knew them immediately. He put on an act, treating them like strangers. He asked them where they were from. He remembered the dreams he'd had as a young man. Then he accused them of being spies. They said, "Oh no. We were twelve brothers. There are ten of us here. The youngest one is at home with our father and one is dead."

Joseph told them that they had to pass a test. He said that they couldn't leave Egypt until their younger brother came. He told them to send someone after their youngest brother while the rest stayed in jail. Then he threw them in jail for three days.

After three days, Joseph told them that one brother must stay with him in jail while the others went back to Canaan for their youngest brother. They agreed to Joseph's plan.

The brothers began to argue among themselves. They felt they were paying for what they'd done to Joseph. They said Joseph had been terrified and begged for mercy, but they ignored him and now they were in trouble. Reuben reminded them that he'd asked them not to hurt Joseph. He said that now they were paying for Joseph's murder. Joseph overheard the entire conversation; his brothers didn't realize he could understand their speech because he'd been speaking through an interpreter. Joseph turned his head and cried when he heard their words.

He took Simeon and tied him up, making him his prisoner. Then he filled their sacks with grain and had their money put back in the sacks. He gave them food for their trip, and they set out for Canaan.

That night when the brothers were about to camp they realized that their money was still in their sacks. This made them really afraid.

When they returned to their father, they told him all that had happened and how man in charge in Egypt had accused them of being spies. They told their father that they needed to take Benjamin back to Egypt with them. Israel was very upset. He'd already lost Joseph. Now Simeon was in jail in Egypt. What if something happened to Benjamin?

Reuben offered his own two sons as hostages for Benjamin. He told his father that he could kill the boys if Reuben didn't return with Benjamin. Still Israel refused to let Benjamin go.

The famine grew worse, and the food ran out. Israel asked his sons to return to Egypt for more food. They explained that they couldn't go back without Benjamin. Judah offered to be responsible for Benjamin. Finally Israel agreed. He sent them back to Egypt with gifts for the man in charge. They also took double the money with them.

When they returned to Egypt, Joseph saw Benjamin was with them and had his servants prepare a meal for his brothers. The brothers were terrified that they were going to Joseph's house because he thought they'd stolen their own money. They let his head servant know that they never meant to leave Egypt with the money and had returned with double the amount. He replied that everything was okay. He said that God must've been with them. Then he returned Simeon to his brothers.

He made them comfortable and fed their donkeys. When Joseph returned home, they gave him the gifts they'd brought from Canaan and bowed before him. He asked them if Benjamin was their youngest brother. Joseph was so overcome with emotion on seeing his little brother that he went away to another room to cry.

When they sat down to eat, Joseph was served at one table, the Egyptians at another, and his brothers at another. The brothers were facing Joseph and arranged by age from oldest to youngest. Joseph had his servants pile Benjamin's plate high with more food than all the others.

Then Joseph ordered his chief servant to fill the brothers' bags with food and replace their money. He asked him to put his silver cup in the top of the youngest brother's bag. The servant carried out Joseph's orders.

The brothers left the next morning. When they were barely outside the city, the chief servant caught up with them and asked them why they had repaid his master's good with evil by stealing his silver cup. They denied what he was accusing them of. They said that if any one of their brothers had the silver cup he would die and the rest would become Joseph's slaves.

The chief servant inspected all their bags. He found the silver cup in Benjamin's. The brothers were terrified and returned to the city. They threw themselves down on the ground in front of Joseph. He asked them why they'd stolen from him.

