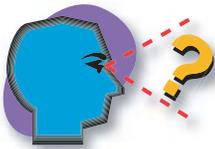




Genesis

Responses to the Questions



NOTE; BE SURE TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THE ANSWERS IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

Joseph's Dreams

Read Genesis 37:1-11

1. A number of reasons for the brothers' hatred and jealousy may be offered: Quite clearly they were jealous that their father preferred Joseph over them—a preference made tangible in the special robe he gave him. [Variously translated “tunic with sleeves,” “long robe with sleeves,” and “richly ornamented robe,” the Hebrew phrase is used elsewhere to indicate a royal garment (see 2 Sam. 13:18). Its length and sleeves would make the wearer unfit for common labor. Whether or not it meant Joseph was exempt from work the others had to do, at the very least it was a sign of his father's preference and set him above his older brothers.]

Why did Jacob prefer Joseph? He was a child of Jacob's old age, vs. 3 explains, but Jacob had other children in his old age. More significant perhaps is that Joseph was the oldest son of Jacob's beloved and now-dead wife Rachel. Joseph's brothers—and particularly the oldest ones—may have worried that Jacob would confer the rights and privileges of the firstborn on his favorite son and pass them by. They also may have hated Joseph because he was better than they, and therefore was preferred for good reason. It is clear from chapters 34 and 35 that the brothers are proud and violent and ruthless, and Joseph's character as it is developed in the rest of Genesis will stand in stark contrast to theirs. In this reading (vs. 2) we learned that reports of their continued exploits were circulating around the neighborhood and Joseph told their father about them. Like any “bad boys,” they would hate this do-good, tattling brother. Joseph's dreams that they would bow before him must have seemed the height of injustice, a final strike against him.

2. Joseph's dreams only added fuel to the fire of his brothers' envy. He was the last person they wanted to bow down to or serve, but according to the dreams, this is just what would happen. It is useful to contrast their reaction to Jacob's. The brothers have no thought for what the dreams might mean beyond their own humbling, and so they hate Joseph. Jacob can't understand the meaning either and wonders; yet he “kept the saying in mind.” He is open to what God has planned. After all, years before his own father blessed him with the words “be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.” Might this one day be fulfilled in Joseph?

Joseph Sold By His Brothers

Read Genesis 37:12-36

3. Once again, as we saw last time they were in Shechem, Joseph's brothers take matters into their own hands. They are “a law unto themselves.” They let anger get the better of them and decide to kill Joseph—“and we shall see what will become of his dreams,” they say. In other words, because they don't ever want to bow down to this young brother whom they hate, they will prevent the dreams being fulfilled by doing away with him altogether.

4. It is one of the great ironies and wonders of the way God works that the very thing Evil hopes will derail His plans, turns out to usher those plans in. The rest of this story will show that what the brothers meant for ill—throwing Joseph into a pit and selling him into slavery—is the thing that God uses to accomplish what they



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Joseph Sold By His Brothers (cont.)

hoped to make impossible, his reigning over them. This should remind us of the way God took the very worst that Satan could do to Jesus and turned it into the door to eternal life, the door that Satan was trying to slam shut forever. In this way God uses even evil people and intentions as instruments of good. “So too,” says St. Gregory the Great, “when one wants to avoid the divine will, then is when it is fulfilled” (Moralia, 6,18,20).

5. Where was God when Joseph was in the pit? For that matter, where was God when the Serpent tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden? Or why does God seem to be absent during some of our difficult times? These are hard questions. It is here, when our senses prove unreliable and everything around us shouts that God has turned His back, that it is necessary to exercise faith and shift our focus to the unseen realities, to the nature and promises of God. Remember what we learned from the early chapters of Genesis about God and His love for His creatures. Scripture doesn't tell us what Joseph thought during that time, but the story will show that God was with him in and through this ordeal and others, using them to effect His plan.

6. God's name is mentioned twice, in the verses immediately before and after Genesis 34, but never in the chapter itself. This is significant, for nowhere in the story of Jacob have we felt the presence of God less than in this tragic episode. It makes one cry out for God and His help, and ask what can be done to salvage this family.

