



GENESIS

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOSEPH

PART ONE

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How To Use

In GraceCity Church we use the C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application) method to work through the biblical text. We believe it is appropriate to replace “discussion questions” (that focus on the theoretical) with “response questions” (which require participants to personally interact with the central theme of the text).

Context →

1. Pay attention to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, events, etc. to see how this passage fits within the context of this particular book of the Bible.
2. Note how this passage fits within the larger storyline of the whole Bible, i.e. how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ to live under his rule in his place.

Observation and Meaning →

3. Make careful observations of the biblical text. Notice details such as linking words (eg. “for”, “if”, “therefore”),

repetition, dialogue, narrative, and Old Testament quotations.

4. To understand the meaning of the biblical text, we need to discern the author’s purpose or intent: Why is the biblical author writing this?
5. Helpful questions to ask include:
 - Who is writing and to whom?
 - What is the situation of the author and of the readers?
 - Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?
 - Are there any repeated themes, or a single idea that holds everything together?

Application →

6. Apply God’s word to the heart. Move beyond merely addressing circumstances and behaviours by asking good “heart” questions. For example: Why do we do what we do? What do we really desire?
7. Always connect the gospel to application. For example, what difference does knowing Christ make to our obedience to God?
8. Ask what the passage teaches us about God, ourselves, salvation in Christ, the church, the world, etc.

A silhouette of a tree with a thick trunk and a dense, rounded canopy of branches and leaves. The tree is set against a dark, starry night sky. The stars are small, bright points of light scattered across the dark background. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Introduction

Introduction

The remaining fourteen chapters of the book of Genesis turn our attention to the ups and downs of Joseph's life. Joseph was one of Jacob's sons. Jacob had twelve sons, but loved Joseph more than the others. As a symbol of his affection, he gave Joseph a coloured cloak. Joseph's brothers were jealous and sold him into slavery. Joseph was taken to Egypt and eventually became steward to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials.

The author of Genesis is Moses. Moses was a prophet who was called by God to lead the children of Israel out of bondage from Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the promised land of Canaan. Moses sees the events surrounding Joseph's life as being ordered by God and as being the fulfilment of his covenant promises. These closing chapters teach not only divine providence, but also a common pattern throughout the Bible. *Each time one of God's chosen deliverers is rejected, the rejection plays a crucial part in the deliverance of God's people.* Jesus is the ultimate example of this pattern (see Acts 4:27-28).

Placing It in the Bigger Story

Joseph's story develops around three stages, each of which reflect an aspect of the person and work of Jesus:

- *beloved son.*
- *rejected slave.*
- *exalted Saviour*

God sent Joseph to Egypt and blessed him, so that he rose to a position of great power. In that position, he was God's instrument for saving his family and many others in the world from starvation. Jesus gave up his position of great power to be God's instrument for saving people. Christ's life and death made a way to save people from spiritual death, which is the penalty of sin. Joseph recognised that though his brothers intended evil, God planned his circumstances for good—to *establish a remnant* (Genesis 45:7). Likewise, though those who crucified Jesus intended it for evil, God's plan for the sacrifice of His Son was for the good of all people. Through Jesus' death, God again saved a remnant.



JOSEPH'S DREAM

Genesis 37:1-11

Genesis 37:1-11

Joseph's Dream

Scripture Text

Genesis 37:1-11

Big Idea

Joseph grew up in a complicated family. He endured betrayal, hardship, injustice, and isolation. Yet in one of the Bible's most dramatic reversals, Joseph rose to a place of power and authority, delivering God's people and preserving the covenant family. Joseph's story is the story of God's providence in the life of a "*beloved son*", and prefigures a true and better Son to come.

Overview

Genesis is structured around "*generations*", and this chapter begins with the "*generation of Jacob*" (v.2).

Abraham (Joseph's great grandfather) had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. In order to maintain harmony in his family, Abraham had to choose between his two sons. Following instructions from God, Abraham chose Isaac and sent Ishmael away. This might have been where the problem of favouritism began, or it could have begun with Isaac (Joseph's grandfather). Together, Isaac and Rebekah had twin boys, Esau and Jacob. Isaac favoured Esau. Rebekah favoured Jacob (25:28). With this dysfunctional family background in mind, the story of Joseph begins.