Judah responded: **“What can we say, master? What is there to say? How can we prove our innocence? God is behind this, exposing how bad we are. We stand guilty before you and ready to be your slaves—we're all in this together, the rest of us guilty as the one with the cup.”** (Genesis 44:16)

Joseph said that he was only going to make the youngest one his slave and the rest could return to their father. Judah interrupted: **“Please, master; can I say just one thing to you? Don't get angry. Don't think I'm presumptuous—you're the same as Pharaoh as far as I'm concerned. You, master, asked us, ‘Do you have a father and a brother?’ And we answered honestly, ‘We have a father who is old and a younger brother born to him in his old age. His brother is dead and he is the only one left from that mother. And his father loves him more than anything.’ Then you told us, ‘Bring him down here so I can see him.’ We told you master, that it was impossible: ‘The boy can't leave his father; if he leaves, his father will die.’ And then you said,**

**‘If your youngest brother doesn’t come with you, you won’t be allowed to see me.’”
(Genesis 44:18-23)**

Judah then told Joseph how they’d repeated the whole story to their father and that their father said he’d already lost one son and if he lost the other, he’d die for sure. He said that if he went back without Benjamin his father would die on the spot and that the brothers would be responsible for his murder.

Joseph couldn’t hold back anymore; he sent his servants away and began to sob. Then he told his brothers who he really was and asked if their father was still alive.

Then he said, **"Come closer to me." They came closer. "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt. But don't feel badly, don't blame yourselves for selling me. God was behind it. God sent me here ahead of you to save lives. There has been a famine in the land now for two years; the famine will continue for five more years—neither plowing nor harvesting. God sent me on ahead to pave the way and make sure there was a remnant in the land, to save your lives in an amazing act of deliverance. So you see, it wasn't you who sent me here but God. He set me in place as a father to Pharaoh, put me in charge of his personal affairs, and made me ruler of all Egypt. Hurry back to my father. Tell him, 'Your son Joseph says: I'm master of all of Egypt. Come as fast as you can and join me here. I'll give you a place to live in Goshen where you'll be close to me—you, your children, your grandchildren, your flocks, your herds, and anything else you can think of. I'll take care of you there completely. There are still five more years of famine ahead; I'll make sure all your needs are taken care of, you and everyone connected with you—you won't want for a thing.' "** (Genesis 45:3-8)

He told his brothers to hurry back to Egypt and report all he’d told them to Israel, their father. Then he threw himself on Benjamin and cried. He hugged all his other brothers and cried. Pharaoh heard the news that Joseph’s brothers had come. He was pleased and came up with a plan. He told Joseph: **"Tell your brothers, 'This is the plan: Load up your pack animals; go to Canaan, get your father and your families and bring them back here. I'll settle you on the best land in Egypt—you'll live off the fat of the land.' Also tell them this: 'Here's what I want you to do: Take wagons from Egypt to carry your little ones and your wives and load up your father and come back. Don't worry about having to leave things behind; the best in all of Egypt will be yours.'"** (Genesis 45:17-20)

Joseph sent his brothers home loaded down with gifts for their father and themselves. When Israel heard all the good news and saw the gifts, he felt alive again! He couldn’t wait to see Joseph for himself!

Israel set out on the journey to Egypt with everything he had and all his family, even grandchildren. He stopped in Beersheba to worship God. God appeared to him and said, **"I am the God of your father. Don't be afraid of going down to Egypt. I'm going to make you a great nation there. I'll go with you down to Egypt; I'll also bring you**

back here. And when you die, Joseph will be with you; with his own hand he'll close your eyes."(Genesis 46:3, 4)

Joseph went in his chariot to meet his father and all the family. When they arrived, Israel hugged his neck and said now he was ready to die in peace. Joseph told his family to let the Egyptians know they were used to being shepherds. Because the Egyptians looked down on shepherds they would leave the Israelites alone in Goshen.

Later, Joseph and five of his brothers appeared before Pharaoh. They told him they were used to caring for livestock. Pharaoh agreed to have them settle in the rich land of Goshen and asked that they take care of his livestock also.

So the children of Israel settled in the land of Goshen and Israel lived 17 years there. When he was dying, he made Joseph swear that he'd bring his body back to Canaan for burial. He blessed Joseph's sons before his death saying:

**The God before whom walked my fathers Abraham and Isaac,
The God who has been my shepherd
all my life long to this very day,
The Angel who delivered me from every evil,
Bless the boys.
May my name be echoed in their lives,
and the names of Abraham and Isaac, my fathers,
And may they grow
covering the Earth with their children. (Genesis 48:16)**

Then Israel told his twelve sons to come to him. He prophesied over each one, telling them what was to come. Then he died.

