

The Book of Genesis

The Story

Joseph

Wednesday 21 July 2021

6:30 PM-8:00 PM

Opening Prayer

Reading Assignment – Genesis Chapters 39- 50

Background

The story of Genesis concludes with the Joseph saga. Unlike the majority of heroes in epic sagas, Joseph does not triumph because of great strength, skill at war, or magical powers. He triumphs because God has given him wisdom and an ability to interpret dreams. In fact, the Joseph saga is very much like Hebrew wisdom literature.

Joseph also seems less flawed and more virtuous than the men of the previous chapters of Genesis. He does deceive his brothers by not initially revealing his true identity. But overall, he is presented as an honest and virtuous person. Still, none of the people of Genesis are great moral examples that we should strive to imitate. They are all flawed humans.

Like the story of creation and the story of the flood, there are two versions of the story of how Joseph came to be in Egypt (Genesis 37:14-36) which have been woven together.

The saga of Joseph is essential to the story of the rise of the Hebrew nation. It is needed to link the two independent narratives of how the nation came to be and to occupy Canaan. In the Genesis version, God promised the land, through Abraham, to his offspring and they settled there, somewhat peacefully. No mention of fighting for it. In the Exodus version, God frees the Hebrews from the Egyptians and they must fight and kill the inhabitants of Canaan to take the land. The Joseph saga joins the two narratives.

Questions to Consider

1. From youth, Joseph was blessed by God. Does he praise God and give the credit to God? How about you? Do you give God credit for good things?
2. Sin is an important theme throughout Genesis, but seems to be nearly absent in the Joseph saga. Can you describe any clear instances of sin?
3. What do you think of the interpretation of dreams? Valid? Why or why not?
4. Just as Jacob deceived Esau, Joseph deceives his brothers. Compare.
5. After the deception, Joseph forgives his brothers for putting him in the cistern and allowing him to be sold as a slave. Why should he? Would you?
6. Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother is describes as a boy. Joseph is at least thirty-five, perhaps older. How can Benjamin be a boy? What is that about?
7. Why might there be two Hebrew foundation stories, one peaceful and the other very violent? Does God command genocide of sinful people?
8. What lessons have you learned from the study of Genesis?

Closing Prayer