Damar Deceives Judah Read Genesis 38

6. Two of Judah's sons were so wicked, God killed them before they had children. According to custom, Judah should have given his third son to the first son's wife so the family name would continue, but he was afraid that son would die too so he sent his daughter-in-law home to her father. This left him with one son who was betrothed to a woman he was not allowed near—hardly a recipe for building a family. The wickedness of Judah's sons makes one question Judah's ability to “father” properly in any sense of the word—and yet God had chosen Judah to father the tribe that would one day produce the Messiah, and He would bring that about.

7. Onan's sin was preventing pregnancy by spilling his seed on the ground. In doing so, he was taking selfish measures to make sure no child would come between himself and his brother's property. But it was not just his intent but the act itself that was wrong. Onan was going through the motions of a covenant act while denying it meaning and purpose. According to the Catechism, “‘every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposed, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible’ is intrinsically evil.” (#2370)

8. Tamar, with her courageous plan to get that which was hers by right but which Judah refused her, became the means by which Judah's line—the line from which the Savior would come—is continued. This is yet another illustration of the fact that membership in the family of God is determined not by natural order but by God's providence in determining who will be heir to promise and blessing.



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Joseph in Potiphar's House

Read Genesis 39:1-6

9. Joseph behaved dutifully, managing Potiphar's affairs with wisdom and competence. This reveals a quite different character from that of his brothers, who tend to react to trouble in hatred and anger. Where Joseph might have grumbled or complained of injustice, he is silent. Where he might have been sullen or bitter, or done only what was required, Joseph threw himself into doing well each job that was put before him. His eyes are clearly on God rather than on his situation.

10. "The Lord" appears eight times in Gen. 39, in vss. 2,3,5,21 and 23. Joseph may have been a slave but God was with him in his slavery—upholding him with His steadfast love, prospering him and giving him success. God cared for Joseph not by taking him out of slavery but in helping him through it and by transforming it into a vehicle for good. God blessed Joseph in slavery and through his duties: not in spite of them.

Interestingly, God's blessing did not end with Joseph: it spilled over to blessing on Potiphar's house, which vs. 5 says was blessed "for Joseph's sake." This is a partial fulfillment of God's promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham's seed, and a foretaste of the greater blessing that would come through Christ.

Potiphar's Wife

Read Genesis 39:7-end

11. In marked contrast to Judah, who sought out a prostitute on the road to Timnah, Joseph resisted sexual temptation. He did so by first refusing to listen to or even be with Potiphar's wife, and then by fleeing her persistent advances. His motivation was to keep from betraying Potiphar's trust and from sinning against God. When unjustly accused, Joseph did not defend himself. He saved the lady's honor, endured the wrong done quietly and without bitterness or resentment, and evidently decided to leave justice to the Lord.

12. Joseph provides a true model of strength in the face of temptation, which recognizes the danger of remaining in its presence. "Shun immorality!" Paul says in I Cor. 6:18. Other translators prefer the word "flee." Joseph did both: he refused Potiphar's wife, shunning her suggestions, and then fled when she didn't listen. It is not cowardice to run from such temptation, it is common sense. Sexual immorality may entice but its ultimate end is death. St. Paul speaks elsewhere (see, for example, I Cor. 10:13 and Heb. 4:15-16) of the mercy and grace that God provides to help us endure and escape temptation, and says that God will not allow us to be tempted above our strength. (See the "Catechism Connection" section of this lesson for the difference between trials and temptation.) What was Joseph's secret? Vs. 21 says it all: "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison."



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Joseph in Prison

Read Genesis 40

13. a. Joseph knew that their dreams were not an intellectual puzzle to figure out but a message from God, and therefore the answer would come from their source, which was God. He was simply a vessel through which God spoke to the Egyptians, even as Israel later would be used by God to speak to other nations.

b. Joseph hoped that being known as one who could interpret dreams would give him favor with Pharaoh and consequently release from his unjust imprisonment (vss. 14-15). His interpretation proved correct, but the chief butler forgot him—and Joseph remained in prison.

14. Joseph's life has been like a roller coaster. Once the favored son and a big dreamer, Joseph was sold into slavery. He was given complete charge of a household, but then was unjustly accused and cast back into prison. God gives him the interpretation of two officers' dreams, which should have been a ticket to freedom—yet the chief butler forgot him. Through all of this shines Joseph's constancy of character. It is clear that his eyes are fixed not on his own shifting situation, but on God who never changes. He remains loyal and faithful, and humbly waits.