



Genesis

Beginnings

Week 8
Chapters 39 - 50

An Accusation, A Dream, and a Reconciliation

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Joseph, God, and Success (Chapter 39)

- ❖ Joseph is sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard, and is very successful. Why? Because God is with Joseph in all that he does and even Potiphar can see it.
 - Though God never speaks to Joseph as God spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God is, nonetheless, very much with Joseph. This is a very different, but no less genuine and significant, way of living with God. In all, there are about fifty references to God in the Joseph narrative.
 - Though God is with Joseph, that doesn't mean he is insulated from all trouble and struggle. God does not always get his way!
- ❖ Joseph is thrown into prison when Potiphar's wife lies and accuses Joseph of attempted rape.
 - Even there, God's love for Joseph is steadfast (verse 21).



Joseph, Interpreter of Dreams (Chapter 40)

- ❖ In prison, Joseph meets two of Pharaoh's important servants who have been tossed into prison themselves. When they have dreams they don't understand, Joseph reminds them that God can interpret dreams and offers to interpret the dreams for them.
 - Joseph basically claims to have the gift of divine interpretation.
- ❖ Note that Joseph asks the cupbearer to remember him before Pharaoh if he gets the chance. But the cupbearer does not, despite everything turning out just as Joseph told him it would.
 - God is with Joseph, but he still needs *human* help.

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Joseph's Elevation to Power (Chapter 41)

- ❖ Now, Pharaoh has a dream that troubles him. Finally, the cupbearer remembers Joseph, who is able to interpret the dream. God is telling Pharaoh that there will be seven years of feast followed by seven years of famine.
- ❖ Joseph not only interprets the dream, he proposes a means of ensuring Egypt's survival during the famine. Pharaoh is so impressed that he places Joseph in charge of the whole thing!
 - Pharaoh sees in Joseph the spirit of god (or "the gods"). Though Pharaoh does not know of God, he still sees God's light in Joseph – the light to the world.
 - Joseph is given "administrative" control over all of Egypt. In essence, he is Prime Minister of Egypt at the age of 30.
 - None of this leads to Joseph boasting – "It is not I, but God."
- ❖ Joseph takes an Egyptian bride and has two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.
 - Manasseh's name highlights that "forgetfulness" can be a gift. We'll see the value of forgetting when Joseph meets his brothers.
- ❖ The seven years of plenty and seven years of famine come to pass.

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Joseph Meets His Brothers (Chapter 42)

- ❖ The scene moves us back to Canaan, where Jacob and his family are endangered by the famine. Jacob sends ten sons to Egypt to buy grain. He won't send Benjamin, fearing for his safety.
- ❖ When the brothers come before the "prime minister" to buy grain, Joseph recognizes his brothers but they do not recognize him. He accuses them of being spies and says he will give them grain, but they must bring the missing brother to show that they have told the truth. Joseph hangs on to Simeon to ensure their return – but will they? Or will they abandon Simeon?
 - Joseph sets about to heal the breach, but he must set things up so that he can observe his brothers and see what comes of it all. By his accusations, Joseph is able to learn about the family circumstances. The brothers claim to be "honest" but are they?
- ❖ As Joseph listens in on his brothers' conversations, including Reuben's "I told you so," he is moved to tears. None of this is easy on Joseph. The weeping helps us to see that there is more to the "test" than we might think.

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The Second Journey to Egypt (Chapter 43)

- ❖ The brothers return to Egypt with double the money Joseph sent back with them – and they return with Benjamin. Joseph receives them all.
- ❖ The brothers have passed the honesty test, though we can wonder if Joseph realizes it is really Jacob's doing.
- ❖ Joseph's attitude toward his brothers has shifted to positive, though he is not yet ready to reveal his true identity.
 - The brothers are astonished that Joseph knows everyone's age!
 - Again, see how difficult it is for Joseph to control his emotions through all this.

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Joseph's Final Test (Chapter 44)

- ❖ One last test. And the brothers pass. When it seems that Benjamin must remain in Egypt for “stealing” the cup, Judah steps forward and offers to stay in his place, knowing what the loss of Benjamin would do to Jacob.
 - Judah’s speech is the longest in Genesis and is a literary masterpiece. Judah speaks straightforwardly and sincerely, conveying what is at stake – all of which goes back to the “death” of Joseph. Judah has repented!
- ❖ All this is wrapped up with the brothers’ earlier betrayal of Joseph, selling home for pieces of silver. Of what are the brothers really guilty?

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Joseph Makes Himself Known (Chapter 45)

- ❖ Finally. Haven’t we been waiting for this long enough.
 - But Joseph’s “tests” have enabled the brothers to demonstrate their repentance and transformation.
- ❖ Joseph reveals himself and comforts his brothers. (They can’t even hear at first, they are so stunned . . . and scared). But, Joseph says, it has all worked for good. If Joseph had not been sold into slavery than the family would have starved.
- ❖ Joseph tells his brothers to return to Canaan and move the whole family to Goshen, in northern Egypt.
- ❖ Pharaoh’s gratitude to Joseph will extend to great kindnesses to Joseph’s family.
- ❖ There are big theological questions here. How does God’s work move forward? What is the relationship between God’s work and our own?
 - Where there is life and not death, love and not hate, reconciliation and not estrangement – in all those places we find God at work. God works in and through our human affairs to create righteousness out of fallenness.

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The Descent into Egypt (46:1 – 47:26)

- ❖ As Jacob prepares to leave Canaan, he worships God. God reassures Jacob that he will be with him, even in Egypt. God is faithful!
- ❖ Joseph is reunited with his father in another emotion-laded scene. Pharaoh will allow the family to settle in Goshen, apart from others. Egyptians looked down on shepherds anyway.
- ❖ We also get a passage about Joseph's competence as the economic administrator of the kingdom. “Slaves” is probably closer to tenant farmers in a time of “nationalization” for the common good. The people have suggested this and affirm it.



The Emergence of Unified Israel (47:27 – 50:26)

- ❖ Before his death, Jacob “adopts” Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob insists that Joseph’s second son get the better blessing – with the right hand.
- ❖ Jacob’s words to his sons can be understood as Jacob’s judgment of his sons’ futures based on his experience with them.
- ❖ When Jacob dies, he is taken to the cave where Abraham et al are buried. Notice the great honor paid to Jacob, even by the Egyptians.
- ❖ After the funeral, the brothers fear that Joseph may now turn on them. They seem to invent final instructions from Jacob.
 - But they have nothing to fear from Joseph. What they had intended for evil, God has intended for good.
- ❖ Before his own death, many decades later, Joseph tells the people that God will take them out of Egypt and he makes them swear that they will take Joseph with them. According to Joshua 24:32, Joseph’s body was buried in Shechem in Canaan.

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Stories and the Big Story

- ❖ We’ve seen that through these stories, God reveals much to us about himself and about ourselves. There is theology (God-stuff) in all these stories because God is with us in all things. And we’ve seen time and again that God is with all people, including “outsiders.”
- ❖ These stories point us toward the larger story, the biggest story: the story of salvation. God, working through Joseph and what was done to him, saved Jacob’s family from the famine. God will again save his people in the Exodus, redeeming them from slavery in Egypt.

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