Jacob favours his son Joseph (v.3), and shows how *not* to be a wise and responsible parent. Jacob perpetuates the dysfunctional experiences in his own life, such as favouritism, deception, anger, and guilt. He passes on to Joseph a model of manipulative parenting. As a result, Joseph foolishly flaunts his dreams over his brothers. Joseph's first dream is interpreted by his brothers to mean he will reign over them (v.8). Joseph's second dream reinforces a similar expectation, brings about a rebuke from his father, and infuriates his brothers (v.10).

Observation and Meaning

1. How old was Joseph and what job is he doing when this story begins (v.2a)? We are told of a specific action that Joseph takes in relation to his brothers (v.2b). What does he do?
2. We are given information (v.3) that helps to make sense of the brother's attitude towards Joseph (v.4). What is Jacob's (Israel's) temperament toward Joseph? Why does Jacob feel this way? How does Jacob demonstrate this feeling?
3. In Joseph's first dream (vv.5-8), what sorts of objects does he see, and what are they doing? What did his brothers think they represented? Do you think they believed it? Why or why not?
4. In Joseph's second dream (vv.9-11), what sorts of objects does he see, and what are they doing? Who does Joseph tell this second dream to? How do they respond?

Application

- Joseph suffers as a result of being faithful to God's Word. The prophets in the Bible often suffer as a result of being faithful to God's Word. Jesus was crucified for being faithful to God's Word. In what way have you suffered as a result of being faithful to God's Word? What kind of reactions have you experienced from your family as a result of becoming a Christian, or as a result of being obedient to God's instruction?
- God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Joseph over his brothers, was not because of anything in Isaac, Jacob or Joseph. Each brother was as fallen as the other. Paul confirms this when he explains God fixed his favour on Jacob, rather than Esau, even though '*they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad*' (Romans 9:11). How does this truth affect your posture towards family?
- What kind of legacy are you passing on to your children? How will they remember you?



JOSEPH IS SOLD

Genesis 37:12-36

Genesis 37:12-36

Joseph Is Sold

Scripture Text

Genesis 37:12-36

Big Idea

Joseph grew up in a complicated family. He endured betrayal, hardship, injustice, and isolation. Yet in one of the Bible's most dramatic reversals, Joseph rose to a place of power and authority, delivering God's people and preserving the covenant family. Joseph's story is the story of God's providence in the life of a "*beloved son*", and prefigures a true and better Son to come.

Overview

Joseph's brothers throw him in a pit, sell him to slave traders, and pretend he is dead. In the midst of this turn of events, God is not mentioned. It is as though God is absent from the story.

What might this silence teach us about God's presence in the most difficult moments of our lives?

Throughout this account, the reader is being trained to see that the apparent hiddenness of God does not indicate the uncaring absence of God. One reminder of this is that at '*Dothan*' (v.17) Joseph finds his brothers and is betrayed by them—uncared for, it would seem, by God. Yet it was also at Dothan, years later, that Elisha was encircled by the Syrian army. While Elisha's servant, perhaps like Joseph, fails to see the presence of God, Elisha sees the countryside filled with horses and chariots of fire (the army of God).

When the brothers see Joseph from afar they call him a '*dreamer*' (v.19). Their comment is sarcastic and implies Joseph is the master of his own dreams. As the oldest, Reuben convinces his brothers not to kill Joseph. Reuben plans to rescue Joseph and return him to his father (vv.21-22). Although Judah shows compassion by not wanting to kill Joseph, he may have seen this as an opportunity to profit from selling his brother into slavery (vv.26-27).

Observation and Meaning

1. Where does Jacob propose to send Joseph in this segment (vv.12-17)? How willing to go does Joseph seem? Do either of them sense any danger in doing this? What might that say about Jacob and Joseph?

Note: Ironically, Jacob tells Joseph to “*see if it is well with your brothers*” (v.14). This literally means “*see the shalom of your brothers.*” But we have already been told “*his brothers saw that their father loved him . . . they hated him and could not speak peacefully (shalom) to him*” (v.4). In other words, Jacob sends his hated son to check for “*peace*” among brothers who have no intention of speaking peace to him!

