

Learn to Read Genesis Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 12



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SESSION 12

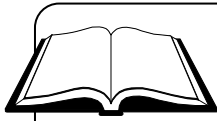
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Genesis 37 to 50 – The Life of Joseph

Summary of chapters

37 v 1 to 36	Joseph sold into Egypt
38 v 1 to 30	Judah's family
39 v 1 to 45 v 28	Joseph in Egypt
46 v 1 to 50 v 26	Jacob and his family in Egypt

37 v 1 to 36 – Joseph sold into Egypt



Read Genesis 37 v 1 to 36

37 v 2 This is the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.

Joseph brought a bad report of four of his brothers – Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher. We don't know if this was Joseph being a "tell-tale", or if he was concerned that the behaviour of his brothers might bring them into disrepute with the people of the land. He would have been aware of the Dinah incident and Jacob's displeasure then.

37 v 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colours.

This verse tells us that Jacob loved Joseph "more than all his children". It may be thought that this was a recipe for disaster, but it has to be borne in mind that Joseph had a special place in Jacob's life for the following reasons:

He was born when Jacob was 91 and was the firstborn of his favourite wife, Rachel.

If Laban had not tricked him into marrying Leah first, Joseph would have been the firstborn of the family instead of Reuben.

Reuben, the real firstborn, had already committed the act which led Jacob to deprive him of the birthright.

(Compare Genesis 35 v 22 with 49 v 4.)

Jacob made Joseph a “tunic (or coat) of many colours” to indicate that Joseph was classed as firstborn instead of Reuben. *The Companion Bible* has a useful comment about the “coat of many colours”:

“All raiment in the East to this day marks the social rank and position of the wearer. Among the Bedouins, the chief and his eldest son wear a distinctive garment. Being the garment of the firstborn it doubtless denoted also his official and priestly position.”

So Joseph would have annoyed some of his brothers who were sons of the handmaids by “telling-tales” as they would see it. Joseph’s coat of many colours would doubtless have annoyed Reuben, who would feel he should retain his status as firstborn. The other sons of Leah would also share Reuben’s discontentment. It is not difficult to see why there was tension between Joseph and his brothers. The dreams of Joseph (verses 5 to 11) and their interpretations would only make matters worse.

37 v 13 And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” So he said to him, “Here I am.”

Joseph was very conscious of his brothers’ hatred, but he did not refuse his father’s request. This willingness to obey his father is “echoed” in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Echoes -
Life of
Jesus Christ**

Matthew 26 v 39 and 42; Hebrews 10 v 5 to 7

When Joseph found his brothers they put him in a pit intending to kill him.

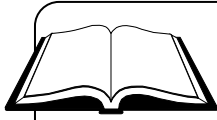
37 v 26 So Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?

27 Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.” And his brothers listened.

**Echo -
Life of
Jesus Christ**

Luke 22 v 4 to 6

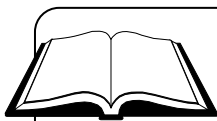
38 v 1 to 30 – Judah’s family



Read Genesis 38 v 1 to 30

Chapter 38 leaves the story of Joseph and tells us what one of his brothers was doing while Joseph was in Egypt. Judah was repeating the mistakes of his uncle Esau, but the results were even more disastrous in the short term than they had been for Esau.

39 v 1 to 45 v 28 – Joseph in Egypt



Read Genesis 39 v 1 to 23

So began a new phase in Joseph’s life under the hand of Potiphar. This period of service to a high Egyptian official served as a good preparation for the high office he was later to occupy. He would become well acquainted with Egyptian customs. Here we see God’s hand at work in Joseph’s life preparing him for events many years ahead.

39 v 2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

God was with Joseph just as He had promised to be with Abraham and Jacob – Genesis 26 v 3 and 24; 28 v 15. Potiphar recognised that Joseph was successful and made him overseer over his house.

39 v 6 ...Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

7 And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.”

8 But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.

9 There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

X-Ref -
Genesis
39 v 6

Genesis 29 v 17

This cross reference seems to imply that Joseph had the same good looks as his mother in her younger days! This would explain Potiphar's wife's advances to him.

