

# CAPITOL STUDIES

JANUARY 11, 2023 • WEEK 1



## JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

### *Contents*

- Joseph's Life is Recorded in the Bible... 1
- To Accentuate His Godly Character 2
- To Emphasize His Historical Role 3
- To Magnify the Providence of God 4
- To Note His Life's Similarity to Christ's 5
- About Capitol Studies 6



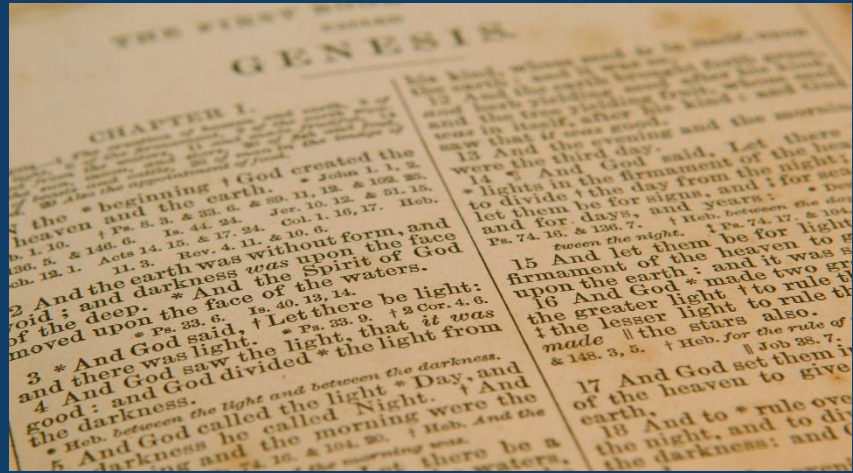
### *Verse of the Week*

Acts 7:8-9

*...and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.*

*The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph....*

## Beginnings and Overview



JOSEPH WAS BORN IN APPROXIMATELY THE 15TH YEAR of Jacob's servitude to Laban, his father-in-law. His oldest brothers were probably entering into their teenage years. That would make them in their twenties when Joseph was preferred by his father and revealed through his dreams to rule over his family. This presented a strained relationship with his siblings.

Joseph was born into a "different" family. His father, Jacob, had two wives, Leah and Rachel, and two concubines. Although Jacob married two wives (Gen. 29:27), bigamy was an exception to God's original plan for marriage (Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:13-15). Almost every time we see this in Scripture, conflict, heartache, or manipulation occurs. There was much strife between Leah and Rachel over their ability to bear children. Rachel, Joseph's mother, was barren for many years, yet she was Jacob's preferred wife.

Joseph's family was one giant mess! Pride, greed, deceit, jealousy, and spite—sounds a lot like the modern family, doesn't it? Except when God was giving them what they wanted—Jacob, Laban, Leah, and Rachel never spoke of him. The only thing God seemed to be good for was to meet their own selfish desires. And that may be a sin we can relate to, as well. Some of us only pray when we're in trouble. Some of us only pray for ourselves. Some of us only obey because we want God to do something for us. And some of us only praise God when He does what we want. That was the major sin that tore apart Jacob's family.

Pastor Arin Hess  
Chaplain, Capitol Studies



## INTRODUCTION

The story of Joseph is primarily recorded in Genesis 37-50. Joseph's life encompasses more varied circumstances than nearly any other Bible character. Details of the first 17 years of his life are largely veiled, and we can only view them through the lens of the story of Jacob. The final 71 years of his life are treated with striking brevity. The majority of the material available to us in Scripture concerning Joseph focuses on the 23 years of his life between the ages of 17 and 40. In that interval, we see him alternately exalted and debased. In each case, he is exalted by the primary authority in his life (father, Potiphar, Pharaoh) but is subsequently brought low by the actions of others. One student of Joseph's life writes: Joseph's "career, like his coat, is of many colors [pieces], varying from the most somber to the most brilliant."<sup>1</sup>

A study of his life displays a beautifully and divinely crafted portrait of the working of God in the life of a man, a family, a nation, and the world. We are given insights into the character of God and principles for the conduct of His people. The story of Joseph is recorded in Scripture for at least four purposes: to accentuate his Godly character; to emphasize his historical role in the life of the nation of Israel, to provide revelation concerning the providence of God, and to note the similarities of his life and Christ's life.

