

JOSEPH  
A Forgiving Faith

Jacob was on his way to meet Esau before returning to his homeland. But first, he has a face to face struggle with God which leaves him both broken and blessed, changed forever. The reunion with Esau is warm and emotional, then Jacob goes on his way, buying land and building an altar to the God of Israel, his new God-given name (Genesis 33). Family difficulties arise which spill over into conflict with neighbors and God tells Jacob to return to Bethel, to live there and to build an altar.

And then Jacob begins to lose those who are dear to him. First, Deborah dies. She had been Rebekah's childhood nurse, coming with her when she married Isaac. Jacob buried this woman he had no doubt been close to all his life under the "oak of weeping." Next as they journey from Bethel to Bethlehem (Ephrath) Jacob's beloved Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin ("the son of my right hand"), his twelfth and last son. Then Jacob's father dies and he and Esau bury Isaac in Hebron (Genesis 35).

Added to Jacob's hard service under Laban, conflict within his family and broken dreams for his children, these most recent heartaches and losses through the death of loved ones set the stage for Genesis 37, the beginning of Joseph's story.

Memorize Genesis 50:20.

Read Genesis 37 and Genesis 39-50, Joseph's story, all the way through. This should take you between 30 minutes to an hour. It is important to get an overview of his life. As you read, notice the times and the circumstances where Joseph acknowledges the presence and the provision of God. \_\_\_\_ Yes, I read these chapters.

Read again Genesis 37.

1. Why do you think Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons? (See also Genesis 35:24.)
2. Do you think Jacob and/or Joseph could have acted more wisely in relating to their family? Explain.
3. Two dreams (verses 5-8 and 9-10) are related at the beginning of the story of Joseph's life. What does their place in the story and their content tell you about whether this is a tale of human success or of divine sovereignty? Explain.
4. Tell the events that led to Joseph being in Egypt (verse 28).

5. How did the ten older brothers account for Joseph's absence to their father (verses 29-33)?

6. Describe Jacob's reaction to the news his sons brought.

Read again Genesis 39:1-6.

7. What happened to Joseph when he was first brought to Egypt as a slave?

Read again Genesis 39:7-23

8. a) Now what happens to Joseph?

b) How does Joseph handle temptation? (Think of attitudes and actions.)

c) Did Joseph have a failure of faith or a moral lapse that caused his current problems? If not, how do you explain what happened to him?

9. Think back through Genesis 39.

a) In what situations was God *with him*?

b) What is one concept from this portion of Joseph's story (Genesis 39) you want to remember and to use in your life?

Think back over Genesis 40-41.

10. Tell how Joseph went from prison to position and power, second only to the Pharaoh of Egypt.

11. In what circumstances is God acknowledged in the events of these two chapters?

The famine extended beyond Egypt's borders, as did word of the food supply available in that country. This situation prompted Jacob to send ten of his sons to buy food for his family. But Jacob kept Benjamin with him because he feared that harm would come to this one remaining son of Rachel, whom he loved so dearly.

From Genesis 42-Genesis 45...

12. a) Describe the meeting of Joseph with his brothers in chapter 42.

b) Briefly tell the events that led to Benjamin arriving in Egypt (Genesis 43:15).

c) Briefly tell how Joseph came to reveal his true identity to his brothers (Genesis 45:3).

From Genesis 45:1-15:

13. At their reunion...

a) why do you think the brothers were distressed, frightened and angry with themselves?

b) describe Joseph's reaction.

After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers were again gripped with fear because of their past evil actions. Their tale of Jacob's dying wish was probably a fabrication.

Read Genesis 50:15-21.

14. After all Joseph had been through -- the pit, slavery, separation from family, unjust accusations, prison, adjusting to a strange culture steeped in a false religion--what perspective enabled Joseph to respond to his brothers as he did? Notice especially Genesis 45:4-5 and 7-9 and Genesis 50:20.

15. What is your attitude right now to some situation you are in? (Please be honest.) Do you need an attitude adjustment based on what you have seen of Joseph's perspective and behavior in many hard times?

16. a) Why do we often find it so hard to forgive someone who wrongs us?

b) Using Joseph as an example, what does true forgiveness entail?

17. Reflecting on Joseph's life, give one or more specific ways your faith, a robust and real God-confidence (Hebrews 11:1, 6, etc.), will make a difference in the way you relate to others. (Think of those who hurt you, those you serve or those who stand in the way of a dream.)

18. How can faith in God and an awareness of God's role in human lives enable you to forgive yourself? (See Genesis 45:5, 7-9.)

Joseph assures his brothers they will be provided for in Egypt and sends them with gifts to bring his father and the family from Canaan. On the way one night God again speaks to Jacob/Israel and tells him to not be afraid to go to Egypt, that He will be with him and will bring him again to the land of promise. An emotional and joyous father/son reunion takes place and the Israelites settle down to life in Egypt.

After seventeen years Jacob realizes he is near death, calls Joseph and extracts from him a promise that he will bury Jacob in Canaan. Jacob worships God while leaning on his staff, a vivid reminder that to the end of his days he realized that he had been blessed through brokenness. When he could no longer stand on his own, he had learned to hang on to God. He also blesses Joseph's sons as his own, singling out the youngest, Ephraim, for the higher place. Jacob thus affirms his belief in God's promise to him as he worships and takes seriously his responsibility to pass on to his descendants their birthright, including the land of Canaan. This act of passing on the birthright shows that Jacob, even while living in Egypt, has his sights and heart set on the land God had promised. This is faith--a combination of belief and behavior which demonstrates an eternal perspective, sure enough of the future to live differently now.

Years later as Joseph was about to die, he, too, reaffirms that God will bring the children of Israel again into their own promised land. Joseph then gives instruction that he also is to be buried there, by faith identifying himself with God's promises and people. He believed what God said and looked ahead with hope.

Both Jacob and Joseph were people of faith. One stumbled and struggled on his faith-journey. One was steadfast. God chose each of them, knowing full-well the path their individual pilgrimages would take. His love, presence and faithfulness were a continuing encouragement and incentive to each one's faith. And at the end, each one's faith endured. This endurance came as each focused not on his own performance but on God's presence, promises and providential care. May this be true of us.

19. Select at least one of the following to answer. As you think back over Jacob's and Joseph's lives:

a) what is it that motivates you to want to imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7)?

b) what changes do you want to make in your perspective and/or life?

c) what do you praise and thank God for?

