

## Lesson 14 JOSEPH IN EGYPT

**READING:** Genesis 37, 39, 40 and 41:1-45

**AIM:** To show how Joseph's life and experience in Egypt revealed him (and Jesus Christ) as a "saviour" of his people.

### 1. BACKGROUND

Jacob had thirteen children, twelve boys and a girl, Dinah (Gen. 30:20-21; 35:23-26). The sons, from whom descended the twelve tribes of Israel, were:

Sons of Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun

Sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin

Sons of Bilhah: (Rachel's handmaid) Dan and Naphtali,

Sons of Zilpah: (Leah's handmaid): Gad and Asher.

In time, Jacob settled in the fertile valley of Hebron near where Sarah was buried. God blessed him with great riches in sheep and cattle and as his sons grew to manhood, they became responsible for tending the flocks and herds. Rachel was Jacob's favourite wife and when she died, her firstborn son Joseph was drawn very close to his father whose other sons recognised that Jacob loved Joseph most of his children.

Joseph loved and obeyed his father whereas his brothers were envious of him and lacked the same righteous characteristics that he displayed. Reuben had manifested an immoral character that showed him to be unfit for the position he occupied as eldest in the family. Jacob later transferred Reuben's birthright to Joseph's sons (I Chron. 5:1-2)

To indicate his special love for Joseph, Jacob made him a coat of many colours. This gift to Joseph caused dislike and jealousy in the hearts of his brothers because they knew their father favoured him: **"They hated Joseph and could not speak peaceably to him."**

### 2. JOSEPH'S TWO DREAMS AND THEIR SEQUEL - (Gen. 37:5-36)

The hatred of his brothers was increased when Joseph repeated to them two dreams which he had when he was 17 years of age:

(1) **The sheaves of Joseph's brothers bowed down to his sheaf.**

(2) **The sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to Joseph.**

Upon hearing the first dream, his brothers hated him more. The second dream brought a rebuke from his father, who nevertheless "observed the saying". Jacob apparently realised that God's hand was behind these dreams but Joseph's brothers disliked the interpretation and later took revenge.

Joseph's brothers' hatred became so strong that when Jacob sent Joseph to visit his brothers as they grazed their sheep in **Dothan** (having moved on from Shechem) they determined to seize this opportunity to kill him. God was with Joseph, however, and intervened to prevent this murder. Instead he was sold for 20 pieces of silver (Lev. 27:5) to a band of Midianite merchants, who later sold him as a slave to Egypt.

The brothers killed a kid and, dipping Joseph's many-coloured coat in its blood, returned with it to their father with the words, "examine it to see whether it is your son's robe". We can picture Jacob's grief at the supposed slaying of his son by a wild beast. He mourned many days for his favourite child.

Joseph was youth aged 17 years when he was sold into slavery (Gen. 37:2) and he was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh (Gen. 41:46). The intervening 13 years was a long, weary period of exile which was spent first as a slave to Potiphar and later in imprisonment.

### 3. **FROM POTIPHAR'S HOUSEHOLD TO PRISON** Gen. 39

In Egypt, Joseph was purchased by Potiphar. For good service, Potiphar who was an officer of Pharaoh, made him controller of his house. It was a difficult, responsible position. Joseph was given full power because he was faithful and under his influence Potiphar's house was blessed and prospered.

Amidst all his prosperity, however, Joseph was called upon to endure bitter calumny. He stood apart, separate from the idolatry and sin that surrounded him. The wicked, designing wife of Potiphar, tempted Joseph who remained upright and refused to sin against God and his master.

The temptation was not from within Joseph's heart. He honoured God, who protected him in the midst of evil. We too, can resist the severest temptation if we cultivate pure thoughts and place our trust in God.

**Joseph** said, **"how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"** (Gen. 39:9). **Jesus** said, **"It is written ..."**

Unable to prove his innocence, however, Joseph was stripped of his office and cast into prison, Joseph's faith and trust in God never wavered during this calamity. In the royal prison for court officials he proved trustworthy and was put in charge of the prisoners. Subsequently Pharaoh's butler and baker were assigned to the prison and both were committed into Joseph's care.

