

JOSEPH: GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN THE PIT, THE PRISON, AND THE PALACE

Genesis 37–50

Theme Verse

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." (Genesis 50:20)

Key Theme

God's providence often works invisibly through suffering before it is seen in blessing.

LESSON 1

Joseph at Jacob's House

Genesis 37

The Setting

Joseph enters Scripture as the favored son of Jacob.

The story is not primarily about favoritism.

It is about God preparing the family through whom Messiah would eventually come.

I. Joseph's Family

Genesis 37 introduces perhaps the most dysfunctional family in Scripture.

- four mothers
- twelve sons
- jealousy
- favoritism
- deception
- lingering consequences from Jacob's own sins

The covenant family was far from perfect.

Yet God remained faithful.

II. The Coat

Genesis 37:3

Jacob loved Joseph more than all his sons.

The "coat of many colors" probably signifies a robe of distinction rather than simply bright colors.

It identified Joseph as heir.

His brothers understood exactly what it meant.

The robe became a visible symbol of rejection.

III. Joseph's Dreams

Genesis 37:5-11

Two dreams communicate one truth.

Joseph would rule.

The dreams originated with God—not Joseph's ambition.

Joseph perhaps lacked wisdom in how he shared them.

Yet the dreams were true.

IV. Hatred Grows

Notice the progression.

They hated him because:

his father's love

his dreams

his words

Eventually hatred became murder in the heart.

James 1 demonstrates the same progression of sin.

V. Joseph Sold

Genesis 37:23-36

Instead of killing him

they sold him.

Ironically,

God used their wickedness

to place Joseph exactly where He needed him.

Providence often arrives disguised as tragedy.

Lessons

God's calling does not exempt us from suffering.

Favor with God may produce opposition from people.

God's promises often appear impossible before they are fulfilled.

Journaling Questions

1. Why did Jacob's favoritism create such destructive consequences?
2. Why do you think God revealed Joseph's future so early?
3. Was Joseph guilty of pride when sharing the dreams?
4. How does jealousy distort relationships?
5. Why didn't God simply prevent Joseph from being sold?
6. What evidence of God's providence can we already see?
7. What lessons can families learn from Jacob's mistakes?
8. How does Romans 8:28 help explain Genesis 37?
9. Have you ever experienced God's purpose only after hardship?

10. What encourages you most from Joseph's early years?

Digging Deeper:

LESSON ONE

Joseph at Jacob's House

Genesis 37

Hebrew Word Studies

1. Dream (דִּלְוָה — *ḥālôm*)

Occurs repeatedly in Genesis 37.

A *ḥālôm* is more than an ordinary dream. Throughout Genesis, dreams often become God's means of revealing His sovereign purposes (Genesis 20; 28; 31; 37; 40–41).

Joseph's dreams were not products of youthful imagination but divine revelation.

Application

God does not ordinarily reveal His will today through dreams as He did before the completion of Scripture (Hebrews 1:1–2). Instead, He speaks through His written Word. Yet Joseph reminds us that God's plans often become clear long before His methods do.

2. Hate (שָׂנְאָה — *sānē'*)

Genesis 37 uses this verb repeatedly.

It describes settled hostility rather than momentary irritation.

Notice the progression.

They hated him...

They hated him even more...

They could not speak peacefully to him.

Hatred always progresses when left unchecked.

Application

Bitterness never remains stationary. It either dies through forgiveness or grows into destructive actions.

3. Bow Down (הִשָּׁחוּ — *šāḥâ*)

Joseph's dreams predicted his brothers would "bow down."

This verb commonly refers to

- worship
- reverence
- submission before a king

The dreams anticipated God's sovereign appointment of Joseph.

Theological Truths

God often reveals His purposes long before He reveals His methods.

Family dysfunction cannot prevent God's covenant promises.

Jealousy is unbelief wearing the mask of resentment.

Providence often begins where human eyes only see tragedy.

Application

For Families

Parents must be careful not to communicate favoritism.

Children should learn that another person's blessing does not diminish God's love for them.

For Christians

Sometimes obedience places us in difficult situations.

The first step of God's plan may look like failure.

Never judge God's faithfulness by today's circumstances.

