

Genesis - The Story of Joseph

Scripture and References: Genesis 34-41; *Patriarchs and Prophets* 208-240; *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 126-161; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 128-178; *The Story of Redemption* 100-105; *Education* 51-54; *1SDA Bible Commentary* 1096-1098; SDG 320; MYP 27-28.

1. We shift our attention from Mesopotamia to Egypt, from the actions of Jacob to the actions of his sons and daughter. Judah (in his early 20s) moved away from home and into Canaanite society, (Genesis 38) married a Canaanite wife, had three children, had two of his children killed by the Lord, and slept with his daughter-in-law who became pregnant and gave birth to twin sons, one of whom became one of the ancestors of Jesus Christ. At the same time, Joseph ended up in Egypt and refused to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife. (Genesis 39) At what ages did those events occur in the lives of Jacob's children? Try to imagine the feelings of Jacob as he went through all those experiences of his children.
2. Isaac had waited until he was 40 years old to marry, and someone else chose his wife. Still, the relationship between Isaac and Rebekah seemed to have been quite good. Jacob (77 years old) picked out his own wife but ended up with four of them! Then, his children had all kinds of problems in their sexual relationships! Abraham died at the age of 175. (Genesis 25:7-8) Isaac died at the age of 180. (Genesis 35:28-29) Jacob was born when Isaac was 60. (Genesis 25:26)

Jacob was 120 at the death of his father (Genesis 25:26). Ten years later, at the age of 130 years, he stood before Pharaoh (Genesis 47:9). At that time Joseph had been governor of Egypt for nine years (Genesis 45:11). Jacob was therefore 121 years old when Joseph was promoted at the age of 30 (Genesis 41:46), and 108 when Joseph was sold at the age of 17 (Genesis 37:2). Consequently, Isaac was 168 years of age when Joseph was sold into slavery. Since this tragic event occurred while Jacob was living at Hebron with his aged father (Genesis 37:14), Isaac witnessed the grief of Jacob and survived that event for a period of 12 years. (*SDA Bible Commentary* on Genesis 35:28)

From this, we can see that Jacob was 85 years old when his first child was born! We can assume that his four "wives" were somewhat younger. Judah, no more than 23, married and had three children; the first two of them were married and were killed before they were out of their teens!

3. What happened to Dinah? (Genesis 34; 46:15) After being raped by Shechem, did she ever marry? Did she marry someone from among Jacob's workers or extended family? Why did the Bible not record any more about her descendants?
4. Do we really need the story of the rape of Dinah to be in the Bible? (Genesis 34) What does it tell us about God? What happened to the people that the sons of Jacob carried off from Shechem?

The tarry of Jacob and his sons at Shechem ended in violence and bloodshed. The one daughter of the household had been brought to shame and sorrow, two brothers were involved in the guilt of murder, a whole city had been given to ruin and slaughter, in retaliation for the lawless deed of one rash youth. The beginning that led to results so terrible was the act of Jacob's daughter, who "went out to see the daughters of the land," [Genesis 34:1] thus venturing into association with the ungodly. He who seeks pleasure among those that fear not God is placing himself on Satan's ground and inviting his temptations.

The treacherous cruelty of Simeon and Levi was not unprovoked; yet in their course toward the Shechemites they committed a grievous sin. They had carefully concealed from Jacob their [205] intentions, and the tidings of their revenge filled him with horror. Heartsick at the deceit and violence of his sons, he only said, "Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land: . . . and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." [Genesis 34:30-31] But the grief and abhorrence with which he regarded their bloody deed is shown by the words in which, nearly fifty years later, he referred to it, as he lay upon his deathbed in Egypt: "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united. . . . Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel." Genesis 49:5-7. . . . (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 204.2,3)

God caused a fear to rest upon the inhabitants of the land, so that they made no attempt to avenge the slaughter at Shechem. The travelers reached Bethel unmolested. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 206.1) [Content in brackets is added.]

5. Do we really need to know that Reuben slept with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22) who was old enough to be his mother? What does this tell us about God's way of communicating with us?
6. How can we explain the differences between the behaviors of Jacob's ten older sons—for example, Reuben (Genesis 35:22), Dinah/Levi and Simeon, and Judah/Tamar—with the story of Joseph in Potiphar's house? (Contrast Genesis 34:31 and 38:15-17,24 with Genesis 39:9-10.)
7. Read Genesis 38. Why do you think this story is included in the record? Wouldn't it have been better to leave it out? These are the ancestors of the royal line of David and the ancestors of Jesus Christ! Was God trying to make sure we understand the deficiencies of Jesus's human ancestors?
8. Read Genesis 38:6-9. What did the first two sons of Judah do? They could not have been more than teenagers when they were married. What does the Bible mean when it says God killed them? Was Onan's behavior serious enough to be killed? Why do you think Judah sent Tamar back home to live with her parents after his first two sons died? Why do you think Tamar became pregnant from one episode of intercourse when she had not become pregnant when married to Er? Did God have anything to do with that? It was from that specific relationship that the royal line descended! Why do you think Judah was living apart from the rest of his family at that time?

