

Joseph Stories Table of Contents

A mini-story set about Joseph is useful to teach forgiveness, patience, and restored relationship. If you only have one session for Joseph, you may use the first story. Otherwise, it is best to use stories 2-4 over three sessions.

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Genesis 37-50 Joseph Forgives His Brothers

Genesis 37-50

Based on NLT (2004)

Introduction: *Abraham had a son, and his son had two sons, one of whom was named Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons, one of whom was named Joseph.*

Gen 37:2-4

...When Joseph was seventeen years old, he ...reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing. Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children ...But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest...

Transition: *One day, Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were with the sheep out in the pasture.*

Genesis 37:18-36

When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him...*But one brother said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? His blood would just give us a guilty conscience. Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those... traders."* So when the...traders came by, Joseph's brothers...sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt...where they sold Joseph to...an officer of...the king of Egypt.

Genesis 39:2-6

*God** was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master...So *the officer* gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat!

Transition: *The officer's wife falsely accused Joseph of attempted rape and Joseph was put in prison. But God was with Joseph in prison, and Joseph was given a position of responsibility and succeeded in everything he did. After some years, the king had two dreams that no one could interpret. Finally, someone who had been in prison with Joseph suggested that Joseph could interpret the dreams. Joseph was brought before the king.*

Genesis 41:15-17

Then *the king* said to Joseph, "I had a dream last night, and no one here can tell me what it means. But I have heard that when you hear about a dream you can interpret it." "It is beyond my power to do this," Joseph replied. "But God can tell you what it means and set you at ease." So *the king* told Joseph his dream.

Transition: *Joseph explained that the dreams meant famine was coming, and he suggested a strategy to prepare for the famine. The king agreed and made Joseph in charge of famine preparations. Because of Joseph's foresight, when the famine came, Egypt was the only country with food. Many people came from all over to buy grain. Joseph's brothers also came to buy grain. Joseph saw them come, recognized them, and tested them. Then he revealed his identity to them.*

Genesis 45:4-15

..."I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives..." Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.

Transition: *Jacob and all his family came to Egypt and lived. Then Jacob died.*

Genesis 50:15-21

But now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers became fearful. "Now Joseph will show his anger and pay us back for all the wrong we did to him," they said. So they sent this message to Joseph..."we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive* our sin*."...Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. "Look, we are your slaves!" they said. But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me... You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

Why This Story?

This overview of Joseph's life is usually told as the fourth story in a forgiveness story set. The story provides some of the history to show why the brothers hated Joseph, what they did to harm Joseph and then how Joseph forgave them.

This story has been told effectively in groups of believers who are doing an in-depth topical study on forgiveness, and who have some Bible background already. Used in combination with others in the story set, this story helps people learn that any offense can be forgiven, and they see that forgiveness can lead to restoration of the family.

Story Crafting

If you wish to add other details to the story that may be known to your people, the story will become too long to learn. For the forgiveness story, you need to keep it to this length.

“Pharaoh” and “King of Egypt” are two titles for the same person. Use the title that is the easiest for your audience.

If you have not had other stories about Jacob, it will be important to link Joseph and his brothers to Abraham.

Words/Phrases to Consider

Please see the master glossary for a full explanation of these words.

Abraham's Descendants*

We've chosen to use this in place of “Israelites,” “Jews,” and “Hebrews” to show the epic storyline from Abraham. This term helps connect the stories, and helps the audience see that all of these different terms for the Jews really refer to the same people. In addition, it alleviates any prejudices

people or cultures might have towards the Jews.

Forgive, Forgiveness*

Some languages don't have an adequate word for ‘forgive.’ If that's the case, understanding what ‘forgiveness’ means is imperative to translating it correctly. Forgiveness involves two people, one of whom has done something wrong to the other and offended him. The one who was offended sets aside his rights and does not punish the other as he deserves. He does not seek revenge. If the other repents of his behavior and accepts the forgiveness, the relationship between the two is restored and the guilt is removed. With God, forgiveness is available to all and dependent on a penitent heart in that the person stops his actions and turns towards God with an attitude of faith and repentance. This results in a restored relationship between God and man.