*Genesis 30:22-24*

*Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. <sup>23</sup>So she conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." <sup>24</sup>She named him Joseph, saying, "May the LORD give me another son."<sup>2</sup>*

*Joseph's Life Is Recorded in the Bible...*

### I. TO ACCENTUATE HIS GODLY CHARACTER

Moses, living well after Joseph, was writing Genesis to a nation of people freshly delivered from their bondage in the land of Egypt. For more than four centuries, Israel had been living in Egypt surrounded by the glitter of Egyptian life. Moses records for these Jews God's covenant with Israel as His special people of promise. God repeats His covenant multiple times to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the life of each patriarch, God patiently develops faith in him. But when we come to Joseph at age 17, he already appears with a comparatively mature faith. Faith in God's promise—what a critical need in the hearts of the spiritually immature Israelites! They needed to learn how to trust God's words to them, to be able to cling to them when the way was long, the water bitter, the food scarce, or when enemies opposed them.

There is a real sense in which Joseph is being upheld as a national role model for all of the children of Israel in succeeding generations—not only as an example of faith, but as an example of faith that produces obedience. Joseph's exemplary obedience to God and his superlative demonstration of forgiveness, united with a seemingly unshakable trust



in the rightness and goodness of God, is notable. Joseph had learned to trust God to do what is right for His own glory and for Joseph's good. Joseph's testimony is even more notable when contrasted with the testimonies of his brothers and when compared with the other patriarchs.

### A. In Contrast to His Brothers

Joseph exudes respect for his father; his brothers trample on their father's heart. Joseph portrays a willingness to accept leadership within his home; his brothers almost rush to forfeit their roles. Joseph obeys God when he is alone; the brothers repeatedly fall when alone and when together. Joseph's brothers need the purging of 22 years before they openly acknowledge their wrong and become men of character as Joseph was when he was but a teen.

### B. In Comparison with the Patriarchs

Joseph is unique among the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Not only does the record span the whole of his life from birth to death, but it covers his life in more detail than any of the patriarchs. Also, the record of Joseph's life does not include the personal failures that so often beset the patriarchs.

From the very first he seems to have been whole-heartedly on the side of God, and his struggles were not with himself in order to maintain that undivided allegiance, so much as they were with others because he was determined to preserve it. His character, indeed, was not perfect, but we do not see the fluctuation between good and evil, between strength and weakness, as we do with the majority of the patriarchs. He never sank to the depths of deceit into which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sometimes descended. "His career is uniquely interesting as that of a good boy who was not a weakling; that of a pious man who was not a business failure; and that of a great man who in the glory of his exaltation, did not outgrow the simplicity of his youth."<sup>3</sup>

## II. TO EMPHASIZE HIS HISTORICAL ROLE IN THE LIFE OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL

When Moses records the generations of Esau in Genesis 36, He uses this single chapter to trace Esau's descendants up to the time of Moses. From chapter 37 to the end of the book, Moses considers the generations of Jacob. At the conclusion, Israel is in Egypt and has been for 71 years since Joseph was 39; he dies at 110 years old. It becomes apparent that God uses Joseph as His specific instrument to move the embryonic nation into the womb of Egypt for protection and to keep Israel there until she is numerically stronger as a nation.

### Joseph Is God's Instrument to Move and Keep Israel in Egypt

God desired to move Israel into Egypt for their spiritual protection. Several times in the book of Genesis, God had warned His people directly and indirectly of the danger of intermarrying with the pagan nations





around them. God deems it necessary to remove his people from this setting for 430 years, and during that time the iniquity of these pagan nations was filling up (Gen. 15:16).

The first three generations—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—had kept themselves pure, but the fourth generation was evidently acquiring the prevailing taint of the country. The people of that generation needed to be broken off from the vile habits they were forming.<sup>4</sup>

While in Egypt, Israel is blessed with the choicest land (Goshen) and lives separately from the Egyptians (Gen. 46:34). Some separation came about because the shepherds of Israel were an abomination to the Egyptians. Goshen serves as a sort of cocoon where God allows His people to develop and increase with little fear of intrusion or temptation. As a result, the people of God prosper during their days in Egypt (Exd. 1:7).