Joseph

LESSON 2

Joseph in Potiphar's House

Genesis 39

One of the greatest chapters on integrity in Scripture.

I. "The LORD Was With Joseph"

This phrase appears repeatedly.

Joseph had no family.

No freedom.

No possessions.

Yet he possessed God's presence.

Success in Scripture is measured by God's favor—not circumstances.

II. Faithful Stewardship

Joseph excelled wherever he served.

He worked diligently.

He earned trust.

His character elevated him.

III. Potiphar's Wife

Genesis 39:7-20

Joseph resisted temptation.

Notice his reasons.

Against Potiphar.

Against trust.

Against God.

"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

His theology shaped his morality.

IV. Integrity Costs

Joseph lost everything.

Again.

Faithfulness does not guarantee immediate reward.

Sometimes righteousness appears to lose.

But heaven keeps perfect records.

Lessons

God values integrity more than promotion.

Character is built before leadership.

Temptation should be resisted before it becomes compromise.

Discussion Questions

1. What does "The LORD was with Joseph" practically mean?
2. Why did Joseph continue serving faithfully after betrayal?
3. Why did Joseph identify temptation primarily as sin against God?
4. How can believers flee temptation today?
5. Why does integrity sometimes seem unrewarded?
6. What does Joseph teach about workplace ethics?
7. How does hidden faithfulness prepare future leadership?

8. Why is character more valuable than reputation?
 9. What similarities exist between Joseph and Daniel?
 10. What area of integrity challenges you most?
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Digging Deeper:

LESSON TWO

Joseph in Potiphar's House

Genesis 39

Hebrew Word Studies

Prosper (נָצַח — *ṣālah*)

"The LORD made Joseph prosper."

The word literally means

"to advance,"

"to succeed,"

"to accomplish."

Notice that prosperity appears while Joseph is still a slave.

Biblical success is measured by God's presence rather than comfortable circumstances.

Temptation

Although no single Hebrew word dominates the temptation narrative, Genesis repeatedly uses the verb

"שָׁכַב" (*šākab*)

meaning

"to lie with."

Potiphar's wife repeatedly invited Joseph into adultery.

Joseph repeatedly refused.

Notice temptation was persistent.

His obedience was equally persistent.

Sin (חָטָא — *ḥāṭā'*)

"How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

The basic meaning is

"to miss the mark."

Joseph recognized adultery primarily as an offense against God.

Theological Truths

God's presence is greater than changing circumstances.

Character develops in private before it becomes visible in public.

Integrity is faithfulness when no earthly reward appears likely.

Application

Your workplace is one of your greatest mission fields.

Success is measured more by faithfulness than promotion.

God often prepares leaders through unnoticed service.

Joseph

LESSON 3

Joseph in Prison

Genesis 39:20—40:23

This is perhaps Joseph's darkest season.

Yet God's providence never pauses.

I. Forgotten but Not Forsaken

Joseph entered prison unjustly.

Still,

"The LORD was with Joseph."

God's presence preceded God's deliverance.

II. Serving While Waiting

Joseph ministered to fellow prisoners.

Even in suffering,

he noticed others.

Pain had not made him self-centered.

III. Interpreting Dreams

Joseph immediately declared

"Do not interpretations belong to God?"

Joseph refused personal glory.

IV. Forgotten

Genesis 40:23

The cupbearer forgot Joseph.

For two years.

Heaven had not forgotten him.

Delay is not denial.

Lessons

Waiting develops faith.

God often prepares leaders in obscurity.

Faithfulness should not depend on recognition.

Journaling Questions

1. Why does God sometimes allow long seasons of waiting?
 2. How did Joseph avoid bitterness?
 3. Why was Joseph willing to serve others while suffering?
 4. What does Joseph teach about humility?
 5. Why is patience difficult?
 6. Have you experienced "divine delays"?
 7. What spiritual growth occurs during waiting?
 8. How does prison become preparation?
 9. Why didn't God rescue Joseph sooner?
 10. What encouragement does this chapter provide?
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Digging Deeper:

LESSON THREE

Joseph in Prison

Hebrew Word Studies

Remember (רָכַר — *zākar*)

Joseph asked the cupbearer,

"Remember me."

