

From Prison Cell to Palace



SABBATH—DECEMBER 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 37:2–41:40.

MEMORY VERSE: “No one in the house is in a higher position than I [Joseph] am. My [Joseph’s] master hasn’t [has not] held anything back from me [Joseph], except you. You are his wife. So how could I do an evil thing like that? How could I sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9, NlrV).

THE STORY OF JACOB CONTINUES. IT SHOWS THE TERRIBLE RESULTS OF HUMAN SIN AND THE GOODNESS AND MERCY¹ OF GOD.

Genesis 34 tells of the rape of Jacob’s daughter by a local ruler and the mass murder of all the city’s males by two of Jacob’s sons. Jacob fears revenge² so he flees to Bethel (Genesis 35). There God again appears to him and repeats the covenant³ promises: “I am the Mighty God. Have children and increase your numbers. A nation and a community of nations will come from you. Kings will come from your body. I am giving you the land I gave to Abraham and Isaac. I will also give it to your children after you” (Genesis 35:11, 12, NlrV).

The rest of Genesis 35 tells of Benjamin’s birth and Rachel’s death. Genesis 35 also explains about Reuben, who “lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine” (Genesis 35:22). Genesis 35 ends when Jacob reunites with Isaac. Isaac is 180 years old. He dies, and his two sons bury him.

Genesis 36 covers Esau’s family history. Part of the family quickly fades from Bible history. Genesis 37 is about Jacob and his “chosen” children.

What is the lesson in all this history?

There is so much sin. But God can still fulfill His will. Just imagine what would happen if all those who claim to be His true people actually obeyed Him.

¹mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

²revenge—doing or saying something bad to someone who has hurt you.

³covenant—a promise or agreement between God and His people.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 17**THE DREAMER (Genesis 37)**

Read Genesis 37. Then answer the following questions:

1. Why did Joseph's brothers hate him to much? _____

2. How did Joseph make the situation worse? _____

3. How odd is the fact that Reuben was the only one who tried to do what was right? _____

4. Why do you think Joseph's brothers decided not to kill him? _____



Jacob's sons lied to him about Joseph.

Look back over Jacob's life. How might he have caused this sad thing to happen to him?

When we know the history of this family, this story should come as no surprise. Jealousy, fighting, and dishonesty marked this family from the earliest days. These boys were raised by a father who worshiped the true God. They even received special instruction from God. But they showed that they did not know God. They did not experience the conversion of heart that is necessary for all who truly want to serve Him.

Look at how far uncontrolled sin took these people. What message should this story have for each of us as to where sin can lead us?

MONDAY—DECEMBER 18**SIN WITH THE CANAANITES⁴
(Genesis 38)**

What is the important message of the story in Genesis 38? What does it tell us about Judah's character?

For some reason, the story of Genesis 38 breaks up Joseph's story. Perhaps God wanted to show the sharp difference between the unrighteous (unholy) character of Joseph's betrayer, Judah, and the righteous (holy) character of the betrayed, Joseph.

Genesis 38 also helps us under-

⁴the Canaanites—people who lived around Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the land of Canaan.

stand “that the sons of Jacob forgot the holy responsibility of their people. So they were in danger of dying in the sins of Canaan. If God had not acted in moving Jacob’s family to Egypt, the whole family probably would have fallen under the evil influence of Canaanite customs. So Genesis 38 is an important part of Israel’s early history.”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 434.

Judah’s actions were sinful. But how does he show some moral⁵ courage? Genesis 38:26; also read Genesis 37:26.

Judah’s terrible sin with Tamar was discovered. So he could do little but admit his guilt. Again, as in the plan against Joseph, Judah showed a spirit of fair play and sincerity behind his sometimes terrible character. Judah’s honest confession,⁶ his following fair treatment of Tamar, and his special place in the line of Christ (Genesis 49:10) show a complete change on his part. Judah’s changed character qualified him for the leadership of the family and qualified his children for leadership in Israel (Genesis 49:3, 4, 8-10).

Why must we be so careful in not passing judgment upon people (Matthew 7:1)? How can we tell the difference between judging actions and judging people? Why is that difference so important?

⁵moral—knowing the difference between right and wrong; leading a righteous (holy) life.

⁶confession—admitting you have sinned.

⁷Amorites—a group of people living in Canaan.

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 19

JOSEPH IN EGYPT (Genesis 39)

The camel train holding Joseph as a slave passed the hills where Jacob’s tents stood. For a time, Joseph “gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 213. But Joseph remembered Jacob’s stories about God’s love and faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So Joseph decided to trust God and act as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. By arranging to have Joseph taken into Egypt, God prepared the way for Jacob’s family to be free from evil foreign influences and control until the sin of the Amorites⁷ in Canaan had reached its full measure (Genesis 15:13-16). Joseph’s going to Egypt begins an unbelievable story of what God can do through someone who wants to remain faithful to Him against all odds.



God was with Joseph.

There was little to know about Joseph before. But what was there from Joseph's past that would show he would be faithful to God? What lessons can we learn from this?

We think about the problems with lust shown by other family members (Genesis 35:22; Genesis 38:16, 18), especially the common practice of polygamy⁸ (which no doubt fed the lower passions). Then Joseph's moral courage against temptations from his master's wife is a powerful testimony to his faith and character.



Joseph showed moral courage.

Here is Joseph who was sold into slavery, and unfairly thrown into prison. But three times Genesis 39 says that “the Lord was with” him. How do we understand what that means? How could God be “with” him when so many bad

things were happening to him?

Problems and troubles do not show that God has left anyone. Joseph was unable to understand God's leading. He could not see then what we can see so clearly now. From Joseph's way of thinking, none of what was happening made sense. But he decided to remain faithful anyway.

