

## JOSEPH

### *God oversees all situations in order to accomplish His plan*

Can you imagine what it would be like to be in jail in a country far away from home and what it would be like if the people who care about you do not even know where you are? No one is searching for you and no one is coming to your rescue. What would that feel like? You would probably feel very, very, very alone.

Joseph probably felt that way sometimes, too. His brothers who were jealous of him sold him as a slave and he ended up far away in Egypt. There in Egypt he was lied about and went to prison for something he never did. Although Joseph felt alone, he knew in his heart that he was not truly alone because God was with him. The man who ran the prison admired Joseph for how trustworthy he was and gave him many important responsibilities.

One day two of the prisoners had very scary dreams. They both knew their dreams were not just ordinary dreams. They knew that their dreams were from God and had some special meaning. But they were very confusing dreams about the king of Egypt, and grapes, and bread, and birds. With special wisdom that God gave him, Joseph was able to tell both of these prisoners what their dreams meant. One of the men was so grateful that he promised Joseph that when he got out of prison, he would help Joseph get released, too! But once he was out, he forgot all about Joseph. At least for awhile.

Two entire years later this former prison-friend of Joseph was working for the king of Egypt. In Egypt the king was always called Pharaoh. One morning Pharaoh woke up and he was extremely upset. He had had two dreams during the night that both scared him and confused him. In one dream, seven ugly cows ate seven very healthy cows. In the other dream, seven very scrawny stalks of grain ate seven very healthy stalks. Pharaoh called together all the wise people he knew and told them to tell him the meaning of his dreams, but they couldn't. Then the former prisoner remembered Joseph.

“I know someone!” he told Pharaoh. “When I was in prison Joseph told me the meaning of my dream and I’m sure he could do the same for you,” he said.

Immediately Pharaoh brought Joseph out of prison.

“I need my dreams interpreted and I understand you have the power to do this for me” said Pharaoh.

“No,” said Joseph. “I do not have the power to interpret dreams, but God does.”

When Pharaoh told Joseph his dreams, God let Joseph know exactly what they meant.

“Your dreams are God’s way of telling you that you better get ready for a terrible famine that is coming,” Joseph explained.

A famine is a time when there’s no rain and so there’s nothing for people or animals to eat and if it gets really, really bad, people die from being so very hungry.

When Pharaoh heard this he believed Joseph and right away put him in charge of food in the entire country of Egypt. For seven years Joseph stored up food in Egypt so that when the awful famine came they would be ready for it. And so it happened. When the famine came, the people of Egypt had food to eat while in all the countries around them people were very, very hungry. God had brought Joseph from the very bottom to the top. He was now the second-most powerful person in all of Egypt.

Remember Joseph’s brothers who sold him because of their jealousy? They were back in their country with their father and they were getting pretty hungry because they did not know the famine was coming and had not prepared for it. When they heard there was food available in Egypt, they decided to make the journey there to buy some. Of course, they had no idea who they were about to meet!

One day as Joseph was overseeing the selling of food, he looked at the people waiting in line and he could hardly believe his eyes! Then he looked again. Sure enough! It was his brothers in line to buy food.

Now Joseph had been away from home for a long, long time. He had grown up, he now dressed like the Egyptians, and he even spoke the language of the Egyptians. He recognized his brothers and understood what they said, but they did not recognize him or understand him because he spoke in Egyptian.

Joseph wanted to help his brothers because he knew they needed food, but he knew they had a problem deeper than just hunger. Way down in their hearts they were hiding the thing they had done to Joseph and their father. For many years they had tried to forget it. They didn't want to remember because they didn't want to feel sorry for what they had done. Joseph knew they needed to feel sorry. Being sorry for doing wrong is the first step toward being forgiven. They needed to feel bad so they could want to be forgiven.

“You are spies come to look at our country so your army can come and attack us!” Joseph said to his brothers.

“No, no, sir! We are just brothers come to get food for us and our family back home,” they replied.

“Well, you will have to prove it to me by leaving Simeon here until you return with your younger brother,” said Joseph.

Joseph said this because he wanted to see his younger brother, Benjamin, who was not with them.

The brothers had no choice so they agreed to Joseph's demand and left Simeon behind. On their way home they looked in their bags of food and there was all their money! They did not know that Joseph had put this there so they were very afraid.

“Now if we go back he will accuse us of stealing from him,” they all said.

Well, they waited as long as they could, but the famine kept getting worse. They knew the only way to stay alive was to return to Egypt for more food. When they could wait no longer, they packed up for another journey to get food. This time they brought twice as much money, so they could pay Joseph for last time, and they brought their younger brother Benjamin to prove they were telling the truth.

When they arrived and explained what happened, Joseph surprised them all by throwing a huge party. Simeon, who they had left behind, joined them and they had a great feast. In the morning they loaded up their food and headed for home. As they were traveling, some Egyptian soldiers caught up with them and stopped them in the road.

“Why have you stolen the Egyptian governor’s very special cup?” they asked.

No, no! We have done no such thing!” said all the brothers.

The Egyptians then went through all the food bags and there it was in the bag that belonged to Benjamin. When they were brought back to Joseph, he told them, “Benjamin will have to stay behind and be my slave because he has stolen from me!”

Joseph’s plan to create sorrow in the hearts of his brothers finally works. All of this reminds them of what they had done many years ago and they believe that God is now punishing them for their sin. Perhaps for the very first time, they become very sorry for what they did.

One of the brothers, Judah, steps forward and tells Joseph, “I will take Benjamin’s place as your slave if you will let him go.” When Joseph sees the sorrow of his brothers, he can’t hide it any longer. He begins to weep and, for the first time, reveals to his brothers who he really is.

“You see,” Joseph tells them, “God has accomplished his good plan even through your bad actions toward me.”

He explains to his brothers that God will save all their lives from the famine through this situation. You see, even when bad things happen, God still has a good plan and nothing can stop God's plans. Joseph has his entire family brought to Egypt where they will have plenty of food and he can take care of them.

But more important than food, Joseph gives his brothers something they need even more. He gives them forgiveness for their sins. His brothers realize how awful they were to Joseph and to their father and they know they do not deserve to be forgiven, but Joseph forgives them anyway.

All that has happened to Joseph, like we have seen in other stories, helps to carry out God's plan. And why does God bring Jacob and his whole family to Egypt? Because he is getting ready for the biggest rescue story yet in the Bible! But you'll have to wait until next time to hear that story.