The cupbearer forgot.

Yet throughout Scripture,

God never forgets His covenant people.

Human memory fails.

God's memory never does.

Interpret (פָּתַר — *pāṭar*)

Used almost exclusively for dream interpretation.

Joseph insisted,

"Interpretations belong to God."

He refused personal credit.

Grace / Favor (חֵן — *hēn*)

Joseph found favor with the prison warden.

This word refers to undeserved favor.

God continually opened doors even while Joseph remained imprisoned.

Theological Truths

Waiting develops dependence.

God's delays are never wasted.

Faithfulness matters even when unnoticed.

Application

Serve faithfully where God has presently placed you.

Don't allow disappointment to become bitterness.

God is preparing you while you wait.

Joseph

LESSON 4

Joseph in Pharaoh's House

Genesis 41–50

This section displays God's providence reaching fulfillment.

I. Pharaoh's Dreams

Joseph gives God all the glory.

"It is not in me."

Humility remained after thirteen difficult years.

II. Exalted to Rule

Joseph moves

from prison

to palace

in one day.

God's timing is perfect.

III. Wisdom in Leadership

Joseph planned.

Stored grain.

Prepared before crisis.

Faith does not eliminate wisdom.

IV. Reunion with His Brothers

Genesis 42–45

Joseph tested them.

Not for revenge.

But to reveal repentance.

Judah emerged as a changed man.

V. Forgiveness

Genesis 45

Joseph revealed himself.

Instead of revenge,

he offered grace.

VI. Genesis 50:20

Perhaps the greatest statement on providence.

"You meant evil."

"God meant good."

Same event.

Different intentions.

God's sovereignty overruled human wickedness.

Lessons

God redeems suffering.

Forgiveness triumphs over revenge.

Providence is often understood only in hindsight.

Journaling Questions

1. Why did Joseph test his brothers?
2. How had Judah changed?
3. What made Joseph able to forgive?
4. How does Genesis 50:20 summarize the book?
5. Can God use evil without causing evil?

6. What does Joseph teach about leadership?
7. Why is forgiveness difficult?
8. How does Joseph point toward reconciliation?
9. What evidence of God's providence is seen throughout Joseph's life?
10. What part of Joseph's story most strengthens your faith?

Perhaps the most important word in Joseph's story.

It means
to devise,
to plan,
to weave together.

Exactly the same Hebrew word describes
man's intentions
and God's intentions.

The event never changed.

Only the purpose behind it.

This is one of Scripture's clearest statements of divine providence.

Theological Truths

God is sovereign over human intentions without becoming the author of evil.

Forgiveness flows from confidence in God's providence.

God can redeem what He does not approve.

Application

Instead of asking

"Why did this happen?"

learn to ask

"What might God accomplish through this?"

Forgiveness becomes possible when we trust God's larger purposes.

Digging Deeper:

LESSON FOUR

Joseph Before Pharaoh

Hebrew Word Studies

Wisdom (חָכְמָה — *ḥokmâ*)

Pharaoh recognized divine wisdom in Joseph.

Biblical wisdom is practical skill rooted in fearing God.

Joseph combined spiritual insight with practical planning.

Rule (מָשַׁל — *māšal*)

Joseph became ruler over Egypt.

The word means to govern under delegated authority.

Joseph never became king.

He ruled under Pharaoh.

Likewise believers exercise stewardship under Christ's authority.

Meant (חָשַׁב — *ḥāšab*)

Genesis 50:20

"You meant evil...

God meant it for good."

LESSON 5

Joseph as a Type of Christ

The New Testament never explicitly calls Joseph a "type" of Christ, but the correspondences are so numerous and theologically rich that Christians throughout history have recognized Joseph as one of the clearest foreshadowings of Jesus. These parallels are not forced; they arise naturally from the biblical narrative and fit the larger pattern of God's redemptive work.

