

CAPITOL STUDIES

JANUARY 18, 2023 • WEEK 2



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

Contents

Family Favoritism	2
Family Prominence	3
Family Providence	4
Included Free Will	4
Included Human Aid	4
Overruled Intentions	4
Included Coincidences	5
Conclusion	5
About Capitol Studies	6



Verse of the Week

Genesis 37:4

His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

The Dreamer and the Pit



JACOB FLED TO HARAN AT 77 YEARS OF AGE (Genesis 30:23, 31:41). He contracted with Laban, his uncle, to work for seven years to marry Rachel, the younger of Laban's daughters. At the conclusion of the seven years, Jacob, the deceiver, was deceived by Laban, who substituted Leah in the marriage tent. This deception was possible because of the custom of veiling the bride amid the dark of night. Laban tried to appease Jacob by telling him that the older sister must marry first, and that Rachel could also become his wife after a one-week wedding celebration with Leah. Laban also required Jacob to work another seven years in order to marry Rachel. (It is interesting to note that the later Mosaic law forbade a man from marrying two living sisters: Leviticus 18:18.)

During this second seven-year period, the first eleven of Jacob's sons were born, though the exact order of their births is not known. The boys lived in an atmosphere of great strife as Leah and Rachel vied for Jacob's attention and affection. Even their handmaids were drawn into this competition. Jacob's rocky relationship with Laban did not improve either.

After Joseph's birth, Jacob unsuccessfully approached Laban about leaving his employment (30:25). Six years later, Jacob made a wild, secretive flight with his family. His sons ranged from six to thirteen in age, Joseph being the youngest. Though Joseph may not have understood the whole situation, surely, he saw and felt the fear as his family raced to avoid being detected by his grandfather.¹

Pastor Arin Hess
Chaplain, Capitol Studies



INTRODUCTION

In addition to a permanent separation from one grandfather, Laban, Joseph experienced the loss of others who were personally close to him (35:8, 19, 29). The first to die was his grandmother's nurse, Deborah (24:59). Historians believe that after the death of Rebekah, Deborah, who was probably no longer needed at Isaac's home, came to live with Jacob and his family and did much to help raise Joseph. Though we are not certain of this, it is difficult to know why she would be mentioned here, if she were not then a part of Jacob's household. Rachel, Joseph's mother, also died (35:19). Surely this grief was very traumatic for the young Joseph. Not only did he feel the extreme loss of his mother, but he also was aware of the great sorrow it caused his father (48:7).

As is evident in the life of Joseph, God can use imperfect parents and their selfish decisions, beguiling relatives, hateful siblings, and even the death of or separation from those whose influence on us may be the greatest, to prepare us precisely for the task He has appointed for us.

I. FAVORITISM IN THE FAMILY

Genesis 37:1-4

Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan. ²These are the records of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father. ³Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. ⁴His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.²

Jacob was now 108 years old, and Joseph seventeen. They had moved to the land of Isaac, Jacob's father. One day, Joseph brought his father a bad report about four of his brothers. Possibly Joseph thought the best thing he could do for his erring brothers was to let their father know how they were living, or perhaps his father had asked him for a report.

Brothers' Response: Hostility

Jacob (Israel) loved Joseph more than all his sons (37:3) as demonstrated by the phrase "son of his old age" (lit., "son of the old ones"). This description probably had a dual meaning, with both meanings ultimately pointing to the same conclusion. Joseph had the privilege of being raised not only under his father but also his grandfather. As the oldest son of his father's favorite but now-deceased wife, yet being the youngest son, Joseph probably enjoyed the company of the "old ones" more than most of the brothers. In addition, the title likely referred to Jacob's intention for Joseph to be the one to whom the family blessing and promise would be passed. It appears that Jacob had made Joseph the son to whom the privileges of the patriarchy would pass. Joseph would carry on the



heritage of the “old ones.” The uniquely colored coat that Jacob gave to Joseph communicated not only his father’s love, but his father’s ambition. Jacob gave full and open expression to the sentiments of his heart. Joseph was his clear choice for present favor and for future promise of leadership. Because of this, his brothers hated him and could not even converse with him without hostility.

II. PROMINENCE IN THE FAMILY

Genesis 37:5-11

Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. ⁶He said to them, “Please listen to this dream which I have had; ⁷for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.” ⁸Then his brothers said to him, “Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. ⁹Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” ¹⁰He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?” ¹¹His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Joseph’s report of the dreams to his brothers is puzzling to us since we have already been given a glimpse of their animosity toward them. Yet, we can be sympathetic with Joseph’s desire to communicate to them what seemed to him to be God’s clear confirmation of Jacob’s earlier action. Joseph might have approached them with the mentality of offering to them possible evidence that might diffuse their anger: “I know you have not thought very well of Dad’s choice of me to lead you. It was not my choice but his. I have felt a bit uncomfortable in this role, but last night I received a dream from God that seems to confirm the choice that Dad himself made.”

Brothers’ Response: Intensified Hatred

When the brothers experienced the injustice at the hands of their father, they responded with hostility toward Joseph (and toward their father). Now it seems that Joseph himself wants them to see his superiority. Their hostility becomes intense hatred.

