

12 The Life of Joseph

To learn about Joseph, you have to go to the Old Testament part of the Bible. The first book is called Genesis. This is where we find out about Joseph. You can read all about Joseph in Genesis chapters 37 to 50.

Remember that God made promises to a man called Abraham. Abraham had a son called Isaac. Isaac had a son called Jacob. Jacob had four wives and 12 sons. Joseph was one of those 12 sons, and Jacob loved Joseph more than his brothers.

The coloured coat of Joseph

To show how much Jacob loved his son, Jacob gave Joseph a coloured coat to wear. Now in those times, only very rich people had coloured clothes. So Joseph would have stood out as someone important in the family, especially in front of his 11 brothers. What did his brothers think of this? Genesis 37:4 tells us:



JOSEPH
Genesis 37-45

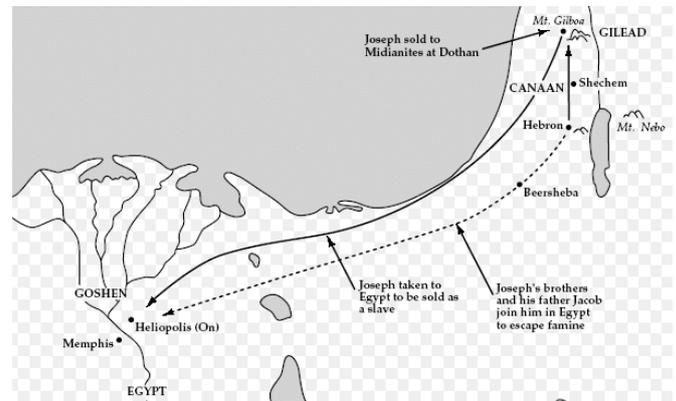
But when his brothers saw that their father Jacob loved Joseph more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

There was something else that made the brothers hate Joseph. Joseph had unusual dreams that he told them about: that Joseph would be a ruler over them. That his brothers, and even his father, would bow down before Joseph as if he was a king. Genesis 37:5-8

The plot to kill Joseph

One day, Joseph was alone with his brothers. Some of them wanted to kill Joseph, but two of them, Reuben and Judah, took pity on their brother. Judah told the brothers to sell Joseph as a slave. That way, they would not have to kill him, and as a slave they would never see Joseph again.

The other brothers liked the plan. They tore off Joseph's coat and sold the young lad as a slave to some traders that were nearby. The brothers then took Joseph's coloured coat and poured goat blood over it. They took the coat back to Jacob



and asked him if it was Joseph's. Jacob knew that it was Joseph's, but his sons never told him the truth. Jacob thought that his favourite son was dead. Jacob was sorrowful from that day on. Genesis 37:18-36.

Joseph in Egypt

What happened to Joseph? He was taken as a slave to Egypt. Now some of you may have come from another country. You have come to a strange place where people speak a different language and have different customs. You know how Joseph would have felt! He was alone in a strange place, chained like an animal, and then having to be sold in the market as a slave. Joseph knew about the God of his father, and so he must have prayed to God to take care of him. But even so, Joseph must have had many rough years in Egypt.

A man called Potiphar bought Joseph at the slave market. Potiphar was an official of the King of Egypt (Egyptian kings are known as Pharaohs). Joseph realised that he had to work to be a free man, and so he worked hard. In fact, Joseph was so good that Potiphar put him in charge of his whole house. The Bible tells us that Joseph was so good at looking after Potiphar's house that all Potiphar had to think about was eating! See Genesis 39:1-6

Later, Joseph was accused of sleeping with Potiphar's wife. Joseph did not do it; but Potiphar believed his wife. So Joseph was placed in the king's prison.

This was a hopeless situation. He was imprisoned without a trial - after all he was just a slave. No one cared about a slave. There were no lawyers to help him.

But God did not forget Joseph. Soon, Joseph was in charge of the prison! Joseph was such a good manager, that a prisoner was running the prison! During this time, Joseph gave some good advice to Pharaoh's butler after he had a dream. Joseph asked the butler to ask Pharaoh if he (Joseph) could be freed. Genesis 39:21-23, chapter 40.

The dream of Pharaoh

Sometime later, Pharaoh has two strange dreams, and Joseph was asked, with God's help, to tell Pharaoh what the dreams meant. Joseph said that there would be seven years when all the crops will grow. After that seven years of famine would come: nothing would grow and there would not be any food.

Pharaoh decided to put Joseph in charge of collecting grain during the seven good years, so that when the famine came, there would be enough for the people. At that moment, Joseph was made the king's deputy. He was the ruler of Egypt, second in command to Pharaoh! Genesis 41:37-44 God was with Joseph! Instead of being a slave, he was now in control of Egypt for the next 14 years. The seven years of good crops came and went, and now there was famine. This famine was very severe. It even reached to Canaan where Joseph's family lived.

Joseph meets his brothers

Jacob heard that food was for sale in Egypt. So he sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy food for the family. When the 10 brothers arrived in Egypt, they bowed down to Joseph, just as his dream many years before had said. But the brothers did not recognise Joseph. They thought their brother was dead. Joseph tested his brothers to see if they had changed over the years. He found that they had. While before they were willing to kill their brother, they now had a dark secret that made their lives sad. They were sorry for what they had done to Joseph as a young man, but there was no way they could have told their father what really happened to his favourite son.

Joseph is revealed to his brothers

Finally, Joseph told his brothers who he was; they were amazed, and could not believe it! Their brother Joseph was not a slave: he was in control of the entire country of Egypt! Joseph knew that the famine would last another 5 years, so he told his family to move to Egypt, which they did.

And so, as an old man, Jacob finally saw his favourite son again. Genesis 46:29-30.

After Jacob died, and later Joseph died, the family grew in numbers, and stayed in Egypt for about 400 years.

Conclusion



What do we learn from Joseph? He was a man who had a very hard life. All the time he was a slave, Joseph never knew why God had done it this way. But in the end, God made Joseph's life happy again. Our lives can be hard too. But if we serve God, if we trust that He will do the right thing for us, then He will care for us.

What happened to Joseph? Fill in the blanks...

_____ was taken to _____ as a slave. He worked for a man called _____ who was the _____ of the _____ for the King of Egypt who was called _____.

Joseph was such a _____ slave that his master made him _____. After _____ years of plenty and _____ years of famine, Joseph ended up being the _____ ruler in the land of _____.