This chapter gives the origin of the three leading families of Judah, the future princely tribe of Israel. It shows also that the sons of Jacob, forgetting the sacred vocation of their race, were in danger of perishing in the sins of Canaan. Had not God in mercy interposed to bring about the removal of the whole house of Jacob to Egypt, the chosen race might have succumbed to the corrupting influence of Canaanite customs. Thus, ch. 38 is an integral part of the early history of Israel.

The phrase "it came to pass" has been taken by many commentators to refer to the story of the sale of Joseph recorded in the preceding chapter. The term, however, is so general that it cannot be limited to a particular event; more likely, it refers to the whole period of Jacob's history in Palestine.

Chronological considerations make it almost necessary to place this narrative at the time Joseph was still in his father's house.

Being the fourth son of Leah, Judah was certainly not more than 3 years or so older than Joseph, which would make him about 20 years old at the time Joseph was sold (see ch. 37:2 and on ch. 30:24). Between Joseph's sale as a slave and Jacob's migration to Egypt lay 22 years (cf. chs. 41:46; 45:6), so that Judah was about 42 years old when the family moved to Egypt. At that time he not only had the three sons, mentioned in ch. 38, but was apparently a grandfather as well, as ch. 46:12 seems to imply. If this be correct, his sons Er, Onan, and Shelah must have been born before Joseph was sold, since they themselves had already reached marriageable ages when the events involving Tamar occurred, and Tamar's son Pharez had two sons of his own when the family moved to Egypt. These observations oblige us to conclude that some of Jacob's sons must have married while very young. Judah could not have been more than 14 years old at the birth of his oldest son, Er, nor Er more than 13 at his marriage to Tamar. The birth of Judah's twin sons by his daughter-in-law Tamar must have taken place within two years after Er's death. Pharez cannot have been more than 14 years old when Hezron and Hamul were born, apparently also as twins, before the departure from Canaan. Such early marriages are by no means uncommon in certain parts of the Orient even today. In the case of Jacob's family, they may represent Canaanite influence. The considerations make it virtually certain that Judah was a married man and a father at the time of Joseph's sale, and that part of the narrative of ch. 38 had already taken place.—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 434). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

9. How much do we know about the wives of Jacob's sons? Only two are even named. They were Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, who gave birth to two of his three surviving sons, and Asenath, the wife that Pharaoh gave to Joseph (known in Egypt as Zaphenath Paneah—"God speaks and lives"). (Judah's first wife was called Bathshua which means "daughter of Shua" as recorded in 1 Chronicles 2:1-4.) Where did these wives come from? Except for Joseph's Egyptian wife, were all the others Canaanites?
10. In light of these experiences, what would have happened to the descendants of Jacob if they had remained in Canaan?
11. We have already noted that Ishmael and his descendants disappeared into history. We also see that Esau and his descendants largely disappeared into history. (Genesis 36) The Nabateans finally overran the descendants of Esau in about 300 B.C. What was different about the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons and one daughter that made them the heritage of the faithful?
12. Why is it that when God chooses a family of patriarchs to be His representatives, He seems to emphasize their mistakes? What would a good Madison Avenue advertising agency do with the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Jacob's sons?

It was the custom of ancient nations to record only the victories and successes of their leaders and armies. If one reads the records of each nation, he will find that there is seldom anything said about battles lost, territory lost, or disasters that happened to their kings or generals.

By contrast, Scripture often seems to talk about the sins of its heroes in even more detail

than their triumphs. There are few exceptions! This actually results in the Bible being more believable. We can relate to the leading characters of the Bible as real people with faults who make frequent mistakes and are people like ourselves.