Here are some idioms used in the New Testament to describe “forgiveness.” Your language may have a similar idiom, and if so, you may use that to create a word picture for your audience.

to wipe away the sins of someone

to lift up the sins of someone

to loose, release

to throw away

to cover over

to pass by

to take away

to turn one's back on

God*

Some languages have a word for a god which is not the “creator/almighty God.” For example, English differentiates the all-powerful, sovereign God from a “lesser” god by the use of a capital letter. When talking about the Creator God (Yahweh), use a term that is recognized as a title for the all-powerful, creator, sovereign God so that

there are no misunderstandings about which god is being referred to. If your audience has a name for God like the descendants of Abraham did (Yahweh, meaning “I am that I am”), you may use it here, but be careful that your audience understands that there is only one true God.

Sin*

Sin refers to an act of disobedience to God. Be sure that the word you use here does not mean that someone has failed to perform a religious act (i.e. alms, ritual prayer, following religious dietary rules, etc.). If necessary, you can use ‘disobedience.’

Worldview

In some cultures forgiveness means that you put the offense aside until the time for revenge comes at some point in the future. The offender and his family know that at some point revenge will come and they live under this threat. In this story, the brothers show that they believe that Joseph will seek revenge. After their father dies, they fear revenge and come again before Joseph. Joseph does not seek revenge. Instead, he assures them that he has forgiven them.

This story will have a major impact on cultures where biblical forgiveness does not exist.

Intra-Story Cohesion

Be sure to use the same terms for **Descendants of Abraham, forgive, sin, and God** that you have used in other stories.

Link this story to Abraham by making sure that the people know that Jacob is Abraham’s grandson.

Story Set Themes

Forgiveness
Relationship

Provision
Dreams
Family
Raising Children
Perseverance

Genesis 37-Joseph's Dreams

Genesis 37:3-36

Based on the NLT (1996)

Example Transition:

Abraham did have a son, and his sons had sons who still lived in the country that God had given Abraham. One of these descendants of Abraham was Joseph. This is his story.*

Genesis 37:3-4 (Genesis 35:22-36 for 'other eleven sons')

...Now *Joseph's father* loved Joseph more than any of his other *eleven sons* because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day he gave Joseph a special gift—a beautiful robe. But his brothers hated Joseph because of their father's partiality. They couldn't say a kind word to him.

Genesis 37:9-11

Then Joseph had...*a* dream and told his brothers about it. "Listen to this dream," he said. "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!"...he told his father as well as his brothers, and his father *scolded* him. "What do you mean?" his father asked. "Will your mother, your brothers, and I actually come and bow before you?" But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father gave it some thought and wondered what it all meant.

Genesis 37:12-14

Soon after this, Joseph's brothers went to pasture their father's flocks...*Joseph's father* said to *him*, "Your brothers are...with the flocks. I'm *sending* you to them...Then come back and *tell me how they are doing*..." So *his father* sent him on his way, and Joseph *went to where his brothers were*...

Genesis 37:18-22

When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance..."Here comes that dreamer!" they exclaimed...*One of the brothers*

suggested, "Let's...throw him alive into this pit here. That way he will die without our having to touch him."...

Genesis 37:23-28

So when Joseph arrived, they pulled off his beautiful robe and threw him into the pit...Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they noticed a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of...traders taking spices...to Egypt. *One of the brothers said*..."Let's sell Joseph to those...traders. Let's not be responsible for his death; after all, he is our brother!" And his brothers agreed. So when the traders came by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him...and the...traders took him along to Egypt...

Genesis 37:31-35

Then Joseph's brothers killed a goat and dipped the robe in its blood. They took the beautiful robe to their father and asked him to identify it. "We found this in the field," they told him. "It's Joseph's robe, isn't it?" Their father recognized it at once. "Yes," he said, "it is my son's robe. A wild animal has attacked and eaten him. Surely Joseph has been torn in pieces!"...He mourned deeply for his son for many days. His family all tried to comfort him, but it was no use. "I will die in mourning for my son," he would say, and then begin to weep.

Genesis 37:36

Meanwhile, in Egypt, the traders sold Joseph to...an officer of...the king of Egypt...

Why This Story?

This story is meant to be the first story in a three-story set about Joseph.

A mini-story set about Joseph is useful to teach forgiveness, patience, and restored relationship.