2. What do the brothers conspire to do to Joseph when they see him coming (vv.18-20)?
3. Which brother intervenes to try to save Joseph’s life (vv.21-22)? What specific reason is given for why this particular son would try to divert the brothers from their intent to murder? Can you think of any reason that he would try to do this for his father? (See Genesis 35:22 for a possible motive.)

4. What visible form of humiliation do the brothers enact upon Joseph when they seize him (vv.23-25)? Who did the brothers see coming toward them, and where were they going (vv.26-28)? Who proposes that they not kill Joseph after all?

5. What was the ruse that the brothers decided to use with their father (vv.31-35)? What kind of animal was used in the deception?

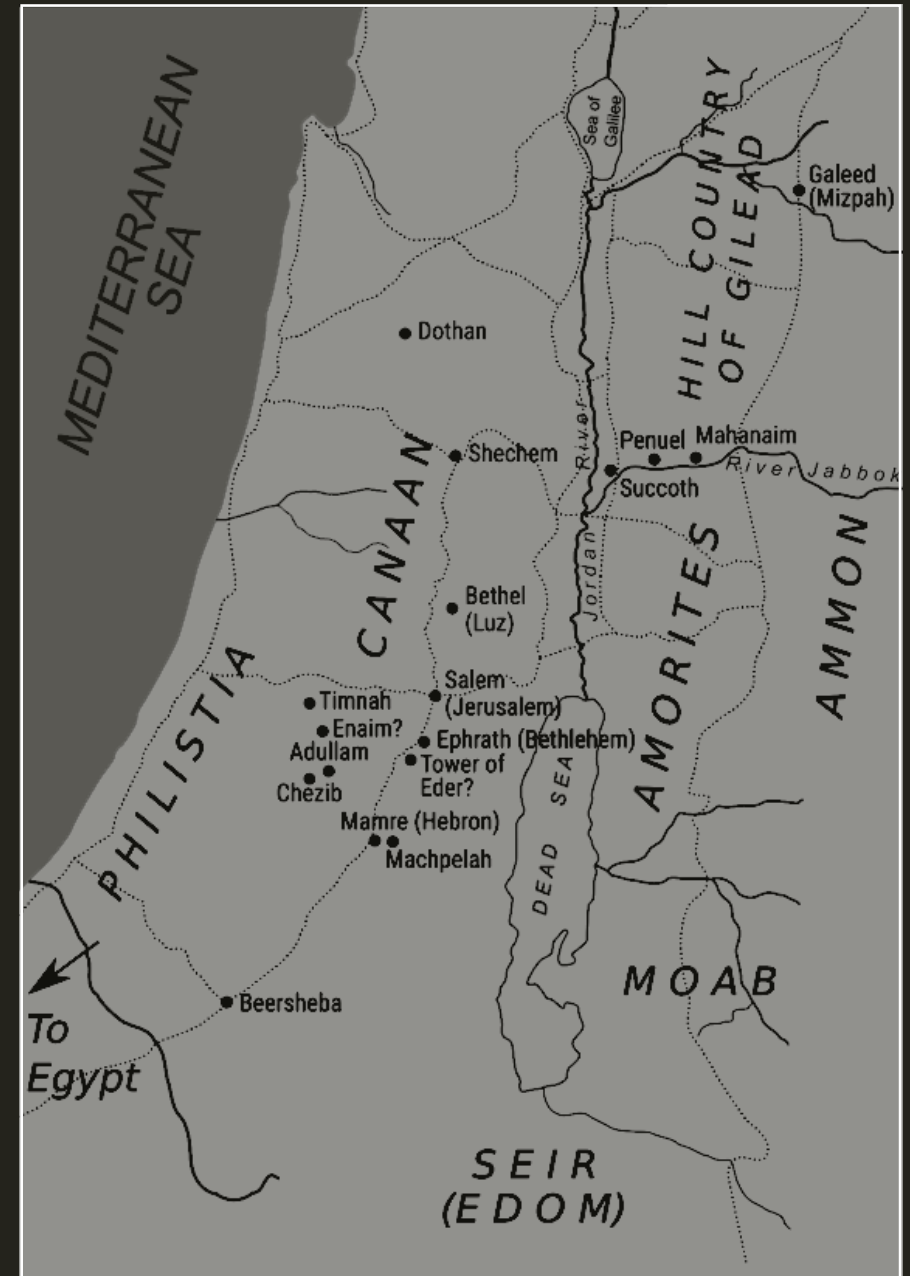
Note: By asking their father to recognise the robe (v.32), they leave it to Jacob to decide what happened to his son (rather than telling him a lie). Ironically, Jacob is being deceived by his sons, when throughout his own life he has deceived others.