Often, the sins of the Bible “heroes” resulted in major changes in the society and culture and those lead to questions being asked by children and others. No doubt, the stories were recalled to explain how it was that such a thing came about. Thus, the story of Tamar had to be told to explain the presence of the two major clans of the tribe of Judah. (Genesis 38) The story of the Levite and his concubine had to be told to explain the disappearance of almost the entire tribe of Benjamin. (Judges 19-21)

13. Why was the story of Joseph told in so much detail when so much else was left out? The book of Genesis covers half of the history of this world! Did this story just “happen”? Or, was God directly involved in each of the details? How much is God involved in our lives each day? Why do you think Judah was chosen as the progenitor of Christ and not Joseph? What happened to the descendants of Joseph? They were carried off into Assyrian captivity in 723/722 B.C. and disappeared from history as did the rest of the northern kingdom. Were the descendants of Judah any better?
14. Look at the events that were recorded from the early life of Joseph. (Genesis 37) If all we knew about Joseph were these events before his sale into Egypt, what would we think of him? What was there in the early life of Joseph that prepared him in any special way for his future?
15. How much do you think the lives of the sons of Jacob were affected by the relationship between their father and their various mothers?

As these sons arrived at manhood they developed serious faults. The results of polygamy were manifest in the household. This terrible evil tends to dry up the very springs of love, and its influence weakens the most sacred ties. The jealousy of the several mothers had [209] embittered the family relation, the children had grown up contentious and impatient of control, and the father’s life was darkened with anxiety and grief. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 208.3)

16. What specific events made the sons of Jacob even more jealous of Joseph? (Genesis 37:1-11; *Patriarchs and Prophets* 209.1-210.3)

Soon he had another dream, of similar import, which he also related: “Behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.” This dream was interpreted as readily as the first. The father, who was present, spoke reprovably--“What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” **Notwithstanding the apparent severity of his words, Jacob believed that the Lord was revealing the future to Joseph.**

As the lad stood before his brothers, his beautiful countenance lighted up with the Spirit of inspiration, they could not withhold their admiration; but they did not choose to renounce their evil ways, and they hated the purity that reproved their sins. **The same spirit that actuated Cain was kindling in their hearts.** (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 210.2-3) [Bold type is added.]

17. In light of what we know so far, what do you think would have happened if Jacob and his family had remained in Canaan? Did God take the family of Jacob to Egypt in order to preserve them from intermingling with the Canaanites and disappearing from history?

18. **What would we do with a family like that in an Adventist church today?**

19. Why do you think Joseph's brothers hated him so much? Why do you think Joseph reported their bad behavior to their father? Was he trying to gain favor with his father? Or, did he have a more righteous objective? Compare the story of Jacob's early experience with that of Joseph's. What was it that ultimately made these two stand out for their moral character? Was it the adversity that they were forced to go through? What does adversity do to a person?
20. Why do you think Jacob favored Joseph? Could he see something different in Joseph's character?

In Joseph, Jacob sees a thirst and hunger for God. Joseph has a far different character than his brothers. A spirit of godliness dwells in him; he is pure, joyous, active, diligent, morally earnest, gentle, faithful, and truthful. He takes to heart the story that his father tells of God's mercy and Providence, and his heart yearns for God. Jacob sees the same love for God in his son that he himself holds so precious. No wonder Jacob loves him so! *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide - Beginnings and Belongings*, (September-December 2006), p. 141.

There was one, however, of a widely different character—the elder son of Rachel, Joseph, whose rare personal beauty seemed but to reflect an inward beauty of mind and heart. Pure, active, and joyous, the lad gave evidence also of moral earnestness and firmness. He listened to his father's instructions, and loved to obey God. The qualities that afterward distinguished him in Egypt—gentleness, fidelity, and truthfulness—were already manifest in his daily life. His mother being dead, his affections clung the more closely to the father, and Jacob's heart was bound up in this child of his old age. He "loved Joseph more than all his children." (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 209.1)

21. Why do you think Jacob chose to make that special "royal" coat for Joseph? Was that an indication of his plan to favor Joseph later in his life?
22. What ages were Joseph's brothers when they thought of killing him and then sold him to the Ishmaelites? If Joseph was only 17, the oldest of them could not have been more than 27. Since the Ishmaelite train would have passed very close to the tents of Jacob in southern Palestine, why didn't Joseph convince them to take him to the home of Jacob where they would have received a much higher price for him than they ever could have received in Egypt?

They [Joseph's brothers] accused him of hypocrisy. As they gave utterance to their envious feelings, **Satan controlled their minds**, and they had no sense of pity, and no feelings of love for their brother. They stripped him of his coat of many colors that he wore, which was a token of his father's love, and which had excited their envious feelings. (*1 Spirit of Prophecy* 128.2)

Meanwhile, Joseph with his captors was on the way to Egypt. As the caravan journeyed southward toward the borders of Canaan, the boy could discern in the distance the hills among which lay his father's tents. Bitterly he wept at thought of that loving father in his loneliness and affliction. Again the scene at Dothan came up before him. He saw his angry brothers and felt their fierce glances bent upon him. The stinging, insulting words that had met

his agonized entreaties were ringing in his ears. With a trembling heart he looked forward to the future. What a change in situation--from the tenderly cherished son to the despised and helpless slave! Alone and friendless, what would be his lot in the strange land to which he was going? For a time Joseph gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror.

