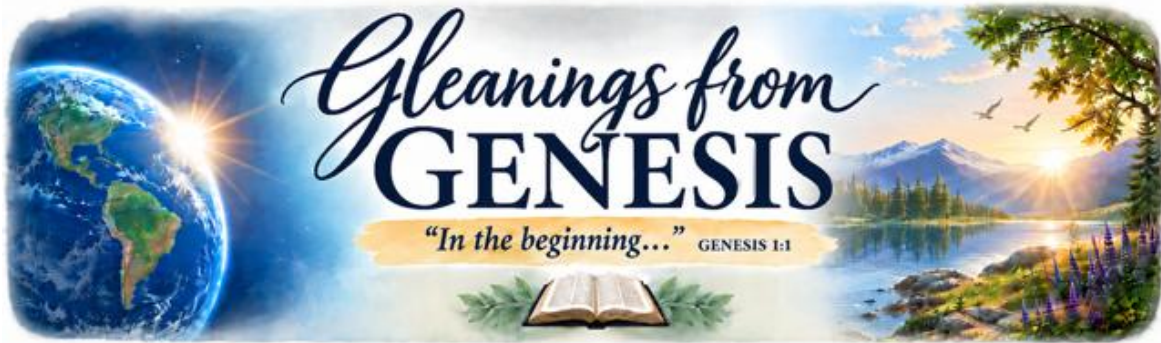




— Genesis 37 - 40. Joseph: The Pit to the Palace —

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Introduction

Did you ever realize that Genesis has more chapters about Joseph than any other character? Why is Joseph's story so prominent in Genesis? We need to take a deeper look.

A Favored Son

Genesis 37:1 – 4

Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.² These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

This “robe of many colors” that Jacob gave to Joseph had great significance. It symbolized parental favoritism and designated family leadership.

Consider Joseph's brothers—the ones who had other mothers: Reuben, the oldest, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun were sons born to Leah. Dan and Naphtali were born to Bilhah (Rachel's handmaid). Gad and Asher were born to Zilpah (Leah's handmaid). Only Joseph and Benjamin were sons of Rachel. Jacob loved Joseph more than the others.

A son wearing this coat signaled that he was not to do heavy work. By wearing it, Joseph stood apart from his hard-working brothers.

Clearly this favoritism should never happen in families, and that includes the family of God.

James 2:1 – 5, 8 - 9

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Have you ever seen partiality in the body of Christ? What did it look like and what harm did it do?

Genesis 37:5 – 8

⁵ Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: ⁷ Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Now Joseph just makes matters worse by telling his dream to his brothers. I think if we had been there as his mother or his aunt, we might have told Joseph not to share that dream with his brothers; it wouldn't go down too well. His brothers hated him even more now. So, here we see a pretty dysfunctional family—brothers against brothers, hatred and jealousy spreading rapidly.

But one dream was not enough. Now he dreams a second dream and told it to his brothers, and even his father rebukes him for such a dream.

Genesis 37: 9 – 11

Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" ¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Joseph's dreams were from God to give Joseph a little glimpse of what his future might be like. The day is coming—many years from this point—when the brothers will bow down to Joseph and beg his forgiveness.

It is through Jacob's son, Judah, that the Messiah will be born. This is God's plan, and this family divisiveness could threaten God's plan.

A Brother Betrayed

Genesis 37:12ff

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them. . . Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word. . ." So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. ¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. . . ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

³¹ Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.
³² And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." ³³ And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces."
³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him. ³⁶ Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Have you noticed that when families have really strong divisiveness or one or two really evil family members, the fights can be very devastating. There is much evidence in our society of family hatred and even violence.

What is a proper response for a Christian?

Romans 12:18: *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

Colossians 3:13: *...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

Matthew 7:5: *"You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."*

Matthew 5:23-24: *"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

A proper response is:

- Own up to whatever part you have played in the problem.
- Make the first move to solve the disagreement.
- Have patience and forgive, even if they have not asked for forgiveness.
- Make sure that you have done everything you can to resolve the conflict.

A Faithful Servant

Genesis 39:1 – 6

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ²The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

Joseph was obviously very gifted in many ways.

- He was successful in the house of his master. Joseph evidently worked hard, worked smart, showed great leadership abilities, and quickly gained the trust and approval of his master.
- He was a very good manager. Joseph was trusted to do all things well, to be honest with the master's assets, to lead the household in a harmonious way.
- The Lord blessed him in all that he did, and the Lord blessed the work of his hands so that he prospered and he made Potiphar to prosper.

In these difficult circumstances for Joseph, he still did his job well, maintained the right attitude, and was a blessing to everyone who knew him. He didn't allow bitterness or self-pity to cripple him; he bloomed where he was planted!

Are you in a place you don't want to be right now? In that stuck place, are you doing what you have to do with excellence? Is your attitude in the right place as you recognize the difficulties and live with the problem? What could you do in that stuck place to make things better?

Genesis 39:6b - 12

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. ⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, ¹² she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

Potiphar's wife set her cap for him. Notice that she tried day after day to tempt him, and he made it a practice not to be alone with her. But she wanted him and no doubt she was not accustomed to being rejected.

Joseph said it would be a sin against his God to give in to her advances. How could he have rationalized his way into sin?

- He's away from home, who would know?
- There were no believers in his life.
- Potiphar's wife will get him in trouble if he doesn't do what she wants.
- After all, none of this is his fault!
- He'll probably never see family again.
- He's a normal man with normal sexual needs.

He could convince himself that no harm would be done just to sleep with the woman and shut her up!

How easy it is for us to rationalize our own sin. But Joseph immediately took his stand: No, I will not succumb to this temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

There is always a way of escape, you just have to want it and look for it! And you need to make that decision quickly.

Proverbs 4:14 – 15, 25 - 27

*Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.
Let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you.²⁶ Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.²⁷ Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.*

Find the way of escape; it's there because God is faithful to provide it.

Genesis 39:13 - 20

And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, ¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. ¹⁵ And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." ¹⁶ Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house." ¹⁹ As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. ²⁰ And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

Notice that Potiphar's wife made a point of Joseph being a Hebrew. Antisemitism goes back a long way, doesn't it? She made her accusation against him as a Hebrew!

Joseph has gone from a pit, to being sold into slavery to a foreigner, to becoming highly favored by his master. He took these dreadful situations he found himself in—none of them deserved—and he stood true to who he was.

Genesis 39:21 - 23

²¹ But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²² And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³ The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

Because he would not succumb to the temptation of Potiphar's wife, because he did the right thing, he is once again in prison. But the Lord was with him there.

A Trusted Prisoner

Genesis 40:1 – 8

Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. ² And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.

⁵ And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. ⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?" ⁸ They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me."

Joseph is bold in saying that his gift of interpreting dreams is from God—the true God. He never denies his faith in God.

Genesis 40:9 – 19

So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, "In my dream there was a vine before me, ¹⁰ and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." ¹² Then Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. ¹³ In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. ¹⁵ For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit."

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, ¹⁷ and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head." ¹⁸ And Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. ¹⁹ In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you."

Are dreams something God still uses today? How do you know a dream sent from God and one from overeating??

Now we see how Joseph's dreams come to pass.

Genesis 40:20 - 23

On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. ²² But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Closing

Through all of the happenings to Joseph up to this point, we see again the sovereignty of God as he continues to be with Joseph and to guide his path—yes, even to places where he is wrongfully treated and accused. God now has him where he will use him—for such a time as this!