

**TUTORIAL**  
**1.25**

# God promoted Joseph. God took Jacob's family into Egypt

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **Genesis 37:1-36, 39:1-23, Genesis 40, 41, 42.**

## Last time

Abraham died and Isaac inherited the blessings and the Promises as head of the family line. With his wife, Rebekah, he had two sons, Esau and Jacob who were vastly different in character. Although Esau was the firstborn, Jacob - God's chosen successor to Isaac - is able to get his brother to relinquish his rights as guardian of God's Promises and then to be blessed as principal heir by his father. While travelling to Haran to escape Esau's murderous anger, in a dream Jacob was shown a stairway from earth to heaven that symbolizes what the Deliverer will do. Later he has 12 sons and was renamed Israel, by God.

## Joseph, loved by his father, hated by his brothers

God's story now focuses on Joseph - favourite son of his father Jacob, having been born to him later in life. (Genesis 37:1-4) Though obviously not distinguished by the special blessing and firstborn rights of his generation in the family line, Joseph nonetheless had a very real relationship with God. Later in God's Narrative he would be identified alongside other historical figures known for their faith.

The account of Joseph's life starts when he's 17 years old, working as a shepherd under his brothers as they tend the family flocks and fields. Joseph informs his father Jacob about some bad things the brothers are up to. Their resentment and criticism turns to hatred after their father gives Joseph a particularly fine robe, as a measure of his favouritism. Their hatred is fuelled further when Joseph tells them a dream he's had in which they, represented by bundles of grain, bow down to him. (Genesis 37:5-11) As we see later, this dream was actually God pointing to events that will unfold later in the Narrative...reminding us again that God, existing outside of the confines of time, has full knowledge of things that to us are still "future".

Later, in another predictive dream, his family, symbolised by planets, bow to him.

## **Sold as a slave and taken to Egypt**

The resentment, jealousy and hatred of Joseph's brothers can be contained no longer. (Genesis 37:12-36) One day Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers who have taken the flocks to pastures a long way from the family home. The brothers seize the opportunity. Their first thought is to kill him, but when they see a caravan of Ishmaelite traders on their way down to Egypt, they sell Joseph to them as a slave. The brothers send the distinctive coat back to Jacob covered in goat's blood, and he believes that wild animals have killed Joseph. Meanwhile, Joseph is sold as a slave to Potiphar, an officer of the king (Pharaoh) of Egypt.

## **Promoted, falsely accused, imprisoned, promoted**

Joseph's situation in Egypt proves not to be terrible, at least for a time. (Genesis 39:1-6) God says in His Narrative that He was with Joseph and helping him to succeed in the house of his master, the captain of the Pharaoh's guard. He becomes Potiphar's personal attendant and is put in charge of the entire household, eventually being made administrator of all his master's affairs.

But trouble is brewing. (Genesis 39:6-20) Potiphar's wife propositions the young, handsome Hebrew. He refuses her, being unwilling to betray the trust invested in him by her husband and, more importantly, to sin against God in this way. In resentment after repeated refusals, she maliciously accuses Joseph of trying to rape her. He is thrown into a prison which, the text says, is where the "king's prisoners are held". But here too, we're told, (Genesis 39:21-23) "the Lord was with Joseph...and showed him his faithful love." He is orchestrating events. Joseph becomes a favourite of the warden and is put in charge of all the prisoners and the running of the place.

## **Interpreting dreams, then governor of Egypt**

The next part of the Narrative (Genesis 40) records an incident in which God gives Joseph the ability to interpret dreams for some former high-ranking fellow prisoners. It seems an isolated incident, but will prove important two years later when Pharaoh has two very disturbing, apparently predictive, dreams. (Genesis 41:1-13) It's worth noting here that God was perfectly able and willing to communicate in this way to the ruler of a culture, which had long ago turned away from God as their true Storyteller. As Pharaoh, he was given semi-divine status in a complex system of polytheistic beliefs with a multitude of deities (the Sun and the Nile river among many), creation myths and elaborate religious rituals. When the divination experts – the "magicians and wise men"

– are unable to make sense of the dreams, it is remembered that a young Hebrew slave in the king's prison has abilities in this area. When sent for (Genesis 41:14-32), Joseph denies the ability to divine such things himself, but asserts that God is able to clarify the meaning for Pharaoh if He chooses to.