What lessons about trusting God, no matter how bad things turned out, can you learn from this story?

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 20

THE CUPBEARER AND THE BAKER (Genesis 40)

Both the baker and the cupbearer were important officials at Pharaoh's court. (Compare⁹ Nehemiah 1:11.) They had been thrown into jail. (They may have been accused of planning to overthrow Pharaoh.) And they had been put under Joseph's care.

What further knowledge does Genesis 40:6-8 give us about Joseph's character?

Even in jail, Joseph tried to help others and witness¹⁰ for God (Genesis 40:8). He gave God glory for the interpretation of the dreams.

Joseph has had “success” in prison and has shown his faithful-

⁸polygamy—when a man has more than one wife.

⁹compare—show how things are the same.

¹⁰witness—showing other people what God is like by living a holy life.

ness to God. But what does Joseph say that shows just how unfairly he knows he has been treated and how badly he wanted to get out of jail?

Joseph was faithful. But he still tried to get human help in getting his own freedom. Again, he did not know the future. He did not know God's plans. But he did what he could to try to get out of his situation. This is very human and understandable. But as Genesis 40 shows, it did not work. Once freed, the chief butler forgot all about Joseph. But later, the chief butler did say, "Hey, Pharaoh, there is a Hebrew in prison who is good at interpreting dreams. You should let him out!" And as we will see in Genesis 41, the chief butler did talk about Joseph when the time was right. Until then, Joseph had to struggle with doubt and discouragement as he sat in jail for two more years.

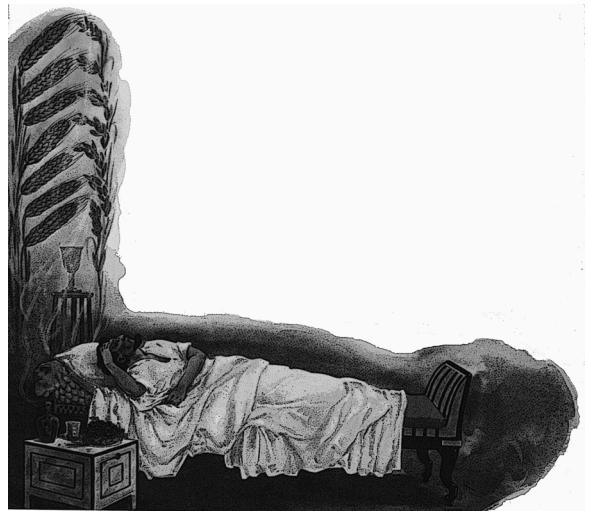
No doubt Joseph's disappointment must have been bitter about his situation. How easily he could have given up all faith and hope. What do we do when we find ourselves bitterly disappointed by life? How can we keep faith and hope alive during such disappointments?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 21

JOSEPH'S FREEDOM (Genesis 41:1-40)

Genesis 41 introduces us to a common Egyptian setting. We read of

cows cooling off as they stand half buried in the river. Reed grasses are spoken of (Genesis 41:2, NIV). And Joseph shaves as he leaves prison. (In Egyptian drawings, Jews are wearing beards.) Egyptians recognized the Nile River as the source of life. For this reason, the description of lean cows coming up from the river must have scared the Egyptians.



Pharaoh had dreams he could not understand.

How does the chief butler finally come to Joseph's rescue? Genesis 41:9-13.

Even after all these disappointments, Joseph still showed his faith in the God of his fathers. In Genesis 41:16, Joseph says very clearly that it is only through his God that he can interpret the dream. It would have been very easy for Joseph to credit all this to himself in order to make himself look better in front of Pharaoh. But he did not. We again

see Joseph's faith in action.

After Joseph interprets the dream, what does he say that witnesses to his God? Genesis 41:28, 32.

For Joseph, all that he foresaw were the results of God's action. Joseph saw the hand of God in all that would take place. Again, Joseph's words show that he trusted in God's power. This certainly helps explain why Joseph was able to keep his faith even while in jail.

After Joseph interpreted the dream, he started giving the king advice about what to do. This included choosing someone responsible for putting grain into storage. What in the dream could have been interpreted in that way? Nothing. Perhaps Joseph sensed an opening that could get him out of jail. So he was hoping to get the job himself. Why not? It would be the human thing to do. Even for a human who loved God and was faithful to Him.

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 22

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "From prison, Joseph was promoted to be ruler over all of Egypt. It was a position of high honor. But it was filled with difficulty and danger. One cannot have a high position without danger. A storm might leave unharmed the lowly flower of the valley, but the same storm uproots the tall, beautiful tree

upon the mountaintop. In the same way, those who have remained honest and humble may be dragged down into the hole by the temptations of worldly success and honor. But Joseph's character met the test of temptation and success equally. Joseph showed the same faithfulness, whether he stood in the palace of the Pharaohs or in a prisoner's cell. Joseph was still a stranger in a country of idol worshipers. He was separated from his own people who were the worshipers of God. But he fully believed that God had directed his steps. By always depending upon God, Joseph faithfully did the duties of his position."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 222.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ In the lesson for this week, dreams and their interpretations played a big part in how God worked. This is because, in this part of the ancient (old-time) world, dreams were considered messages from different gods. Does God today work through dreams and interpretations as He did back then? Or might He do so more in one culture than in another, where dreams are not taken as seriously? If Joseph's story were placed in a modern location or in your own culture, how might God have shown Himself and His plans?

❷ Let class members talk about some of their own personal "Joseph" stories. These stories may include

painful experiences but show God's wonderful leading.

Some people go through bitter experi-

ences and come out stronger in faith. Others have their faith destroyed. As a class, discuss what makes the difference between these two results.