

Bible Stories

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Genesis 37:3

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Last week we ended the story of Jacob with a blessing and a name change: Jacob will now be Israel – from “*Heel grabber*” to “*Overcomer*”.

Now to the story of Joseph – which will occupy 13 of the final 14 chapters of Genesis.

As we noted last week, Joseph was born in Charran at the end of Jacob’s 14 years of service. He would have been around 6 years old when the family returned to Canaan.

Genesis 33:1-2 gives us a hint of the favoritism to come:

“Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. ² He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear.”

Genesis 37 provides a backdrop for the rest of the story:

- **Genesis 37:2** - This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of **seventeen**, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and **he brought their father a bad report about them.**
- **Genesis 37:3** - Now **Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons**, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him.
- **Genesis 37:4** - When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, **they hated him** and could not speak a kind word to him.
- **Genesis 37:5** - **Joseph had a dream**, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.
- **Genesis 37:9-11** - Then **he had another dream**, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" ¹¹ **His brothers were jealous** of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Somehow, both Jacob and Joseph missed the “*they hated him*” part of the story because Jacob sent Joseph literally into the camp of the enemy:

- **Genesis 37:13** - and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied.

The flocks had moved to Dothan, so, Joseph continued on. Upon seeing him coming down the road, his brother’s turned to each other and said, “*Here comes that dreamer. Let’s kill him and throw him down the well. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams!*”

Reuben intervened, so instead, Joseph was stripped of his beautiful robe and thrown into the dry well alive, while the brothers figured out what to do with him {**Reuben intended to free him and send him back home**}.

As they ate, the brothers saw a caravan ambling down the road. Judah came up with the brilliant idea of selling Joseph, so that’s what they did. They sold their brother for 20 pieces of silver.

At **17**, Joseph, the pampered and most loved son became a slave:

- **Ellen White {PP 213-214}** - For a time Joseph gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror.

But, in the providence of God, even this experience was to be a blessing to him. He had learned in a few hours that which years might not otherwise have taught him. His father, strong and tender as his love had been, had done him wrong by his partiality and indulgence. This unwise preference had angered his brothers and provoked them to the cruel deed that had separated him from his home. Its effects were manifest also in his own character. Faults had been encouraged that were now to be corrected. He was becoming self-sufficient and exacting. Accustomed to the tenderness of his father's care, he felt that he was unprepared to cope with the difficulties before him, in the bitter, uncared-for life of a stranger and a slave.

Then his thoughts turned to his father's God. In his childhood he had been taught to love and fear Him. Often in his father's tent he had listened to the story of the vision that Jacob saw as he fled from his home an exile and a fugitive. He had been told of the Lord's promises to Jacob, and how they had

been fulfilled -- how, in the hour of need, the angels of God had come to instruct, comfort, and protect him. And he had learned of the love of God in providing for men a Redeemer. Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile.

His soul thrilled with the high resolve to prove himself true to God -- under all circumstances to act as became a subject of the King of heaven. He would serve the Lord with undivided heart; he would meet the trials of his lot with fortitude and perform every duty with fidelity. One day's experience had been the turning point in Joseph's life. Its terrible calamity had transformed him from a petted child to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed.

I love that description, don't you..... ***"Transformed from a petted child, to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed."***

Joseph's life would not be as he expected it to be and his dreams of a glorious future were shoved to the far reaches of his mind. His life would now be filled with difficulty and trial, but he trusted God to walk beside him. He chose to have an ***"undivided heart"***. He chose fidelity to God -- no matter the cost.

God saw to it that Joseph landed in the house of Potiphar -- captain of Pharaoh's guard -- where he didn't just survive -- he thrived:

- **Genesis 39:2-6** - The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, ⁴ Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵ From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶ So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.....

Yippee, we say! Good for him. He was faithful and God blessed him -- as He should have done.

But, wait, there's more..... His education was not yet over:

"Now Joseph was well-built and handsome"

How can this be a problem? Don't we all wish to have that burden to bear.....

Well, for a slave who had chosen faithfulness over comfort, this fact will become a real problem --- because Mrs. Potiphar took notice of him.

- **Genesis 39:7** - "Come to bed with me!"

But he refused:

- **Genesis 39:8-9** - "With me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

Not one to be deterred, apparently, Mrs. Potiphar turned to stalking:

- **Genesis 39:10** - And though she spoke to Joseph, day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

One day, he went into the house.... No one was around. Run, Joseph, run!!!

Around the corner slinked Mrs. Potiphar. She grabbed his coat, ***"Come to bed with me"***, she whispered.

Joseph turned and ran right out of his coat.....

Mrs. Potiphar screamed, ***"Joseph tried to rape me!!! Look, I have his coat in my hand!!"***

Joseph knew it was a lie.

She knew it was a lie.

Master Potiphar had to have known it was a lie -- but in his anger, he had Joseph thrown into prison.

At **27**, Joseph, Stewart of all Potiphar possessed, became prisoner #159635

But he didn't go alone - God went to prison with Joseph and caused the jailer to look favorably on him:

- **Genesis 39:22-23** - So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. ²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

About a year later, 2 royal prisoners arrived at the prison – accused of treason against the king. They each had a dream – Joseph interpreted both dreams – 3 days later the dreams came true just as Joseph said they would:

- The cupbearer – not guilty – restored to his former position.
- The baker – guilty – beheaded and left in a tree for the birds to eat.

Before returning to the palace, Joseph asked the cupbearer to mention his case to Pharaoh.

"Yep, no problem, will do" – He forgot.....

2 years later..... Pharaoh had 2 dreams:

- 7 sleek and fat cows were eaten up by 7 ugly and gaunt cows.
- 7 healthy and fat heads of grain were eaten up by 7 withered and thin heads of grain.

As you can imagine, Pharaoh was troubled because he didn't know what these dreams meant and neither did any of his advisors.... That's when the cupbearer remembered his promise.

Within hours, Joseph's life changed again.

At **30**, Joseph, prisoner #159635, became Joseph {Zaphenath-Paneah}, 2nd in command of the greatest empire on earth. Everything he had learned in the past 13 years would help him as he navigated, first how to prepare the land for famine and then how to manage the land during famine.

At every step, God had placed him exactly where He needed him to be to learn and grow and mature and ultimately accomplish what GOD had intended for him all along.

And what of Joseph's dreams – they came true too:

- **Genesis 42:5-6** - So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. ⁶ Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

What do make of this story?

When faced with a choice, Joseph chose to be something different than what his genetics and upbringing said he would be.

Despite his unwanted circumstances, Joseph chose fidelity and an undivided heart toward God. To act under all circumstances as became a subject of the King of heaven

When placed in a position of power, Joseph chose to honor his employer and his God instead of caving to the inviting proposition of a beautiful woman.

Despite his undeserved circumstances, Joseph chose again to remain faithful to God and represent Him to the best of his ability.

When given the opportunity, Joseph made use of the gifts he had been given and all that he had learned.

In the end, Joseph chose forgiveness, because he had learned first-hand that *"All things work together for good for those who love God and have been called according to His purposes."* {Romans 8:28}

- **Genesis 45:5-9** - And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. ⁹ Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay.