



JOSEPH

The Son who was
Servant and Saviour

A Bible Teaching Commentary
for personal or group study
by Fred Morris



Genesis Part 4

Chapters 37 to 50

JOSEPH: Genesis Part 4, Chapters 37-50

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How God brought peace to a divided family.• How God used Joseph's dreams to tell the future.• How Joseph, became a servant and saviour of Israel. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How Joseph's faith blessed a family of 70 people.• God's plans for Jacob and Judah through Joseph.• Preparing the way for Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah. |
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THIS BOOK shows God at work in the life of Joseph. He was the great-grandson of Abraham. He was one of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). Joseph was part of God's plan for blessing the children of Israel. His faith in God remained strong in times of trouble. In doing God's will, Joseph reunited his family and also saved them from famine. Joseph's jealous older brothers planned to destroy him, but God brought good out of evil and restored family unity. This then fulfilled the promises God made to Abraham regarding the family of Jacob and the future nation of Israel. Also, Joseph's step-brother Judah repented and became an ancestor of King David. In this way both Joseph, Israel's saviour, and Judah, prepared the way for Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah and God's Servant and Saviour of the world.

MANNA PUBLICATIONS publish small Bible teaching commentaries written by Fred Morris. For many years Fred, and his wife Lorna, travelled round the world teaching and preaching. His books are easy to read, understand and translate into other languages. They give basic New and Old Testament teaching of God's truth with practical applications of our salvation through Christ alone plus additional notes for Bible students, teachers and pastors.

THESE BOOKS will help you to come closer to Almighty God. He is worshipped by millions of Jews and Christians worldwide. These books will also help you to receive salvation and eternal life through God's Son, Jesus the Christ who is Israel's Messiah. They will help you to talk about your faith in God and to pray to Him. They will help to guide you from going the wrong way in life. They will help you to live a life that is pleasing to God through the love and power of His Holy Spirit. This was promised to all who believe Jesus is the Son of God, who suffered death for our sins before returning back to Heaven.

WE PRAY that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you trust in God, read the Bible and use these commentaries. Think about what Jesus taught and suffered 2000 years ago for our eternal salvation and what He is calling you to say and do today to prepare the way for His return. Amen.

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"The secret of God's Kingdom has been given to you" (Mark 4:11)

To the Reader or Leader

These commentaries help to explain the Bible in a way that is easy to read and understand. They are also easy to translate. Fred Morris was a missionary in Africa and Asia. You can use his books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. Each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible.



Bible reading: Where you see this, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible passage first before reading this book.



Learn about this: Where you see this, the words help you to check the main things to know and to share with others to help everyone to grow in Bible knowledge and understanding of God's truth.



Talk about this: Where you see this, there are questions to prayerfully answer yourself or to discuss in a group study. They also help the reader to remember the Bible verses.



Think about this: Where you see this, the question requires more time for personal meditation.



Ruled teaching boxes: Where you see this, the information gives extra teaching about life at the time the Bible was written and for today's believers.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
 The names of the family of Jacob (later called Israel)	6
JOSEPH, JUDAH AND JESUS	7
 Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 37	9
JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS	9
 Joseph's Dreams	10
GOD BEGINS HIS SPECIAL WORK IN JOSEPH	10
REUBEN TRIES TO HELP JOSEPH	10
 Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 38	12
JUDAH LEAVES HOME	12
JUDAH AND HIS FAMILY LINE.....	12
 God's purpose in marriage (Genesis 38:9-10).....	13
JUDAH IS DECEIVED	13
JUDAH CONFESSES HIS SIN	14
 Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 39	14
JOSEPH REMAINS FAITHFUL TO GOD IN EGYPT	14
 Bible reading: Genesis Chapters 40 and 41	15
GOD GIVES JOSEPH WISDOM FOR THE FUTURE	16
 Dreams.....	16
JOSEPH EXPLAINS THE KING'S DREAMS.....	17
JOSEPH IN CHARGE OF ALL EGYPT	17
 Egypt in the history of God's people	18
 Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 42	19
JOSEPH'S BROTHERS TRAVEL TO EGYPT.....	19
 Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 43	21
THE SECOND JOURNEY TO EGYPT	21
 Prayer. Genesis 43:14.....	22
JOSEPH'S BROTHERS ARE AFRAID	22
 Bible reading: Genesis Chapters 44 and 45	23
THE BROTHERS TRY TO LEAVE EGYPT	23
JOSEPH TELLS HIS BROTHERS WHO HE REALLY IS	24
PHARAOH INVITES THE FAMILY OF JACOB TO EGYPT	25
 Bible reading: Genesis Chapters 46 and 47	26
GOD SPEAKS TO JACOB	26
 A remnant of faithful believers	27
PHARAOH BLESSES JACOB AND HIS FAMILY	27
HOW JOSEPH MANAGES THE FAMINE	28
THE FAMILY OF JACOB REMAIN IN EGYPT	28

	Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 48	29
	JACOB BLESSES JOSEPH'S SONS.....	30
	Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 49	31
	JACOB'S FINAL BLESSINGS FOR HIS TWELVE SONS.....	31
	PROPHECIES FOR THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL	31
	THE BURIAL PLANS OF JACOB	33
	Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 50	34
	JOSEPH CARES FOR HIS FATHER AND BROTHERS	34
	JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS RETURN TO CANAAN TO BURY JACOB	35
	THE DEATH OF JOSEPH.....	35
	CONCLUSIONS.....	36

JOSEPH: Genesis Part 4, Chapters 37-50

INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth commentary written by Fred Morris on the first book of the Bible. It describes how the people of Israel moved to Egypt. They stayed there for 400 years before returning to Canaan, God's Promised Land. It talks mainly about the work of God in the life of Joseph. He was one of the twelve sons of Jacob. He and his brother Benjamin were born to Rachel, Jacob's favourite wife. Jacob was given the name 'Israel' by an angel of God (Genesis 32:28).

Joseph was one of the twelve great-grandsons of Abraham. Joseph was eleventh and was the favourite son of Jacob. Benjamin was his younger brother whom Joseph loved dearly. Joseph's ten older step-brothers did not like him. They were jealous. But God was with Joseph. God helped him through many troubles. God used him to bless all his brothers and their families and also Egypt.

We also read about Judah, one of the children of Jacob born to Leah. It is important to read your Bible and learn about people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and Joseph. They are known as the Patriarchs of Israel.

Joseph was part of God's plan for the salvation of the children of Israel (Jacob). He and Judah were also part of God's plan to save the rest of the world through the promise given by God Almighty to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This plan to offer God's salvation to the world was finally fulfilled through the birth, death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah, Jesus the Christ.



The names of the family of Jacob (later called Israel)

The family and tribes of Jacob are given these names in the Bible:

- The children of Israel
- The people of Israel
- The twelve tribes of Israel
- The house of Israel
- The house of Jacob
- The Hebrews
- The Israelites

Later, the family of Judah became the main tribe of Israel in the region called Judea. The people then became known as Jews. Jerusalem was their main city.

It was God's plan for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to live in the land now called Israel, originally called Canaan. However, these people that God chose for His plan lived in Egypt for 400 years. Many years before, Abraham was told this would happen (Genesis. 15:13-21).

Terrible things happened to Joseph. As we read this well-known story, we learn that God was with him at all times. Joseph's faith in God never grew weak. He did not complain when things were difficult for him. He did not become proud when things went well for him. He was not perfect, but we will do well if we copy Joseph's example of faith in God. The story of Joseph and his father and brothers also show examples of how God can overcome family problems and use them for His purposes with everlasting impact, locally and worldwide.

The life of Jesus was the perfect example of how to live and do what God wants us to do, in good times and in bad times. If we follow Jesus and believe that He is God's Son, then God promises salvation from sin now and for ever. His Hebrew (Jewish) name is Yeshua. His Father, our LORD God Almighty, is called Yahweh in Hebrew.