But, in the providence of God, even this experience was to be a blessing to him. He had learned in a few hours that which years might not otherwise have taught him. His father, strong and tender as his love had been, had done him wrong by his partiality and indulgence. This unwise preference had angered his brothers and provoked them to the cruel deed that had separated him from his home. Its effects were manifest also in his own character. Faults had been encouraged that were now to be corrected. He was becoming self-sufficient and exacting. Accustomed to the tenderness of his father's care, he felt that he was unprepared to cope with the difficulties before him, in the bitter, uncared-for life of a stranger and a slave.

Then his thoughts turned to his father's God. In his childhood he had been taught to love and fear Him. Often in his father's tent he had listened to the story of the vision that Jacob saw as he fled from his home an exile and a fugitive. He had been told of the Lord's promises to Jacob, and how they had been fulfilled--how, in the hour of need, the angels of God had come [214] to instruct, comfort, and protect him. And he had learned of the love of God in providing for men a Redeemer. Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile.

His soul thrilled with the high resolve to prove himself true to God--under all circumstances to act as became a subject of the King of heaven. He would serve the Lord with undivided heart; he would meet the trials of his lot with fortitude and perform every duty with fidelity. **One day's experience had been the turning point in Joseph's life. Its terrible calamity had transformed him from a petted child to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed.** (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213.1-214.1) [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

Joseph in Egypt

23. In Egypt and working for Potiphar, Joseph began an exemplary life. He had no Bible; and as far as we know, he had no contact with other people who faithfully worshiped the true God. How do you think he maintained his honesty and his moral uprightness in those circumstances? How could he avoid the corrupting influences of the society that surrounded him?

Arriving in Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, captain of the king's guard, **in whose service he remained for ten years.** He was here exposed to temptations of no ordinary character. He was in the midst of idolatry. The worship of false gods was surrounded by all the pomp of royalty, supported by the wealth and culture of the most highly civilized nation then in existence. Yet Joseph preserved his simplicity and his fidelity to God. The sights and sounds of vice were all about him, but he was as one who saw and heard

not. His thoughts were not permitted to linger upon forbidden subjects. The desire to gain the favor of the Egyptians could not cause him to conceal his principles. Had he attempted to do this, he would have been overcome by temptation; but he was not ashamed of the religion of his fathers, and he made no effort to hide the fact that he was a worshiper of Jehovah. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213.1-214.1. [Bold type is added.]

24. Did Potiphar believe his wife's story about Joseph? If he really believed that Joseph had attacked his wife and tried to rape her, what would he have done with Joseph?

Joseph suffered for his integrity, for his tempter revenged herself by accusing him of a foul crime, and causing him to be thrust into prison. **Had Potiphar believed his wife's charge against Joseph, the young Hebrew would have lost his life; but the modesty and uprightness that had uniformly characterized his conduct were proof of his innocence; and yet, to save the reputation of his master's house, he was abandoned to disgrace and bondage.** (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 218.1) [Bold type is added.]

25. Try to imagine how this story might have been different if Joseph still had been in prison when his brothers were thrown into prison during their first visit to Egypt. What might they have said to him? What if he had been put in charge of caring for them in prison?
26. We are familiar with the story of the dreams of the butler and the baker and with God helping Joseph give accurate interpretations of their dreams. (Genesis 40) Why do you think it was necessary for Joseph to remain in prison for another two years before God chose to bring about his rescue?
27. What did Joseph learn during his time in Potiphar's household and in prison that helped to prepare him for his later work as prime minister of Egypt? Did Joseph ever become seriously discouraged while in prison?
28. When the king had the visions about the cows and the stocks of grain, (Genesis 41:1-36) the butler remembered about the interpreter of dreams that had helped him while he was back in prison. When Joseph was called to appear before the king, he shaved himself carefully and dressed appropriately. Do you think he had any idea about what was going to happen when he went to see Pharaoh? Do you think God had told Joseph what would happen and what to do?
29. There are very few people in Scripture about whom nothing bad is recorded. There are no bad stories told about Joseph after he arrived in Egypt. Is that because Egyptians did not record bad things that happened to their leaders? Or, because Joseph's character was so upright?
30. Would we be better Christians if we had to suffer a little more persecution and struggle through more hardships? Both Jacob and Joseph seemed to have experienced great growth in faith when they suffered and were taken away from their homes. Why do you think so few Christians in our day seem to suffer for anything? (2 Timothy 3:12)
31. If nothing else, the story of Joseph is a story of amazing reversals! Joseph went from being the petted son, to slave, to top manager, to prisoner, to palace-saving his "adopted" nation and his own family from starvation. What were the background conditions that made it possible for this story to take place? The people who ruled Egypt at that time were called Hyksos, a nomadic Asian people, probably Semites (descendants of Shem while the Egyptians themselves were descendants of Ham) who controlled Egypt from 1720 B.C. until 1560 B.C. *Hyksos* comes from the Greek word *Huksos*, name of the ruling dynasty in

