

GOD WITH US
Part 1: The Great Blessing
Genesis – Deuteronomy

Message 5 – Joseph: The Rejected Brother
Becomes the Deliverer
Genesis 37-50

Introduction

The final segment of Genesis centers on the Joseph narrative. Joseph, the rejected brother, becomes the savior of the family (and of the whole world). Joseph is, thus, one of the great types of Christ in the Old Testament. Another key idea in this final segment centers on Judah, the 4th born son of Jacob and Leah. Special attention is given to the life and words of Judah. Jacob, in his final hours, pronounced a unique blessing over him. Judah would be the son through whom the Messiah would come to the world. From the author's perspective, Moses (writer of the Pentateuch) was showing the Exodus generation how they ended up in Egypt in the first place. Their long enslavement and deliverance was part of the plans and purposes of God, in fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The family of Jacob became the nation of "Israel" in the womb of Egypt.

Joseph sold into Egypt: 37:1-36

Joseph was the first of two sons born to Jacob and Rachel, the younger sister of Leah. Benjamin was her second born son. Joseph became the favored son of Jacob and was hated by his brothers.

“Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

Joseph, only 17 years old, seems to have been very 'principled,' feeling the need to 'tell on' his older brothers. This introduces the spirit of animosity that existed between the brothers. In addition, there was the issue of Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was

the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms” (37:2-4).

There was added animosity in the family due to Joseph’s seemingly egotistical dreams, which mysteriously pointed to his preeminence in the family: bundles of wheat bowing down to *his* bundle (37:7); and the sun, moon and *11 stars* bowing down to *him*. The first dream depicted Joseph’s preeminence among his brothers, while the second extended this to include his parents bowing to his supremacy.

The tension came to a head when Joseph was sent by his father to check into the welfare of his brothers, who were pasturing the flocks. The brothers formed a plot to kill Joseph; but Reuben, the oldest, intervened and had them throw Joseph into a pit, hoping to save him and return him to their father (37:21,22). Judah then suggested that Joseph be sold to a group of Ishmaelite traders who were passing by, heading to Egypt on business. They sold Joseph to the traders for 20 shekels of silver. (Rejection, betrayal and abandonment are themes running throughout Joseph’s life story, beginning here.) Special emphasis is given to Reuben’s grief when he returned to the pit to find that Joseph was gone (37:29,30). Reuben later expressed remorse over their plot, in the hearing of Joseph (see 42:22). The brothers covered Joseph’s robe with animal blood, delivering it to their father, Jacob. Thus, the sons of Jacob deceived their father into believing that Joseph had died. The hand of God was upon Joseph in Egypt, however. He was sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s security forces and prospered greatly in that place.

J. I. Packer notes: The favoritism that had spoiled the tranquility of Jacob’s own childhood home became the very thing that destroyed the family he parented. Jacob was a stubborn man, slow to learn lessons from previous life experiences. As for the practice of favoritism: “There is no partiality with God” (Deuteronomy 10:17).

Judah has children through Tamar: 38:1-30

The strange story of Judah and Tamar shows not only the deterioration of faith in the line of promise; but also how the line of Judah was preserved from extinction by the actions of his shunned daughter-in-law. Tamar was married to Judah’s firstborn

son, Er. The Lord took Er's life because he was *"evil in the sight of the Lord"* (38:7), leaving Tamar a widow. In case of the early death of a husband, it was the duty of a brother to raise up children for the deceased. The line of Judah depended on this happening, and the duty fell to Judah's second born son, Onan. He refused to perform his duty, not wanting to raise children that were not his own. Like his brother, he was *"displeasing in the sight of the Lord,"* and the Lord took his life also (38:9,10). Judah had but one remaining son, Shelah, whom he promised to give to Tamar as a husband, after the boy had grown up. Actually, he was lying to her, being unwilling to give him to Tamar fearing that he, like his brothers, might die. Judah wrongly assumed that it was something evil in Tamar that was causing the death of his sons. Tamar spent many long years in widow's clothing, waiting for Judah to fulfill his promise to give her Shelah as her husband. Eventually it became clear to Tamar that Judah was never going to fulfill his pledge to her. Thus, a plot formed in her head to preserve the family line through her father-in-law. She posed as a prostitute, tricked Judah into having sex with her, and conceived twins by him! Three months later, when Judah was informed that Tamar was pregnant, he indignantly said that she should be burned for "playing the harlot" (i.e., having sex outside of marriage – precisely the sin of Judah!). Tamar, however, brought forth proof that she was pregnant *by Judah*. This led to Judah's confession: ***"She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah"*** (38:26). Tamar gave birth to twin boys, Perez and Zerah.