JOSEPH, JUDAH AND JESUS

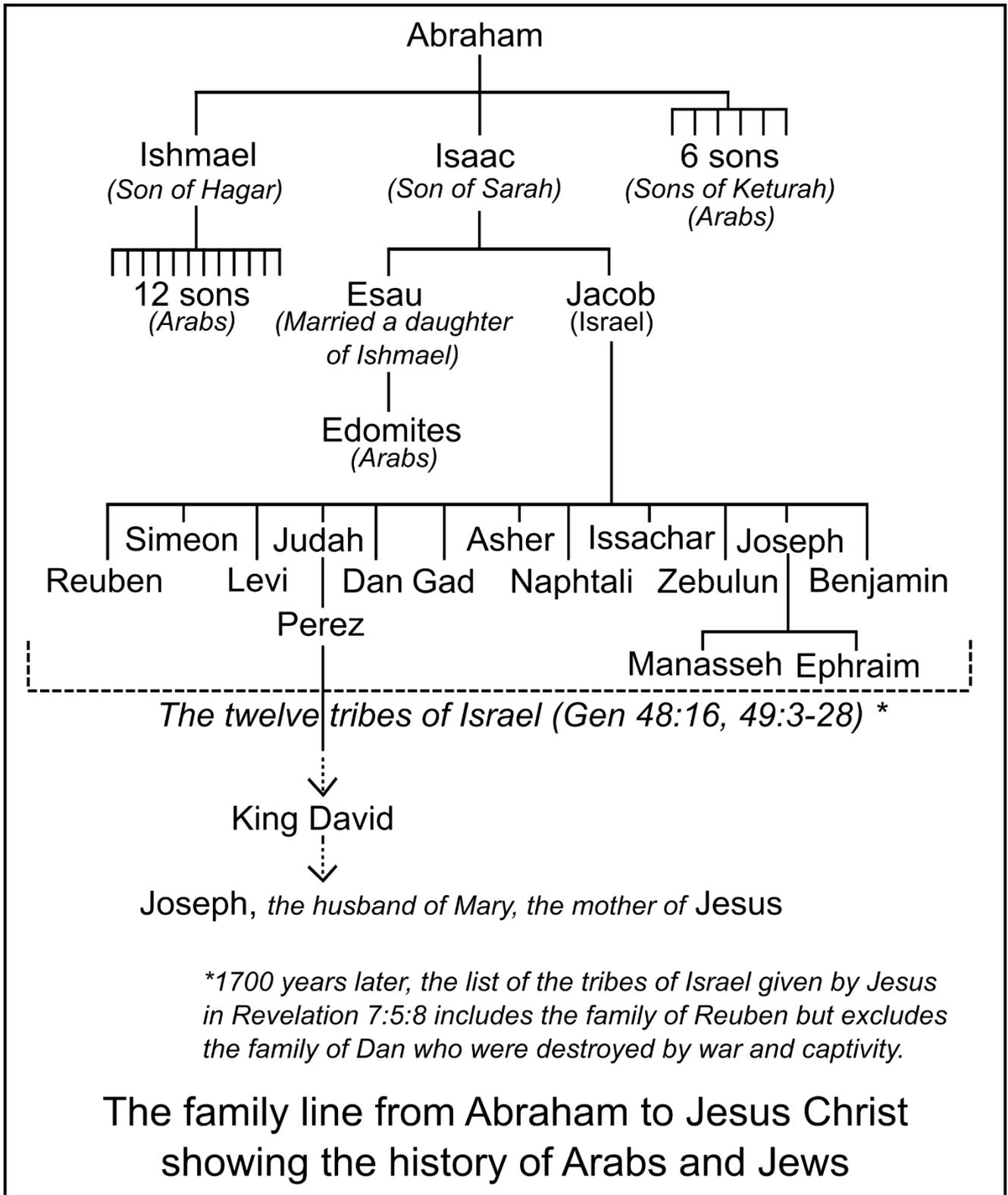
God blessed Joseph. His brother Judah was also important to God. It was through Judah that God kept His promise of a special line of people from Abraham down to Jesus Christ. Jesus was God's promised Messiah to the Jews and the Saviour of the world. He is the Son of God.

Judah was cruel to start with. He and his brothers did a bad thing to Joseph. Later, God changed Judah. God worked out his plans for the people of Israel and for their Messiah, using Judah as well as Joseph. This shows us that God Almighty chooses who He wants in His plan to save the world from sin: great men of faith like Abraham, Isaac and Joseph but also cheats like Jacob and cruel people like Judah. In His grace and mercy, God calls and uses sinful believers, including you and me, to bring salvation to the world. (Both Jacob and Judah repented.)

Joseph's story begins a new part of the history of God's people, the Jews. It tells us why they lived for a long time in Egypt and ended up as slaves there.

Two hundred and fifty years before Joseph lived, God had promised Abraham that his family would become a great people. This promise was given to Abraham and then to his son Isaac and later on to his grandson Jacob. A different promise was given to Ishmael, Isaac's step-brother, who was born to the slave girl of Abraham's wife (Genesis 17:20).

Jacob's twelve sons were as different as brothers are in any family. Because they were born to four different mothers, they had very different natures (Genesis 35:23-26). Judah was the fourth son in Jacob's large family. Joseph was the eleventh son. Benjamin, the youngest, was born after Joseph. Joseph loved Benjamin because these two brothers were born to the same wife of Jacob called Rachel.





Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 37



Learn about this: *Joseph, who is hated by ten of his brothers, has two dreams which increase their anger (verses 1-11). His father Jacob sends Joseph to visit his brothers who then plan to kill him. His brother Reuben saves him but he is later sold as a slave for Egypt (v.12-28). Reuben is distressed by what his brothers did. Jacob grieves believing that Joseph is dead (v.29-35). Joseph is later sold to Potiphar in Egypt (v.36).*

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Joseph lived with his father and brothers in God's Promised Land of Canaan until he was seventeen. This was the land God had promised to give to Abraham's family. In the years after this, Joseph learned to trust God for all he had promised.

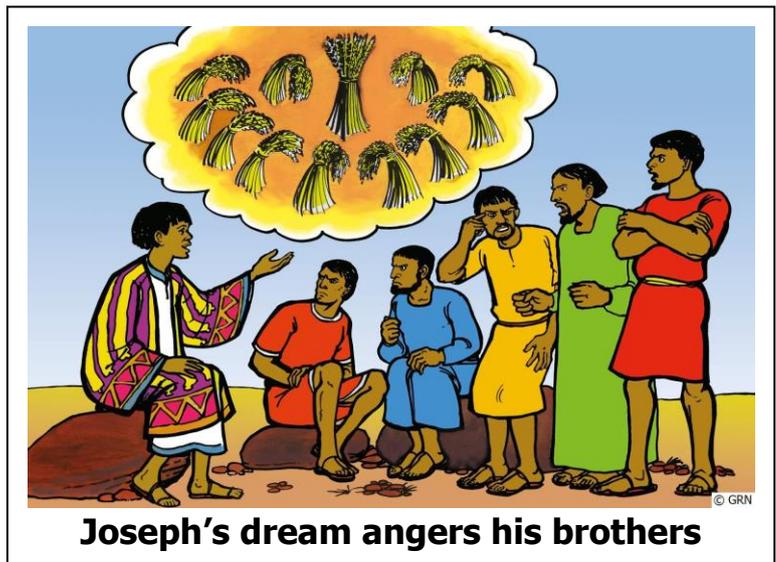
God sometimes showed Joseph His plans for him in dreams. When he told his brothers, they were not pleased with him!

Joseph was Jacob's favourite firstborn son of Rachel, his favourite wife. He was the first of Jacob's two youngest children born to Rachel. To show his great love for his son Joseph, Jacob made him a special coat with cloth of many colours. This was not a wise thing to do. Joseph's brothers were jealous and 'could not even speak one kind word to him' (37:4).

Joseph gave Jacob news about his older brothers. It was not good news (37:2). Joseph may have meant well, but he caused trouble with his brothers. The older brothers were not only jealous of Joseph but angry with him.

Joseph's gift from God was that he was able to understand dreams. In two of his dreams we see that Joseph was always the important one and his brothers bowed down to him (37:5-11). This made his brothers even more angry.

It was not all Joseph's fault. He was Jacob's favourite and that was why there was trouble between Joseph and his brothers. If parents have favourites, they make their children jealous of each other. Parents must learn to treat their children equally and fairly.



Joseph's dream angers his brothers



Joseph's Dreams

Some people have dreams that have a special meaning. Joseph dreamed that his brothers all bowed down to him (37:5-7). His dreams looked ahead to the time when Joseph would be in charge of all the food in Egypt. Then his brothers would bow low before him and ask to buy food (42:6).

In Joseph's second dream, the sun and the moon and eleven stars worshipped him (37:9). If the sun and moon were his parents, the eleven stars were Joseph's brothers. Again, this dream looked forward to the time when Joseph would be in charge of his whole family (45:7-11; 47:11-12).

GOD BEGINS HIS SPECIAL WORK IN JOSEPH

God has a special work for every believer to do. But we all need God to prepare us and to train us. God gave Joseph the gift of interpreting dreams. This was similar to divine wisdom (1 Corinthians 12:8). Through Joseph, God showed him and other people what was going to happen. He gave Joseph the meaning of dreams. God used Joseph in this strange and wonderful way. But Joseph had to suffer and be trained before God would allow him to use that gift. Joseph needed to learn the wisdom of God and submit to His will and not cause problems. God's plan for Joseph was to be a suffering servant and saviour for the world through the family of Jacob (Israel).

We may have a hard time when we want to do God's work, because God wants to change us and to make us ready. In surprising ways, God made Joseph ready for the work He wanted him to do.

One day Jacob's eldest sons took their sheep north, near Shechem. Jacob sent Joseph to see that all was well (37:14).

Joseph found them at Dothan in the far north, and they saw him coming. They planned to kill him (37:18,20). Then we see how God took control through Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob, and through some of the family of Abraham's son Ishmael.

REUBEN TRIES TO HELP JOSEPH

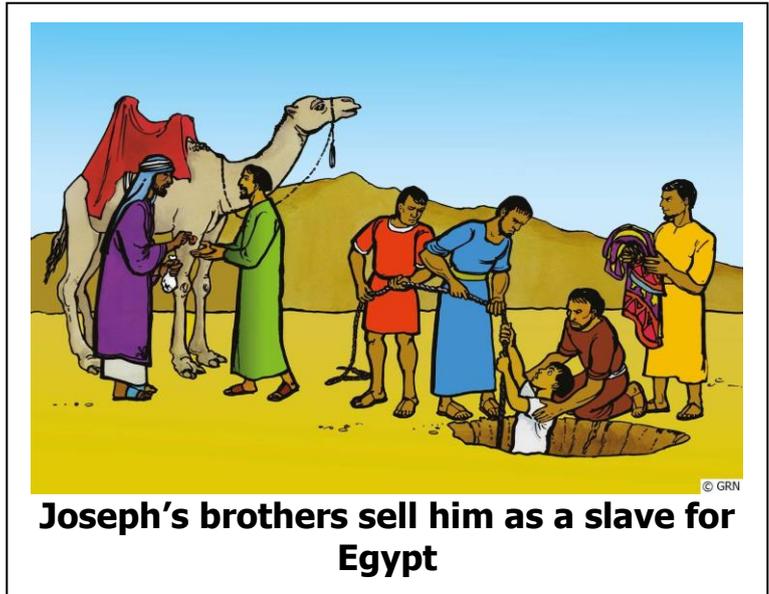
Reuben said, "Let us not take his life ... Throw him alive into this empty well here." Reuben wanted to come back later and take Joseph back to his father (37:22).

But while Reuben was away, Judah saw camels coming. It was a group of Ishmaelites taking spices to sell in Egypt. He and his brothers sold Joseph to these traders for 20 pieces of silver, the price of a slave (37:25-28).