However, Joseph showed great humility, obedience to his master and respect for God's principles of marriage laid down in Genesis 2 v 24. Verses 10 to 20 tell how Joseph unjustly ended up in prison. But there was no hint of complaint from him.

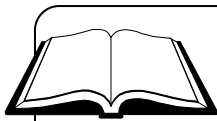
**Echo -
Life of
Jesus Christ**

1 Peter 2 v 21 to 23

39 v 21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

22 And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing.

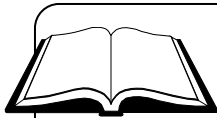
Again we are reminded of the hand of God in the affairs of Joseph's life.



Read Genesis 40 v 1 to 23

Chapter 40 relates the story of the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker and of Joseph's correct interpretation of them.

Joseph asked the chief butler to mention his plight to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, but verse 23 tells us that he forgot. We can imagine Joseph hoping each day that something would happen.



Read Genesis 41 v 1 to 57

41 v 1 Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river.

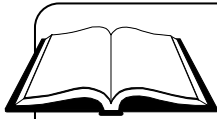
Joseph had to wait two full years before God's hand started to move again. Chapter 41 verses 1 to 8 tells us that Pharaoh had two dreams which troubled him.

Verses 9 to 36 tell us Pharaoh's butler remembered that Joseph had correctly interpreted his dream. Pharaoh immediately sent for Joseph, who hastily shaved and was brought before him. Joseph subsequently interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. There were to be 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine.

Note how Joseph attributed his ability to interpret dreams to God (v 16). He also gave Pharaoh advice in verses 33 to 36, but did not hint that he might be the man for the job.

Verses 37 to 57 describe how Joseph was made second in importance to Pharaoh.

Verses 51 and 52 show us that, despite his meteoric rise to power and fame, he still maintained his faith in God. The names he gave to his two sons showed that God was still in his thoughts.



Read Genesis 42 v 1 to 38

42 v 1 When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?"

2 And he said, "Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die."

3 So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.

The famine in Egypt also affected Joseph's father and brothers in Canaan. So all the brothers except Benjamin went down to Egypt to buy food. Verse 4 tells us why Jacob did not allow Benjamin to go as well.

Chapters 42 to 45 record the dealings of Joseph with his brothers, whom he recognised as soon as they arrived.

Verse 6 of chapter 42 tells us that the brothers "bowed down before him" just as Joseph's dreams all those years ago had suggested they would. He could have made himself known to them immediately and taken vengeance on them – he had the power and authority – but he did not. He could see the hand of God at work again, so instead he tried to draw out from them how they had accounted to Jacob for his disappearance.

We may think that Joseph's treatment of his brothers was rather ruthless. However, a careful reading shows that Joseph was trying to make them confess their guilt at selling him into Egypt. We may wonder why they did not recognise him. He was only 17 when they sold him and he would now be 38. In addition he would be clean shaven and be dressed as an Egyptian.

42 v 13 And they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more."

Initially their only confession to Joseph was, "one is no more".

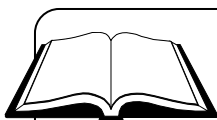
Three days later, in Joseph's hearing, they confessed their guilt among themselves, not knowing that Joseph understood them:

42 v 21 Then they said to one another, "We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us."

22 And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us."

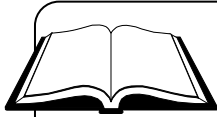
Their actions all those years ago must have been always on their conscience. Joseph had not questioned them on the subject, but it seems to have been the first thing they thought about.

They had acknowledged their guilt privately, but Joseph wanted the whole story from them. So he imprisoned Simeon and sent the rest back home with the demand that Benjamin come as well next time.



Read Genesis 43 v 1 to 14

Chapter 43 verses 1 to 14 describe the natural reluctance of Jacob to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt. But when more food was needed he eventually agreed, putting the whole thing into God's hands (verse 14).