6. Who did the Midianites sell Joseph to (v.36)? In what capacity did this person serve Pharaoh?

Application

- Does this “family” seem like it can function as a channel of blessing to all the nations of the earth (see Genesis 12:1-3; 26:4; 28:14)? What does this “family” show you about human nature? In what way do you identify with this messy “family”?
- What do you learn from this passage about God’s posture towards messed up families?
- How does God’s providence in Joseph’s life, despite experiencing such messy “family” dynamics, influence your posture towards your own “family”?

At the very moment God seemed absent—at the cross of his Son, Jesus Christ—God was present, working to redeem and restore
(Acts 2:22-24)





JUDAH AND TAMAR

Genesis 38:1-30

Genesis 38:1-30

Judah and Tamar

Scripture Text

Genesis 38:1-30

Big Idea

Joseph grew up in a complicated family. He endured betrayal, hardship, injustice, and isolation. Yet in one of the Bible's most dramatic reversals, Joseph rose to a place of power and authority, delivering God's people and preserving the covenant family. Joseph's story is the story of God's providence in the life of a "*beloved son*", and prefigures a true and better Son to come.

Overview

In one of the most disturbing chapters of the Bible, we follow Joseph's brother Judah on a downward journey of sexual sin and selfishness.

Why have a whole chapter devoted to Judah and the sordid details of his sexual misconduct?

This chapter provides a record of Judah's family line. The chapter concludes with a birth account in which a firstborn son is pushed aside by his younger brother (vv.27-30). The royal line of David—and therefore of Jesus Christ—will come through this younger brother. The actions recorded in this chapter are committed by Judah, the one through whom the Messiah will eventually be born. This reinforces a common theme in scripture, where God uses the most unlikely subjects through whom to accomplish his redemptive purposes (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

There are many things which make Judah undeserving. He takes a Canaanite wife and has three sons by her. The first son is so wicked that God puts him to death. The second son refuses to fulfil his marriage obligations because he doesn't want to diminish his sons' inheritance (see Deuteronomy 25:5-6). He is therefore put to death. Some time later, having lost his wife, Judah mistakenly thinks his daughter-in-law is a prostitute. He impregnates her, and then orders her death when he discovers she is pregnant.

Eventually Judah discovers the pregnancy is his own responsibility, and Tamar is allowed to give birth to twins. One illegitimate son is Perez, from who comes Boaz. Boaz will marry Ruth, and they will become the ancestors of David—from whose line the Messiah will come (see Ruth 4:18-22; Matthew 1:5). Although this chapter shows Judah at his worst, it is also the beginning of his transformation.

Observation and Meaning

1. How many children does Judah have with this woman? What are their names (vv.2-5)? In order for these things to happen, how long must Judah have been among these Canaanites?
2. Who does Judah think this woman at the crossroads is? Why does he not recognise her as Tamar (v.15)? What does Judah ask of her? What does she ask of him (v.16)?

Note: Although the Mosaic law will come later, the book of Leviticus addresses the kind of sexual transgression that Judah is about to engage in (see Leviticus 18:15; 20:12).

3. What does Judah promise to give the woman (v.17)? In the absence of such payment, what does Tamar ask for until then (v.18)? Why do you think she asked for these things? How did Judah attempt to fulfil his pledge to “the woman” (vv.20-23)?
4. What are the names of Tamar’s children (vv.27-30)? What does the name Perez mean? Why is he called this?