Joseph's brothers then killed a goat and dipped Joseph's coat in the blood. When they went home, they showed the coat to their father. Jacob thought as they wanted him to, that his son had been killed by a wild animal. His sons

could not comfort him. "I will be full of sorrow when I go down into the grave to be with my son," he cried (37:35).

When he was young, Jacob tricked Isaac, his father. Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob instead of to his brother Esau (Genesis 27). The Bible says that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). Jacob had deceived his father. Now he was deceived by his own sons. Family relationships can be changed forever through wrong words and actions. However, God can use all things for good (Romans 8:28). But we must never deceive people in order to get our own way!



Reuben lost the blessing of Jacob's firstborn son when he sinned with Bilhah, his father's mistress (35:22). Despite that sin, Reuben tried to save Joseph, but failed (37:21-22,29-30). Instead of Reuben, it was Judah who became the leader of his brothers (37:26-27; 43:3-5,8-10; 49:9).

We read later that the special work God wanted Joseph to do began when he went to Egypt as a slave. God also planned a special work for Judah to do in the future nation of Jacob's whole family, later called Israel.



Talk about this:

1. Why did Joseph's dreams make ten of his brothers hate him? Give two reasons (37:5-11)
2. What did Jacob do that made things worse for Joseph (37:3)?
3. What did Jacob think of Joseph's dreams (37:10)?
4. What did Reuben want to do with Joseph (37:21-22)?
5. What did the brothers do with Joseph while Reuben was away (37:28)?
What part did Ishmael have in God's plan for Israel (37:25)?
6. How did Joseph's brothers deceive their father Jacob (37:31-32)?



Think about this: Joseph's dreams told him that God would bless him. Do your dreams cause trouble when you talk about them? Are they from God? Pray for wisdom to avoid family and other problems. Remember to trust in God if things go wrong. Think about how God might be at work in your life. Think about how God might be at work through family problems.



Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 38



Learn about this: *The history of Judah's family who married a Canaanite and had three sons. Tamar marries the first then the second son without bearing children so she tricks Jacob into giving her a son instead to maintain the family line (verses 1-30).*

JUDAH LEAVES HOME

The Bible story moves to Judah, who was the fourth son of Jacob born to his first wife Leah.

Judah left home. In Bible times men normally stayed with their family until they were ready to marry. They then left home to find a wife and start a new family (Genesis 2:24).

Judah left his home and his brothers and went to live in another part of the country. While he was there, Judah saw the daughter of one of the Canaanite families and he married her. He did not speak to his father or family about this. So Judah lived with Hirah, the Canaanite. Hirah was a follower of local religions and did not worship the one true God of Abraham.

Before a man chooses a wife, he needs to ask God "Is this woman chosen by God?"

JUDAH AND HIS FAMILY LINE

Judah had three sons. He was not leading his family as a godly husband should. He was not teaching them to follow the one true God Almighty of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Deuteronomy 6:5-7).

The firstborn, Er, was given a wife called Tamar (Genesis 38:6). Because Er was wicked, God 'put him to death' and Tamar was left a widow (38:7).

Judah gave her as a wife to his second son, Onan, so that she could have a son 'for his dead brother'. This was the custom of that time (38:8; Deuteronomy 25:5-10). It was a way for the widow to have a son who would carry on her first husband's name and receive his inheritance, the inheritance of the firstborn son.

No-one knew that the family line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would go through the family line of Judah to the birth of Israel's Messiah (Genesis 49:10). God's plan could not be changed. But Onan refused to give children to Tamar. He spilled his sperm onto the ground instead of inside Tamar's womb (38:9). To be childless was not only sad but it was a disgrace to the woman who was childless.

God was angry with Onan. What he did was wicked in God's sight and God judged him and he too died (38:10).



God's purpose in marriage (Genesis 38:9-10)

Children are a blessing from God. When Onan refused to give Tamar children, he refused to obey the command and plan of God for a future family line of children. God created male and female in His own image for this purpose. He said to Adam and Eve and also to Noah and his sons, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth" (Genesis 1:27-28; 9:7). The people of Israel had many children and believed that children were a blessing from God. We, too, if we are married, should ask God to bless the sperm and the eggs He uses to create our babies and to bless the unborn babies in the womb.

Now Judah had only one son left, called Shelah. He was too young to marry. Judah promised to give him to Tamar, but she did not trust his promise. She thought that Shelah might die too, just like his brothers (38:11). Judah asked Tamar to return to her father's house and wait for the third son to grow up (38:11).

JUDAH IS DECEIVED

A long time passed and Judah's wife died (38:12). Shelah, his third son, had grown up, but Judah had not given Tamar to Shelah to be his wife as he had promised (38:11).

Tamar heard that Judah was going to Timnah. She knew that her father-in-law would travel near her home. She took off her widow's clothes and covered her head. She dressed so that she looked like a prostitute (38:14). Tamar wanted to have a son with Judah's family name.

When Judah saw his daughter-in-law Tamar, he did not recognise her. She offered to serve him as a prostitute and demanded payment. Judah agreed. This was common in the heathen land of Canaan. Judah gave Tamar his personal seal and its cord and his staff as a promise that he would pay her later.

Judah did not let anyone know what he had done. He tried to protect himself from the shame. However, when he sent a goat as payment, his servants could not find the prostitute so he could not get back his seal and cord and staff (38:20-22).

Three months later, news came to Judah that Tamar was pregnant. Judah wanted to have her punished and killed (38:24). But Tamar brought out Judah's own seal and cord and staff. She said, "I am pregnant by the man who owns these" (38:25). Then everyone knew whose child Tamar was carrying.

JUDAH CONFESSES HIS SIN

Judah had been selfish and tried to deceive everyone. But now he confessed his sin (38:26) and said he was sorry. We should not deceive people, but if we do, we must say sorry and change our ways.

God was pleased that Judah became a kind man. Tamar gave birth to twin sons, Perez and Zerah. God chose to bless Perez in the family line of Judah. We read their names in the family line of the man who married Mary the mother of Jesus after He was born. Jesus is the promised Son of God Almighty, the Jewish Messiah. He is known by Jewish believers as Jeshua or Yeshua or Joshua, which means 'God's Salvation', whom God sent to save the world from their sins (Matthew 1:3, Luke 3:33).



Talk about this:

1. Can God make good come out of wrong things that we do if we repent (Romans 8:28)?
2. What lessons can we learn from Judah's life? What changed him?
3. How did God keep His promise to Abraham for a Saviour for Israel and the world?



Think about this: *What hope is there for people who do not trust God and live wicked lives? Why is it true that we cannot deceive God, only ourselves? Are we ready to repent when our sins lead to bad things (Revelation 3:19)? Do you look for the mercy of God to do good in a sinful world?*



Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 39



Learn about this: *Joseph does well in Potiphar's house but is wrongly accused of trying to rape his mistress so is thrown into prison (verses 1-20). The LORD shows mercy to Joseph in prison and was put in charge of the prisoners (v.21-23).*

JOSEPH REMAINS FAITHFUL TO GOD IN EGYPT

The Bible story now moves back to Joseph. Jacob still mourned the loss of his son Joseph, the firstborn of his favourite wife Rachel. He assumed Joseph was dead. As soon as they arrived in Egypt, the Ishmaelite traders sold Joseph to Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard.

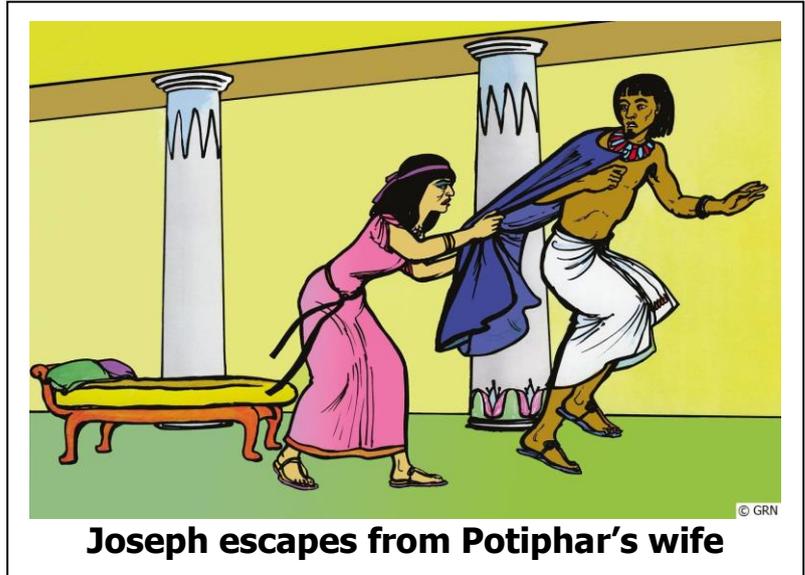
Joseph served Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard, for many years. The LORD God Almighty was with Joseph and gave him success in everything he did (39:2,3,5,21,23). Potiphar saw that everything was going well in his household, so he put Joseph in charge of everything.

Potiphar's wife liked having this handsome young Hebrew man in her house. She often tried to get Joseph alone, but he stayed away from her. "Make love to me," she demanded (39:7).

Joseph answered, "How could I do such a wicked thing as that [to my master]? How could I sin against God?" (39:9)

But one day, she saw her chance and took hold of his coat. "Make love to me," she said again (39:12). Joseph pulled himself away from her (39:12). As he pulled away, she took his cloak. Then she began to scream for help.

She told her husband that Joseph had tried to rape her (39:17). Potiphar was angry and put Joseph in prison. Normally the punishment for a slave would be death. But God kept Joseph safe. And Joseph kept on trusting in God. God allowed Joseph to be tempted by Potiphar's wife but he remained faithful to the LORD God Almighty.



Joseph was in prison for a long time, but God was with him. The chief jailer saw that Joseph could be trusted and he put Joseph in charge of everything in the prison. There, 'the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in everything he did' (39:23).

