
Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

NOTE: The final storyline in Genesis is devoted to Jacob's sons, especially Joseph and, to a lesser extent, Judah. This material builds a bridge from the patriarchal narratives to the Book of Exodus, explaining how the family of Israel came to reside in Egypt. Several deaths in this section pertaining to Egyptian names, customs, funerary practices, and state administration have been verified as historically authentic. *Ignatius Study Bible*

DAY ONE

Read Genesis 37:1-4

1. As chapter 37 begins, Jacob was settled in the land of Canaan where his father had lived. We now begin the story of the family, or sons, of Jacob (verse 1). The primary focus of this story will be about his son, Joseph. Record what you learn about him in verse 2.

2. Why is the story of Joseph so important that it takes up fourteen chapters in the Book of Genesis? Refer to the Commentary, pages 67-68, and record one reason.

3a. In verse 3 we learn that Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than his other children and he made him a long robe with sleeves. Record the reactions of Joseph's brothers to this gift from their father to his favorite son (verse 4).

b. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons because he was "the son of his old age." What do you think that means and do you think there might have been other reasons for his favoritism for Joseph?

NOTE: The meaning of the Hebrew phrase [long robe with sleeves] is unclear. In 2 Samuel 13:18-19, it is the distinctive dress of unmarried royal daughters. The "coat of many colors" in the Septuagint [most ancient translation of the Old Testament] became the traditional translation. Ancient depictions of Semites in formal dress show them with long, ornamented robes and that is the most likely meaning here. Possibly, the young Joseph is given a coat that symbolized honor beyond his years. *NABRE*

4. Recall another instance in which favoritism occurred with adverse effects in this book (see Genesis 4:4-7; Genesis 25:28).

5. List a few things we learned in today's readings about Joseph that might have caused jealousy and resentment among his brothers toward him. What do you think was the most damaging and why?

6. **CONNECTION:** Today's readings describe how Joseph's brothers hated him because their father favored him. Jacob should have known that parental favoritism causes sibling jealousy because of the problems it created in his past. A recurring theme in Genesis is that the ancient people did not learn from their mistakes. Not learning from mistakes happens to us, too. Many of us have had the experience of resolving to do better but stumbled and made the same mistake or watched a loved one make the same mistake over and over waiting for them to learn and grow. With the abundant love and grace of God, what are some ways to learn from our mistakes or help others to do so? How can we turn our stumbles into valuable spiritual life lessons for others?

Read and record Romans 12:2 and pray today for God's mercy and grace to help guide you in your daily struggles.

DAY TWO

Read Genesis 37:5-11

7. In today's lesson we read that Joseph's brothers' animosity continued to grow because he had two dreams and told them to his brothers. Select one of the dreams below and record how his family reacted to him (verses 5-11).

Dream about sheaves

Dream about the sun, moon and eleven stars

NOTE: It was widely believed in the ancient Near East that visions of the night contained meaningful messages, often encrypted in bizarre symbols and storylines. In the biblical tradition, dreams are important channels of divine communication. Through them the Lord issues warnings and instructions, reveals his glory and blessings, and gives prophetic insights into the future. Dreams play an especially important role in the life of Joseph. *Ignatius Study Bible*

NOTE: This reference to Joseph's "mother" does not refer to Rachel, who died in childbirth soon after Jacob left Bethel in Genesis 35:16-20 when Joseph was still a child. The reference was to Leah as the chief wife who was now Joseph's "legal" mother. *Agape*

8. Why do you think Joseph's future success was revealed to him in a dream at such a young, immature age?

9. In this chapter the word *hate* is mentioned three times (verses 4, 5, 8), and the author tells us that jealousy continued to grow in the hearts of Joseph's brothers as he told them the second dream which implied superiority over them and his father (verse 11). Why do you think Joseph remained so oblivious of their increasing contempt and resentment?

10a. What do we learn about Jacob's thoughts about his son, the dreamer in verse 11?

b. What experiences from Jacob's past might have caused him to reflect on his son, Joseph's dreams?

11. Dreams were an important means of communication from the LORD with his ancient people. Record one of the following verses that show how dreams revealed God's glory or gave prophetic insight into the future.

Numbers 12:6

1 Kings 3:5, 9-10

Daniel 1:17

12. CONNECTION: Today we read that Joseph's brothers hated him because of the dreams he had. How could Joseph have been unaware of the hostility this caused and insensitive to the jealous feelings his dreams of superiority created in his brothers? While it is healthy to share feelings of satisfaction in our accomplishments, boasting or bragging about them can create negative feelings and affect relationships by producing competitiveness and resentment in those around us. Jesus came to teach us humility and putting others first. What are some ways to share our accomplishments without bragging and be more humble?

Read Jeremiah 9:23-24 and as you pray today, ask the Holy Spirit for the wisdom to grow more aware of how your words affect others.

