

# Joseph, Master of Dreams



## SABBATH—JUNE 4



The sons of Jacob give their little brother a nickname: **“ba ‘al hachalomot,”** which means **“the dreamer”** in the Hebrew language.

**READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON:** Genesis 37:1–11; Genesis 37:12–36; Genesis 38; Genesis 39; Genesis 40:1–Genesis 41:36.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “They said to each other, ‘Here comes Joseph the dreamer’ ” (Genesis 37:19, ERV).

**WE READ THE STORY ABOUT JOSEPH** in Genesis 37–50. We find the story about Joseph in the last part of the book of Genesis. In Genesis 37:1–11, we read about the first dreams that Joseph has in Canaan. Finally, in Genesis 50:26, we read about Joseph’s death in Egypt. Joseph is one of the most important people in the book of Genesis. More is written about Joseph in Genesis than about Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob.

The life of Joseph shows us two important Bible truths: First, God keeps His promises. Second, God can change evil to good.

This week, we will look at the early life of Joseph. Joseph is the favorite son of Jacob. The sons of Jacob give their little brother a nickname: **“ba ‘al hachalomot,”** which means **“the dreamer”** in the Hebrew language (Genesis 37:19). This name really means **“master of dreams,”** which shows us that Joseph is an expert in understanding dreams. This name fits Joseph well. Joseph not only understands the dreams God gives him. Joseph also works with God to make the promises in these dreams real in his life.

For sure, God keeps His promises, even when the hearts of men are filled with evil. God works with everyone to make His plan happen. God also gives everyone a chance to obey Him.

### FAMILY TROUBLES (Genesis 37:1–11)

After Jacob meets Esau, Jacob and his family find a place to live in the land of Canaan. Isaac and his family traveled and often moved their tents from place to place. Jacob's family lived in one area and did not often move their tents (Genesis 37:1, NLV). The Bible tells us that “Jacob lived in the land where his father had lived as a stranger” (Genesis 37:1, NLV). That is when the troubles start. This time the troubles come from Jacob’s family. The fight is not about the land or the use of a water well. The fight is spiritual.

**Read the story in Genesis 37:1–11. What causes the brothers of Joseph in this story to hate him so much?**

Joseph is born to Jacob in his old age (Genesis 37:3). Joseph is Rachel’s first son. From the start, we see that Joseph and his father, Jacob, love each other so much. Jacob loves Joseph more than all his brothers (Genesis 37:4). Jacob made Joseph a special coat that was long and beautiful (Genesis 37:3). This coat is fit for a prince (2 Samuel 13:18). So, the coat shows us that Jacob wants to honor Joseph more than his other sons. Jacob wants to give Joseph the special blessing that belongs only to the son who is born first.

No wonder that Joseph’s brothers hate him so much. Joseph’s brothers are jealous. They are so mad at Joseph they cannot say anything nice to him at all (Genesis 37:4).

To make things worse, Joseph brings to Jacob bad reports about his brothers. Anytime his brothers do something wrong, Joseph runs and tells his dad (Genesis 37:2). No one likes a tattletale.

Then Joseph shares two dreams with his brothers. His dreams show that God will put him above his brothers. So, his brothers will bow down to Joseph in the future. After his brothers hear this dream, they hate Joseph more. The two dreams come from God (read Genesis 41:32). Jacob scolds Joseph for telling his family about the dreams (Genesis 37:10). At the same time, Jacob thinks about the dreams and what they show about the future (Genesis 37:11). For sure, Jacob thinks that God may have sent the dreams. Jacob is correct. Later, we also see that God gives Joseph understanding about other dreams when he is in Egypt.

**Read Matthew 20:26, 27. What important Bible truth do we see in these verses? How can we live this Bible truth?**



**Jacob made Joseph a special coat that was long and beautiful (Genesis 37:3).**

## JOSEPH GETS ATTACKED (Genesis 37:12–36)

The dreams of Joseph soon get him into trouble.

**Read the story in Genesis 37:12–36. What does this story teach us about people who do not belong to Jesus? What can the evil in the human heart lead us to do when we are not under the complete control of God?**

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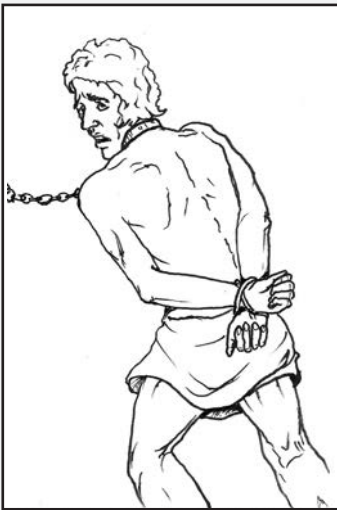
God shows His favor to Joseph. Joseph's brothers see this favor and get jealous (Acts 7:9). We see that God takes care of Joseph while he looks for his brothers. When Joseph gets lost, God sends a man to help Joseph find his way to his brothers (Genesis 37:15). When the brothers plan to kill Joseph, Reuben stops them. Reuben suggests that they should throw Joseph in a pit (Genesis 37:20–22).