God blessed Joseph in times of danger, loneliness, hard work and temptation. God blessed him as a slave, a household manager and a prisoner because God knew Joseph's heart.



Talk about this:

1. How did Joseph show his faith in God when he was tempted to sin (39:9)?
2. How did God bless Joseph because of his faithfulness to Him?



Think about this: Who was most important in Joseph's life? How is your faith tested and strengthened?



Bible reading: Genesis Chapters 40 and 41



Learn about this: *Joseph speaks to Pharaoh's wine taster and chief baker in prison and interprets their dreams (40:1-23). Pharaoh has two dreams and the wine taster remembers Joseph who is then called out of prison to speak to him (41:1-24). Joseph interprets the dreams and explains to Pharaoh what to do to plan for famine (v.25-37). Pharaoh releases Joseph from prison, places him in charge of preparing for famine and then gives him a wife (v.38-57).*

GOD GIVES JOSEPH WISDOM FOR THE FUTURE

While Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, became angry with two of his workers. He put his wine taster and his baker in prison with Joseph (40:1-3). One night the two men had dreams. They did not know what their dreams meant and they were sad. "We both had dreams," they told Joseph, "but no-one can tell us what they mean" (40:8).

Joseph answered, "Only God knows what dreams mean. Tell me your dreams" (40:8). Joseph listened then said that the dreams correctly described what would happen to them in three days time (40:12-19).

Three days later, it was Pharaoh's birthday. He gave a special meal for his workers. Pharaoh let the wine taster go free, but he hanged the chief baker (40:20-22). This was exactly as Joseph had said.



Dreams

God sometimes speaks to people through dreams. God spoke to Joseph's father, Jacob, several times through dreams or visions (Genesis 28:12-15; 31:10-13; 46:2). God spoke to Joseph in dreams (Genesis 37:5,9). God also gave him the meaning of dreams (40:12; 41:25). God gave the same gift of understanding dreams to Daniel (Daniel 2:19; 4:20).

Sometimes God uses dreams to speak to unbelievers. Their dreams are usually given to warn them (Genesis 20:3; 31:24; 40:5; 41:1; Daniel 2:1; Matthew 2:12).

It is always important for us to understand God's written word, the Bible, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Dreams can then be tested by what the Bible teaches (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1). But those who allow Satan to control their thoughts (while they are asleep or awake) deceive themselves and will lead others astray.

Wrong thoughts often begin with selfish plans for each day and for the future, instead of trusting in God's plans for our lives and His guiding Spirit within us. Wrong thoughts or fantasies can also happen when we are tempted. This is why we must be careful what we allow into our minds through what we read, hear or see.

However, God does speak at times through dreams both good and bad. Also about old memories and new ideas. He may surprise us or encourage us or warn us. We must therefore be 'on guard' and ready to take action when Scripture confirms if our dreams are true or false. "Understand what is right" then you will know God's wisdom and peace so that "when you lie down you will sleep well" (Proverbs 3:21,24).

JOSEPH EXPLAINS THE KING'S DREAMS

Two more years passed before God used Joseph in His plans for the children of Jacob (Israel). Then Pharaoh had two dreams, one after the other. Next morning he was worried. He sent for all his magicians and wise men (41:8). Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no-one could tell him what they meant.

Then Pharaoh's servant wine taster remembered Joseph. He had been in prison with Joseph. He told Pharaoh about Joseph who was still in prison. He told the king how Joseph explained the meaning of his dreams. Pharaoh sent for Joseph.

He said to him, "I have heard that when you hear a dream you can explain it" (41:15).

Joseph looked at Pharaoh. "I cannot do it," he replied, "but God will." This proves how much Joseph's faith in God had grown. He believed that God would give Pharaoh the right answer (41:16).

Joseph did not want the praise. He wanted God to have all the praise. He put all his trust in the LORD God Almighty. God was with him, even in prison. God planned to use Joseph for His future plans for Egypt, Israel and the entire world!

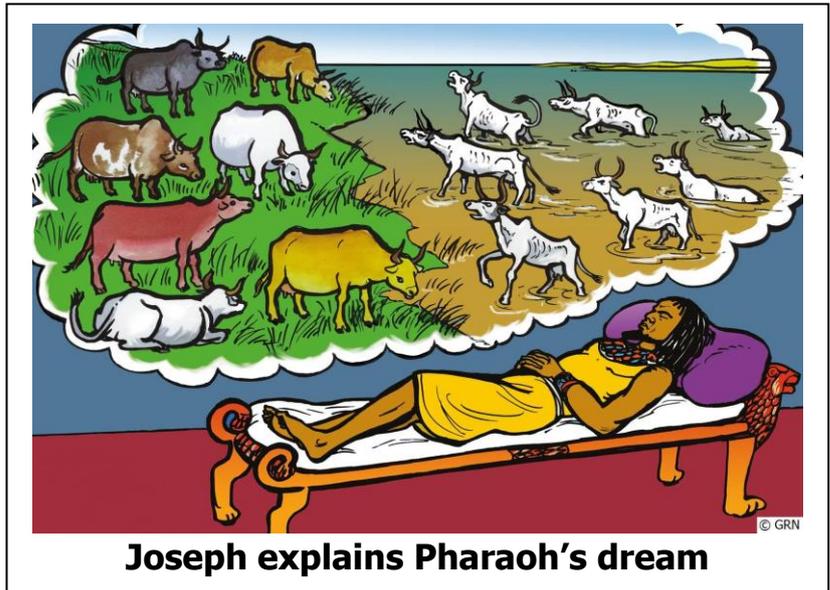
Then Pharaoh described his dreams to Joseph. Joseph said to Pharaoh, "God has shown Pharaoh what He is going to do. Seven years with plenty of food are coming to the whole land of Egypt." Seven years of famine would follow them (41:28-30).

JOSEPH IN CHARGE OF ALL EGYPT

"The matter has been firmly decided by God," Joseph told Pharaoh. "God will do it soon. Pharaoh should look for a wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt." The food from the good years should be stored ... to be used during the seven years of famine (41:32-36).

Joseph trusted God to tell Pharaoh what to do to save his people. God gave Joseph the plan. It seemed a good plan to Pharaoh and his officials (41:37).

Pharaoh then asked them, "Can we find anyone as wise as this man?" Pharaoh respected the faith Joseph had in God Almighty. He said, "The Spirit of God is in this man" (41:38).



Joseph explains Pharaoh's dream

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "God has made all this known to you ... You will be in charge ... All my people must obey your orders" (41:39-40).

Pharaoh took his special ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. Joseph was given great power in the land of Egypt. Everyone bowed down to Joseph and obeyed his orders (41:42-43).

Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife, called Asenath. Asenath gave Joseph two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (41:50-52).

In each of the seven years of good crops, Joseph stored one fifth of all the grain grown in Egypt (41:34). When famine came to Egypt and all the other lands around them, there was plenty of food in Egypt. The people of Egypt and people from other lands came to Joseph to buy grain (41:56-57).

This prepared the way for the family of Jacob (Israel) to visit Egypt.



Egypt in the history of God's people

Egypt played an important part in God's plan for the Jews including the Lord Jesus Christ. It was:

- A place of safety for the future people of Israel, planned by God.
- A place of training and power for Joseph, the important son of Jacob (Israel).
- A country of much food and good pastures (Genesis 45:18; 47:6) where the Israelites greatly increased in number (Genesis 46:3; Deuteronomy 10:22).
- The country where the children of Israel later became slaves. This made them want to be free and they cried out to God Almighty to deliver them (Exodus 2:23; Acts 7:34).
- The country where Moses, one of Israel's leaders, was born and grew up in Pharaoh's palace (Exodus 2:2,10; Hebrews 11:27).
- The country God used to bless His special people with many gifts as Moses led them out to the promised land of Canaan (Exodus 12:35-36).

God later warned the people of Israel not to return to Egypt (Deuteronomy 17:16; Jeremiah 42:15-16; 44:12; Isaiah 30:3; 31:1).

Many centuries later, an angel of God told Mary and her future husband to take the baby Jesus to Egypt when King Herod wanted to kill Him (Matthew 2:13). However, God used Egypt as a place of safety for the future Messiah.



Talk about this:

1. How can we know if dreams are true?
2. How do we know that Joseph kept on trusting God while he was in prison (40:8; 41:16)?
3. Describe the wisdom given to Joseph for Pharaoh (41:32-36).



Think about this: Joseph went to prison for doing what was right. Do we say that life is unfair to us? Read Romans 8:28. How do you behave when trouble comes? Do you look forward for God's purpose and provision? Do you look back to see how God has prepared the way? Think about how Joseph's faith in God while in prison saved him and fulfilled the purpose of God for the family of Jacob (Israel). How do we know if our thoughts, ideas and dreams are good or bad?



Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 42



Learn about this: *Jacob sends ten of his sons to go and buy grain in Egypt who meet Joseph without recognising him (verses 1-5). Joseph sends them to prison as spies but then releases nine of them with instructions to bring his favourite brother Benjamin to Egypt (v.6-24). The nine brothers return to Canaan and discover the money for the grain has been returned inside the sacks. All this causes Jacob much fear (v.25-38).*

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS TRAVEL TO EGYPT

Joseph's brothers would soon meet Joseph, though they did not know this. God brought them all together so that Joseph could forgive them and they could be friends again. Joseph did not travel to Canaan but his brothers travelled to Egypt. This was part of the plan for the people of Israel that God promised to Abraham many years before. His descendants would live in the land of Canaan but would first spend 400 years in Egypt (13:15; 15:13).

There was famine everywhere. Jacob (Israel) and his family in Canaan heard that there was grain in Egypt. He said to his sons, "Go down there. Buy some for us. Then we will live and not die" (42:2).

The ten oldest sons packed their donkeys and went down to Egypt, but Jacob kept the youngest son Benjamin at home (42:4). Benjamin was his second son by Rachel, before she died. (Benjamin was Joseph's full brother; his other brothers were half-brothers or step-brothers, through the three other wives of Jacob.)