DAY THREE

Read Genesis 37:12-24

NOTE: Joseph's brothers went to pasture the flock and Israel (Jacob) sent Joseph to Shechem to find them. There, a man found Joseph wandering and lost and directed him to Dothan. Shechem was 60 miles from Jacob's home area in Hebron and Dothan was another 16-20 miles farther. The vastness of these grazing lands illustrates Jacob's resources and wealth (verses 12-17). (You may refer to your Bible map for these locations.)

NOTE: The mysterious stranger may be an angel, like the visitors who came to Abraham (18:2) and the heavenly man who wrestled with Jacob (32:24). *Ignatius Study Bible*

13. His brothers saw Joseph coming from a distance, perhaps recognizing him by his distinctive robe. "Here comes this dreamer," the brothers said, and they conspired to kill him (verses 18-19). What was their initial plan according to the beginning of verse 20?

14. From verse 20 we learn that part of the brothers' motivation for their actions was to "see what will become of his dreams." Do you think fear of what his dreams represented motivated this cruel plan? Briefly explain your answer.

15. Reuben, the oldest son and firstborn of Leah, stepped forward to prevent the plan his brothers devised. What did he say to them and what was his plan to rescue Joseph according to verses 21-22?

16a. Briefly state how the plan was executed in verses 23-24?

b. Why do you think his brothers took Joseph's robe with long sleeves?

17. In this chapter we do not read a word about Joseph's reaction to his brothers' aggression and brutality, but it is referred to in Genesis 42:21. In your own words, describe how Joseph must have felt when he was set upon by his brothers.

18. **CONNECTION:** In this passage jealousy and hatred caused the worst and most violent of actions to occur—the sons of Israel (Jacob) plan to murder one of their own. Though he may have unwittingly encouraged their hatred, Joseph, the Dreamer, did not deserve to be killed. On a smaller scale, jealousy provokes many of us as well. Comparing ourselves to others can often end with us feeling jealous of what they have.

We can't focus on what God has given us or is calling us to do because we want what we don't have. What are some ways we can free ourselves from jealous thoughts and focus instead on our blessings?

In 1 Peter 2:1-2, St. Peter urges us to rid ourselves of all malice and envy and "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation." Let your desire for the "pure milk" of the Word, guide you in prayer today.

DAY FOUR

Read Genesis 37:25-36

19. Today's lesson begins just after Joseph was thrown into a pit by his brothers. With no remorse for their cruel actions, they sat down to eat a meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites going to Egypt (verse 25). Another brother, Judah, the fourth son of Leah, then intervened to save the life of Joseph and the brothers agreed. Record his persuasive argument below (verses 26-27).

What profit is it if we kill our brother

Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites

for he is our brother

20. When some Midianite traders passed by, they lifted Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites who took Joseph to Egypt (verse 28). When Reuben returned to the pit and realized that Joseph was gone, he was overcome with grief (verses 29-30). What do you think was the motivation of Reuben or Judah to preserve the life of their younger brother? What else might they have done to help him?

NOTE: The Midianites and Ishmaelites are tribal groups descended from Abraham but outside the elect line of Isaac. Some see the disparity of names in this verse as an indicator that two different traditions about Joseph have been combined without being harmonized. More likely, the designations Midianite/Ishmaelite were functionally synonymous, both referring to desert traders from Arabia with common descent from Abraham. [The sale of Joseph for] twenty shekels of silver is an authentic detail reflective of the early second millennium B.C. The price for a slave climbed to 30 silver pieces by the middle of the second millennium and rose much higher in first millennium B.C. *Ignatius Study Bible*

THINK: Either version is a horror. And let us, in a world grown ugly beyond telling, be grateful for a story of even small mercies, two brothers who labor to mitigate a vast evil. We linger over them, Reuben and Judah, and their stratagems. *Genesis, Berrigan*

21. The brothers took Joseph's long robe and dipped it in the blood of a slaughtered goat. When they presented it to their father, they did not even have to lie to him about what happened (verses 31-32). Once again, we see a betrayal occurring in this book. The Commentary calls this a "horrendous wrongdoing" (page 69). Why do you think the theme of betrayal is repeated so often in this book?

22a. Jacob was inconsolable with grief when he saw the proof of the death of his favorite son. Summarize his reaction in your own words from verses 33-35.

NOTE: Jacob put on a sackcloth, a common sign of mourning which was torn according to the afflicted feelings of the mourner and was a coarse rough piece of black cloth or camel's hair cloth wound round the waist. Jacob's reference to "Sheol" was the first time it is mentioned in the Bible. In Hebrew, "Sheol" means grave, pit or abode of the dead. It was described in Scripture as an underworld and place of stillness and darkness to which all the dead go, both the righteous and the unrighteous.

b. From verse 36 describe what was reported to have happened to Joseph.

23. Select one or two of the characters from the following list and describe some of the personal qualities they exhibited in this story.

Jacob

Joseph

Reuben or Judah

the other brothers

24. CONNECTION: As we end this chapter and the first part of the story of Joseph, we read that Jacob's sons have committed a horrible act against their brother and father. But this is not the end of the story – it is the beginning. As in other stories of Genesis, God was at work in the lives of his people. Often when we face conflict in our lives, we may feel desperate and hopeless, but as people of God, we trust that no matter what happens, God is present and directing the events our lives. Is there something in your life that has begun recently and you are unsure where God is leading you or a loved one? Share with your group what spiritual tools help you to trust in God's purpose.