Note the sinful actions of Judah and his sons:

- Judah married a Canaanite woman (prohibited by patriarchs).
- Er, Judah's first born, was evil in God's sight.
- Onan, the second son, was also evil in God's sight.
- Judah lied to Tamar concerning a future marriage to Shelah.
- Judah went in to what he thought was a prostitute (Tamar).
- Judah hypocritically condemned Tamar for playing the harlot.
- Judah admitted that Tamar was more righteous than him.

This story shows how the line of Judah was preserved (which was critical since it would be Judah through whom the Messiah would come, as prophesied in Jacob's final blessing – 49:10). Messiah eventually came through Perez, the second born twin of Judah by Tamar (see Matthew 1:3).

God works in unexpected ways. Who would have guessed that the privilege of carrying on the Messianic line would be granted to Tamar? God uses courageous, faithful women who seem insignificant to men. Judah appears in this chapter as a man of little faith (and even less obedience). Yet, he will be given the greatest blessing of all the brothers – his would be the line of Messiah. There is no sin that is a match for the grace of God!

Joseph sent to prison: 39:1-23

Joseph was hugely successful working in Potiphar's house. The reason for his success: ***"The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man"*** (39:2). Potiphar's wife, however, had interests in Joseph that went beyond business! Joseph resisted her sexual advances; but she kept persisting day after day. Finally, he fled the house; but she grabbed his cloak on the way out. She accused him of sexual harassment. Potiphar believed his wife and had Joseph thrown into prison. Again, betrayal, rejection and abandonment were part of Joseph's experience. Following God does *not* mean that life will be easy!

This injustice, however, did not stop God's blessing on Joseph:

"But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper" (39:21-23).

It is clear that no matter what situation Joseph found himself in, God was with him.

Joseph's actions with regard to Potiphar's wife illustrate a key principle. The New Testament says: "Flee immorality" (1Cor. 6:18). Immorality is one sin we are told to run away from, because its pull is often too strong to stand against. If you are in a situation where there is temptation to immorality, consider imitating Joseph. Run from it. Create clear boundaries. If you stay too close to the temptation of immorality for too long, you will likely fall.

Joseph interprets dreams in prison: 40:1-23

In this chapter and the next, Joseph is the first "wise man" of Israel, in whom "the Spirit of God dwells." Like Daniel a

millennium later, Joseph has God-given insight into the affairs of men and nations. In prison, Joseph interpreted dreams for Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, who were confined for offending Pharaoh. After interpreting the cupbearer's dream, Joseph specifically asked him to bring up his case to Pharaoh after his release:

“Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon” (40:14,15).

Three days later, Pharaoh restored the cupbearer to his position, but executed the baker, precisely according to Joseph's interpretations. Sadly, the cupbearer forgot about Joseph and failed to speak favorably to Pharaoh about him. Joseph was stuck in prison for two more long years, yet another instance of being forgotten and abandoned.

“Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him” (40:23).

Joseph exalted to be Pharaoh's second in command: 41:1-57

“Two full years later . . .” Pharaoh had a dream which none of the wise men in Egypt could interpret. Suddenly, the cupbearer remembered Joseph and brought him to Pharaoh's attention.