When Jacob's ten sons reached Egypt, they came to Joseph, who was by this time governor of the land. This was unknown to them and they did not recognise him. They 'bowed down to him with their faces to the ground' (42:6). In this way Joseph's dreams when he lived in Canaan with his father Jacob came true (37:5-7).

Joseph recognised his brothers at once (42:7,8). But they did not know that he was Joseph their young step-brother. He looked and spoke just like an Egyptian. Joseph pretended that he did not know them. Then he remembered his dreams and spoke unkindly to them. "You are spies" he said (42:9).

They told him they had come only to buy food. "We are honest men. We are not spies" (42:11). Joseph told them he would test them to see if they were honest. "Unless your youngest brother comes here ... you will not leave this place" (42:15). He then put them in prison for three days (42:17).

This gave Joseph time to think what to do next. He did not want the problems from the past to hinder what God would do in the future. He also wanted to talk about his father and his brother Benjamin.

On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do what I say. Then you will live because I respect God. If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison. The rest of you may go and take grain... But you must bring your youngest brother to me" (42:18-20).

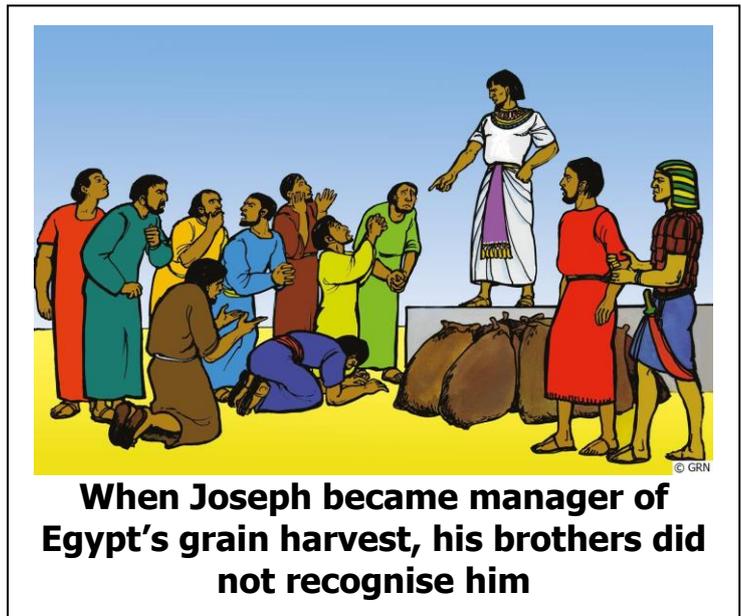
The brothers now thought about what they had done to Joseph many years before. They began to think that God was punishing them (42:21,22).

Joseph heard and understood the language they used. He was moved to tears (42:24), but he did not let them see him cry. Joseph ordered Simeon to be tied up, and then he let the others go. He also gave instructions that their money should be left inside the bags of grain (42:25).

On their way home, one of the brothers opened his sack to get food for his donkey. He found the money he had paid for the grain inside the sack. They were all afraid and said, "What has God done to us?" (42:28).

When the brothers got home, every man found his money in his sack. Jacob was worried. Simeon was a prisoner in Egypt and his sons wanted to take Benjamin with them the next time they went there. Jacob said, "Everything is going against me!" (42:36).

Benjamin was special. He was the only son left in Canaan of his favourite wife, Rachel. Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin (35:16-20). At first Jacob said he would never let Benjamin go to Egypt (42:38).





Talk about this:

1. Were Joseph's brothers honest men (42:11)?
2. After three days, how did God use Joseph to punish his ten brothers (42:17-22)?
3. Why did Joseph cry (42:24)? Why did he ask to see Benjamin (42:20)?
4. What did the brothers find in their sacks of grain (42:27,35)? Why were they afraid? Why was their father afraid?



Think about this: When Joseph saw his brothers, how did God help him to speak and act wisely? How were God's plans for Jacob's family coming true? When things suddenly change in our lives, do we take time to understand our personal feelings and thoughts? Pray for wisdom to forgive others, and to move forward with God's guidance like Joseph.



Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 43



Learn about this: *Jacob finally agrees for Benjamin to travel to Egypt with his nine brothers (verses 1-15). Joseph welcomes the ten brothers to his house without revealing who he is and prepares a feast for them all including Simeon (v.16-34).*

THE SECOND JOURNEY TO EGYPT

When Jacob's sons and their families had no food left, Jacob said to his sons, "Go back [to Egypt]. Buy us a little more food" (43:2).

Judah reminded his father that if they did not take Benjamin with them they could not buy food (43:3-4).

Jacob blamed his sons for bringing trouble on him (43:6). They said they had to answer all the Egyptian man's questions (43:7).

Judah said to Jacob, "Send the boy along with me. We will go at once. Then you and your children will live and not die. I myself promise to keep him safe. If not, you can blame me" (43:8-9).

What a change! It was Judah who sent his brother Joseph into Egypt as a slave without telling his father. Now he tells his father that he will take his brother Benjamin into Egypt and take care of him.

Jacob said, "Put some of the best goods of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift... Take twice the amount of money with you. You must give back the money that was put back into your sacks. Maybe it was a mistake" (43:11-12).

Then Jacob gave them his most precious gift: his son Benjamin (43:13). And he used one of the special names of God, *El Shaddai*, God Almighty, in his prayer for mercy and safety (43:14). He prayed that God Almighty would show mercy when Judah and Benjamin met 'the man' (Joseph). We see clearly that

this was a prayer that was very much in God's will. Jacob was sad and afraid but he also trusted in God without knowing the answer to prayer. But he also had doubts. He added to his prayer, "If I lose my sons, then I lose them."

The brothers then took Benjamin with some gifts and money to buy food and went back to Egypt.



Prayer. Genesis 43:14

Jacob was now getting old. His prayer to God was partly in faith and partly in despair at the thought of losing family members. However, using the growing faith he had been given, he said "May the Almighty God cause him (the Governor of Egypt) to show mercy." He did not know at that time that the Governor was his favourite son Joseph and that his prayer was exactly in the will of God!

- Prayer is demanded and commanded by God.
- Prayer establishes a stronger relationship with God.
- Prayer confirms we are chosen and adopted by God.
- Prayer strengthens our faith and trust in God.

Prayer today is prompted and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is promised to all believers in Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah. We must remember to admit our sins as well as our needs, honour God with our love, ask in faith and pray in the name of Jesus. Finally, we must go forward without doubts, unlike Jacob, trusting in the hope that our prayers are in the will of God and giving thanks to our Father in Heaven. Jesus told His disciples to pray believing that "what you want to happen will be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS ARE AFRAID

When Joseph saw that Benjamin was with his brothers, he told the manager of his house, "Take these men to my house ... I want them to eat with me at noon" (43:16). The brothers were afraid. They thought perhaps Joseph might keep them as his slaves.

When they came to the house, they told Joseph's manager about the money.

He said to them "Do not be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you riches in your sacks" (43:23). Then he brought their brother Simeon to them. 'He gave them water to wash their feet and provided food for their donkeys' (43:24).

Then Joseph arrived. His brothers gave him their gifts and bowed down to the ground in front of him (43:26). He asked them if their father was well.

Then he said to Benjamin, "May God be gracious to you" (43:29). 'Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to cry' (43:30).

The brothers sat together at a separate table because they were Hebrews. Egyptians did not eat with Hebrews (43:32). The brothers noticed a strange thing. Each man was given a place to sit according to his age (43:33).

Joseph ordered five times more food for Benjamin than the others (43:34) because he loved him the most.



Talk about this:

1. Jacob prayed to God Almighty for mercy (43:14). What did Joseph say to his brothers when they arrived in Egypt (43:16)?
2. What did the manager of Joseph's house say to them (43:23)?
3. How did the dreams of Joseph come true many years later (43:26)?
4. How did Joseph show his love for Benjamin (43:29-30,34)?



Think about this: What made Jacob trust completely in God (43:14)? Think about how God blessed Jacob, Judah and Joseph when they trusted completely in Him. Can you look back and see God at work in your life? Is life a mystery to you or can you see a divine purpose at work? Thank God for the mystery of Christ at work in your life (Ephesians 1:9).



Bible reading: Genesis Chapters 44 and 45



Learn about this: *The eleven brothers prepare to leave Egypt with more grain but Joseph's cup is found in Benjamin's sack (44:1-13). The brothers are brought before Joseph and Judah pleads for his brothers and their father Jacob (v.14-34). Joseph reveals who he is to his brothers and comforts them by describing God's purpose and provision (45:1-8). Joseph asks for his brothers to bring his father Jacob to Egypt then embraces his younger brother Benjamin before kissing them all and weeping over them (v.9-15). Pharaoh agrees that Jacob is brought to Egypt and supplies their needs for the journey back to Canaan where Jacob at first refused to believe his favourite son was still alive (v.16-28).*

THE BROTHERS TRY TO LEAVE EGYPT

Joseph told his manager to fill his brothers' sacks with as much food as they could carry on their donkeys. "Put each man's money in his sack. Then put my silver cup in the youngest one's sack (44:1-2).

After they had left for Canaan, Joseph told his manager to go after them. He told the brothers, "The one who is found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you will be free from blame" (44:10).

Joseph's manager opened each sack, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest brother's sack. He found Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack.

The men were very sad. They all went back with Benjamin to Joseph's city. Once more they bowed down to the ground before Joseph. The ten older brothers were free to go home. They were very frightened. (44:13).

Joseph still spoke to them in the Egyptian language. "What have you done?" he asked (44:15).

Judah pleaded for his youngest brother Benjamin. He told again all that had happened to them. He said, "I promised my father I would keep the boy safe" (44:32).