Joseph	Jesus
Beloved son of his father (Gen. 37:3)	Beloved Son of the Father (Matt. 3:17)
Sent by his father to his brothers (Gen. 37:13)	Sent by the Father to Israel (John 3:17)
Hated by his own brothers (Gen. 37:4)	Hated by His own people (John 1:11)
Conspired against (Gen. 37:18)	Conspired against (Matt. 26:3–4)
Sold for silver (Gen. 37:28)	Betrayed for silver (Matt. 26:15)
Stripped of his robe (Gen. 37:23)	Stripped before crucifixion (Matt. 27:28)
Falsely accused (Gen. 39:17–18)	Falsely accused (Mark 14:55–59)
Numbered with criminals in prison (Gen. 40)	Crucified between criminals (Luke 23:32–33)
One prisoner saved, one condemned (Gen. 40:20–22)	One thief saved, one remained condemned (Luke 23:39–43)
Exalted after suffering (Gen. 41:41–43)	Exalted after resurrection (Phil. 2:9–11)

Joseph	Jesus
Given authority over Egypt (Gen. 41:40)	Given all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18)
Bread provided through Joseph (Gen. 41–47)	Jesus is the Bread of Life (John 6:35)
Gentiles came to Joseph for life (Gen. 41:57)	All nations come to Christ (Matt. 28:19)
Forgave those who wronged him (Gen. 45:5; 50:20)	Prayed for His executioners (Luke 23:34)
Saved many lives (Gen. 50:20)	Saves all who come to Him (Heb. 7:25)

Major Observations

1. Suffering Preceded Glory

Joseph's path to the throne was through the pit and the prison. Likewise, Christ entered glory through the cross (Luke 24:26). In both stories, exaltation comes only after humiliation.

2. Rejection Was Part of God's Plan

Joseph's brothers intended to remove him, but their very act became the means by which they would later be saved. Israel rejected Jesus, yet through that rejection God accomplished salvation for the world (Acts 2:23).

3. Salvation Came Through the Rejected One

The brothers bowed before the very brother they had despised. Every knee will bow before the One many rejected (Phil. 2:10–11).

4. Forgiveness Replaced Revenge

Joseph had the power to punish but chose mercy. Jesus possessed the authority to judge but first came offering grace and forgiveness.

5. God's Sovereignty Wove Redemption Through Human Evil

Genesis 50:20 and Acts 2:23 stand as parallel declarations. Human beings acted wickedly, yet God sovereignly accomplished His saving purposes without becoming the author of sin.

Journaling Questions

1. Why do you think God included so many parallels between Joseph and Jesus?
2. Which comparison between Joseph and Christ is most meaningful to you, and why?
3. How does Joseph's suffering help us better understand Christ's suffering?
4. In what ways did Joseph save physical lives while Jesus saves eternally?
5. How do Genesis 50:20 and Acts 2:23 express the same theological truth?
6. What does Joseph teach us about responding to those who have wronged us?
7. How does Joseph's exaltation prepare us to appreciate Christ's exaltation?
8. Why is it significant that both Joseph and Jesus were rejected by their own people before becoming their deliverers?
9. How does Joseph strengthen your confidence in God's providence during seasons of suffering?
10. After studying Joseph's entire life, what one lesson do you most want to apply to your walk with Christ?

Digging Deeper: LESSON FIVE

Joseph as a Type of Christ

Hebrew Word Studies

Salvation (יָשַׁע — *yāš'a'*)

Although not used directly throughout Joseph's narrative, this Hebrew root dominates Old Testament salvation language.

Joseph physically saved nations. Jesus eternally saves sinners.

The Old Testament consistently moves from physical deliverance toward spiritual redemption.

Redeemer (לִּגְאֹל — *gā'al*)

The concept of redemption runs throughout Genesis.

Joseph became the means through whom God preserved His covenant family.

Jesus became the true Redeemer who purchases sinners by His blood.

Shepherd (רֹעֶה — *rā'â*)

Joseph began as a shepherd.

Jesus calls Himself "The Good Shepherd."

Joseph cared for sheep. Jesus lays down His life for the sheep.

Theological Truths

Joseph points beyond himself.

His life anticipates Christ.

The Old Testament continually prepares us for Jesus.

The Bible tells one unified story of redemption.

Application:

When reading Old Testament narratives ask:

How does this prepare us for Christ?

What aspect of God's character is being revealed?

How does this deepen my appreciation for the Gospel?

How should this change my life today?