### III. TO MAGNIFY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

A dominant theme that surfaces in the account of Joseph is the providence of God. Joseph does not resign himself to God’s providential dealings; he embraces them. In so doing, he teaches us to appreciate the workings of God in our lives.

#### Joseph Is Aware of the Continuing Presence of God

Joseph constantly recognizes the presence of God with him. “He believed in God, not as far off, but always near; not as sitting aloof from all the actions of men, but as overruling and controlling them; not as an enemy to be feared, but as a friend to be loved and trusted and served. No persecution could keep him from realizing that God was with him, and no prosperity could blind him to the fact that it was... God [to whom] he owed it all.”<sup>5</sup>

The consciousness of the presence of God is evident in his dreams, in his response to Potiphar’s wife, in interpreting the dreams in prison, in interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh, in the naming of his children, in his words with his father, in his words with his brothers, and in his request to have his bones taken with them when they departed from the land. His is a constant walk with God. His faith has almost the strength of sight. Whatever men might intend, he knows that God always “meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20). He receives both the “good” and “bad” as from the hand of God.<sup>6</sup>

“God works out His great purposes through even the crimes of unconscious men. There is an irony, if we may so say, in making the hatred of these men the very means of their brother’s advancement, and the occasion of blessing to themselves.”<sup>7</sup>

*Psalm 76:10*

*For the wrath of men shall praise You; with a remnant of wrath You will gird Yourself*





## IV. TO NOTE HIS LIFE'S SIMILARITIES TO CHRIST'S

Though a number of interesting parallels can be noted, it should not be forgotten that the New Testament nowhere speaks of Joseph as a type of Christ. It is proper, however, to identify the similarities in the lives of Joseph and Jesus and to acknowledge that Joseph's life points us to Jesus and reminds us of Him. "Whether we view Christ as the object of the Father's love, the object of the envy of 'His own,' in His humiliation, sufferings, death, exaltation and glory—in all,"<sup>8</sup> we see much of the same in Joseph.

One of the many points of parallel is addressed in the New Testament. During Stephen's message, he demonstrated how a pattern of rejection existed in the Old Testament. God chooses and/or elevates someone to leadership of His people only to have the divinely chosen leader to be rejected. Joseph was divinely chosen, and his leadership was rejected. Ultimately, this pattern would reach a fulfillment on the Cross (Acts 7:9, 51-53). "The story of Joseph... exhibits..., as Stephen was to show, a human pattern that runs through the Old Testament to culminate at Calvary: the rejection of God's chosen deliverers, through the envy and unbelief of their kith and kin—yet a rejection which is finally made to play its own part in bringing about the deliverance."<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

God uses the story of Joseph to accomplish specific aims. Joseph is not merely a story to be relayed to children. God gives us the story to show us a godly life in the midst of perversity, to divulge an important part of His covenantal dealings with His chosen people, to teach His people of His omnipotent ability to providentially control even evil men and foreign circumstances to fit them into His will, and to magnify for us a life that manifests many similarities to the promised Messiah. Only as our study is able to magnify these Divine purposes will we be able to appreciate the depth and splendor of God's working in Joseph's life.

Pastor Arin Hess

## FOOTNOTES

1. Thomas Kirk, *Life of Joseph*, Andrew Eliot Publisher, 1900, pp. 1-2.
2. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.
3. William Taylor, *Joseph: Prime Minister*, Palala Press, 2016, pp. 222-23.
4. W. G. Blaikie, *Heroes of Israel*, Forgotten Books, 2019, p. 242.
5. Taylor, *Joseph: Prime Minister*, p. 226.
6. *Ibid.*



*Theme Verse*

Philippians 4:8

*Finally, brethren,  
whatever is true,  
whatever is honorable,  
whatever is right,  
whatever is pure,  
whatever is lovely,  
whatever is of  
good repute,  
if there is any  
excellence  
and if anything is  
worthy of praise,  
dwell on these things.*

- 7. Charles Simeon, *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*, Volume 1, Zondervan, 1956, p. 240.
- 8. C. H. Mackintosh, *Notes on the Pentateuch*, Loizeaux Brothers, 1972, p. 127
- 9. Derek Kidner, *Genesis, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, InterVarsity Press Academic, 2008, p. 179

Much of this material was gathered by Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina; it is used with permission.

*Personal Study Notes*

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