



JOSEPH & GOD'S PROMISE

STUDY GUIDE
St John's
Southbourne

A WELL KNOWN STORY WITH MUCH TO SAY

Joseph is probably one of the best-known Bible stories. The themes in the story of betrayal, family, deception, forgiveness, tragedy, success and reconciliation are all as important now as they were then. But hopefully this series will give us a chance to ask the deeper question - how does this part of God's word relate to the bigger story of which we're part?

Joseph's story follows on from Jacob, who was the grandson of Abraham. They are in the promised land but there will soon be a famine, how will God ensure this family survives in order to keep his promise to Abraham that through his offspring, the whole world will be blessed?

NOTES ON SMALL GROUPS

Small groups are a great opportunity to encourage one another. Hopefully they are times when God is at work and people feel valued, listened to and open to the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. These questions offer a framework for discussion but please feel free to explore and develop your own discussions on God's word.

My suggestion is that you begin each week with time for one another before getting into the Bible - find out how people are, what's God been speaking to you recently, what have you found encouraging or challenging - those sorts of things. Then after reading and discussing what God's saying through his word, it would be good to pray together. You might like to use worship music, quiet times, and other ways to respond.

Please make time to enjoy spending time together, and enjoy!

FURTHER READING TO DIG DEEPER

- Joseph and the Gospel of Many Colours, V. Baucham
- God Meant it for Good, R.T. Kendall
- Joseph, L. Goligher

1. JOSEPH'S DREAMS

GENESIS 37:1-11

- Before you start to read, what can you remember from the story of Joseph?
- Is it fair to say that our closest relationships are often the most complicated?
- v2 - What is the situation already like between Joseph and his brothers?
- Does Jacob help the situation and why should he have known better?
(See Genesis 25:28 for the story of his Father's favouritism)
- Was Joseph right to tell his dream to his brothers? Does the Bible tell us?
- Do we sometimes wish God would speak in dramatic ways like dreams, and forget that he's promised to always speak through his word?
- Are you able to trust God's word even when it isn't what you might want to hear?
- What does this opening tell us about the family God has chosen to fulfil his promise?
- And does that encourage you that God can call, use, save and love us - no matter who we are, what we've done?

2. JOSEPH SOLD INTO SLAVERY

GENESIS 37:12-36

- Do you have any stories you can share of sibling rivalry growing up?
- Was it wise of Jacob to send Joseph to report on his brothers?
- Why would God allow Joseph to meet the man in v15, knowing that danger awaited Joseph if he found his brothers?
- What is going on in the brother's hearts that they've reached this level of anger?
- Does sin always escalate if it isn't dealt with?
- Which of the brothers come out of this story seeming a little less nasty?
- How desperate do you have to be to commit the deception in vv31-32?
- Are we ever tempted to take actions we know are wrong?
- How quickly can situations spiral out of control when we go against God's ways?
- It would be a good week to spend time praying against the evils of human trafficking and slavery, as well as your usual prayers.

3. JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

GENESIS 39

This is a potentially difficult story for some people, especially if they've been affected by the issues it raises. It would be good to pray and ask for extra sensitivity in discussing it!

- How can we tell that God had his hand over Joseph's life from his time in Potiphar's household?
- Is this passage focussing on how great Joseph was or is it more about the Lord's blessing and how can you tell?
- But does that mean that when work goes well for us we're blessed and when it doesn't we must have fallen out of God's grace?
- What does it say about how we can commit our working lives to the Lord?
- How quickly does Potiphar's wife's attitude to Joseph change from wanting to have an affair to wanting to have him arrested?
- The feeling of a false accusation is horrible isn't it? That sense of injustice? Is it a comfort to remember that God sees and knows the truth?
- And yet how do we see in v21 and 23 that none of this would prevent God's plans?
- Is it reassuring that even when things are messed up by our own or others actions, God is still in control?

4. JOSEPH, THE CUPBEARER AND THE BAKER

GENESIS 40

- Have you ever had a really bad boss? It can be very difficult can't it?
- What do you think the cupbearer and the baker thought about their own prospects when they were put in custody?
- In v8 does Joseph take the glory of interpretation for himself?
- What is the meaning of the cupbearer's dream and how does Joseph see this as part of God's plan for his own life?
- The baker's dream tells a horrific story of what Pharaoh will do. Was Joseph right to warn him?
- This chapter ends with Joseph forgotten by the man he had helped. If we're honest do we sometimes feel forgotten?
- Are we in danger of forgetting others and is there forgiveness from Jesus when we do?
- What do you find helpful as a reminder that God will never forget you?

5. JOSEPH INTERPRETS PHAROAH'S DREAMS

GENESIS 41:8-40

- Why do you think no-one else could interpret Pharaoh's dreams?
- V9 How do you think the cupbearer felt when he suddenly remembered Joseph?
- V16 How does Joseph make sure that God gets the glory for the gift he's given of interpreting dreams?
- How can we ensure that God get the glory from the gifts he's given us each to use?
- After Joseph interpreted the dreams, do you think he was angling for the job he suggests in v33?
- What practical lessons can we take from this about how to manage our resources, and wider issues of distributing food fairly?
- Just how unlikely was it for this foreign slave to become so prominent in Egypt?
- What does that say about how God can use each one of us?
- How do you think Joseph would have felt, being given so much responsibility?
- Do we trust God with our responsibilities or are we tempted to look to our own strength to fulfil them?