Egypt, from the Egyptian word *hq's'sw* meaning ruler of the lands of the nomads. (See *Collin's English Dictionary, 21st Century Edition.*) They ruled Egypt from a city in the eastern delta of the Nile, not far from Goshen.

32. How much do we know about the background of this story from extra-biblical sources? Why is it that there is no archaeological evidence or any trace of the Israelites to be found in Egypt or the Sinai Peninsula? Does that shake your faith? Should we be looking in the Saudi Arabian Peninsula as some scholars now believe?
33. Was God responsible for the famine that occurred in the days of Joseph? Since Egypt is watered primarily by the Nile and since the headwaters of the Nile are in East Africa, did the famine spread to all of East Africa as well? How many people died in that famine? Was the famine sent just for the benefit of Jacob's family? What was the "benefit" of the famine to Jacob's family? Would we know anything about the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob if they had not become segregated in Egypt away from the influence of the Egyptians and Canaanites?
34. Was God manipulating conditions on this earth? Or, was He merely able to see into the future and know what was going to happen? How close is the relationship between heaven and earth? How often are events that take place on earth affected by the work of angels and even God Himself?
35. Was God playing favorites? While we see the book of Genesis was written from the perspective of the Jewish people and their ancestors, wasn't God also trying to reach out to save Canaanites and Egyptians? What impact did the events of these chapters in Genesis have on the Canaanites and Egyptians?
36. When Joseph was chosen as the new prime minister of Egypt, what else happened to him? (Genesis 41:45-46) Asenath was the daughter of Potiphera, a priest in the city of Heliopolis. Did Joseph have any choice in his marriage? What about Asenath? Was Pharaoh trying to find a way to integrate Joseph into their Egyptian culture and religion?
37. Since Joseph knew from the interpretation of the dream that famine was coming, shouldn't he have warned his family back in Canaan before they ran out of food? Even during the years of plenty, shouldn't he have alerted his family so they could prepare? Shouldn't he have let his father know that he was safe?
38. We know what was coming in terms of the future of the Hebrew people in Egypt. If the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been better representatives of God and more faithful to the truth, would it have been necessary for them to go through all the events in Egypt? How many people from Canaan had become followers of God because of the witness of Abraham and his descendants?

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 364.2)

39. Jacob and Isaac mourned for several years for Joseph whom they thought was dead.

(Isaac lived for twelve years after Joseph was sold into slavery.) Why was all that suffering necessary? Was that part of God's overall plan?

Jacob and Esau met at the deathbed of their father. Once the elder brother had looked forward to this event as an opportunity for revenge, but his feelings had since greatly changed. And Jacob, well content with the spiritual blessings of the birthright, resigned to the elder brother the inheritance of their father's wealth—the only inheritance that Esau sought or valued. They were no longer estranged by jealousy or hatred, yet they parted, Esau removing to Mount Seir. God, who is rich in blessing, had granted to Jacob worldly wealth, in addition to the higher good that he had sought. The possessions of the two brothers “were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle.” [Genesis 36:6-8] This separation was in accordance with the divine purpose concerning Jacob. Since the brothers differed so greatly in regard to religious faith, it was better for them to dwell apart.

Esau and Jacob had alike been instructed in the knowledge of God, and both were free to walk in His commandments and to receive His favor; but they had not both chosen to do this. The two brothers had walked in different ways, and their paths would continue to diverge more and more widely. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 207.2,3) [Content in brackets is added.]

40. Did the brothers ever talk about Joseph during those 13 years? If so, what did they say?
41. When speaking to Joseph on their first visit, his brothers told him quite a few details about their family. Did Joseph pry those details out of them? Or, did they volunteer them? Was that the work of the Holy Spirit?