Maybe we can't understand the hate that Joseph's brothers have for him. How can these young men do something so mean to their own family member? Do they not stop to think about how much their crime will hurt their father? What these men do is really awful. Their actions show us that humans can be very evil.

The brothers thought that they would feel better after they hurt their brother Joseph. But some of the brothers did not feel good about what they did to Joseph. Soon the brothers saw a group of travelers coming. The travelers were Ishmaelites from beyond Jordan. They were on their way to Egypt with spices and other goods. Judah now suggests to his brothers a new plan. They should not kill Joseph. They should sell him to these Ishmaelite traders. Then they will not be guilty of killing him."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 211, adapted.

So, the brothers sell Joseph to the traders (Genesis 37:28). Then the traders sell Joseph to someone in Egypt (Genesis 37:36).

**Why is it so important to ask God to help us win the fight against our evil thoughts and feelings before we do something we never thought we will do?**



**So, the brothers sell Joseph to the traders (Genesis 37:28). Then the traders sell Joseph to someone in Egypt (Genesis 37:36).**

## JUDAH AND TAMAR (Genesis 38)

Now we come to the story about Tamar. Her story happens after Joseph is sold as a slave (Genesis 37:1). Soon after Joseph is sold, Judah leaves his brothers. When Judah leaves, that helps us understand that Judah disagrees with his brothers. In the story about Judah and Tamar, we see the same Bible truth that we see in much of Genesis: God will change an evil act into something good.

**Read the story in Genesis 38. Compare the behavior of Judah with the behavior of Tamar, the Canaanite. Who is the better person in this story? Judah, or Tamar? Why?**

Judah marries a Canaanite wife (Genesis 38:2). They have three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Judah gives Tamar in marriage to his son Er, who is born first. But Er and then Onan are killed by God because they are very evil. So, Judah promises his last son Shelah to Tamar.

Some time passes. The wife of Judah dies. Tamar worries that Judah forgot about his promise to let her marry Shelah. So, Tamar plans to force Judah to keep his promise. As part of her plan, Tamar pretends to be a prostitute. A prostitute is someone who sells sex for pay. When Judah sees Tamar by the side of the road, he asks to pay her to have sex with him. Judah does not know that the prostitute he sleeps with is Tamar. Judah promises to pay her with a goat from his flock later.

In the meantime, Tamar asks that Judah give her his ring and his special stick. These things show Tamar that Judah will keep his promise. Later, Judah hears that Tamar is going to have a baby. Judah accuses Tamar of sinning. Tamar shows Judah his ring and his special stick. Then Judah understands that he is the father of the child.

This story ends when Tamar gives birth to twin boys. One son is named Perez. In the Hebrew language, Perez means “breaking through.” Perez is born second, the same as Jacob. But Perez becomes first as Jacob did. He becomes the future father of the family line of David (Ruth 4:18–22) and of Jesus (Matthew 1:3). Tamar is the first of four women on the family list of Jesus. There are Rahab (Matthew 1:5), Ruth (Matthew 1:5, 6), and Bathsheba (Matthew 1:6), too. Just as God saves Tamar, He will save His people by the Cross of Jesus. God also will turn the troubles of Joseph into something good and save His people.

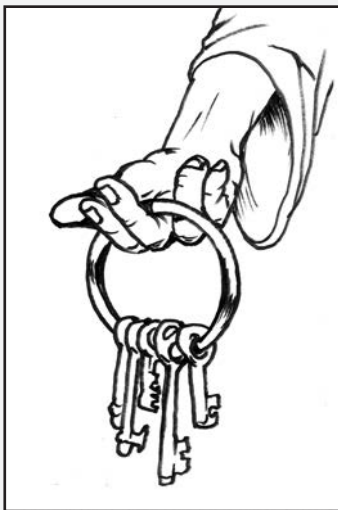


**Tamar is the first of four women on the family list of Jesus.**

**JOSEPH, A SLAVE IN EGYPT (Genesis 39)**

Now we turn back to the story about Joseph. Joseph now works as a slave for Potiphar. Potiphar is the captain of the soldiers who protect Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar also is in charge of the prison for workers in the royal palace (Genesis 40:3, 4; Genesis 41:10–12).

**Read the story in Genesis 39. As we see, Joseph works as a manager for Potiphar. What helps Joseph to do a good job?**



**Joseph is so good at his job. His master trusts him with everything.**

Almost right away, God gives Joseph success (Genesis 39:2, 3). Joseph is so good at his job. His master trusts him with everything. Potiphar soon makes Joseph the manager of his whole house (Genesis 39:4). Yes, Joseph has success. But Joseph always remembers God. Joseph understands that God gives him success.

Soon trouble comes. Potiphar's wife sees Joseph and wants to have sex with him. Joseph refuses to sin with her. Joseph chooses to lose his job and not sin against God (Genesis 39:9). Potiphar's wife is hurt and shamed when Joseph refuses to have sex with her. So, she lies about Joseph to her servants and also to her husband. Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph of trying to force her to have sex with him. Then Joseph is thrown into prison.