### 4. **THE DREAMS OF THE BUTLER AND BAKER AND OF PHARAOH** - Gen 40-41:1-32

During their term of imprisonment, the butler and baker had dreams that troubled them. Joseph invited their confidence and they told him their dreams. Acting under God's inspiration, he interpreted their dream, and his words were fulfilled. The butler was restored to his position before Pharaoh, but the baker was put to death.

Knowing that the butler would be restored to favour, Joseph pleaded for his help to be given when he was restored to his position. However the butler forgot Joseph, who served another two years in prison. Then Pharaoh had a dream, the import of which was repeated to emphasize its certainty.

- (1) Pharaoh dreamt that seven starving cattle came out of the River Nile and devoured seven fat cattle that were grazing on the banks, but even then the seven starving cattle were thin and lean-fleshed.
- (2) In his second dream, seven ears of corn, thin and blasted by the east wind, devoured seven healthy full ears of corn which had sprung up before them.

Pharaoh was perplexed about his dreams. The magicians failed to satisfy Pharaoh on this occasion and eventually the butler remembered Joseph, the prisoner who had interpreted his dream. Joseph was summoned from the prison to appear before Pharaoh. According to Egyptian custom he had to shave and change into suitable apparel.

Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams but refused to take any credit, **"It is not in me. God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace"**. (Gen. 41:16). The fat cattle and the ears of corn represented seven years of plentiful harvests to be followed by seven years of famine. All the plenty would be consumed by the years of drought. The dreams concerned not only Egypt but other nations also, who were to depend on Egypt for food.

### 5. **RULER IN EGYPT** - Gen. 41:33-45

Joseph not only explained the meaning of the dreams but advised the king how to act. Let Pharaoh appoint a discreet and wise man over Egypt! Let him arrange for officers throughout the land to take up a fifth part of the harvest in the seven plenteous years, and store it in granaries so that it may be there for use in the years of famine.

This wise counsel impressed Pharaoh. Who better could he employ to act on this advice than the young man who had exhibited greater wisdom than the wise men of Egypt. So Joseph was elevated to second in the land. Royal garments were given him. Only Pharaoh was greater than Joseph.

Joseph's promotion at Pharaoh's court was a further step in God's plan for Israel's salvation. Thirteen years of hardship and imprisonment had ended. Joseph now 30 years of age still had a great mission to carry out as saviour of his people.

## 6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Joseph, in God's Providence, was to be Israel's saviour from starvation and death. He was sent into Egypt for that purpose. He was chosen for the working out of God's plan. He controlled and stored the food of Egypt to provide for the years of famine. Who could be better equipped to take control than a man in whom was the wisdom and fear of God?

Joseph possessed those sterling qualities of character and endurance to trials which are all too rarely seen. He is a noble example because:

- His was a life of self-control and obedience to duty.
- He patiently waited God's own time.
- He forgave and faithfully served those who had wronged him.
- He received honour and promotion without boasting.

For us, as with Joseph, the hardest paths of life may be the way to honour in "God's Kingdom".

## REFERENCE LIBRARY

- "The Ways of Providence" by Robert Roberts, chapter 8
- "Elpis Israel" by John Thomas, part 2, chapter 3.
- "Wrestling Jacob" by Harry Whittaker, chapter 16
- "Undesigned Scriptural Coincidences" by J.J. Blunt, part 1, chapters 9 and 10.
- "Joseph: The Saviour" by Harry Whittaker

## QUESTIONS

1. Tell how and why God was with Joseph in the events of his youth.
2. How was Joseph tried while he was in Egypt?
3. Explain the dreams which Joseph interpreted for Pharaoh.
4. Describe Joseph's position in the family and how the hand of God caused Joseph to be taken to Egypt.
5. Why was it necessary that Joseph should be in Egypt at this time?
6. Compare the character of Joseph with those of his brothers.