Brothers’ Response: Envy

The second dream included father and mother. This seems to have been a bit more than even Jacob had foreseen. He envisioned Joseph’s position above his brethren, but the thought that his son would be greater than his parents brought a firm rebuke (37:10). (The inclusion of the mother probably signifies more the entirety of the family, rather than either Rachel or Leah specifically. Rachel had already died when Benjamin was





born, and it seems very unlikely that Leah herself made the journey to Egypt, see Gen. 49:31). When Joseph's brothers heard of God's sovereign choice of Joseph, they responded with hearts full of envy. Note how a series of unchecked improper attitudes led to even greater sin.

III. PROVIDENCE OVER THE FAMILY

A. Included the Free Will Decisions of Other People

Genesis 37:12-14

Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem.

¹³Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "I will go." ¹⁴Then he said to him, "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

Shechem belonged to Jacob, partially by purchase (33:19) and partially by deceit (34:24-25). The city lay approximately 45 miles from Hebron where Jacob lived. Jacob had impulse to check on his sons. This may have been predicated by concern over the length of their absence or the location where he believed them to have gone. The brothers' presence in the land where they had so recently sullied their father's name by their treachery (ch. 34) no doubt raised concern. Jacob merely wanted a word of assurance as to their wellbeing (37:14). "Welfare" and "friendly" (37:4, *shalom*) are the same word. Jacob only wants Joseph to check on them and return with a good report. Little did either realize that twenty-two years would pass before Jacob would hear a full report.

B. Included Human Aid

Genesis 37:15-17

A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?" ¹⁶He said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock."

¹⁷Then the man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

C. Overruled Good Intentions

Genesis 37:18-24

When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. ¹⁹They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! ²⁰Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!" ²¹But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." ²²Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands



on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. ²³So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; ²⁴and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

D. Included Apparent Coincidences

Genesis 37:25-28

Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt. ²⁶Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? ²⁷Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

CONCLUSION

“Joseph had ample reason for self-pity, rage, anger with God, and revenge. He had immense reasons to become enslaved to victimhood. He had been relationally crippled by his father’s overweening favoritism. He had suffered from the ‘yours, mine, ours’ relational pathology of polygamy. He had been monstrously abused by his brothers. The scars were there to stay—their homicidal rage, his beating and humiliation, their demeaning piercing epithets, the agonizing trip to Egypt, and his naked humiliation on the slave block in Egypt. What an opportunity for enslavement to victimhood! But there is not a ‘poor me’ hint anywhere in the entire Genesis account of Joseph! And in Egypt his treatment would become even worse. ...[T]hough enslaved, Joseph chose to reject the slavery of self-pity and victimhood....”³

Here is reality: Real life is unfair. Real life deals out many inequities. Real life is filled with sin and sinners. Real wounds are everywhere. But the transcending eternal reality is that God is all-powerful and that his massive providence is at work in his children’s behalf. Life brims with hope and optimism. The story of Joseph tells of real life some 4,000 years ago that is just as real today and under the control of the same sovereign God. Barry Horner says:⁴

1. It speaks of **Hebrew life**, of Abrahamic and embryonic patrimony.
2. It speaks of **unstable life**, of imprisonment and privilege.
3. It speaks of **moral life**, of passion and purity.
4. It speaks of **human life**, of guilt and grace.
5. It speaks of **family life**, of wrangling and reconciliation.
6. It speaks of **national life**, of disaster and deliverance.
7. It speaks of **divine life**, of the sovereignty of God and the foreshadowing of the Savior of the world.



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.

Many Lessons Can Be Learned Through the Life of Joseph

Believers should expect to be misunderstood for doing good, even being regarded as a sinner and worthy of mistreatment (John 16:2).

God is working all for His glory and our good. Joseph is certainly one of “the called according to [God’s] purpose” (Romans 8:28). The divine consequence of Joseph’s rejection and humiliation is that of a wider salvation, both familial and national.

You can’t buck the sovereignty of God. If you attempt to do so (37:20), as did Pharaoh, Haman, Herod, and the Jewish Sanhedrin, you will only be frustrated, overthrown, and even crushed by it (37:29-30, 35).

For the Christian, the best is yet to come. The principle of “the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (1 Pet. 1:11) is exemplified in the life of Joseph, and thus represents the pilgrim journey of the Christian as he follows “in [Christ’s] steps” (1 Pet. 2:21) toward “the revelation of His glory” (1 Pet. 4:13) and “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet. 3:13).



Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, Baker Book House, 1976, p. 484.
2. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.
3. R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Crossway, 2004, p. 449.
4. Barry Horner, *The Life of Joseph*, https://www.agathonlibrary.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Horner-Barry-E.-life_of_joseph-bunyanministries.org_.pdf, 2007, p. 9.

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



Serving Civil Servants with Scripture

Capitol Studies™ exists to serve kings for the King of kings until His glorious return. We are privileged to minister to Civil Servants at all levels of government for their good and God’s glory. Capitol Studies is led by Pastor Arin Hess, who has over 40 years of ministry experience in the State of Nebraska and Washington, D.C.

Capitol Studies Offices
4547 Calvert Street • Lincoln, NE 68506



WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Meeting during the
108th Legislature’s
First Session

SENATORS

7:00–8:00 A.M. Wednesdays
To Be Announced

STAFF

12:00 P.M. Wednesdays
To Be Announced



www.CapitolStudies.org
info@capitolstudies.org
f/CapitolStudies
402-770-6270