

THE STORY OF JOSEPH AND HOW JACOB'S FAMILY MOVES TO EGYPT. (PART ONE)

(See special paragraph at the end on sexual sins)

God had predicted to Abraham long before Jacob (Israel) was born:

"Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." (Genesis 15:13-16 NIV)

In today's lesson we are going to learn how Jacob and his 12 sons were born in Canaan and Mesopotamia but grew into a nation in Egypt. After growing to great numbers in Egypt, they eventually were made slaves at the end of 400 years. How did this happen? The story of Jacob's favorite son will answer these questions. It is one of the greatest short stories ever written and it is true. If you have not read this story and don't want me to spoil it for you, then read it in Genesis 37-50 before reading the rest of this article.

Jacob had married sisters, loving the youngest more than the oldest. The youngest, Rachel, gave birth to his two youngest sons, Joseph and Benjamin and died giving birth to the last one. Jacob loved Joseph more than the other 11 sons and gave him a long coat of many colors, which was in their culture usually given to the oldest son. Joseph's ten older brothers became very jealous of him and would not even speak to him in a friendly way. As a youth of 17, Joseph helped his brothers with the flocks but often brought back reports about his older brothers bad behavior. This increased their hatred for him.

One day Joseph had a couple of dreams that he explained to his brothers. He said, "We were all in the field tying up sheaves of wheat. My sheave stood up and yours made a circle around mine and bowed down to it. In another dream I saw the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowing down to me. His father scolded him saying, "Do you think that your entire family will bow to you?" His brothers hated him even more after this, but his father thought often about these dreams.

A while later, his brothers were keeping the flocks several kilometers away and Joseph was sent to check on them. When the brothers saw Joseph coming in the distance they said, "Here comes that dreamer, here is our chance, let's kill

him.” Reuben, the oldest, knew they were too angry to be reasoned with, so he tried to spare Joseph by insisting they not shed his blood but put him down into a deep well and leave him to die. Reuben planned to come back later and get Joseph out. After throwing him into the pit, they sat down for a meal.

However, while Reuben was busy a group of traders passed by going to Egypt. One of the brothers, Judah, the ancestor of Jesus, said, “What profit is it to kill our brother and have his blood on our hands, let’s sell him to these traders.” The traders took him to Egypt and sold him to a wealthy Egyptian named Potiphar. Potiphar was also the captain of the bodyguards for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. All the kings of Egypt wore the title of Pharaoh.

God was with Joseph and made sure everything he did in Potiphar’s household was prosperous. Soon, Potiphar put him in charge of all his business affairs. Joseph was young, strong, talented, and handsome, but trouble was not far away. Potiphar’s wife began to pay lots of attention to Joseph and pressed him to have sex with her. Joseph, being a righteous man, tried to avoid her. Joseph was not only loyal to his master, who had treated him well, but he told her also, “How can I sin against God.” However, one day when everyone was away from the house she grabbed Joseph and tried to bring him to her bed. Joseph found a way out by quickly slipping out of his garment and running from the house. Potiphar’s wife was left holding his garment. She screamed and told the other workers who came running, “Joseph attacked me!”

When Potiphar returned she repeated her lie, “Joseph attacked me and when I screamed he ran. See, here is his garment.” Potiphar was so angry that he had Joseph thrown into prison, the same prison where the king’s prisoners were held.

The story will continue in our next lesson in a couple of days. If you can’t wait to know the ending, then stop and read the story in Genesis 37-50. But please read the special paragraph below.

***** In this story we see that Joseph knew it was wrong to be intimate with another man’s wife. One of the ten commandments that God later gave to the nation of Israel was, “You shall not commit adultery”. Part of another commandment said, “You shall not covet (desire) your neighbor’s wife”. The sexual relationship outside of marriage is always sinful and brings sadness and destruction into people’s lives. Fornication is a term in the English Bible that is defined as unlawful sexual contact between those who are not married. Jesus said this was a sin that will defile us and comes from a sinful heart (Mark 7:20-23). If you are married, your body belongs to your mate (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). Young people, even if you are not married, your body belongs to the one you will marry. You may not even know your future mate yet, but you need to save yourself for that person. Those who do not, God will judge. This will not only happen in the final judgment, but even while you are alive. All sin brings unhappiness and wasted lives, but this is especially true of sexual immorality. Unwed mothers, dads who desert, sexual diseases like AIDS, loneliness, rejection, guilt, loss of self-respect, and the hurt of others.

These are just the beginning of the price you and others pay when you commit this sin. This is why God warns, “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

QUESTIONS:

1. Give at least two reasons why Joseph’s brothers hated him so.
2. Which brother planned to free Joseph from the pit?
3. Into what country was Joseph sold as a slave?
4. What situation illustrates that Joseph’s morals were governed by a love for God?