“Two full years later . . .” God's timing in our lives is almost always impossible to understand. It usually seems He is not moving fast enough, that there is unnecessary delay. Yet, God is doing things, both in our own lives and in the world around us, that require the delay. The cupbearer remembered Joseph at just the right time ... when Pharaoh desperately needed an answer to his dreams. Once out of prison, Joseph's rise to power was meteoric. If you find yourself sitting in the prison house of waiting . . . keep your eyes on God. He will have His way with you, in His time.

Joseph was brought from prison and, with God's help, interpreted Pharaoh's dreams.

“Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will ravage the land. So the abundance will be

unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it will be very severe. Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about” (41:29-32).

Joseph urged Pharaoh to take quick action to prepare for these events. In turn, Pharaoh decided to appoint Joseph as second in command over all of Egypt, in order to help the country properly prepare for the famine.

“Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you.” Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt” (39-41).

Joseph spent the next seven years stockpiling the abundance of crops in Egypt.

“Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven years of plenty the land brought forth abundantly. So he gathered all the food of these seven years which occurred in the land of Egypt and placed the food in the cities; he placed in every city the food from its own surrounding fields. Thus Joseph stored up grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea, until he stopped measuring it, for it was beyond measure” (41:46-49).

Two sons were born to Joseph and his wife, Asenath. The names given to the sons indicate how Joseph was processing the pain of his past.

Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” He named the second Ephraim, “For,” he said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

You can try to forget the past – but the past doesn’t forget you! One of the key principles of Emotionally Healthy Spirituality is that we often need to “go b back in order to go forward.” We tend to minimize or deny the impact of the past upon the present. By doing so, however, we allow the pains of the past to continue to sabotage the way we live and love. Deep healing comes when we recognize the full impact of past wounds and bring these into the light of God’s love for healing.

As for his role in the world – Joseph became something of a “savior” for the whole earth.

“The people of all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth” (41:57).

Joseph’s brothers come to buy grain: 42:1-38

The 10 older brothers of Joseph were sent by their father Jacob down into Egypt to find food, for the famine had also overtaken the land of Canaan.

When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, “Where have you come from?” And they said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food” (42:7).

Joseph concealed his identity from his brothers. Interpreters take different views as to Joseph’s precise motives behind his actions (which are not made clear in the text). It is *unlikely* that he was seeking revenge. It *may be* that he was testing the sincerity of his brothers and carefully measuring the level of their repentance for having sold him into Egypt some 10-12 years earlier. (See the Moody Bible Commentary as an example of this view.) Or, it *may be* that he was carefully scheming how to get his younger brother Benjamin to come to him in Egypt. The latter is my view of the narrative: Joseph was carefully trying to recapture that part of his past that he wanted (his beloved younger brother, son of his mother, Rachel) while removing the painful parts of his past that he did not want to deal with (the other 10 brothers). He accused them all of being spies and threw them into prison for three days in order to fully develop his scheme.

“You are spies; by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” So he put them all together in prison for three days” (42:14-17).

Joseph then sent 9 brothers away, to fetch their younger brother, keeping only Simeon hostage in prison, so that they would be forced to return with Benjamin. Joseph did not keep the oldest, Reuben, because in listening to their exchange he learned for the

first time that Reuben had tried to save his life on the day he was thrown into the pit (which caused Joseph to weep greatly).

When the 9 brothers returned to Jacob and told him what had happened, and of the need to take Benjamin down into Egypt, Jacob despaired, refusing to allow them to take Benjamin away.

Their father Jacob said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me . . . My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow” (42:36,38).

The brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin: 43:1-34

The continuation of the long famine forced Jacob to reconsider sending his sons, including Benjamin, back into Egypt. They departed, carrying some specialty gifts from Jacob:

“ . . . a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds” (43:11).

Once in Egypt, Joseph called the brothers to a special meal at his house, causing them to fear that they were in big trouble! Joseph was immediately overcome with deep emotion upon seeing his younger brother Benjamin.

Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and he controlled himself and said, “Serve the meal” (43:30,31).