The Pharaoh recounts his dreams of 7 emaciated cows eating 7 well-nourished cows and 7 diseased heads of grain swallowing 7 healthy heads. Joseph explains to Pharaoh that God has revealed to him that this represents 7 years of prosperity He will bring to Egypt followed by 7 years of famine. Joseph suggests that someone be put in charge of Egypt to coordinate the collection and storage of crops during the plentiful years against the following time of want. (Genesis 41:33-36) This idea's merits are obvious and Joseph having impressed Pharaoh with his intelligence and wisdom is promoted to the position. In fact, he is given a rank in the nation of Egypt answerable only to Pharaoh himself. (Genesis 41:37-46)

## **Famine spreads and Joseph's family comes to Egypt**

Events unfold just as God had said they would. (Genesis 41:47-57) Joseph, in his position of enormous influence, sees to it that the surplus is gathered and stored during 7 bumper years...then the famine hits. Egypt and the surrounding countries are gripped by drought and food becomes short.

Now Joseph's foresight pays off. The storehouses are opened and distribution begins. And people from neighbouring countries are forced to buy grain from Egypt. To the north-east, Canaan is severely impacted by famine as well.

Hearing that grain is available in Egypt, Jacob sends his ten sons – Joseph's older brothers – to buy some to tide them over. (Genesis 42)

They come before the governor overseeing sales of grain. They are unaware that it is Joseph but he recognises them as they bow before him, in fulfillment of the predictive dreams he'd had from God so many years ago. He accuses them of being spies, but they protest their innocence, stating they are 12 brothers, with one missing and one back home in Canaan.

Joseph sends them back to get their youngest brother as proof of their story, keeping one, Simeon, as hostage. With the famine worsening, the brothers return to Egypt to buy more food, this time with their youngest brother Benjamin. Joseph stage manages a number of events which put the brothers under a great deal of stress, but eventually reveals his identity as the brother they'd sold into slavery years before. Of course they are dumbfounded. Pharaoh and the palace are delighted that Joseph has renewed contact with his family. He insists that Joseph sends for his father to come to Egypt. In wagons provided by Pharaoh, Jacob (also known as Israel) and the entire extended family, along with all their possessions and their livestock come to Egypt. They settle there and, as a people group, come to be known as "The

Children of Israel”. And his 12 sons, of course, would be the patriarchs of twelve tribes.

For the human players in all of this, it would have played out as sequential experiences of life. They had no way to see all the immediate connections or future implications. But God was hands-on involved in working the events seamlessly together for His purposes. Remember the prophecy He had made to Abraham, Jacob’s grandfather – that his descendants would go to a foreign land where they would be strangers. The Plan was on track. He was, and is, writing His Story of reality in and through the lives of people.



## DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. Can you describe any personal parallels with Joseph’s experience – a time when you felt that you had been sidelined or when a particular direction had been blocked? In retrospect, can you see how God was achieving something different - but better - than you had originally planned? Reflect in a broader sense on what this tells us about God and how He works in and through the lives of people.
2. The lesson makes the point that the giving of dreams to the Egyptian ruler is an example of God sovereignly using people to achieve His purposes. Think back through the Biblical narrative so far and identify any other such instances. Also note times when God gave very real choices to people, even holding them accountable for their decisions. Give your thoughts on how we can come to terms with this apparent contradiction in the way God deals with us.



## ACTIVITIES

*God promoted Joseph. God took Jacob's family into Egypt*

1. Research and write in less than a page a summary of the time in Egyptian history where this part of the Narrative takes place. Have a look at the culture and lifestyle plus the religion of Egypt around the time of Joseph (sometime between 2000 and 1600 BC).