Joseph had communicated with them through an interpreter, and having no thought that the governor understood them, they conversed freely with one another in his presence. They accused themselves in regard to their treatment of Joseph: “We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.”... On his return he commanded that Simeon be bound before them and again committed to prison. In the cruel treatment of their brother, Simeon had been the instigator and chief actor, and it was for this reason that the choice fell upon him. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 225.4)

42. Do you think anybody besides the 10 sons of Jacob knew about the true fate of Joseph before the facts were finally revealed by Joseph in Egypt? Did the 10 brothers remain faithful to each other by not even revealing the truth to their wives? Or, to Benjamin?
43. Do you think the various tests that Joseph put on his brothers were his plan? Or, God's plan? After returning to Canaan with their first load of grain and finding the money in their sacks, do you think the brothers had any idea that there were still five more years of famine?
44. When it came time for the sons of Jacob to return to Canaan to get more food, Reuben suggested to his father that if Benjamin did not return safely from Egypt, Jacob could kill Reuben's two sons. (Genesis 42:37) What would be accomplished by that? What do you think the two sons thought about their father after hearing such a rash statement? Does that sound like the carefully thought-out suggestion of a mature father?

45. When the 10 brothers arrived back in Egypt with Benjamin and were reunited with Simeon, they were invited to a banquet at the prime minister's (Joseph's) home. (Genesis 43:16-17) Much to their surprise, they found themselves seated in order according to their ages! Why do you think Joseph placed five times as much food on Benjamin's plate? Did any of the brothers have the slightest idea that they might find Joseph somewhere in Egypt? Did they look for him as they traveled through the streets?

By the laws of caste the Egyptians were forbidden to eat with people of any other nation. The sons of Jacob had therefore a table by themselves, while the governor, on account of his high rank, ate by himself, and the Egyptians also had separate tables. When all were seated the brothers were surprised to see that they were arranged in exact order, according to their ages. Joseph "sent messes unto them from before him;" but Benjamin's was five times as much as any of theirs. By this token of favor to Benjamin he hoped to ascertain if the youngest brother was regarded with the envy and hatred that had been manifested toward himself. Still supposing that Joseph did not [229] understand their language, the brothers freely conversed with one another; thus he had a good opportunity to learn their real feelings. Still he desired to test them further, and before their departure he ordered that his own drinking cup of silver should be concealed in the sack of the youngest. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 228.2)

46. After placing his special cup in Benjamin's sack and sending his servant after his brothers during their return journey to Canaan, Joseph was ready to give his brothers their final test. He told them that he would just keep Benjamin as his servant and the rest of them could go home. Judah intervened and pleaded for Benjamin in a way that completely convinced Joseph that his brothers were changed men. (Genesis 44:18-34) Then, Joseph told all the Egyptians to leave the room, and he announced to his brothers—in Hebrew—that he was Joseph! Try to imagine yourself in their situation! What were they thinking? When they finally were able to speak, what do you think they said? What went through the mind of Benjamin? Was that the first hint to Benjamin that the story of Joseph's death was a fabrication? (See *Patriarchs and Prophets* 230-232.)
47. What do you think it was that convinced Joseph that his brothers really had changed? What was it that changed those brothers? Was it just a matter of time? Was it the suffering that they went through? Was it their own internal recriminations? Was it their father's example? Was it the suffering that they saw Jacob and Isaac go through? Which of these factors do you think would have had the biggest impact on you?

During the years since Joseph had been separated from his brothers, these sons of Jacob had changed in character. Envious, turbulent, deceptive, cruel, and revengeful they had been; but now, when tested by adversity, they were shown to be unselfish, true to one another, devoted to their father, and, themselves middle-aged men, subject to his authority. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 225.3)

48. Did changes need to take place in the heart of Joseph? Was it easy for Joseph to forgive his brothers? Why does it seem almost impossible for people in the Middle East to forgive each other in our day? Why are they still fighting over the Crusades?
49. What needed to happen between Joseph and his brothers before everything could be completely restored to a "right" condition? Was forgiveness and acceptance all that was necessary? Or, was a true change in attitude and character needed?

50. Finally, the brothers were ready to set off in royal style to return to Canaan to collect their families and their father and then return to Egypt. How many other people do you think accompanied them? Did they have servants, or even slaves, themselves? Did they say anything to Esau or his family and his descendants? Did they say anything to their immediate neighbors about why they were going to Egypt? Or, even that they were going to Egypt?
51. What do you think the 10 sons said to Jacob about Joseph? What was the most convincing evidence or information in the eyes of Jacob that led him to believe that Joseph was really still alive? What did Benjamin have to say?
52. Try to imagine the meeting of Joseph and Jacob after so many years. Picture Joseph in his royal attire and Jacob in his shepherd's clothes. Were they hugging and crying!
53. What did Joseph say to his brothers about what they should say to Pharaoh regarding their occupation? Why was it important for them to tell the Egyptians that they were shepherds? Why did the Egyptians despise shepherds? Was their occupation as shepherds their "protection," as God's "special people," from intermingling with the Egyptians?