Application

- What do you learn about human nature from this passage?
- In the end, God’s grace breaks through and transforms Judah, as he encounters the faith of his daughter-in-law Tamar. What does this teach you about God’s grace?
- How will your insights from this chapter impact your life today?



JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

Genesis 39:1-30

Genesis 39:1-30

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

Scripture Text

Genesis 39:1-30

Big Idea

Joseph grew up in a complicated family. He endured betrayal, hardship, injustice, and isolation. Yet in one of the Bible's most dramatic reversals, Joseph rose to a place of power and authority, delivering God's people and preserving the covenant family. Joseph's story is the story of God's providence in the life of a "*beloved son*", and prefigures a true and better Son to come.

Overview

With this chapter, our attention is drawn back to the '*Joseph story*' and his whereabouts in Egypt. The narrative

resumes where it left off at the end of chapter 37. One of the techniques in Hebrew narrative for the resumption of an interrupted story is to repeat much of the verse that came prior to the break (compare 37:36 and 39:1).

Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, is not given to trickery or deception. He is a man of integrity, is tested, and demonstrates maturity. The Lord was evidently with Joseph, despite his earlier immaturity (37:10). Joseph became a source of blessing (vv.2-3) and rose to be responsible over his master's household (vv.4-6). He did not give in to the enticements of his master's wife (vv.6-14). He was entrapped by her and escaped (vv.11-13), but she accused him falsely and he was imprisoned (vv.14-20).

While Joseph's circumstances change, one thing does not change—God's empowering presence (vv.2-3, 21 and 23). God is with Joseph, and remains committed to working out His plans through Joseph's life. This is the secret to Joseph's endurance. As a result of God's presence Joseph experiences success over Potiphar's house (vv.1-6), success in temptation (vv.7-12), and success in overseeing the prison (vv.21-23).

Observation and Meaning

1. There are five explanations for Joseph's success within Potiphar's house (vv.2-5). List them below:

Genesis 39:2	
Genesis 39:3	
Genesis 39:3	
Genesis 39:5	
Genesis 39:5	

2. How does this passage describe Joseph's physical appearance (v.6)? Why are these qualities being highlighted?

Note: In the Hebrew narrative, we are rarely given physical characteristics. When we are, these characteristics are significant to the story.

3. How long does it take for Potiphar's wife to begin the false accusations (vv.13- 14)? Who does she address first with Joseph's "wrongdoing"? Who does she seem to blame for Joseph's misbehaviour in the first part of her speech (v.14)?

4. What is false about the way Potiphar's wife retells the events as they relate to Joseph (vv.14b-15)? What is Potiphar's response to the story told by his wife (v.19)?

Application

- God had given Joseph (through the two dreams in Genesis 37) an indication of greatness. If you were in a similar situation, what would you be thinking about the viability of these dreams coming to fruition? What might you be thinking of God's involvement in your life if you were Joseph?
- Why is it difficult for you to remember that God is present with you when life hurts? How do you typically respond to suffering?
- How does the assurance of God's presence with you change how you respond? What would it look like for you to be better at trusting God during tough times?



THE CUPBEARER AND THE BAKER

Genesis 40:1-23

Genesis 40:1-23

The Cupbearer and The Baker

Scripture Text

Genesis 40:1-23

Big Idea

Joseph grew up in a complicated family. He endured betrayal, hardship, injustice, and isolation. Yet in one of the Bible's most dramatic reversals, Joseph rose to a place of power and authority, delivering God's people and preserving the covenant family. Joseph's story is the story of God's providence in the life of a "beloved son", and prefigures a true and better Son to come.

Overview

In the ancient world, the chief cupbearer and chief baker would have been a part of the royal court. As members of

the royal court, they would have seen the king's counsellors consider dreams and offer interpretations. However, the chief cupbearer and chief baker are cut off from the king's counsellor as a result of their imprisonment and have no one to interpret for them. In ancient thinking, dreams were the prime vehicle of divine revelations. Joseph acknowledges this but departs from the common viewpoint that professional magicians were required to interpret dreams.

Joseph interprets the dreams of both the cupbearer and the baker. After this, the cupbearer is set free and restored by Pharaoh to his original position within the royal court (v.21). But as a result of the cupbearers lack of action, Joseph remains in prison (v.23). Seasons of disappointment challenge our faith, and in this story Joseph finds himself in such a season.