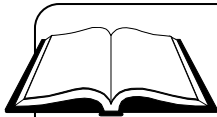


Read Genesis 43 v 15 to 44 v 34

When Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt with Benjamin, Joseph ordered them to be taken to his house. He released Simeon and gave them a meal, astonishing them by seating them in the order of their birth.

The events of chapter 44 eventually forced from them the information that Joseph was seeking. His father believed he had been torn in pieces (v 28).

It seems that Judah's comments (v 34) of the possible effect of Benjamin not returning made Joseph realise it was time to make himself known to them. This he now did.

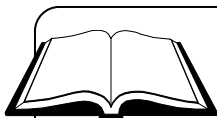


Read Genesis 45 v 1 to 28

45 v 4 And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

5 But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life."

He was not going to let them forget that they had sold him, but there was reassurance and forgiveness as he went on. As we saw in the first course, this is how God forgives – first confession, then forgiveness.



Read 1 John 1 v 9

The brothers had confessed everything now, so there could be forgiveness.

Because of the continuing famine, Joseph suggested that the whole family should come to Egypt.

The brothers returned and eventually convinced Jacob that Joseph was still alive.

46 v 1 to 50 v 26 – Jacob and his family in Egypt



Read Genesis 46 v 1 to 47 v 12

God appeared to Jacob and confirmed that he should go down to Egypt. Chapter 46 also gives details of all of Jacob's family who went down into Egypt and of Jacob's meeting with Joseph.

Chapter 47 verses 1 to 12 gives details of how Joseph introduced Jacob to Pharaoh, and settled his father and family in Goshen.



Read Genesis 47 v 13 to 26

This section concerns Joseph's management of the food supplies as the famine worsened.



Read Genesis 47 v 27 to 31

Jacob, who was nearing the end of his life, asked Joseph to make sure that he was not buried in Egypt. He wanted to be buried with his father, his grandfather and his wife Leah in the land promised to him and his descendants.



Read Genesis 48 v 1 to 22

48 v 3 Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me,

4 and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.'"

Joseph heard that Jacob was ill and took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim to see him. Jacob referred to the promises made to him by God in Genesis 28 v 13 and 14.

In the rest of the chapter Joseph and his two sons were singled out by Jacob for special blessings. We discover from verse 22, and cross-references from it, that Joseph was considered the firstborn.

X-Refs -
Genesis
48 v 22

Deuteronomy 21 v 17; 1 Chronicles 5 v 1 and 2; Ezekiel 47 v 13



Read Genesis 49 v 1 to 33

These were Jacob's last words to his sons. He was aware that his life was ebbing away and so he called his sons together to bless them before he died. It is interesting to note the order in which Jacob gave his blessing:

- first to the sons of Leah
- then to the sons of Leah's maid, Zilpah
- next to the sons of Rachel's maid, Bilhah
- finally to the children of his beloved Rachel

We shall look at the more significant aspects of his words:

Reuben – Although Jacob's firstborn, he was deprived of that status because he had committed fornication with his father's concubine Bilhah (Genesis 35 v 22).

Simeon and Levi – These two were very close to each other – they were the instigators of the slaughter of the family of Shechem (Genesis 34 v 25). But they were to be separated when they inherited the promised land. The tribe of Levi was given no land. The tabernacle and temple service were to be their inheritance (Numbers 18 v 21 to 24).

Judah – Supremacy over all his brothers was to be the lot of Judah. From his tribe would come those who would occupy the throne, and eventually the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joseph – Jacob's blessing of Joseph was in effect a review of all his troubles through which he had come successfully by his trust in God. As a result God would bless him abundantly.

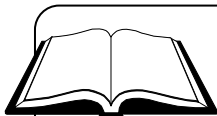
Jacob then repeated the request he made to Joseph at the end of chapter 47, and shortly afterwards he died.



Read Genesis 50 v 1 to 26

This chapter records the mourning by the Egyptians for Jacob, who was, after all, the father of the most important man in Egypt next to Pharaoh.