Abraham had been greatly favored by the king; even now Pharaoh would permit no harm to be done him or his company, but ordered a guard to conduct them in safety out of his dominions. **At this time laws were made prohibiting the Egyptians from intercourse with foreign shepherds in any such familiarity as eating or drinking with them.** (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 130.2) [Bold type is added.]

54. Knowing what you do about the family of Jacob, would you have chosen them as the one family to work through to carry God's message to the world?
55. Review the blessings that Jacob pronounced on his children. (Genesis 49:1-28) Where did Jacob get the information about the future of his children's descendants? Why wasn't Dinah mentioned? Were those futures revealed to Jacob by God? Or, did Jacob just know his children well enough that he could anticipate their futures?
56. Can anyone, even God, predict the future? Did the children of Jacob have free choice? Or, were their futures pre-determined by those prophecies? Do we have free choice?
57. The book of Genesis ends with the final events in the life of Jacob and Joseph. **One biblical sage suggested that the book of Genesis could be summarized by reading the first five words and the last four words of the book: "In the beginning God created...A coffin in Egypt."** This book records the beginning of the sad story of sin on this planet but not the beginning of the story of sin in the universe!
58. **Try to imagine your life spelled out in the book of Genesis.** Would a condensed version of the story of your life be a true witness for the cause of God?
59. We have suggested that the family of Jacob began with a lot of problems. It was truly a dysfunctional family! And yet, look at what came out of it! Remember that God is planning to put the names of those brothers on the gates of the New Jerusalem! (Ezekiel 48:30-35; Revelation 21:12-13) Does that give you hope? Do any of us have experiences with dysfunctional families? How would you summarize the life of Jacob?

Jacob had sinned, and had deeply suffered. Many years of toil, care, and sorrow had been his since the day when his great sin caused him to flee from his father's tents. A homeless fugitive, separated from his mother, whom he never saw again; laboring seven years for her whom he loved, only

to be basely cheated; toiling twenty years in the service of a covetous and grasping kinsman; seeing his wealth increasing, and sons rising around him, but finding little joy in the contentious and divided household; distressed by his daughter's shame, by her brothers' revenge, [238] by the death of Rachel, by the unnatural crime of Reuben, by Judah's sin, by the cruel deception and malice practiced toward Joseph—how long and dark is the catalogue of evils spread out to view! Again and again he had reaped the fruit of that first wrong deed. Over and over he saw repeated among his sons the sins of which he himself had been guilty. But bitter as had been the discipline, it had accomplished its work. The chastening, though grievous, had yielded “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” Hebrews 12:11. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 237.4)

60. The Joseph story builds to a focal point, or pivot point, at Genesis 45:1-3 after which the themes and stories are repeated in reverse order, thus creating the chiasmic structure.
- a. In Genesis 45:1-3, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers.
 - b. There are six episodes (A, B, C, D, E, F) followed by six parallel episodes (F', E', D', C', B', A') in reverse order.
 - c. The result is a neatly constructed *palistrophe* or symmetrical structure in what is already a well-unified story.
 - d. Though not indicated in the chart, each of the matching episodes is linked by a series of key words (for example, *hesed*, “favor,” in Genesis 39:21 and Genesis 47:29).

The Joseph Story

A Joseph and his brothers; Jacob and Joseph part (Genesis 37:1-36)

B Interlude: Joseph not present (Genesis 38:1-30)

C Reversal: Joseph “guilty”; Potiphar’s wife “innocent” (Genesis 39:1-23)

D Joseph: Hero of Egypt (Genesis 40:1-41:57)

E Two trips to Egypt (Genesis 42:1-43:34)

F Final test (Genesis 44:1-34)

Focal point: Joseph revealed himself to his brothers

F' Conclusion of test (Genesis 45:1-28)

E' Two tellings of migration to Egypt (Genesis 46:1-47:12)

D' Joseph: Hero of Egypt (Genesis 47:13-27)

C' Reversal: Ephraim firstborn, Manasseh second-born (Genesis 47:28-48:22)

B' Interlude: Joseph nominally present (Genesis 49:1-28)

A' Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (Genesis 49:29-50:26)

61. Some have suggested that the life of Joseph was a type of the life of Christ. What parallels do you see? Read the story in *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 157-159.
- a. **Joseph was arrested and suffered because he was faithful. So was Jesus.**