Where is God in all of this?


God is still working in small and creative ways, even through Joseph's disappointment and loneliness.

Observation and Meaning

1. Compare the cupbearer, the baker and Joseph:
 - i. *Compare Genesis 40:2-3 with Genesis 39:19-20. How are these two men similar to Joseph?*
 - ii. *Compare Genesis 40:1 with Genesis 39:8-10, 13 (see also 40:15). How are these two men unlike Joseph?*
2. What were the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker:
 - i. *Whose cup does the cupbearer see? In whose hand is it located when he sees it? What does he do with it? Where does he place the cup? (v.11)*
 - ii. *What item in the bakers dream is first described (v.16)? What is in the top-most layer (v.17)? What is happening to the food there?*
 - iii. *How did Joseph interpret their dreams (see Genesis 40:12-13 and Genesis 40:18-19)?*
3. Joseph's success in interpreting the dreams should have lead the cupbearer to immediately follow through on Joseph's request. Instead, what happened (v.23)? What do you think was going through Joseph's mind?
4. As a result of the cupbearers lack of action, how much longer did Joseph have to remain in prison (see Genesis 41:1)?

Application

- Recall a difficult season in your life, and explain how God was working in small and creative ways (despite your disappointment or loneliness).
- What truths about God did you discover, during your difficult season, that have helped you to encourage others during their difficult season?
- What can you do to make sure you don't forget one another during the week?



PHARAOH'S DREAM

Genesis 41:1-57

Genesis 41:1-57

Pharaoh's Dream

Scripture Text

Genesis 41:1-57

Big Idea

Joseph grew up in a complicated family. He endured betrayal, hardship, injustice, and isolation. Yet in one of the Bible's most dramatic reversals, Joseph rose to a place of power and authority, delivering God's people and preserving the covenant family. Joseph's story is the story of God's providence in the life of a "beloved son", and prefigures a true and better Son to come.

Overview

In a dramatic turn of events, Joseph is finally promoted from prison and given a position of prominence.

These events take place two years after the chief cupbearer was released from prison. Joseph is now thirty years old (v.46) and has been in Egypt for approximately twelve years (see Genesis 37:2).

It is clear from this chapter that human prosperity is not self-generated. God oversees every event in the lives of his people. Joseph acknowledges God as sovereign when he is brought before Pharaoh. Pharaoh comments on Joseph's ability to interpret dreams, and Joseph responds by saying

- *"It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer" (v.16).*

Joseph continues to give all the credit to God:

- *"God has revealed... what he is about to do" (v.25).*
- *"God has shown... what he is about to do" (v.28).*
- *"The thing is fixed by God" (v.32).*

Eventually, Pharaoh himself acknowledges God:

- *"Since God has shown you all this..." (v.39).*

Observation and Meaning

1. Joseph transitions from dream-interpreter to wise-counsellor. What does Joseph recommend that Pharaoh do in light of what God has revealed to him (vv.33-35)? What kind of man does Joseph suggest is needed (v.33)?
2. God revealed certain things to Pharaoh through Joseph's interpretation of his dreams. Joseph's offers advice (based on these dreams) in order to preserve '*the land of Egypt*'. What does Joseph eventually realise God intended to preserve (see Genesis 45:5-8)?
3. Before the year of the famine, Joseph becomes a father to two sons. What does Joseph call his first son and why does he use this name (v.51)? What does Joseph call his second son and why does he use this name (v.52)?
4. Despite the widespread famine, what existed in Egypt (v.54)? Who does Pharaoh send people to when they cry out to him for bread (v.55)?

Application

- What do you learn about God from this passage?
- The key to living a life '*worthy of the gospel of Christ*' (Philippians 1:27) is the ascribing of all glory to God for all the fruit in our lives. What are you forgetting to give God credit for?
- Jesus honoured his Father (John 12:28). How might you draw closer to God by recognising and honouring his care in your life? How can you do a better job of living out the Apostle Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 and 18?

“Father, glorify your name”

(John 12:28)

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