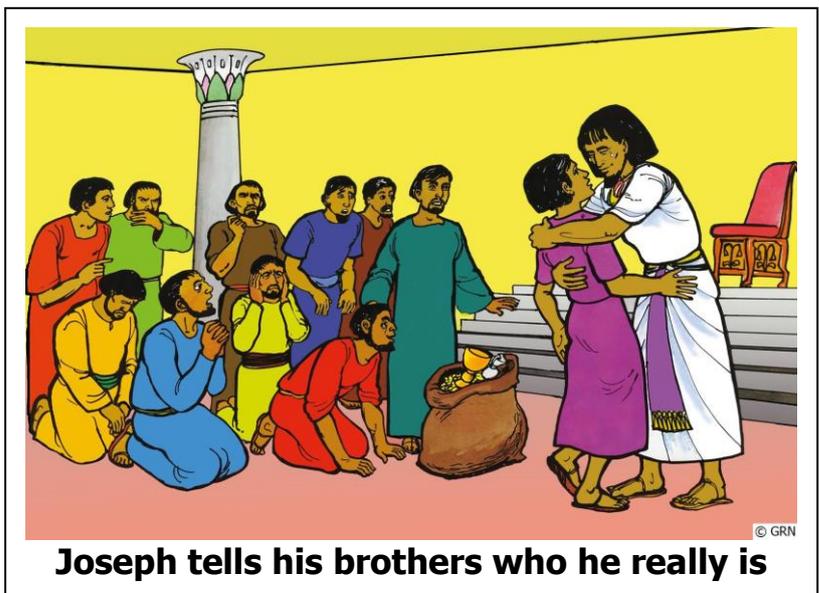
If anything happened to Benjamin, Judah would always know it was his fault. Then Judah offered to remain in Egypt as a slave in Benjamin's place so that Benjamin could return to his father in Canaan (44:33). Years before, Judah and his brothers sent Joseph to Egypt as a slave. He was now a changed man.

JOSEPH TELLS HIS BROTHERS WHO HE REALLY IS

Joseph could not keep quiet any longer. "Make everyone leave me," he shouted out. And he began to cry so loudly that everyone in the house heard him. He loved his brothers even though they had hurt him. He knew it was God's love that had brought them together again.

He said to his brothers, "I am Joseph!" The brothers were afraid. Joseph called to them to come closer. "I am your brother Joseph," he told them again. "I am the one you sold into Egypt. Do not be upset. Do not be angry with yourselves ... God sent me ahead of you to save many lives" (45:4-5). "It wasn't you who sent me here. It was God" (45:8).

In this way Joseph showed how much he had learned to trust God in all things and to believe in God's wonderful plan to save his family, the twelve sons of Jacob, who became known as the children of Israel. He did not know at that time of God's bigger salvation plan for all the families of Israel and later, for the whole world, through Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.



Joseph helped his brothers to choose between good and evil. God encouraged them to choose to do what was right. They came back to Egypt and took the blame. In this way they showed Joseph that they were now changed men and were sorry for the wrong they had done all those years ago.

Jacob suffered at first by losing his son in Canaan. Joseph suffered at first by being a slave in Egypt. But now all his brothers were reunited.

Joseph did not tell the Egyptians about the wrong things his brothers had done.

PHARAOH INVITES THE FAMILY OF JACOB TO EGYPT

Things happened quickly. Joseph sent all his brothers home to bring his father Jacob (Israel) and all his family and flocks to Egypt. Pharaoh agreed and sent carts and men to bring them to Egypt. He promised them the best of everything (45:18-20).

As they were leaving, Joseph said to them, "Do not argue on the way!" (45:24). He wanted the brothers to love and not blame each other.

When the eleven sons of Jacob arrived back in Canaan they told their father, "Joseph is still alive. He is ruler of the whole land of Egypt!" (45:26).

Jacob did not believe them at first. But when he saw all the carts and gifts, Jacob said, "I believe it now! My son Joseph is still alive!" (45:28).

Father and son wanted to be together again. God wanted the whole family of Israel to be together. He wanted them to be safe and well cared-for.

The way Joseph cared for his family points to how God loves His people. God's plan for Joseph was part of God's plan for the whole family of Jacob (Israel). We should all learn to trust God, who cares for us. The sadness caused by death, sin, separation or disaster does not mean that God has stopped loving all who trust and obey Him.



Talk about this:

1. What did Joseph tell his manager to do (44:1-2)? What did he say to his brothers (44:10)?
2. What did the ten brothers do when they were free to go home (44:13)? Why did they return to Joseph?
3. What did Judah agree to do to save Benjamin (44:33)? How does this show he was a changed man?
4. How did Joseph explain the things that had happened to him (45:5-8)? How strong was his faith in God?
5. Why did Joseph keep secret the story of his brothers?



Think about this: How much did Joseph understand the purposes of God? How much did this affect his faith in God? Can you trust God even when you do not understand what He is doing in your life and family? Can you show the mercy of God to others who do wrong things to you? Ask God to help you to forgive and forget and show love for those who have hurt you.



Bible reading: Genesis Chapters 46 and 47



Learn about this: *Jacob sets out to visit Joseph in Egypt with his eleven sons and their families, 70 in all, plus servants and flocks. God speaks to him at the border saying not to fear (46:1-27). Joseph meets Jacob and tells him what to say to Pharaoh (v.28-34). Joseph arranges land and supplies for Jacob's family (47:1-12). He then arranges for storage of grain in the whole land of Egypt in preparation for the famine (v.13-26). The tribe of Jacob (Israel) multiplies in Goshen, northern Egypt, and Jacob instructs Joseph to bury his bones back in Canaan in the cave which belonged to Abraham (v.27-31).*

GOD SPEAKS TO JACOB

Jacob's family travelled towards Egypt. When they reached Beersheba, Jacob worshipped and offered sacrifices to God. There the LORD God Almighty renewed His covenant made with Abraham and Isaac and then spoke a wonderful promise to Jacob (46:3). Beersheba was on the border of Canaan and Egypt. It was on the border of the land that God promised to Abraham many years before.

God spoke to Jacob in a vision at night. "Jacob! Jacob!" He said (46:2).

"Here I am," Jacob answered. He was prepared to do what God asked.

"I am the God of your father [Isaac]. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt. There I will make you into a great nation. I will go down to Egypt with you. You can be sure I will bring you back again" (46:3-4). God also promised Jacob that Joseph would be with him when he died.

Compare this with what God said to Abraham (22:13,17-19) and Isaac (26:23,24) at Beersheba many years before.

There were 70 people in Jacob's family at this time (46:27). Their names are given in 46:8-25. This was in the year 1706 BC.

Jacob sent Judah ahead to tell Joseph they had arrived in Egypt and to ask where they should live (46:28). They stopped in the north of Egypt in the area of Goshen.

Joseph went to Goshen to meet his father. As soon as he saw Jacob, he threw his arms around him and cried a long time.

Joseph told his family how to greet Pharaoh and what to say to him about their move to Egypt. This was very important if they were to have Pharaoh's blessing.

Joseph told them, "When Pharaoh calls you in and asks what your work is, you should answer that you look after cattle and sheep just as our fathers did" (46:33-34). The Egyptian people at that time refused to welcome those who worked with sheep. So the Hebrews, the family of Jacob (Israel), were told to live in Goshen in the far north without hindrance to anyone (46:34).



A remnant of faithful believers

At certain times in history, God has separated a few people who had faith in Him, to continue His work on Earth. The Bible calls these true believers 'a remnant'.

- God saved Noah and his family, a remnant of 8 persons, from the Great Flood (Genesis 7:23; 1 Peter 3:20).
- God saved Jacob and his family, a remnant of 70 persons, from the great famine (Genesis 46:27).
- God sent a remnant of 4600 Jews into exile (Jeremiah 52:25-30). He brought back 50,000 Jews from punishment and captivity in Babylon 70 years later (Ezra 2:64).

These remnants of believers were greatly used by God to fulfil His plan of salvation for the world through Jesus Christ their Messiah.

PHARAOH BLESSES JACOB AND HIS FAMILY

Joseph chose five of his brothers and took them to the king. When Pharaoh asked them about their work, they told him they were shepherds (47:3). The Egyptians did not keep sheep or goats; they kept cattle. So this is why the children of Israel were left alone for 400 years in the region of Goshen.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "The land of Egypt is before you; let your father and brothers live in the best part of the land" (47:6). So the children of Israel (Jacob's family) went to live in the land of Goshen in the region of Rameses in the north of Egypt. God wanted his people to be separate from other nations and their religions. The river pastures also provided vegetables and rich food for their sheep and goats.

Then Joseph brought his father Jacob to meet Pharaoh (47:7)

Jacob blessed Pharaoh twice (47:7,10). This shows that Jacob's faith in God remained strong. After meeting Almighty God at Beersheba, Jacob was encouraged (46:3). So he knew that he had God's authority to bless Pharaoh. He knew that his God was greater than Pharaoh, King of Egypt (Hebrews 7:7). Jacob was not afraid of Pharaoh but also became humble in his later years.

God had really changed Jacob. Despite all his bad ways and everything he had suffered in his life, Jacob now knew that God, in His grace and mercy, would fulfil His promise to Abraham to raise up a special people through his family. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had spoken. He would keep His covenant promise. The children of Jacob did well in the land of Egypt. Pharaoh gave them the best land for their flocks (47:11).

Jacob had no authority. He had no power. He had no wealth. He had a promise from God Almighty for his family. Pharaoh was part of God's plan for

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob believed this and so blessed Pharaoh using God's authority in faith.

'Joseph also provided food for his father and family... He gave them enough for all their children' (47:12). In this way, Joseph, who was badly treated by ten of his brothers, became a servant and saviour of Jacob's family, through God's provision and with the authority of Pharaoh. This prepared the way for the time when God sent Israel's Messiah, Jesus the Christ, to be the persecuted Servant and Saviour for all who believe He is the Son of God.

