

### Old Testament overview 3

#### Joseph – God is in control. Leader's version

#### For an hour study, just do the starred \* questions

*Joseph's story is 14 chapters long. You will need to fill in the details at various points, in order for the study itself to concentrate on the main teaching points. I have given you enough information, if you just want to read what I've given, but I would encourage you to familiarise yourself with Genesis 37-50 and put it into your own words. Encourage the group to read the account in their own time.*

**Check in** – ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

#### What does the passage say and mean?

1. **SHOUT-OUT** Read Genesis 37 v 1-4. What is going on in this family's relationships and do you think this is a good sign for the future of this family?

*(Israel is another name for Jacob).*

- Joseph's relationship with his brothers

*Joseph tells tales on his brothers (v2), who are jealous of him (v4)*

- Jacob's relationship with his sons

*Jacob has a favourite son. Never a good idea!*

- Jacob has 2 wives

*He had 4 but only 2 are mentioned here. Multiple wives was culturally acceptable (it ensured women were looked after and increased the chances of surviving heirs) but it was not the way God had ordained marriage. Multiple wives probably led to multiple arguments regarding favouritism etc.*

2. Read Genesis 37 v 5-11. Joseph has some dreams. When the family hear, and realise the meaning, they are furious! What do Joseph's dreams mean?

*The family interpret the dreams (correctly) to mean Joseph will be in authority over them. The problem wasn't the dreams, it was Joseph's arrogance as he told his family about them.*

*Not all dreams have meanings. We need to be wise in recognising the occasional dream with meaning from the routine dreams of our brains unpacking themselves at the end of the day.*

\*3. Read Genesis 37 v 18-24. How do Joseph's brothers feel about him? What do they do?

*They hate him so much that they plan to kill him. Reuben tries to save him. Joseph is stripped of the robe that represents their father's favouritism and thrown into a cistern.*

Questions 4-6 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. Let the group work on them in pairs.

\*4. **SDL** Read Genesis 37 v 26-32. How many wrong / bad decisions did the brothers make and what were they?

*Lots!*

*They allowed their dislike of Joseph to build up into hate.*

*They planned to kill him.*

*They didn't stand up against each other, allowing the group to determine what happened*

*They took justice into their own hands.*

*They sold him to foreigners.*

*They covered up their crime with lies and false evidence*

\*5. **SDL** Can you see how one bad decision leads to another until you are in so deep you can't see how to get out? Can you understand this situation, from personal experience?

*Don't allow this to turn into a time of confession – if people feel the need to unburden, direct them to a chaplain at another time. Try to keep the discussion hypothetical.*

\*6. **SDL** What would have been the right things for the brothers to do about their problems with Joseph?

*Speak to their father about his favouritism*

*Speak to Joseph about his arrogance*

*This may have required mediation (a third party to guide the discussion and hold a neutral point of view).*

**Joseph was sold to Potiphar, one of Pharaohs officials who was very high in Egyptian government. 'The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.' (Gen 39 v 2). Potiphar promoted Joseph to be his personal attendant in charge of his household. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, but he said 'How... could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?' (Gen 39 v 9). She persisted and grabbed his cloak to pull him in, but he ran away. She told Potiphar that Joseph had tried to rape her and Joseph was immediately imprisoned. 'The Lord was with him' (Gen 39 v 21) in prison and Joseph became a trusty, in charge of the other prisoners.**

7. What do we learn about Joseph from this?

*He had strong faith which was not broken by suffering. He was trustworthy. He didn't take advantage of his position as head of Potiphar's household. He didn't succumb to Potiphar's wife because that would be a sin against God. He lived a life of integrity in prison. God was with him even though, on the face of it, things were going from bad to worse.*

**In prison, Joseph met two of Pharaoh's staff who had also been thrown into prison. One night, they both had a dream which Joseph interpreted, saying one will live and one will die. Joseph credited the interpretations to God, not himself. Three days later the dreams came true; one lived and one died. The man who lived forgot all about Joseph, who got left in prison for another 2 years.**

**Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world, started having dreams that no-one could explain. He dreamed 7 fat cows and 7 skinny cows came from the River Nile. The skinny cows ate the fat cows but didn't get fatter. Then he dreamed about 7 skinny ears of corn swallowing up 7 fat ears of corn. His magicians tried to try to explain the dreams and failed. Joseph was summoned (Genesis 40-41).**

\*8. Read Genesis 41 v 15-16. What does this tell you about what has happened to Joseph's faith while he's been in prison?

*Joseph credits God with the ability to interpret dreams and himself with a gift from God. This is not arrogance, he's stating fact. His faith is strong and he knows God is with him, even in this situation.*

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What is happening to your faith while you are in prison?

