

## Lesson 7

# The Faith of Joseph

## Introduction

By faith Joseph, as he was nearing the end of his life, mentioned the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions concerning his bones.

– Hebrews 11.22

Joseph was the fourth-generation heir to the promise of Abraham. He lived around two-hundred years after God made His initial promises to Abraham in Genesis 12. Think about it. Two centuries . . . and no fulfillment in sight. In fact, by the time of Joseph's death, *none* of Abraham's descendants (the descendants of promise) lived in the promised land at all. Because of famine, Joseph and his father's family remained in Egypt, Genesis 50.22. Jacob was carried back to the promised land when he died, and Joseph wanted the same, Genesis 50.25. It was not until the exodus that Joseph's bones were actually taken to Canaan, Exodus 13.19.

Note his faith in the promise as recorded in Genesis:

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will certainly come to your aid and bring you up from this land to the land he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

– Genesis 50.24

Did you catch Joseph's abiding faith? *God will certainly come to your aid.* What assuring words to the people of God, who would spend the majority of their time in Egypt as slaves. Joseph believed in the promises. His faith remains an inspiration today.

In the rest of this lesson we will take a brief look at Joseph's life and the tremendous examples he set by walking in faith.

## Joseph's Early Life

Joseph was the 11<sup>th</sup> son of Jacob and the firstborn of Rachel, Jacob's favored wife, Genesis 30.22-24. Joseph was given a decorated tunic (coat of many colors) by his father who loved him more than all his other sons because he was born in Jacob's old age, Genesis 37.3. At this early age, Joseph either lacked the maturity to realize how much he insulted his brothers by flaunting his own favor, or he intentionally flaunted it.

Joseph certainly did not help matters in the relationship with his brothers by tattling on them, Genesis 37.22, wearing the coat around them, Genesis 37.4, or sharing his dreams, Genesis 37.5-11. His brothers grew to despise him and betrayed him for it, Genesis 37.11, 19-20. Only Rueben and Judah prevented the rest of their brothers from killing him and they settle on throwing him in a pit to die, Genesis 37.22. Rueben intended to come back and rescue Joseph and return him to Jacob. Judah devised the plan to sell Joseph into slavery, Genesis 37.27 . . . hoping that this would take him away from them forever.

Genesis 37.28, 36 inform us of Joseph being sold to a group of Midianite slave traders, who sell him to Potiphar, Genesis 37.36; 39.1. The Biblical record states that Joseph quickly moves from common slave, to noticed and respected household servant, to personal assistant to Potiphar, and to overseer of the land, Genesis 39.2-4. As you read, you will notice how the text emphasizes God's continual presence with Joseph, pointing to this fact as the reason for Joseph's success, Genesis 39.2, 5, 21, 23.

Potiphar had complete trust in Joseph. *He did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate*, Genesis 39.6a. Joseph, *well-built and handsome*, soon catches the eye of Potiphar's wife, who continually tries to seduce him. This continued until Joseph had to literally flee from her presence, leaving behind his clothing, Genesis 39.7-12.

Joseph's refusal to the advances of Potiphar's wife is a huge statement of faith. He saw the sin of sexual immorality for what it is: *immense evil* and a *sin against God*, 39.9. His passion was to do right at all times. Joseph also took great strength from his master's trust in him, 39.8-9. His decision to escape and run away was an incredible act of self-restraint and trust in God's way.

Joseph's faith continues to be exhibited in how he reacts to what happened after he successfully resisted the temptation of sexual sin. Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of trying to seduce her, 39.13-18.<sup>8</sup> Potiphar has Joseph thrown into prison, 39.20.

## Joseph in Prison

Banished to prison for doing the right thing, this could have been a very low moment for Joseph. But the text informs us that God continued to be with Joseph during this dark time. God *extended kindness to him and granted him favor with the prison warden*, 39.21. Joseph prospered, 39.23. When the king's cupbearer and baker were imprisoned, Joseph was assigned as their personal attendant. These men both had dreams and Joseph interpreted them, 40.9-22. Once restored to service of the king, the chief cupbearer forgot about Joseph's kindness, 40.23. Joseph remained in prison for two more years, 41.1.

Again, we see Joseph's faith in action through his perseverance. Instead of being embittered or giving up, he remains faithful to God. Finally, Joseph's steadfastness is rewarded. Pharaoh had a dream and needed an interpreter as his magicians were unable to provide a satisfactory explanation. Finally, the cupbearer remembered Joseph, who is called out of prison and presented before the king, 41.14.

Joseph interprets the dream and gives God all the credit. Joseph proposes that Pharaoh set a high official in place to direct the government to prepare for the coming famine. Pharaoh places Joseph in that position and establishes him as second in command over Egypt. Joseph was given an Egyptian name and a wife. He was 30 years old. He is blessed with two children during this time, Manasseh and Ephriam.

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<sup>8</sup> Some scholars believe that Potiphar doubted the accusations against Joseph or he would have had him executed. See Wolcott, Carrie Sinclair. "Joseph, Son of Jacob." Edited by John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

When the famine came, Egypt stood well prepared and was able to sustain itself. In fact, neighboring nations came to Egypt to purchase grain, 41.57.

## Joseph's Handling of His Brothers

In Genesis 42 we read of Joseph's reunion with his brothers. Jacob had sent all his remaining sons except Benjamin to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him. Joseph speaks to them harshly, accusing them of being spies and has them placed in jail for three days. Simeon is held in Egypt, while the remainder of the brothers are told to go home and retrieve their brother Benjamin.

In Genesis 43 Joseph's brothers return to Egypt for more grain, this time bringing Benjamin with them. Joseph prepares a meal for them and is overcome with emotion. He is overjoyed to see Benjamin, but continues to test his brothers by seeing how loyal they were to Benjamin. Eventually, Judah intercedes on behalf of Benjamin and offers himself as a slave to Joseph, 44.33-34. This moved Joseph to deep emotion and he finally reveals his identity, 45.1-4. He reminds them of the great evil they did against him, but then, reassures them that it was actually God who sent him into exile among the Egyptians, 45.4-9. Everyone is then reunited and reconciled to Joseph, 45.9-11.

Again, in this story we see the great faithfulness of Joseph, who ultimately trusted in God. Instead of taking it upon himself to pay the ultimate retribution to his brothers (he could have easily had them killed), he was always looking higher. Here his faith and obedience to God really shines. He trusted in the activity of God and had faith in where God had been working in his life. It's just a tremendous story of faith.

It should not be surprising at all that the Hebrew writer included him in the great chapter of faith in Hebrews 11.

## For Thought and Reflection

1. What does the Hebrew writer mention regarding Joseph's faith?
2. What is so amazing about Joseph's faith?
3. How did Jacob regard Joseph and why?

4. How did Joseph's brothers feel about Jacob's favoritism? Did Joseph help himself out by the way he acted? Explain.
  
5. How did Joseph exhibit great faithfulness in the incident with Potiphar's wife?
  
6. What two things did Joseph describe sexual immorality as?
  
7. How does Joseph demonstrate perseverance after he gets punished for doing what was right?
  
8. What are some powerful lessons we can take away from the way Joseph handled his brothers after they come to Egypt for grain?
  
9. Do you think Joseph believed in the providence of God?
  
10. Are we as apt to attribute the course of our life and its various happenings to the activity of God? What are some things you can do to set your mind more on things above?