Joseph illustrates Christ. Jesus came to his own, but his own received him

not. He was rejected and despised, because his acts were righteous, and his consistent, self-denying life was a continual rebuke upon those who professed piety, but whose lives were corrupt. Joseph's integrity and virtue were fiercely assailed; and she who would lead him astray could not prevail, therefore her hatred was strong against the virtue and integrity which she could not corrupt, and she testified falsely against him. The innocent suffered because of his righteousness. He was cast into prison because of his virtue. (1SP 157.2)

- b. ***Joseph was sold to his enemies by his family. Jesus was betrayed by one of His disciples.***

Joseph was sold to his enemies, by his own brethren, for a small sum of money. The Son of God was sold to his bitterest enemies by one of his own disciples. (1SP 157.2)

- c. ***Jesus was humble, meek, and refused to use His power to fight His enemies. Joseph humbly served God in whatever place he found himself.***

Jesus was meek and holy. His was a life of unexampled self-denial, goodness, and holiness. He was not guilty of any wrong; yet false witnesses were hired to testify against him. He was hated because he had been a faithful reprovener of sin and [158] corruption. (1SP 157.2)

- d. ***Joseph and Jesus were both stripped of their coats.***

Joseph's brethren stripped him of his coat of many colors. The executioners of Jesus cast lots for his seamless coat. (1SP 157.2)

- e. ***Joseph's brothers wanted to kill him, but finally sold him as a slave because they were jealous of him. The Jewish leaders arrested Jesus and arranged for His trial and crucifixion because they were jealous of His miraculous powers and His influence with the people.***

Joseph's brethren purposed to kill him, but were finally content to sell him as a slave, to prevent his becoming greater than themselves. They thought they had placed him where they would be no more troubled with his dreams, and where there would not be a possibility of their fulfillment. But the very course which they pursued, God overruled to bring about that which they designed never should take place—that he should have dominion over them.

The chief priests and elders were jealous of Christ, that he would draw the attention of the people away from themselves, to him. They knew that he was doing greater works than they ever had done, or ever could perform; and they knew that if he was suffered to continue his teachings, he would become higher in authority than they, and might become king of the Jews. They agreed together to prevent this by privately taking him, and hiring witnesses to testify falsely against him, that they might condemn him, and put him to death. They would not accept him as their king, but cried out, Crucify him! crucify him! The Jews thought that by taking the life of Christ, they could prevent his becoming king. But by murdering the Son of God, they were bringing about the very thing they sought to prevent. (1SP 158.1-2)

- f. ***Despite the terrible treatment that both Joseph and Jesus received, as a result of their treatment, they rose to take the pre-eminent position that God planned***

for them. In neither case did it lessen the guilt of those responsible.

Joseph, by being sold by his brethren into Egypt, became a saviour to his father's family. Yet this fact did not lessen the guilt of his brethren. The crucifixion of Christ by his enemies, made him the Redeemer of mankind, the Saviour of the fallen race, and ruler over the whole world. [159] The crime of his enemies was just as heinous as though God's providential hand had not controlled events for his own glory and the good of man. (1SP 158.2)

- g. **Despite everything that Satan could throw at them, neither Joseph nor Jesus could be persuaded to depart in the least manner from his/His walk with God. In the end, both graciously forgave those who had done them wrong.**

Joseph walked with God. He would not be persuaded to deviate from the path of righteousness, and transgress God's law, by any inducements or threats. And when he was imprisoned, and suffered because of his innocence, he meekly bore it without murmuring. His self-control, and patience in adversity, and his unwavering fidelity, are left on record for the benefit of all who should afterward live on the earth. When Joseph's brethren acknowledged their sin before him, he freely forgave them, and showed by his acts of benevolence and love that he harbored no resentful feelings for their former cruel conduct toward him. The life of Jesus, the Saviour of the world, was a pattern of benevolence, goodness, and holiness. Yet he was despised and insulted, mocked and derided, for no other reason than because of his righteous life, which was a constant rebuke to sin. His enemies would not be satisfied until he was given into their hands, that they might put him to a shameful death. He died for the guilty race; and, while suffering the most cruel torture, meekly forgave his murderers. He rose from the dead, ascended up to his father, and received all power and authority, and returned to the earth again to impart it to his disciples. He gave gifts unto men. And all who have ever come to him repentant, confessing their sins, he has received into his favor, and freely pardoned them. And if they remain true to him, he will exalt them to his throne, and make them his heirs to the inheritance which he has purchased with his own blood.—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 159.1.

62. **If you were asked to summarize the book of Genesis, what would you say? Think about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Seth, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and his four wives and those 12 brothers with their only sister. Do we know more about their spiritual successes? Or, about their failures? Why does the Bible go to such length to spell out the sins of these saints?**
63. **What have you learned about God from this trip through the book of Genesis?**

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