HOW JOSEPH MANAGES THE FAMINE

The people in Egypt and in Canaan were suffering because of the famine, but Joseph continued to sell food. He took payment for it and brought the money to Pharaoh. When the people had no more money they came to Joseph and said, "Give us food. Why should we die? ... Our money is all gone" (47:15).

"Then bring your cattle," said Joseph. "I will sell you food for your cattle" (47:16).

The following year they came to Joseph and said, "There is nothing left to give you except our bodies and our land. Buy us and our land in exchange for food ... then we and our land will belong to Pharaoh" (47:18,19).

So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh.

"You have saved our lives," they said to Joseph (47:25).

As the famine came to an end, Joseph gave the people seed to plant (47:23).

"When the crop comes in, give a fifth of it to Pharaoh," he told them. "Keep the other four-fifths for yourselves. It will be seed for the fields and food for yourselves..."

So Joseph made it a law in Egypt that a fifth of the food belonged to Pharaoh. Egypt became a powerful nation, but its people became slaves to Pharaoh (47:25-26).

THE FAMILY OF JACOB REMAIN IN EGYPT

Meanwhile, the children of Jacob (Israel) settled in the north of Egypt (47:27). There was plenty of water and grass for their flocks. They built homes and had many children over the next 400 years.

Jacob lived for another 17 years. He died in Egypt when he was 147 years old (47:28).

Before he died, Jacob asked Joseph to make a promise to him (47:29). He said, "Do not bury me in Egypt ... carry me out of Egypt." Joseph promised to bury his father in Canaan where his parents and grandparents were buried.

In this way, Jacob reminded Joseph and his brothers that their true calling was to serve the God of Abraham and Isaac in Canaan, the land that God promised to give them.

Joseph was sold as a slave but became the servant and saviour of Jacob's family while in Egypt. It was part of God's plan for the descendants of Abraham who are the nation of Israel. He was their servant and saviour 1700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, our 'Servant King'.

Judah was also part of the same plan of God. He was an ancestor of another Joseph who became the husband of Mary the mother of Jesus, Israel's Messiah or Christ (Matthew 1:3,16).

Jesus is God's Son who came to save Israel and become Servant and Saviour of the world. Repent, believe and receive God's mercy and salvation now through accepting Jesus, Israel's Messiah, as your Saviour!



Talk about:

1. What did Jacob do when he reached Beersheba (46:1)?
2. What did God say to him (46:3-4)? Why was this important for him in Egypt?
3. What did Joseph tell his brothers to say to Pharaoh (46:34)? What did they say to him (47:3)? Why was this important for the future of Israel?
4. How did the children of Israel come to live in the best land of Egypt (47:11)?
5. When the Egyptians had no more money or animals, what did they trade for food (47:18)?
6. What law did Joseph make about the crops that grew in Egypt after the famine (47:26)?



Think about this: When things go wrong in life, do you keep trusting God even if you do not completely understand? Why is this important for your future? Why was it important for Jacob and Joseph? Think about how the grace and mercy of God was at work in the family of Jacob whose new name was Israel. Think about how God changed the lives of Jacob, Joseph and Judah to fulfil His promise to Abraham for the Jews and their Messiah and the rest of the world.



Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 48



Learn about this: *Joseph visits his father Jacob who confirms God's promise for Joseph and his two sons to be part of the tribe of Israel, with a double portion of land for their many descendants (verses 1-22).*

JACOB BLESSES JOSEPH'S SONS

When Joseph heard that his father was ill, he went quickly to Goshen to meet his family. When Jacob saw Joseph with his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, he asked who they were.

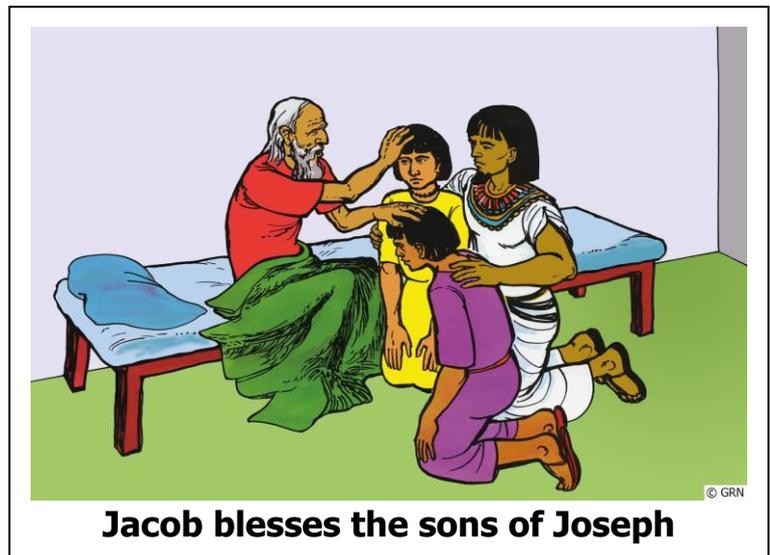
Jacob told Joseph that many years before, God made him a promise in the land of Canaan. "I will make you a nation of many peoples, and I will give this land ... to your children after you" (48:4). Jacob told Joseph, "Ephraim and Manasseh will belong to me" (48:5).

Jacob then remembered the death of Joseph's mother Rachel. He buried her body near Bethlehem. He said, "Rachel died. It made me very sad. She died in the land of Canaan... We were not very far away from Ephrath. So I buried her body there beside the road to Ephrath." (48:7). Ephrath was also called Bethlehem, which became the birthplace of Israel's Messiah.

The old man said, "Bring your two sons to me so that I can bless them" (48:9).

In the Jewish tradition, the eldest son always has the greatest blessing. It was called his birthright. It was the custom for the father to give God's blessing to his eldest son or grandson by putting his right hand on his head and praying over him.

Joseph wanted his father to bless Manasseh, his firstborn son. So he stood Manasseh near his father's right hand and Ephraim near his father's left hand. But Jacob crossed his arms so that his right hand was on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Manasseh's head (48:13-14). Then he asked God to bless the two boys (48:15-16).



Jacob blesses the sons of Joseph

Joseph thought his father did not know which boy was Manasseh and which boy was Ephraim, and so he took his father's hand to move it. "No, my father, this is the firstborn," he said. "Put your right hand on his head" (48:18).

But Jacob said, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become great ... but his younger brother will be greater than him." So Jacob blessed Ephraim before his older brother and called them both sons of Israel. He prophesied that the children of Israel in future would say these words: "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh" (48:20). Later they became part of the nation of Israel (Joshua 14:4) and settled in the best part of the Promised Land.

Jacob said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with all of you. He will take you back to the land of your fathers" (Genesis 48:21). He was speaking words of prophecy, looking far into the future of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob now showed the same great faith in God as Abraham and Isaac. God promised to make a great nation from the family of Abraham and Sarah and Jacob believed this.

Now Joseph fully understood how and why God had used him to unite his family. God also used Joseph to save them from dying in the great famine by arranging for them to live in Egypt. Through Joseph, God brought a big change in Jacob and in all of Joseph's brothers. Jacob learned to love all his sons equally. All his sons learned to love each other. Amazingly, Joseph was a slave and servant who became Israel's saviour.

God loves all His sons and daughters equally. He does not have favourites. He gives us different work to do in the Kingdom of God. Jesus also taught His followers to love each other (John 15:17).



Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 49



Learn about this: *Jacob calls all his sons together before he dies to bless them and speak prophecies over them (verse 1-28). He confirms the instructions to bury his bones in Canaan where Abraham and Isaac were buried (v.29-33).*

JACOB'S FINAL BLESSINGS FOR HIS TWELVE SONS

Jacob called all his sons to his deathbed and blessed them. "Gather around me so I can tell you what will happen to you in the days to come," he said. "Listen to your father Israel" (49:1-2).

Jacob gave each of the 12 sons a blessing and told them what would happen to that son's family and their families in the Promised Land. We believe that Jacob spoke to his sons these words direct from God. These words are called 'prophecy'. They tell what God has planned for the future. Jacob spoke these words in faith believing they were from God.

Jacob loved his family but he reminds them of past sins (49:4,6). God loves us too. When we repent and follow Jesus, He forgives and forgets our sins.

PROPHECIES FOR THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

These are the prophecies God gave through Jacob for his twelve sons, the twelve tribes of Israel.

Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, lost his birthright because he had shamed his family. Reuben was powerful but his character was weak. No judge, prophet or prince came from Reuben's tribe.

Next Jacob spoke to **Simeon** and **Levi**. They were two angry and violent men. Because of their wickedness God said "I will scatter them in ... Israel." Simeon did not receive land in Canaan but was scattered amongst the tribe of Judah (Joshua 19:1). Levi was the tribe of priests. So God did not give them land of their own either. They lived in towns among the other tribes (Numbers 35:2-8; Joshua 14:4; 21:41). God was their Provider.

Judah: "Judah, your brothers will praise you" (49:8). Jacob gave Judah the greatest praise and the most wonderful prophecy. Judah's tribe would:

- win wars (49:8).
- be the leader and ruler over others (Judges 1:1-2; Psalms. 60:7).
- be like a lion in courage and strength (49:9).
- be the kingly tribe from which the Messiah (Christ) would come to rule over all nations (49:10).
- become a very handsome and prosperous tribe, with plenty of vines and wine (49:11-12).

Zebulun would live near the sea and become a tribe of fishermen and traders. This prophecy came true when Joshua divided the land. Zebulun's part in the Promised Land reached the Mediterranean coast.

Men of **Issachar** were strong and worked hard (49:15). In later years they suffered forced labour and heavy taxes. But they also understood the purposes of God. They were not deceived.

Dan was a small tribe, but it ruled itself. Danites were like 'a serpent by the roadside'. They sprang at their enemies and defeated them (Judges 18:27). Samson was from the tribe of Dan. He kept the Philistines out of Israel for many years.

