

CHAPTER 3

Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

TIMELESS TRUTH: Though Man Fails, God's Plan Prevails.

CHAPTER SUMMARY: (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

The Story continues with Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph. His story doesn't get off to a very good start and it goes downhill from there. In the process, we see very clearly that God's plan of redemption cannot be thwarted by man's evil intentions and feeble efforts.

Joseph was the 11th of 12 sons, so he had little to expect by way of blessing or position through seniority. Even so, he was his father's favorite and Jacob gave him a beautiful gift to demonstrate his preference. This gift, coupled with Joseph's prediction that his 10 older brothers would one day bow down to him, guaranteed an intolerable case of sibling rivalry. The 10 plot his death at first, but wind up selling him into Egyptian slavery instead.

The road to Egypt rid the brothers of their nuisance, but landed Joseph a job as manager of Potiphar's household. God blessed Potiphar because of Joseph and Potiphar was therefore pleased with Joseph. It turns out Potiphar's wife was also pleased with Joseph, but for different reasons. After rejecting her advances and refusing to sleep with her, she accused him of rape and he got a prison sentence in exchange for his integrity.

But even in prison, the circumstances start to look familiar. Joseph's good character was noted and, once again, he was promoted to manager within the prison. He ended up interpreting some dreams for two of Pharaoh's court officials who were doing time with him. Pharaoh eventually hears of Joseph's talents and summons him to unravel one of his own dreams and ends up promoting Joseph from prison manager to Deputy Pharaoh.

Hard times were on the way, so Joseph initiated a plan to storehouse food to sustain Egypt during a coming worldwide famine. This famine was felt back home by Joseph's family as well, and they made their way to Egypt to buy food. It had been 20 long years since they sold him into slavery, but sure enough, Joseph was right: there they were, bowing at his feet. Sometimes, dreams really do come true.

Joseph's entire family was saved. The Hebrew word actually means preserved as though God had something in mind here; and indeed, He did. Jacob, the brothers, and all the extended family moved to the safety of Egypt where they would survive the famine, and God would in fact safeguard his people and his promises. Joseph saw the Upper Story, the big picture. He declared to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done" (p. 42). There it is: redemption in a sound bite. The Messiah would not come for centuries, yet God's storytelling had begun. Joseph's life is a precursor, reminding us that though man plans for evil, God redeems for good. Beauty for ashes. Life from death. Man fails, but God prevails. Every time.

DISCUSSION STARTER:

What's the best promotion you ever received? How did you earn it?

GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. If Jacob had learned from his parent's mistakes, he might not have torn his family apart by showing Joseph favoritism. What are some practical lessons families can learn from their stories? Are there any "family history" issues you need to overcome or avoid? Any items you want to preserve for your family? Do you have a "victory" story that you could share?
2. As a teen, Joseph had two dreams that indicated he would one day rule over his brothers. List Joseph's character qualities that demonstrate why he was God's choice for a leader. Which of these character qualities are important in a leader today?
3. Even though Joseph experienced betrayal, he went on to enjoy a full and purposeful life in Egypt. What factors or spiritual understandings do you think made this possible? How was it possible for Joseph to forgive his brothers?
4. What are the benefits experienced by Joseph's employers, Potiphar and the prison warden (p. 31-32)? How would your workplace benefit if you allowed God to work through you there?
5. List the injustices Joseph suffered. What sustained him? Recall a time in your own life that you suffered unjustly for doing the right thing. What sustained you?
6. Twenty years after his brothers sold him into slavery, they came to Joseph to buy grain. Do you see evidence they had changed over the years?
7. Why do you think Joseph did not reveal his true identity at first? What was he waiting for?
8. Over the course of twenty years, Joseph had risen to a place of power and prestige as Pharaoh's governor. Why do you suppose he never returned to his home?
9. Jacob's whole family lived in Goshen for seventeen years before he died (p. 41-42). Do you think the family relationships were every truly restored?
10. Ponder the whole life story of Joseph. As a group, list the ways God's sovereignty came to light. How does God's sovereignty impact your personal faith in Him?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.