**God revealed the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams to Joseph. They foretold 7 years of good harvest then 7 years of famine and Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of Egypt. He suddenly, went from being an alleged sex-offender, forgotten in prison, to Prime Minister! He organised the storage of grain during the 7 years of good harvest, so that Egypt could survive the coming famine. Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife, they had 2 sons.**

**Joseph is 30 years old now, it's 13 years since the start of the account and he's spent a lot of it in prison. After 7 years of good harvests the famine begins. The Egyptians had food because of Joseph's good planning. The surrounding countries started coming to Egypt for help.**

9. Read Genesis 42 v 5-8. Who comes to Egypt for food? What do you think will happen?

*Joseph's brothers. Is Joseph going to put them in jail for what they did to him? Tell their father what they did? Have them killed? Let the group speculate about what they deserve.*

Joseph accused his brothers of being spies and held Simeon in prison. He sent the others home with grain, and put their silver back in their bags. He told them to bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, to him before he would release Simeon. Joseph's brothers found the silver in their sacks and realised they would be accused of stealing. They went home to their father, Jacob, who refused to let Benjamin (his new favourite son) go to Egypt. The famine got worse and the brothers convinced Jacob that they had to go back to Egypt for food. They took Benjamin. Joseph sent them home again with food, this time putting a precious cup in Benjamin's sack. He then sent his servant to accuse them of stealing and bring them back to Egypt.

10. Read Genesis 45 v 3. What happens and why are the brothers so frightened?

*Joseph tells them who he is. They are frightened because they are guilty of trying to kill him and Joseph is now 2<sup>nd</sup> in command of the most powerful country in their world.*

Joseph's sends his brothers back to Jacob to tell him he is alive and to bring the whole family (70 people) to live in Egypt. Later, when Jacob died, each son's name became the name of a tribe of Israel, thus there are 12 tribes. (No tribe of Joseph, whose two sons Ephraim and Manasseh became tribal leaders. No tribe of Levi, whose descendants became priests).

\*11. Read Genesis 50 v 15. What problem is still unresolved for Joseph's brothers?

*Guilt.*

12. Read Genesis 50 v 19-21. What does Joseph do?

*He tells them he knows God was in control all the time, and God had greater plans which none of them could have foreseen. He forgives them totally and makes this very clear to them, so they need have no more guilt or fear.*

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Joseph's brothers continued to feel guilt and fear for what they had done. Do you need to talk to someone about guilt for something that you have done?

*If anyone needs to talk, point them in the direction of a chaplain, who will be able to advise what is appropriate. Often, the problem is that we have not forgiven ourselves – we know that God has forgiven us, but we haven't let ourselves off the hook.*

\*13. In Genesis 50 v 20 Joseph explains to his brothers why all these things had happened. Paul says something very similar in Romans 8 v 28. What do you think about this?

*It is important to remember that in Romans 8 v 28, Paul says that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, i.e. for Christians. This verse only applies to Christians so be careful with how your group interpret these words! The 'good of those who love him' is, ultimately, for them to become more like Jesus (v29), and it is often through suffering that we mature in our faith.*

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Can you think of any ways in which God has brought good out of bad in your life?

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The account of Joseph's life shows us that God was involved and was in control all the time, but *at the time* it seemed that God was not watching over Joseph at all.

Are you aware that God is present and in control of every situation in your life, even when things are going very badly?

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Joseph's life was not easy. He was abandoned by his brothers, sold, imprisoned, falsely accused of a sex offence, and forgotten by the man who could have got him out of jail. He held on to his faith in God during that time. How does this encourage you?

\*14. **STICKERS** Can you think of anyone else in the Bible who suffered at the hands of men, as part of God's plan to save other people?

*Joseph is a foreshadow of Jesus. Take the opportunity to explain the gospel again (or ask the group to explain it to you). Main points: mankind was made perfect by God, mankind sinned, this resulted in death – physical and spiritual (separation from God). Jesus is God. He died in the place of repentant sinners to restore them to relationship with God, and rose again to life showing that death has been conquered.*

**TIME-LINE** if you are making a time-line, do the next part of it now – ask the group to add what they have learnt today in the appropriate place. See the time-line on the TFC website for guidance of dates.

**Check out** – ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.



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**Joseph – God is in control.**

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7. What do we learn about Joseph from this?

8. Read Genesis 41 v 15-16. What does this tell you about what has happened to Joseph's faith while he's been in prison?

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What is happening to your faith while you are in prison?

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11. Read Genesis 50 v 15. What problem is still unresolved for Joseph's brothers?

12. Read Genesis 50 v 19-21. What does Joseph do?

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