After the funeral, Joseph's brothers were afraid that now that their father was dead Joseph would seek to avenge himself of all the evil that they had done to him. How they misjudged him! Being afraid to confront Joseph himself they sent a message to him to say that, before he died, Jacob had told them to seek forgiveness from Joseph. (There is no record of this – perhaps they invented the story.) Later they went to Joseph in person and once again bowed down before him. The reply of Joseph was characteristic:



Re-read Genesis 50 v 19 to 21

The rest of Joseph's life is passed over. He died at the age of 110. Like his father he did not wish to be buried in Egypt. Even though he was a powerful man in Egypt, his heart was still with the land promised to Abraham:



Re-read Genesis 50 v 24 and 25

After the children of Israel had grown into a nation in Egypt, they were eventually led out by Moses back into the land of Canaan. When they settled in the land they buried Joseph's bones in accordance with his wishes as we read in Joshua 24 v 32:

The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph.

Summary of Joseph's life

37 v 1 to 11	Joseph's brothers disliked him because of his dreams and his special coat of many colours.
37 v 12 to 36	His brothers sold Joseph to Ishmaelite traders who took him to Egypt.
39 v 1 to 23	Joseph was sold in Egypt to Potiphar, who eventually trusted Joseph to run his household. Potiphar's wife made unsuccessful advances to Joseph. She contrived to have Joseph put in prison.
40 v 1 to 23	Joseph was put in a position of trust by the prison keeper. He correctly interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker. He asked the butler to plead for him to Pharaoh when the butler was reinstated to favour. However, the butler forgot Joseph.
41 v 1 to 57	The butler remembered Joseph two years later when Pharaoh had dreams, and Joseph was brought from prison. He interpreted the dreams, which predicted seven years' plenty followed by seven years' famine, and was made second in command to Pharaoh.
42 v 1 to 44 v 34	The famine eventually caused Jacob to send Joseph's brothers to Egypt for food. Joseph recognised them and eventually they confessed to him their guilt in selling him to Egypt.
45 v 1 to 47 v 31	Jacob and all his family went down to Egypt and were saved from the famine by Joseph.
48 v 1 to 49 v 33	Jacob blessed Joseph's sons and then all of his own sons.
50 v 1 to 26	Jacob and Joseph both died in Egypt.



- Joseph accepted all that happened to him without any complaint
- He did not protest his innocence despite blatant injustices
- It was obvious to all that "God was with him"
- He realised that God was at work in his life
- He accepted that unpleasant experiences as well as pleasant ones can be part of God's plan for our lives
- He remembered God's principles and applied them in his life despite having no contact with God-fearing people for many years
- He forgave his brethren when they confessed their guilt

Most of these characteristics are seen in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We should try to show the same features in our lives.

The life of Joseph forms an appropriate ending to the book of Genesis, showing how to put God's principles into practice in our lives. It is a contrast to the events we have considered in the early chapters of Genesis, where God's principles were ignored.

Summary of Genesis

As we have now reached the end of Genesis, we shall complete our summary of the book, which we started at the end of Session 7.

- After creation everything conformed to God's wishes. There was no challenge to His authority
- God gave Adam and Eve the choice of whether or not they would respect His authority and believe Him
- Overcome by ambition and desire, they chose to believe the serpent rather than God, and in so doing challenged God's authority
- God responded by passing a death sentence on mankind, and foretold a hard struggle between those who respected God's authority and those who did not
- Cain showed the capabilities of those who did not accept God's commands by murdering his brother
- A corrupt, violent world was the eventual result of mankind turning its back on God's commands
- God decided to stop the corruption and violence by destroying most of mankind with a flood
- He made a fresh start with Noah and his family
- God's authority was again challenged by most of mankind led by Nimrod
- This time the spirit of rebellion was restrained by confusing the language so that people could not understand each other. This resulted in them spreading all over the earth
- God was now able to continue His plan with a small group of people without too much interference from the rest of the world
- God began to do this through Abraham and his family
- God underlined the difference between His way and that of the rest of the world by asking Abraham to leave his idolatrous surroundings and live a life away from influences opposed to God
- Because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not rebel against God but put their complete trust in Him, God made promises to them about their future inheritance of the land we now know as Israel
- The tension between God's way and human thinking was seen in the relationship between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers
- God promises to bless and "be with" those who try to live a life in harmony with Him. The blessings God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are also available to us as part of the gospel if we share their faith

Lessons from Genesis

God gives us the choice of whether or not to obey and trust in Him

Because of this choice there are two groups of people in God's eyes – those who choose to obey and trust God and those who think they know better, and ignore God and His principles.