Some teams working in Muslim cultures have found that in a story set with Relationship as the redemptive theme, the stories about King David and his broken and restored relationship with God are extremely offensive because Muslims believe that King David never sinned. In cases such as this, some may find it useful to replace the David stories with this set of Joseph stories.

Story Crafting

An example transition is given for use in a story set where the preceding story is about Abraham. Be sure to choose an appropriate transition, connecting Joseph somehow with the preceding storyline.

We left out most of the names for ease of retelling, and to focus on Joseph as the main character. If you are using this story in a set in which you've introduced Jacob, you may use his name in this story.

We have not included all of the dialog between Joseph's brothers as they were deciding what to do with him---whether to kill him or simply throw him in the pit. We have not included which brothers suggested which things, because later in the story we will also keep the individual brothers' roles vague in order to keep the story shorter, and to highlight Joseph's role as a man with whom God had a good relationship, and a man who extended his good relationship to his brothers by forgiving them.

If your audience would not recognize the country name "Egypt," or be confused by

the name, you may leave it out and say "another country."

Robe

This was probably a coat or tunic with long sleeves, so be sure that the word you use for this can include this description.

Words/Phrases to Consider

Descendants of Abraham*

We've chosen to use this in place of "Israelites," "Jews," and "Hebrews" to show the epic storyline from Abraham. This term helps connect the stories, and helps the audience see that all of these different terms for the Jews really refer to the same people. In addition, it alleviates any prejudices people or cultures might have towards the Jews.

Worldview

We chose to include only one of Joseph's dreams in order to keep the story simple and short. However, you can choose which dream you would like to include depending on the worldview of the people group. This story was originally crafted for a mountainous people group who may not understand the agricultural scene depicted in Joseph's first dream. Both dreams express the same idea.

Some people groups' cultures resonate with dreams and their fulfillment. In those cultures, the dreams in the Joseph stories are important to include, and their fulfillment is important to emphasize.

Some people groups know Jacob as one of the patriarchs. You may include Jacob's name if doing so would validate the story or add interest for the people listening.

Intra-Story Cohesion

This story is meant to be the first story in a three-story set about Joseph.

Use the same word for **descendants** that you have been using.

Story Set Themes

Relationship

Forgiveness

Patience

Raising children

Family

Father/son relationships

Gen 39-41-Joseph in Egypt (2)

Genesis 39:1-41:57

Based on the NLT (1996)

Genesis 39:1-4

Now when Joseph arrived in Egypt with the traders, he was purchased by an *officer of the king of Egypt*...*God was with Joseph and blessed* him greatly...and the officer noticed this...he soon put Joseph in charge of his entire household...*

Genesis 39:6-9

...Now Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man...*The officer's wife began to desire him and invited him to sleep with her. But Joseph refused...He told her, "...How could I ever do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin* against God."*

Transition Genesis 39:10-18

Although he continued to refuse her, she accused Joseph of trying to sleep with her, even though he had not done so.

Genesis 39:19-23

...*The officer was furious! He took Joseph and threw him into...prison. But God was with Joseph there, too...and showed him his faithful love. And God made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden. Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison...God was with him and caused everything he did to succeed.*

Genesis 40:1-5

Some time later, *two of the king's officials* offended *the king*...and he put them in the prison...*One night while in prison, the two officials each had a dream, and each dream had its own meaning.*

Transition (Genesis 40:6-21)

God told Joseph what their dreams meant. As the dreams predicted, one of the officials went back into service with the king...

Genesis 41:1-4

Two years later, *the king* dreamed that he was standing on the bank *of the river*...In his dream, seven fat, healthy-looking cows suddenly came up out of the river and began grazing along its bank. Then seven other cows came up from the river, but these were very ugly and gaunt. These cows went over and stood beside the fat cows. Then the thin, ugly cows ate the fat ones! At this point in the dream, *the king* woke up...

Genesis 41:8-13

...*No one could tell the king what the dream meant...Then the king's official spoke up... "Some time ago, you imprisoned me...I had a dream while in prison, and a man in prison told me what my dream meant, and everything happened just as he said it would..."*

Genesis 41:14

The king sent for Joseph at once...

