



Walking Through the Scripture Together

March 30 – April 5, 2008

Acts 7:9-19

Joseph

Vision for an Amazing Deliverance

Text The Jesus Storybook Bible

The Forgiving Prince from **Genesis 37-46**

Jacob had twelve sons but of all his sons, Joseph was his favorite.

One day, Jacob gave Joseph a splendid new robe. It was beautiful and rich with all the colors of the rainbow, but it made Joseph's brother's jealous — they wanted rich rainbow robes too.

Then to make matters worse, Joseph kept on having these special dreams: "I dreamed I was the greatest! I was king!" Joseph told his brothers. "And you all bowed down to me!"

Now I'm sure you know, even if Joseph didn't, that telling your brothers things like that isn't a very good idea. Joseph's brothers hated him even more. They wanted to kill Joseph. They wanted to kill Joseph and his dreams.

And one day that's exactly what they tried to do.

They tore Joseph's rainbow robe off him and sold him to slave traders — for 20 pieces of silver.

The traders took Joseph to Egypt and made him into a slave. The brothers went home and lied to their father, telling him that Joseph was dead.

That's the end of the dreamer! they thought. But they were wrong. God had a magnificent dream for Joseph's life and even when it looked like everything had gone wrong, God would use it all to help make the dream come true. God would use everything that was happening to Joseph to do something good.

Meanwhile, though, things were not looking good for Joseph in Egypt. He was far from home and from his dad. Then he got blamed for something he didn't do, and, even though he had done nothing wrong, he was punished and thrown in jail. But God was with Joseph.

One night, Pharaoh (king of Egypt) had a scary dream about thin cows gobbling up fat cows. What did it mean? He didn't know. But Joseph was a dream expert, so Pharaoh sent for him. "It means a famine is coming," Joseph explained. "There won't be enough food."

Pharaoh was so pleased by Joseph's skill that he immediately took Joseph out of jail and made him a prince.

Now back home, Joseph's brothers had run out of food and everyone was hungry. God's special family was in danger —

if they didn't get food soon they would starve to death. So Joseph's brothers traveled to Egypt to buy food.

They came and knelt before the new prince. His brothers didn't know that the prince was Joseph. But Joseph knew who they were. Joseph's dream, the one about his brothers bowing down to him, was coming true.

"It's me!" Joseph cried. When they saw it was Joseph, his brothers were afraid. They had wronged Joseph. They had sinned and they knew it. Now Joseph would certainly punish them.

But Joseph looked at his brothers and his eyes filled with tears. Even though his brothers had hurt him and hated him and wanted him dead — in spite of everything — he couldn't stop loving them.

His heart, which they had broken, filled up with love, and Joseph forgave them. Joseph threw his arms around them. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Behind what you were doing, underneath everything that was happening, God was making everything right again."

Joseph didn't punish them, he rescued them — he brought God's special family to live safely with him in Egypt.

One day, God would send another Prince, a young prince whose heart would break. Like Joseph, he would leave his home and his Father. His brothers would hate him and want him dead. He would be sold for pieces of silver. He would be punished even though he had done nothing wrong.

But God would use everything that happened to this young Prince — even the bad things — to do something good: to forgive the sins of the whole world.

Thoughts

"Every story whispers his name" — that's the subtitle of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. In Joseph's story His name is whispered through a bullhorn. The Joseph story is the crowning story of the book of Genesis and the outlines of the path of Jesus are seldom more colorfully on display. Also on display is a clear summons to us — a divine summons to transcend present grief and pain and bitterness from past wrongs done to us. Beautiful feet bearing good news are linked to hearts bearing no simmering grudges. The eyes are then free to see the bigger picture of what God is doing in this world, our ears to hear the tune of the dance he invites us to join.

Joseph had every reason to end up paralyzed, victimized by life. Who could blame him? Betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, lied about, forgotten in prison on a trumped up charge. It has all the makings of a classic tale of sweet throat-slitting revenge. And though perhaps Joseph may have enjoyed the testing of his brothers a bit too much, ultimately it was a tune of divine forgiveness and sovereign purpose to which he moved — a salvation tune that still plays, inviting us to join in the dance.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Lean In

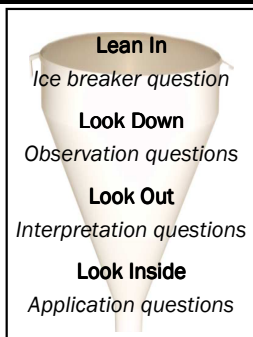
- Growing up, how well did you get along with your siblings? Who was the baby of the family? How was that person treated? How has your relationship with your siblings changed?