Gad means 'a troop of soldiers'. The Gadites were brave fighting men (1 Chronicles 12:8). They settled to the east of the Jordan River and were often attacked by Moabite and Ammonite raiders. Jacob assured them that they would overcome their attackers. When Saul and David were kings, their invaders were defeated (1 Chronicles 5:18-20).

Asher became a very rich tribe and sold its produce to the other tribes.

The name **Naphtali** means 'my struggle'. This tribe settled in the hill country, north of the Sea of Galilee (Joshua 19:32-39). Jacob prophesied that the tribe of Naphtali would be like an animal set free to give birth to a beautiful family.

Last of all, Jacob blessed his favourite sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Both sons were born to his favourite wife Rachel (49:22-27).

From his youth, **Joseph** trusted in God. Joseph had many enemies, but God protected him. When bad things happened to him, he trusted God and God turned bad things into good.

Jacob knew that everything that had happened to Joseph was because God allowed it in order to bless his people. He called God the Mighty One, the Shepherd, the Rock. "Let all these blessings rest on the head of the one who is prince among his brothers," he prayed (49:26).

Jacob loved **Benjamin** but spoke this prophecy about his future: "Benjamin is a hungry wolf!" he said (49:27). Years later, Jacob's words came true. The men of Benjamin were strong and fearless and made themselves rich with war. King Saul came from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Samuel 9:21), and so did another Saul who became the apostle Paul (Philippians 3:5).

THE BURIAL PLANS OF JACOB

Jacob's words show that God kept his promises to Abraham and to Isaac in the Promised Land. The prophecy for Judah was the most important. From the family of Judah would come King David and finally Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah.

The words used by Jacob in his prophecies give glory to Yahweh, Almighty God. They also show the power and mercy of God Almighty to keep His promises for His people when they remain faithful. They also show the judgement of God on Levi and Simeon for their sins recorded in Genesis 34. Jacob gave each son 'the blessing that was just right for him' (49:28). Jacob blessed Joseph and Judah the most.

After Jacob blessed his sons, he spoke about his death and asked them to take his body back to Canaan. "Bury me with my fathers," he said, "in the cave in the field of Machpelah." This was where his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham were buried with their wives (49:29-32).

It is the place where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were buried. It is near Mamre and Hebron where Abraham and Lot first settled. Rachel was buried near Bethlehem (Ephrath) where she died giving birth to Benjamin (35:19-20).

During the next 1700 years, the prophecy for Judah was not forgotten. After much disobedience towards God and punishment from God, the remaining people of Israel waited faithfully for the promised Messiah, the Son of God, who is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Today, we wait for His promised return. His Hebrew name is Yeshua, or Jeshua or Joshua, which means 'God's Salvation'.

Jacob began life as a deceiver. He ended life as a true man of God. His prophecies and plans revealed the love and purpose of God for future generations.



Talk about this:

1. Did all Jacob's sons live godly lives? How did they change when they moved to Egypt?
2. How did Jacob change at the end of his life?
3. Where did Jacob ask to be buried (49:29-32)? What was special about that place?
4. Which tribe did Israel's Messiah come from?



Think about this: Jacob became a godly parent and grandparent. How did God change Jacob and use Joseph in building the nation of Israel? Pray for the ministry of elderly believers that they may understand what God has done in and through them in their lifetime. Can you see God's larger plan to bring good out of conflict in your life, in your church and in your nation?



Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 50



Learn about this: *After mourning for Jacob 40 days, Joseph obtains permission from Pharaoh to go bury his father in Canaan (verses 1-14). After they all return from Canaan, Joseph reassures his brothers that he has forgiven them for the wrong they did to him. He cares for them and prophesies that God will take them out of Egypt into the land of Canaan promised by God for Abraham's family. Finally, he also asks them to take his bones to Canaan when he dies (v.15-26).*

JOSEPH CARES FOR HIS FATHER AND BROTHERS

Jacob died and Joseph mourned his father. He told the Egyptians to preserve his father's body (50:1-3). We do not preserve bodies today. Jesus told his followers that we would have new bodies when we are raised from death to be with Him.

Now that Jacob was dead, the brothers started to worry.

"What if Joseph still hates us?" the brothers asked each other (50:15). Had Joseph really forgiven them? They were filled with guilt and fear.

They sent a message to Joseph. "Before your father died, he told us to ask you to forgive your brothers the wrong things they did to you" (50:17).

When Joseph read this message, he cried. He loved them and forgave them. It was true forgiveness.

His brothers came to him and threw themselves on the ground. "We are your slaves," they said. But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid ... You meant to hurt me, but God planned it for good ... So then, do not be afraid. I will provide for you and your children" (50:18-21). God's plan was to bless the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Joseph calmed the fears of his brothers.

Over one thousand seven hundred years later, Paul wrote, "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28).

Many people try to take revenge for the bad things others do to them. Joseph spoke kind words to his brothers and fully forgave them. Through Joseph, the family received the unity and peace of God at that time.

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS RETURN TO CANAAN TO BURY JACOB

The Israelites and the Egyptians mourned Jacob for 70 days (Genesis 50:3). Pharaoh gave permission for the families of Jacob (Israel) to travel to Canaan (50:6-8). Many important Egyptians went with them.

There were many men and women, horses and chariots (50:9). They took the preserved body of Jacob with them. When they reached the River Jordan they stopped for seven days to mourn (50:10). The people of Canaan watched everything. They named the place 'the place of mourning of the Egyptians' (50:11). These people did not know that 400 years later, they would become slaves in Egypt, but then would live in the land of Canaan. Joseph and his brothers acted in faith that God's promises would be fulfilled.

Then the sons of Jacob took his body to the field of Machpelah. This is the field near Mamre which Abraham bought. They buried Jacob there with his parents and grandparents (50:12-13). Then they returned to Egypt.

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

Joseph and his brothers lived in Egypt for many years. He saw the children and grandchildren of his two sons. (50:22-23).

When Joseph was very old he called his brothers and said to them, "I am about to die. But I am sure that God will come to help you and take you out of this land [back] to the land He promised ... to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (50:24).

Joseph made the children of Israel (Jacob's family) promise that when they left Egypt they would take his body with them to the Promised Land. (50:25). Twice he said, "God will be with you and help you (50:24,25). Joseph believed that God would continue to work out the plan He had started with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Like them, Joseph had great faith.

Then Joseph died as he had lived, a humble servant of the LORD God Almighty. He did not ask for any honours, only that they should carry his body to Canaan, the land of his father, and bury him there.

Many years later, his family carried his bones all the way through the wilderness and buried them in the land that God had promised them (Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32).



Talk about this:

1. What happened when Jacob died? Why was this part of God's plan?
2. Why were Joseph's brothers afraid of him? How did they receive the peace of God through Joseph?
3. What happened before Joseph died (50:25)? Did the children of Israel do what Joseph asked them to do? (Exodus 13:19)?
4. What can we learn from Joseph's life and the family of Jacob?



Think about this: How often do you encourage others with the peace of God and tell them, "Do not be afraid"? Think how forgiveness can bring peace to others and to yourself. Think about how God's purpose was established for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph and Judah.

CONCLUSIONS

God Almighty warned Abraham that his family would become slaves in a foreign land (Genesis 15:13). This happened some years after Joseph died (Exodus 1:1-14). Many years later, the children of Israel were led by Moses out of Egypt and went into the land of Canaan to live there in the way that God promised Abraham (Exodus 12:50-51).

The story of Joseph shows how God was in control, working out his plans for the future of Israel. He even used family problems to do good.

This commentary also tells the story of Judah, Joseph's brother, and how he served the purposes of God. God used him in his plan for a Saviour to be born in Israel through his family. It also shows how Jacob, Joseph's father, finally changed his ways and fulfilled God's plan for Israel.

God wants us to know that He is the God Almighty of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the great men of faith. He is also the God of Joseph who was a slave, a servant and a saviour of Israel. He is also the God of Judah through whose family tribe Jesus Christ was born.

Joseph was persecuted at first by Judah and then nine other brothers and sold into slavery, ending up in prison. His father Jacob was unable to help him. However, Almighty God had a purpose far beyond human understanding for Jacob, Joseph and all his brothers regarding their move to Egypt and later on for the nation of Israel and their Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

God wants all people to know Jesus and to trust Him to make them part of His long-term plan for Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). He wants to change people to become more like Him. It is Satan's plan to tempt us to sin which stops people from being what God wants them to be. Belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God brings forgiveness and eternal life. It is always God's plan to bring good and salvation out of sin and suffering.

Joseph was the son of Jacob and became a servant and saviour for the whole family of Abraham. Jesus was the Son of God and became a servant and

saviour of Israel and the wider family of Abraham who believe in Israel's Messiah or Christ. Through faith in Jesus the Christ we are all saved from death and receive eternal life with God. Hallelujah!

God also knows that the persecution of Jews and Christians today is evidence of Satan's attack on His salvation plans since the time of Abraham. We pray, "Come back soon Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20.)

This story of Joseph is part of a divine plan for the family of Abraham to provide eternal salvation to the people of Israel and then to all who believe in Jesus Christ their Messiah. The special work that God wanted Joseph to do began with him going to a foreign land as a slave! He became a servant and suffered much but ended up saving many. During all this time he trusted God and his faith increased. His life is an example to follow.

The purpose and provision of God for the world can also be seen in the lives of Judah and Jacob. They fulfilled God's plan for the 12 tribes of Israel to unite and grow into a nation of one million people in Egypt before Moses led them back to God's Promised Land where Jesus our Saviour was born.

A prayer: Thank you Jesus, that we can see the love and purpose of Almighty God and Father at work in the life of Joseph and the wider family of Abraham, despite their serious failings. Help us to be 'instruments of peace' while suffering like You. Help us also to show Your love and mercy to family and friends and the needy people around us. We trust this will bring blessings locally and worldwide, for now and for ever. Amen.

Note: You can read more about Joseph and Moses in Acts 7:9-38 and Psalm 105:16-45.

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