Genesis 41:16-17

When the king asked Joseph to interpret his dream, Joseph said, "It is beyond my power to do this. But God will tell you what it means...So the king told him the dream..."

Genesis 41:25-30

Joseph said, "God was telling you what he is about to do. The seven fat cows...represent seven years of prosperity. The seven thin, ugly cows...represent seven years of famine...The next seven years will be a period of great prosperity throughout the land of Egypt. But afterward there will be seven years of famine..."

Genesis 41:33-36

"My suggestion is that you find *someone...to* gather all the food and grain of these good years...and store it away...That way there will be enough to eat when the seven years of famine come..."

Genesis 41:38-40

The king said, "Who could do it better than Joseph? For he is a man who is obviously filled with the spirit of God*"...Turning to Joseph, *the king* said, "...I hereby appoint you to direct this project...Only I will have a rank higher than yours."

Genesis 41:47-48

And sure enough, for the next seven years there were *abundant* crops everywhere. During those years, Joseph took a portion of all the crops grown in Egypt and stored them...

Genesis 41:54-57

Then the seven years of famine began...Joseph opened up the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians. And people from surrounding lands also came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe throughout the world.

Why This Story?

This story is meant to be the second in a three-story series of Joseph stories.

This mini-story set teaches about forgiveness, patience, and restored relationship.

Some teams working in Muslim cultures have found that in a story set with Relationship as the redemptive theme, the stories about King David and his broken and restored relationship with God are offensive because Muslims believe that King David never sinned. In cases such as this, some may find it useful to replace the David stories with this set of Joseph stories.

Story Crafting

We left out most of the names for ease of retelling, and to focus on Joseph as the main character.

We have left out some of the dreams in order to keep the story short, easy to tell, and to focus on the plotline of the story, which is about Joseph's relationship with God even in difficult circumstances and his kind actions with his brothers despite all the suffering he endured in Egypt. In our story, we chose to use the dream about the cows rather than the dream about the grain. You should choose the dream that you think your audience will best resonate with. If you chose the grain dream from the first story, you might want to choose the grain dream in this story as well.

We have emphasized Joseph's relationship with God by including the sections where Joseph shows his respect for God's power and hatred of sin; e.g. Joseph says that committing adultery with the officer's wife would be a sin against God, and Joseph reminds the king that he can not interpret dreams, only God can.

Words/Phrases to Consider

Please see the Master Glossary for a full explanation of these terms.

Bless*

This refers to when God helps, does good to, or favors someone or something. In the *Creation* and *Abraham* stories, the specific blessing includes God giving them the ability to reproduce and multiply. Try to avoid using a word related to luck or games of chance.

Sin*

Sin refers to an act of disobedience to God. Be sure that the word you use here does not mean that someone has failed to perform a religious act (i.e. alms, ritual prayer, following religious dietary rules, etc.). If necessary, you can use 'disobedience.'

Spirit of God/God's Spirit*

You can translate this term directly as 'God's Spirit.' The meaning is that God had qualified him to do the job he had called him to do.

Worldview

Determine the most culturally appropriate way to explain 'trying to sleep with her' that makes it clear what the sin was without causing offense to the audience.

Muslims have a different Joseph story. In their story, the situation with the officer's wife turns out differently. If this is a problem, you can simply mention that while working in Egypt, Joseph was thrown in jail for something he did not do, rather than tell that part of the story in detail.

Some people groups' cultures resonate with dreams and their fulfillment. In those cultures, the dreams in the Joseph stories are very important to include, and their fulfillment is important to emphasize.

Intra-Story Cohesion

This story is meant to be the second in a three-story series of Joseph stories.

If you have used a different preceding story than the example story in this Master Manual, be sure that this second story follows the plotline of the first Joseph story. Leave in or omit the same names as you did in the first story.

Story Set Themes

Relationship

Forgiveness

Patience

Faithfulness

Perseverance

Blessing

Dreams

Genesis 42-45-Joseph Forgives His Brothers (3)

Genesis 42:1-45:9

Based on the NLT (1996)

Genesis 42:1-6

When *Joseph's father* heard that there was grain available in Egypt, he said to his sons... "Go down and buy some for us before we all starve to death." So Joseph's ten older brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain. *Their father* wouldn't let Joseph's younger brother...go with them, however, for fear some harm might come to him... *When the brothers arrived in Egypt*, it was to *Joseph* that *they* came. They bowed low before him, with their faces to the ground...