Seated for the meal, the brothers were stunned that somehow this stranger had seated them around the table precisely according to their birth order. Perhaps they thought the man, Joseph, had supernatural powers? They were still clueless as to his true identity.

Joseph’s attempt to take Benjamin from the brothers: 44:1-34

Joseph once again sent the 11 brothers back to Canaan, making sure that his own silver cup was hidden in Benjamin’s sack. Joseph’s servant was then instructed to overtake the brothers and bring them all back. Joseph’s strategy was to take Benjamin from them (for “stealing” his silver cup) and dismiss the others to return to Canaan. Joseph *only wanted Benjamin*, not reconciliation with

his entire family. The brothers pled with Joseph, recounting the entire story about their father, Jacob, and his deep grief over the loss of Joseph (!) and now the potential loss of Benjamin. All of this was more than Joseph could handle. The deep emotions he had been stuffing for years finally got the best of him and his grief spilled forth.

Another principle of Emotionally Healthy Spirituality is that we must “feel before we can deal.” We need to feel the full force of our emotional pain, stemming from past hurts, before we can truly deal with them. Denying or minimizing our pain will get us nowhere. We must grieve the impact of our losses before we can truly forgive and heal.

Joseph reveals his identity: 45:1-28

In one of the most dramatic scenes in the entire Bible, Joseph finally revealed his identity to his brothers.

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Have everyone go out from me.” So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence (45:1-3)

Joseph immediately showed that he saw God’s bigger plan behind the many difficult events and years of his life:

“God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt” (45:7,8).

Joseph sent his brothers away with an invitation for the entire family to move into Egypt to be with him, knowing that another 5 years of famine were still ahead. The brothers returned to Canaan and told Jacob of the stunning turn of events.

They told him, saying, “Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” But he was stunned, for he did not believe them. When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob

revived. Then Israel said, “It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die” (45:26-28).

Jacob (“Israel”) moves to Egypt: 46:1-34

Moses was writing to the Exodus generation of Israelites. This entire story of Joseph helped them to understand *how* Israel ended up in Egypt in the first place. It was part of the plan of God. This became all the more clear as Jacob set out for Egypt with his family. God affirmed to him the promises made to Abraham and Isaac:

So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes” (46:1-4).

Recall the words God spoke to Abraham at an earlier point in the Genesis narrative:

God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years” (15:13).

The plan of God was moving forward, right on schedule. Egypt would be the place where the house of Jacob became, over several centuries, the nation of Israel. The Exodus generation must have received great encouragement from this larger story. Their trials in Egypt, and their ultimate deliverance through the Passover and Exodus, were all part of God’s plan for them and for the world.

A detailed list is given of the 70 persons who went down into Egypt with Jacob, the patriarch. It is probably no coincidence that there were 70 nations listed in the table of nations back in Genesis 10. There, the 70 nations represented the descendants of Adam who sought to build their own kingdom reaching up to heaven (Genesis 11). Here, the 70 persons going into Egypt represent the descendants of Abraham, whom God would use to build His kingdom on earth.

The narrative resumes as Jacob arrives in Egypt . . . and Joseph falls on his father’s neck. He wept ***“for a long time” (46:29)***. So many emotions of grief and loss had been buried down inside for

so long. Now, deep emotions were finally spilling out of Joseph, bringing healing to his soul.

Israel settles in Goshen; Joseph's rule prospers: 47:1-31

Emphasis is given to the fact that Jacob twice “blessed” Pharaoh (47:7-10). The promise to Abraham was being fulfilled: “*I will bless those who bless you*” (Genesis 12:3). Yet, even in the midst of his blessing, Jacob sadly summarized his own life:

Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning” (47:9).

Abraham, the man of faith, died “at a ripe old age, and satisfied with life” (25:8). Jacob, the life-long schemer, lived a much shorter and more pain-filled life. While they both experienced God’s faithfulness in the continuation of the covenant, Abraham experienced more enjoyment of the covenant relationship with God, because of his obedience. The hymn writer said it well: “Trust AND obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust AND obey.”

