

Patriarchs Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Eight: Lessons for Joseph and Judah – Genesis 37-40

Overview and Genesis 37:1-11: Read questions 1-3 and then read Genesis 37-40 in one sitting.

- 1) List all the shocking situations in which Joseph finds himself in Genesis 37-40. In Genesis 37:3, Joseph is shown to have been the favored son and heir-apparent of the household. However, his brothers threw him into a cistern (37:19) and sold as a slave to Midianite merchants headed for Egypt (37:28). In Egypt, Joseph became the slave of Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials (37:36). Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his household (39:4) but ended up imprisoning him (39:20). In prison, Joseph was once again put in charge (of the other prisoners [39:22]) and given hope of release (40:14). However, he was forgotten, and he remained in prison (40:23).
- 2) Note the reasons why Joseph's brothers hated him? Was Joseph partly to blame? Joseph's brothers hated him because he was his father's favorite son (37:3), he gave a bad report about them (37:2), and he told his brothers about his dreams of exaltation over them. It is possible that Joseph was prideful and foolish (or naïve) in telling his family about his dreams. It also may have been at God's prompting, so that when the dreams came to pass, the brothers would know that only God could have done this.
- 3) What character qualities do you think the Lord was developing in Joseph through these experiences? It seems the Lord was preparing Joseph for the greatness his dreams foretold by teaching him humility. The Lord was also teaching Joseph how to administrate through positions of oversight in Potiphar's house and the prison.
- 4) What qualities might the Lord be forming in you through a trial or injustice you are currently experiencing?
Personal sharing

Genesis 37:12-36

- 5) Which two of Joseph's brothers are specifically named? What role did each play in Joseph's mistreatment? What have we been told in previous chapters about these specific brothers? Reuben and Judah. Reuben secretly tried to keep Joseph from being killed, while Judah thought of a way to get rid of his brother and profit from it at the same time (selling him). Previously in Genesis, Judah has only been named as Leah's fourth son. Reuben is Jacob and Leah's first son, and he slept with his father's concubine Bilhah (chapter 35).
- 6) Reread Genesis 37:31-33. Recall Jacob's personal weakness. Describe how his example seems to have influenced his sons' characters. Jacob was deceitful. His sons surely witnessed this weakness. When they deceived Jacob about Joseph's disappearance, they were following his example.
- 7) Compare Genesis 37:34-35 with 37:10-11. Jacob believed for many years that Joseph was dead. What recollection may have baffled or haunted him in that time? What circumstances in your own past or present have left you puzzled about God's purpose? During the many years Jacob believed Joseph was dead, he surely recalled Joseph's dreams (37:11 says he "kept the matter in mind") and wondered how a young man who believed he would be exalted over his entire family could have come to such a completely different end. Personal sharing

Genesis 38

- 8) Which three ancestors of Christ are named in Matthew 1:3 and have their stories told in Genesis 38? Judah, Tamar, and Perez

- 9) From both Genesis 37 and 38, describe Judah's character. Genesis 37 and 38 tell us that Judah was a man who wanted to profit from his brother's agony, moved away from Israel, married a Canaanite woman, had two wicked sons, refused his widowed daughter-in-law the customary right of having a child to carry his dead son's name, visited a woman he believed was a prostitute, and condemned his daughter-in-law for the sin of which he was also guilty. Apparently, Judah was a man of weak moral character – deceitful, defensive, and above all, self-centered. However, his concluding statement, "She is more righteous than I" (38:26) hints at self-awareness and possible change.
- 10) Estimate the amount of time the events of chapter 38 may have taken. Recalling what you discovered by reading chapters 37-40, what was happening in Joseph's life during this same approximate period (compare 37:2 with 41:46-48, 50-54)? For what change (in yourself or someone else) have you waited and prayed a long time? Please guard against slandering anyone in your sharing. The events of chapter 38 must have occurred over a relatively long period of Judah's life (indicated by his marriage, the births of his sons, and his sons' marriages). Apparently, during the years that God was molding Joseph in Potiphar's house, in prison, and as lord of Egypt, He was also working to shape Judah's character. Joseph was 17 when sold into slavery and 30 when he became the lord of Egypt. After that, he ruled during seven years of prosperity and for at least part of the following seven years of famine, before his life intersected again with Judah's. Interestingly, both brothers lived among foreign people. Sometimes God uses people outside our family of origin to bring about needed transformations. Personal sharing

Genesis 39

- 11) Name the main characters in this chapter, including their titles and their relationship to Joseph. Potiphar was the Captain of Pharaoh's guard and Joseph's Egyptian master. Potiphar's unnamed wife was Joseph's temptress. The unnamed prison warden kept Joseph in captivity but put him in charge of the prison.
- 12) How might Joseph have justified giving in to Potiphar's wife's pleas? What do verses 8-9 tell us about Joseph's actual perspective? Joseph could have rationalized that he was once destined to be the head of a prosperous family (like Potiphar's), not the slave of one. He could have told himself that he deserved this personal comfort. He could have lied to himself, saying that Potiphar's wife was a gift from God to comfort him in the loss of his own family. He could have convinced himself that Potiphar's wife would make life easier for him if he gave in to her demands. Instead, Joseph was a man of integrity. He was levelheaded, valued his master's trust, and showed respect to the seductress, as his master's wife. He concluded that ultimately, such a sin would be against God.
- 13) List all the phrases in chapter 39 (include verse numbers) that mention the Lord. What do Psalm 34:18 and Romans 8:28 say that explains the phrases in Genesis 39 and broadens your perspective about difficult circumstances? The Lord was with Joseph (Genesis 39:2). Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph and had given him success (39:3). The Lord blessed Potiphar because of Joseph (39:5). Joseph asked, "How could I sin against God?" (39:9). The Lord was also with Joseph in prison, showed kindness to him, and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden (39:21). In fact, the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did (39:23). Joseph was in very difficult circumstances, but God cared about his plight. He allowed these trials to shape Joseph's character, turning every difficulty toward His good end. Psalm 34:18 and Romans 8:28 indicate that God is concerned about those facing difficulty and that He will work trials for good in the lives of those who love Him (just as He did for Joseph). Personal sharing

Genesis 40

- 14) What subject matter in chapter 40 also appeared in the first chapter of this lesson (Genesis 37)? Dreams: Joseph's own dream in chapter 37 and in chapter 40, he was interpreting those of others.

15) How do Joseph's words in 40:8 show that he held a high view of God despite personal tragedies?

Considering all you have learned in the Patriarch's lessons, what does it mean to you to hold a "high view" of God? How would raising your view of Him change your attitude toward a trial you are currently facing? First, Joseph believed that God not only understood the meaning of all dreams but also gave these particular dreams (implied) for the purpose of delivering a message. Furthermore, Joseph believed God could and would interpret the dreams for him. He maintained confidence in God's greatness and God's involvement with him, despite all the tragedy he had faced. In fact, he even maintained confidence in God's goodness (his words suggest intimacy with God). Joseph saw God as bigger than all of life's circumstances. In Joseph's view, such a great and good God could be trusted. Holding a high view of God involves an ever-increasing understanding of the magnitude of His character. When we view life through this filter, we perceive God as more involved, more sovereign, more powerful, and more loving than we last imagined. This change of thinking leads us to act in greater faith and dependence on Him. Personal sharing