Look Down / Look Out

- What kind of a young man is Joseph? What do you find most striking about him?
- What was the root of his brothers' jealousy? Do you think he had any idea how they felt?
- Which of Joseph's qualities do you most see in yourself? Which would you like to see more of in yourself?
- Why does Joseph test his brothers as he does? Do you see a desire for revenge? Caution? or what? How would you have felt if you had been Joseph? What would you have done? How would you have felt as one of the brothers?
- From his vantage point, how does Joseph explain the unfolding events of his life?

Look Inside

- Where are you experiencing famine in your life right now – physically? Emotionally? Financially? Socially? Spiritually? Which traits of Joseph can help you to weather these famine-like conditions?
- What primary lesson have you learned from watching Joseph this week? How will you apply this lesson in a practical way?



Family Discussion Guide

Day One Acts 7:9-10 Genesis 37, 39

How well do you get along with your brothers and sisters? What do you like most about your family? What kind of brother do you think Joseph was? What do you learn from his example?

Day Two Acts 7:10 Genesis 40-41

Have you ever had a time when you felt like God was speaking to you in a dream? What are some different ways we can hear God's voice? Why do you think God spoke through dreams so much to Joseph and to those around him?

Day Three Acts 7:11-12 Genesis 42-43

Do you tend to do your chores in advance or do you tend to wait until the last minute to get them done? Why? What does this story teach us about looking ahead and not waiting until the last minute to get everything done?

Day Four Acts 7:13-14 Genesis 44-45

Why do you think Joseph tested his brothers like he did? Was he trying to get even with them or do you think he was just being careful? When has it been hard for you to forgive someone? What can help us to forgive the way Joseph did?

Day Five Acts 7:15-19 Genesis 46 Hebrews 11:22

What do you think God wants to do with your life? How can you start getting ready today? What big lesson have you learned from Joseph this week?

Bible Life & Times

Dreams in the Ancient World

The belief in dream oracles is well attested in the ancient world, including in the Bible. Job's friend Eliphaz stated that he had received in a dream a divine message relating to Job's misery (Job 4:12-21). Elihu also expressed his knowledge that dreams are one means by which God communicates with people (Job 33:14-18). The Lord visited the patriarch Jacob in a nocturnal vision (Genesis 28:11-19). His son Joseph also received prophetic dreams (Genesis 37), as did Solomon (1 Kings 3:3-15), prophets in general (Numbers 12:7), Daniel (Daniel 7) and Joseph the carpenter (Matthew 1 and 2).

Dream oracles were not exclusive to Israel, however. Joseph interpreted the dreams of the pharaoh and his servants. Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2 and 4) and the Magi were warned in a dream not to return to King Herod (Matthew 2).

Of course, not all dream oracles can be considered legitimate. If the omen portended in the dream encouraged the worship of anyone besides the one true God or if the apparent implication of the dream did not come to pass, that message did not issue from the Lord (see Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

Dreams were one of the many ways people of the ancient world believed that humans received divine messages. It is important to observe, however, that the Bible contains no guidebook for interpreting dreams. There is no magical code we can follow. If God communicates by a dream, only God can give the interpretation (Genesis 40:8)

Archaeological Study Bible



The dream of Gilgamesh, Babylonia, 19-18th cent BC

details, details...

A richly ornamented robe

A mark of Jacob's favoritism, "the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore" (2 Samuel 13:18). That puts a whole new spin on it!

Ishmaelites

Also called *Midianites*. These various tribal groups were interrelated, since Midian and Medan, like Ishmaelites, were also sons of Abraham (Genesis 25:2). These tribal groups conducted a profitable trade usually moving in caravans down the Via Maris (the "Way of the Sea" – a major trade route running through the coastal plain of Canaan) to Egypt. It was not unheard of for there to be up to 500 camels and donkeys in one caravan, along with armed guards.

House of the captain of the guard

Some scholars read between the lines in the story of Potiphar's wife and suggest that Potiphar may ultimately have had a better grasp of his wife's nature and the true facts of the case. This would account for him not having Joseph executed or sent to a worse prison than he did. Regardless, God continued to show up in the flow of Joseph's circumstances...

Scorched by the east wind

The Palestinian *sirocco* (in Egypt the *khamsin*), which blows in from the desert (see Hosea 13:15) in late spring and early fall, often withers flowers and crops alike (see also Isaiah 40:7).

Joseph recognized his brothers

It had been 21 years, and his brothers had probably changed little. But Joseph was seventeen when they had last seen him. And now he was in an unexpected position of authority, shaved like an Egyptian (Hebrews always had the beards!), dressed like an Egyptian, and speaking to his brothers through an interpreter.