Joseph feels alone. We all feel alone sometimes, right? But at this difficult time, "the LORD was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:21, KJV). Joseph was not alone. You are not alone.

In time, the Lord helps Joseph. The Lord blesses Joseph in the prison. Joseph is a very skilled man. Yes, he is a slave in prison. But Joseph makes the best use of his time there. God gives Joseph success. "The commander of the guards trusted Joseph with everything that was in the prison. This happened because the LORD was with Joseph. The LORD helped Joseph be successful [have success] in everything he did" (Genesis 39:23, ERV). We must always remember, as Joseph did, that our success comes from God.

**Read Genesis 39:7–12. How did Joseph fight against Potiphar's wife and her invitation to sin? Why does Joseph say that what she invites him to do will be a sin against God? What do the words of Joseph show us about sin?**

## THE DREAMS OF PHARAOH (Genesis 40:1–Genesis 41:36)

**Read Genesis 40:1–Genesis 41:36. How are Pharaoh’s dreams connected to the dreams of his manager and his baker?**

As time passes, Joseph is put in charge of the prisoners. Two of the prisoners worked for Pharaoh, king of Egypt, until they lost his favor. These men are a manager and a baker (Genesis 41:9–11). Both men have dreams that they cannot understand. As soon as Joseph hears about their problem, he asks them to tell him their dreams. Then Joseph tells each man what his dream means.

Pharaoh has two dreams, too, that no one can understand (Genesis 41:1–8). Then the manager remembers how Joseph helped him understand his dream. So, the manager tells Pharaoh about Joseph (Genesis 41:9–13).

Pharaoh is upset by his dreams. He tells his dreams to Joseph (Genesis 41:14–24). Then Joseph explains the dreams.

The two dreams show the same thing. In the first dream, seven skinny cows eat seven fat cows. In the second dream, seven skinny heads of grain eat seven fat heads of grain. The seven fat cows and seven fat heads of grain show seven good years. The skinny cows and heads of grain show seven bad years. The two dreams show that God is the One who gave them to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:32; compare with Genesis 37:9).

Joseph makes sure that Pharaoh knows that God gives him the wisdom to explain the dreams. God shows Pharaoh the future things that He will do (Genesis 41:25, 28). Pharaoh believes Joseph. Then Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge of Egypt. “So Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘God showed these things to you, so you must be the wisest man. I will put you in charge of my country, and the people will obey all your commands. I will be the only one more powerful than you’ ” (Genesis 41:39, 40, ERV).

Wow! Thanks to God, Joseph goes from manager over the house of Potiphar to the manager of the prison. Finally, God puts Joseph in charge over all Egypt. This story is so powerful. It shows us how God can work miracles even when things look awful, and we have no hope.

**How can we learn to trust God and His promises when bad things happen? What should we do when we feel that God does not hear our prayers?**



**Pharaoh is upset by his dreams. He tells his dreams to Joseph (Genesis 41:14–24).**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Ellen G. White, “Joseph in Egypt,” pages 213–223, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Satan tries hard to get Joseph to sin when his life changes with no warning. At home, Joseph is Jacob’s favorite son. In the house of Potiphar, Joseph is a slave. Then he becomes an excellent worker and the friend of Potiphar. . . . Later, Joseph goes to prison for a crime he did not do. He has no hope that he will ever be free. Then Joseph becomes a leader of Egypt to help get the people ready for the difficult time ahead. What helped Joseph to stay loyal to God? . . .

“Jacob taught Joseph to love and respect God. As a child, Joseph often spent time in the tent of his father. Under a sky filled with stars, Jacob told Joseph the story about his night at Bethel and his dream of the ladder. This ladder went from the ground all the way up to heaven. Angels went up and down on this ladder. Jacob told Joseph about the God on the throne in heaven. In these stories, God showed Himself to Joseph. Jacob also told Joseph the story about wrestling with God beside the Jabbok River. There, Jacob confessed his sins. Then God gave him a win over his past sins and made Jacob a prince.

“Joseph was a shepherd boy. He took care of the sheep of his father. His life as a shepherd helped him to become strong in mind and body. Joseph communicated with God in nature. Joseph studied the Bible truth that God gave to Jacob. All these things helped Joseph develop a strong mind. He was loyal to the commands of God.

“During the awful journey that Joseph made to Egypt, Joseph remembered the God of his father. As he did, Joseph looked for the last time at the hills that hid the tents of his family from his eyes. He was leaving his home in Canaan to be a slave in Egypt. Joseph remembered the lessons he learned as a child. He decided to be loyal to God and to always be the servant of the King of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pages 51, 52, adapted.



“At home, Joseph is Jacob’s favorite son. In the house of Potiphar, Joseph is a slave.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Compare Joseph with Daniel and Jesus. How are they all the same? How do we see Jesus in Joseph and Daniel?
- 2 How do we learn to trust God when things do not go well for us? What if our lives do not get better?