6. JOSEPH'S BROTHERS COME TO EGYPT

GENESIS 42:1-20

- How does it feel when you see a long lost friend after a long time? How different is it when you see someone you find harder to get on with?
- What impression do you get of the brothers in v1?
- In v4 Is Jacob still protecting a favourite? Has he learned any lessons?
- How do we see Joseph's earlier dreams fulfilled in this passage?
- Why do you think Joseph doesn't immediately introduce himself to his brothers?
- Do you detect any change in the brothers' attitude, has God been at work in their hearts?
- What do you think Joseph is hoping to find out by testing his brothers when he knows the truth?
- Does God ever test us even though he knows our hearts?
- What is the testing for if God already knows the answer?
- Are we open to how the Lord might be at work in changing our hearts?

7. JOSEPH'S BROTHERS RETURN

GENESIS 43:1-30

- Are you looking forward to being reunited with anyone again soon?
- Do you notice Judah becoming more prominent as the story goes on, why might that be?
- Do you think they had any idea at all that it could be their long lost brother in Egypt?
- Jacob comes up with a practical plan to take goods back with them, but where do we see that he also is praying for their safety?
- Do you find you can be both practical and prayerful over decisions and courses of action?
- Are the brothers now showing a more honest and upfront character?
- Does the steward's faith in their God show that Joseph is having some kind of impact amongst Pharaoh's staff?
- How do we see Joseph's love for his father and his brother in this passage?
- Joseph is moved and goes out to cry. Do you ever think about your emotions in terms of your faith?
- How about how we express what's going on in our hearts to God?

8. JOSEPH'S TEST AND JUDAH'S OFFER

GENESIS 44-45:7

- Why is it that being falsely accused is such an unpleasant feeling?
- Why do you think Joseph persists with these tests planting silver in their bags?
- Why would Joseph be so keen to bring his youngest brother Benjamin back to Egypt?
- Is Joseph trying to establish if the other brothers have changed?
- What does Judah say will happen if Benjamin isn't able to return with them this time? So, what does he offer to do?
- Do you think it's fair to start seeing parallels with Judah's later descendant Jesus taking our punishment in our place?
- Are there even words to describe how Joseph was feeling when he cried out, and how the brothers felt when they realised?
- How is Joseph able to be so forgiving with them (45:5) and how does that give us an amazing example of grace?
- How does 45:7 point us forward to God's even bigger plan for this family?
- As we've been reading, have you considered that we can only know God through Jesus because this family was saved through Joseph?

9. JOSEPH, JACOB AND JUDAH'S PROPHECY

GENESIS 48 AND 49:8-11

- Do you know any famous 'last words'?
- As Jacob approaches the end of his life, how do you think he and Joseph would look back on it?
- Jacob recounts God's promise to him at Luz - how often has it been repeated down the generations of Abraham's family?
- Jacob doesn't mean that Joseph's sons will suddenly be adopted by him, so what point is he making in terms of where they belong and the blessing they will inherit?
- If you know the story of Jacob's blessing from his father Isaac, do verses 8-14 remind you of anything? Why do you think we have themes repeating so much in this part of the Bible?
- Again, we see a repeat of the greater blessing for the younger of the sons - why does this seem to happen so often?
- How many different parts of the imagery connect Judah to his descendant Jesus?
- Do you find it incredible that this prophecy was made centuries before Jesus was born?
- Does it give you confidence that God can achieve his purposes and fulfil his promises?

10. GOD'S BLESSING ON JOSEPH

GENESIS 49:22-26

- v. 22: In the context of Joseph's life in Egypt, how did his "fruitfulness" benefit people beyond his own family and culture?
- v. 23: Looking back at the whole Joseph story, who were the "archers" in his life, and what were the different types of "arrows" (e.g. betrayal, temptation, etc)?
- v. 24: How does this imagery of God putting His hands over Joseph's hands change your perspective on Joseph's personal "success"?
- v. 25: How do we distinguish between material prosperity and the spiritual "blessings of heaven" that Joseph relied on to survive the prison?
- Reflecting on the whole series, which trait of Joseph do you find most inspiring: his integrity in private (Potiphar's wife), his patience in suffering (the prison), or his radical forgiveness in power?
- Jacob emphasizes that God meant it for good. How does Joseph's journey help you trust God when your current "chapter" feels like a pit or a prison?

11. THE DEATHS OF JACOB AND JOSEPH

GENESIS 50

- It may sound morbid, but have you thought about what you'd like to happen when you die?
- Why was it so important for Jacob to be buried in Canaan?
- (Think back to the promise from God)
- How far has God brought Joseph from the depths of the pit to gaining favours from Pharaoh?
- Why are the brothers worried that this will be the point that Joseph shows he hasn't truly forgiven them?
- V19 - How does Joseph's faith in God help him to truly forgive?
- V20 - Is it fair to hear this verse as an explanation of the cross?
- How does Joseph's forgiveness then work itself out in practical ways? Does that need to happen for forgiveness to be real?
- How do you think Joseph was able to have that clear faith in
- God right through to the end of his life?
- Have you prayed for that for yourself?
- How does Joseph's story encourage you to trust in God?
- What will you take away from this series in Joseph?

SPACE FOR NOTES, PRAYERS, etc