Joseph had the Egyptians embalm his father and requested that he be allowed to go bury him as he'd promised. Pharaoh granted his request.

After the funeral, Joseph's brothers got nervous that he might still hold a grudge against them and take revenge now that their father was gone. So they went to Joseph, telling him that one of their father's final requests was that Joseph forgive his brothers. When they saw him, they threw themselves at his feet and asked for forgiveness, offering to be his slaves.

This was Joseph's reply: **"Don't be afraid. Do I act for God? Don't you see, you planned evil against me but God used those same plans for my good, as you see all around you right now—life for many people. Easy now, you have nothing to fear; I'll take care of you and your children."** (Genesis 50:19-21)

Joseph kept his word to his brothers and lived to be 110 years old. When he was dying, he told his brothers that God was going to send them back to Canaan one day. He asked them to swear they'd take his bones with them when they left.

Summary:

Joseph was a young man with dreams from God. He probably should have used more wisdom in sharing them with his brothers and dad. The important point is that Joseph had to hang on to these God-dreams for a very long time. It must have looked like God had forgotten him more than once. First, he was thrown down a well and sold into slavery. Then he was falsely accused and thrown into prison. The cupbearer forgot about him for years after Joseph correctly interpreted his dream. Can you imagine how depressed Joseph must have felt? Yet, we learn from this story that Joseph was determined to do the best job he could wherever he was. His great attitude caused him to have favor with those over him—first Potiphar, then the jailer, and ultimately Pharaoh. These men all recognized that God was with Joseph. Joseph looked to God to interpret the dreams and give him wisdom. Because of Joseph’s reliance on God, God was able to fulfill the dreams He gave Joseph and make him second in command over all of Egypt.

Did you notice that Joseph tested his brothers when they showed up? He was trying to find out if they had changed and if they were truly sorry for what they’d done. I think his brothers, especially Reuben and Judah passed the test, don’t you? Even though Joseph forgave his brothers and provided for them and their families, they were still afraid of what would happen when their dad died. Wasn’t it wonderful how Joseph pointed out that what they had planned was evil, but God used it for the good of many? In the New Testament, Paul shares this same idea in Romans 8:28—“We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him and are chosen to be a part of His plan.” (NLV)

Discussion Questions:

1. Who was Israel’s favorite son? How did he show this? Was this a good idea?
2. Describe Joseph’s two dreams. What did they mean? How did sharing them affect his brothers? His dad?
3. What did the brothers plan to do to Joseph? What was Reuben’s plan?
4. Where did Joseph end up after being sold as a slave?
5. What did Potiphar think of Joseph at first?

6. What did Potiphar's wife do?
7. What did the jailer think of Joseph?
8. What did the cupbearer dream? What did it mean?
9. What did the baker dream? What did his dream mean?
10. What did Pharaoh dream? What did God show Joseph his dream meant?
11. After talking to Pharaoh, what happened to Joseph?
12. When Joseph's brothers first came to Egypt what happened?
13. How did Joseph test them? Which brother stood up for what was right?
14. Did Joseph's brothers feel guilty for what they'd done?
15. When the brothers returned with Benjamin how did Joseph further test them?
16. Which brother offered himself in Benjamin's place this time?
17. On the way back to Egypt, what did God promise Israel?
18. What was Joseph's plan to keep the children of Israel separate from the Egyptians? Why do you think he wanted to do this?
19. What did Pharaoh tell Joseph to do for his family?
20. When Israel was dying, how did he bless Joseph's sons? (Hint: See Genesis 48:16 above.)
21. What did Israel make Joseph promise him? Did Joseph keep his promise?
22. After their father died, the brothers were afraid of Joseph. What did he tell them?
23. How did God fulfill Joseph's dreams?
24. Let's learn the verse from Romans 8:28 in the summary this week: —**“We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him and are chosen to be a part of His plan.”** (NLV)