Genesis 42:8-24

Joseph's brothers didn't recognize him, but Joseph recognized them. And he remembered the dreams he had had many years before. He said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become." "No..." they exclaimed. "We have come to buy food. We are all brothers and honest men, sir! We are not spies!"... *Joseph said*, "This is how I will test your story...Only one of you will remain in the prison. The rest of you may go on home with grain for your families. But bring your youngest brother back to me. In this way, I will know whether or not you are telling me the truth. If you are, I will spare you." To this they agreed...He then chose *one brother* from among them and had him tied up right before their eyes...

Transition (Genesis 42:29-43:14)

So *the brothers* came to their father...and told him all that had happened...*But their father did not want to send his youngest son to Egypt. Finally, when all the grain was gone, he allowed the youngest son to go back to Egypt to buy grain with his brothers.*

Genesis 43:15-28

So they took *their youngest brother*...and hurried to Egypt, where they presented

themselves to Joseph...they gave him their gifts and bowed low before him...He asked them how they had been getting along, and then he said, "How is your father...? Is he still alive?" "Yes," they replied. "He is alive and well."...

Genesis 44:1-17

When his brothers were ready to leave, Joseph gave these instructions to the man in charge of his household: "Fill each of their sacks with as much grain as they can carry...Then put my personal silver cup at the top of the youngest brother's sack..." So the household manager did as he was told.

When the brothers left, Joseph sent someone after them to stop them and bring them back to search their bags. The cup was found in the youngest brother's sack!...Joseph said... "the man who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go home to your father."

Genesis 44:18-33

Then *one brother* stepped forward and said, "...I cannot go back to my father without the boy... When he sees that the boy is not with us, our father will die. We will be responsible for bringing his gray head down to the grave in sorrow...Please...let me stay here as a slave instead of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers"...

Genesis 45:1-7

Joseph could stand it no longer... "I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers...But his brothers were speechless...And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother whom you sold into Egypt. But don't be angry with yourselves that you did this to me, for God did it. He sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives...God has sent me here to keep you and your families alive so that you will become a great nation"...

Genesis 45:9

"Hurry, return to my father and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. Come down to me right away!'"

Why This Story?

This story is meant to be the third story in a three-story set about Joseph.

This story teaches forgiveness, patience, and restored relationship.

Some teams working in Muslim cultures have found that in a story set with Relationship as the redemptive theme, the stories about King David and his broken and restored relationship with God are offensive because Muslims believe that King David never sinned. In cases such as this, some may find it useful to replace the David stories with this set of Joseph stories.

Story Crafting

Be sure that the silver cup is seen as something precious to Joseph.

We've avoided much of the conversation between the brothers and between Joseph and the brothers in order to simplify the story and make it easier to retell. We wanted to focus on the brothers' change of heart and Joseph's forgiving heart and recognition of God's plan.

“down to the grave in sorrow”

This phrase conveys the depth of sorrow that the father would feel when he discovered that his son had been left behind. The older brothers were concerned that the father would die from sorrow. Use the appropriate figure of speech in your language to convey this.

“speechless”

The brothers were shocked and probably frightened.

Worldview

Bowing low was a respectful greeting from a subordinate to his master. It does not convey worship.

In some cultures, it could be helpful to point out that the youngest brother was Joseph's full brother, unlike the others.

In some cultures, people pretend to forgive and then exact vengeance much later. In those cultures, it could be beneficial to include Genesis 50:14-21, which shows that Joseph's forgiveness was genuine.

Intra-Story Cohesion

Joseph's dream from the first story is fulfilled in this story. It's important to mention that Joseph 'remembered' the dreams he had had many years before, so that the audience is also reminded of God's fulfillment of his plan. You may want to reference the specific dream you mentioned in the first story to remind the audience, if needed.

Be sure that you use the same wording in this story when the brothers bow before Joseph as you did in the 'Joseph's Dreams' story when the sun, moon, and stars bowed before him.

Story Set Themes

Relationship

Forgiveness

Patience

Family relationships