As we saw in the first session, Adam and Eve chose not to believe, trust or obey God; *they* thought they knew better. They were punished. We have the same choice today.

God respects and works with those who trust and worship Him

We saw that Abraham believed what God told him concerning his future children when humanly speaking it seemed he had little prospect of having any. Because of this belief, Abraham was deemed to be “righteous” or “in the right with God”. If we wish to be “right with God” we must trust God and learn to obey Him, and respect His principles even when it is difficult or inconvenient.

Antagonism between the two groups of people

There has always been tension between these two groups of people. This applies in our day just as much as in Bible times. One obvious area where it is seen today is in the general disregard of the Bible and its standards.

This antagonism sometimes causes problems and trouble, which God uses to mould our characters

The life of Jacob shows that the life of a faithful man can be full of problems. God uses these problems to develop our characters. God sent Jacob to Syria to get Syrian characteristics out of him. Have a look at Hebrews 12 v 5 to 11, which summarises this principle.

God is “always with” those who trust in Him

God is always concerned about those who try to live using His principles. There are almost thirty references in Genesis to God “being with” or promising to “be with” such people. Have a look at some of them from the list below.

6 v 18	24 v 40	33 v 11
9 v 9, 11,	26 v 3, 24, 28	35 v 3
15 v 18	28 v 15, 20	39 v 2, 3, 21, 23
17 v 4, 19, 21	31 v 3, 5, 42	46 v 4
21 v 20, 22	32 v 9	48 v 21

As we saw in the *Learn to Read the Bible Effectively* course, God has shown how effectively He can “be with” people by preserving Abraham’s descendants – the Jews – right down to our day, just as He promised He would to Abraham. As we saw in Session 9, we can be involved in these promises and have the amazing assurance that the God Who created and sustains the whole universe will be “with us” as well.

God is “with” all kinds of people

If we look at the character summaries of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we see that they were all totally different characters, but God cared equally for them all.

Abraham was a man who obeyed and trusted God without question.

Isaac was a meek man who was always being pushed about by other people yet maintained his trust in God.

Jacob believed in God but it took him a long time to learn to trust Him and not rely on his own abilities.

God does not act as quickly as we should sometimes like

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all had to wait God’s good time to have children. This would have tested their trust in God’s promises which depended on them having children.

Joseph was two years in prison waiting for the butler to remember him. He was 20 years away from his family wondering if he would ever see his father again.

Conclusion

We hope that you have enjoyed and benefited from this course. Our aim has been to help and encourage *you* to open the Bible and read it *yourself*.

The book of Genesis is the introduction and key to the Bible. It is one of the longer books of the Bible, but when we consider that it deals with the spiritual history of more than 2,000 years of mankind's existence, perhaps that puts its length into perspective. In Genesis we see that God does care for real people, and works in their lives for good, even when things appear to be going wrong.

We hope, God willing, to produce other Distance Learning Courses in the future, and any feedback you may like to give us on the one you have just completed would be very much appreciated.

The courses currently available are:

- Learn to Read Luke Effectively
- Learn to Read Acts Effectively

Please ask your tutor if you would like either of these courses.

Your tutor will always be pleased to hear from you and discuss anything relating either to this course or any other Bible-related topic. Please also let your tutor know if there is any topic you would like to study. Your tutor will also be able to give you details of further Distance Learning Courses on other Bible subjects that are being prepared.

Finally, please remember that the Bible contains God's plan for us. The hope of a life after this one is to be found in the Bible, and we have attempted in some small way to help you towards obtaining it. We all face a similar choice to that of Adam and Eve. We hope and pray that you, like the characters we have considered, may learn to believe, trust and obey the Lord God, following the example of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE CHRISTADELPHIANS

Notes