Read and record Romans 8:28. Begin your prayer today confident in God's love and purpose for your life.

NOTE: [Chapter 38 is not included in this study but in it] the spotlight turns briefly from Joseph to Judah. Besides hinting that Israel is beginning to be assimilated into its Canaanite surroundings, the chapter explains how Judah became the father of Perez, the genealogical ancestor of King David (Ruth 4:18-22) and ultimately Jesus the Messiah (Mt 1:3-16). *Ignatius Study Bible*

DAY FIVE

Read Genesis Chapter 39:1-23

25. This chapter begins with Joseph in Egypt where Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, bought him from the Ishmaelites (verse 1). Describe how the LORD was with Joseph during this time and what that meant according to verses 2-6.

NOTE: Recall that in Genesis 12:3 God promised Abraham that he would bless those who blessed him, a covenant blessing inherited by his descendant Joseph (see Genesis 17:9). Now Potiphar was blessed through his kindness to Joseph as an appreciative master. *Agape*

26. Verses 7-20 recount the story of how the master's wife became attracted to the young, handsome Joseph. Despite her interest in him, Joseph remained faithful to his master. After she falsely accused Joseph of attacking her, the master became enraged and put Joseph in prison. What does this episode tell us about the moral character of Joseph?

NOTE: This was a mild punishment considering that Joseph is a foreign slave charged with the attempted rape of an Egyptian noblewoman. That he is confined rather than killed may suggest that Potiphar had his doubts about the allegations of his wife. *Ignatius Study Bible*

27. Does it seem that Joseph, though blessed by God, was being constantly tested by him? What would you have done under similar circumstances?

28. While he was in prison, in what way did Joseph continue to receive the steadfast love of the LORD according to verses 21-23?

29. In this chapter, Joseph suffered for something he did not do. Being falsely accused of wrongdoing can be traumatic and painful. What is one way you would handle a false accusation in your life?

30. **CONNECTION:** In this chapter we learned that the LORD was with Joseph in Egypt and helped him prosper despite adverse circumstances. From this story, we learn that trials and misfortunes can sometimes help us discern and sharpen our gifts, and that no matter where we find ourselves, we should share the gifts that God has generously given to us. Have you been surprised to find that God's grace has helped you out in some unlikely situations? How does God's loving protection of Joseph in this story encourage you?

Read and record [James 1:12](#). Today as you pray, thank Our Loving Father for the spiritual gifts that help prepare you for times of testing.

DAY SIX

Read Genesis Chapter 40:1-23

31. As this chapter begins, some time has passed while Joseph was in prison. The chief cupbearer and chief baker offended Pharaoh and were put in prison with him (verses 1-3). Record Joseph's responsibility over the men (verse 4).

NOTE: The cupbearer was the keeper and taster of the royal wines and held a high position at court. Similarly, the royal baker was a trusted and valued servant with influence at court who was in charge of breads and pastries prepared for the pharaoh's table.

32. One night the two men each had a dream and told Joseph they were troubled because there was no one to interpret them. Joseph replied that all "interpretations belong to God" and asked to hear their dreams (verses 5-8). Compare this conversation about dreams with Joseph's first assertion about them when he was a young man of seventeen ([Genesis 37:5-11](#)). How has his attitude toward dream interpretation changed and why do you think that was?

33. In verses 9-19, the chief cupbearer and the baker revealed their dreams to Joseph. He foretold that the cupbearer's dreams meant that he would be reinstated to Pharaoh's service. Record what he asked of the cupbearer in verses 14-15.

34a. Joseph revealed to the chief baker that his dream meant he would be put to death (verse 19). On his birthday, the Pharaoh had a feast for all his servants and the chief cupbearer was restored to his cupbearing but the baker was hanged just as Joseph had said (verses 20-22).

3What happened to Joseph despite his favorable interpretation for the chief cupbearer (verse 23)?

b. When he was restored to Pharaoh's court, the cupbearer forgot what Joseph had done for him. Read and record one of the following Scripture passages that give us comfort in times of feeling forgotten and ignored.

Isaiah 49:15

Hebrews 13:5

Luke 12:6-7

35. In what ways does this episode of imprisonment in the life of Joseph remind you of Jesus (see 1 Peter 2:19-24).

36. CONNECTION: Despite his request to the chief cupbearer after successfully interpreting his dream, he did not remember Joseph. Joseph must have wondered why he was languishing in prison for honoring his master and obeying God, abandoned by his family and forgotten, his accomplishment for interpreting the dream unacknowledged. There are times in our lives too when we can feel abandoned, forgotten or unappreciated and may doubt God's goodness or plan for us. What are some ways to keep trusting in God in the dark times of our lives?

Read Philippians 4:8-9. Record a verse that helps focus you on the God of peace.

Read pages 67-69 in *The Book of Genesis* by Lawrence DiPaolo, Jr., Ph.D. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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