Jacob and his family settled in the land of Goshen, in Egypt, where they prospered as shepherds.

“Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous. Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob’s life was one hundred and forty-seven years” (47:27,28).

Much space is given to the description of Joseph’s success as second in command over all of Egypt (47:13-26). People everywhere came to him, bartering all of their land in exchange for grain. There is irony here. The young man who was sold into Egypt as a slave for 20 shekels of silver ends up buying all of Egypt back through his God-given wisdom and skill!

“So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. Thus the land became Pharaoh’s” (47:20).

As Jacob neared death, he made Joseph promise that his burial would take place in the land of Canaan, not in Egypt. Jacob had finally embraced the promise concerning Israel having its own great land in the future.

Jacob's blessing over Joseph's two son: 48:1-22

Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to Jacob for a blessing. In surprising manner, Jacob crossed his arms so that his right hand rested on Ephraim, the younger, while his left hand rested on Manasseh, the firstborn. Then, he pronounced the blessing on the two sons of Joseph.

“The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and may my name live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (48:15,16).

Joseph protested this action of crossing the hands; but Jacob insisted that it be so, explaining that the younger son would become a greater people group than the older. Thus, Ephraim was given preeminence over his older brother Manasseh.

Jacob's final prophecies over his 12 sons: 49:1-33

All of chapter 49 details the specific words of prophecy/blessing that Jacob (Israel) pronounced over his sons just prior to his death. Most significantly, the first 3 sons of Leah - Reuben, Simeon and Levi - were all stripped of the normal blessings associated with birth order because of serious sins against the family. (1Chronicles 5:1,2 explains that *Reuben's firstborn rights* were transferred to the two sons of Joseph.) Judah, the fourth son of Leah, was given the great fatherly blessing. This is the first indication that the Messiah would ultimately come through the line of Judah.

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the nations” (Genesis 49:10).

As might be expected, **Joseph** also received a very special blessing from Jacob, because of the significant role God had allowed him to play in the preservation of the entire family.

The death and burial of Jacob: 50:1-14

Joseph made sure that his father received a proper burial back in the land of Canaan. With him went a huge contingent from Egypt, including all of Pharaoh's leaders.

“So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the

elders of the land of Egypt, and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father's household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen. There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company" (50:7-9).

Joseph's brothers protect themselves against revenge: 50:15-21

Joseph's brothers feared he might take revenge on them after their father's death, so they lied, saying that their father had instructed Joseph to forgive them for his sake. When Joseph received their fabricated message, he wept yet again (v.17). Perhaps he was sad that they did not believe in his heart of forgiveness. Or, perhaps the memory of all the painful events swept over him again. Maybe he was grieved at the thought (though false) that his father had to plead for his forgiveness of the brothers just before his death. In any case, through his tears Joseph was able to see the bigger plan of God in the difficult events of his life.

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (50:20).

The death of Joseph: 50:22-26

Genesis ends with the death of Joseph, and his instructions for his bones to someday be taken back to Canaan. Moses has accomplished his purpose for writing Genesis. He has shown Israel their roots in the plans and providence of God. He has shown them how they ended up in Egypt, according to God's sovereign plan. Finally, he has made it very clear that their future is in the land of Promise, to which they were headed as he wrote.

Joseph was one of the most righteous people in the Bible; yet, his life was extremely difficult. There are no "formulas" with God (do A and you get B). Joseph was a good man, yet: His father played favorites with him. His brothers hated him and sold him as a slave. Potiphar's wife falsely accused him. The cupbearer forgot about him. He languished two additional "full years" in prison. Yet, Joseph was able to rise above all of the evil that had been inflicted upon him to see God's grander purpose: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (50:20). We will forever remain bitter about the pain of our past until the day we can, with Joseph, rise above the clouds of human failure and see God's hand at work. If there is any "formula" with God, it can only be this: God will use our story for His glory and for "the saving of many lives" . . . IF we allow Him to.