

## JOSEPH IN EGYPT

*(1 Corinthians 2:9)*

**Purpose:** To show how troubles can make us strong.

Long ago in the land of Canaan there lived a family of shepherds – Jacob and his twelve sons.

Joseph was next to the youngest. Of course Jacob loved all his children but something about this younger son touched his father's heart in a special way.

Joseph loved to hear about God. He would sit for hours at his father's knee asking again and again for the story of how God had called his great-grandfather, Abraham, to serve Him; and had chosen their family for a very special purpose.

Joseph's family was to be called God's people, his appointed witnesses to all the world! As the story grew familiar, the Lord became very real to Joseph and he wanted to serve Him with all his heart.

How different his brothers were! They only wanted to please themselves, and the things they did brought shame to the name of their family.

As Joseph grew up, his father loved him more and more, for Joseph was all that a son should be – good, obedient, honouring his father in everything he did.

He became his father's trusted servant and that made the other sons angry. They were jealous that Joseph was loved and trusted more than they were.

They never missed a chance to be mean to Joseph, and they despised all the good things he did.

But God's loving care was so real to Joseph that he talked to the Lord about his problems, and the Lord never failed him.

With God's help, Joseph found he could even forgive his brothers and go on loving them, no matter how unkind they were.

When Joseph was 17 years old, his father gave him a beautiful coat. It was a mark of honor, to show that Jacob was pleased with his younger son.

Wearing this coat set Joseph in a place above his brothers. And Joseph deserved the honor because he had served his father better than the others. But of course the brothers didn't see it that way. They envied Joseph so much that they hated him.

It was even worse when they heard of a strange dream Joseph had. And as they talked about that dream, their hatred grew and grew.

They jeered at Joseph and tried to make it seem he was lying, pretending to have a dream like that just to make himself big and important!

Then Joseph told his family about a second dream he'd had. This time the sun and moon and eleven stars seemed to come and bow down to him. Now even Jacob rebuked his beloved son.

*“Do you mean that I and your mother and your brothers will bow down to you as if you were a king?”* As much as he loved and trusted his son, Jacob hardly thought of him as a king.

But as the days passed and he saw how humble, good and faithful Joseph was, Jacob began to think that the dreams must have been sent by God.

But not the brothers! Dreams or no dreams, they weren't going to have Joseph telling them what to do. And so in their hearts an evil purpose began to grow.

One day they were out on the hills tending their father's sheep, and away in the distance they saw Joseph. *“Here comes that dreamer. Now's our chance to be rid of him for good!”*

Quickly they plotted together. *“Come on, let's kill him. Then we'll see what becomes of his fine dreams!”*

So without any warning they seized Joseph.

They stripped off the beautiful coat that had made them so envious and were ready to kill their own brother!

Just then Reuben, one of the older ones, saw a deep hole nearby and had an idea. Instead of killing Joseph...

...they would cast him into the pit.

It might mean slow death for Joseph, from starvation and exposure, but actually Reuben intended to come back later and help him escape. Then, before Reuben had a chance to do anything about it...

...a caravan of traders came along on their way to Egypt. The brothers decided that here was an even better way to get rid of Joseph!

For twenty pieces of silver they sold him as a slave. Now the traders would take him far away. The brothers thought they would never see Joseph again.

Some animal's blood spread on Joseph's coat would make Jacob believe that a wild beast had killed his dearest son, and he would never guess what really had happened. The plot against Joseph seemed to work without a flaw!

Poor Joseph! – a slave in a foreign land, despised and forsaken! The faithful and obedient son, who loved and served God with his whole heart, had come to the lowest depths of suffering and shame!

But Joseph knew his heavenly Father would never forsake him. And his faith grew stronger as his trials grew worse.

Joseph served as a slave for six years and then spent seven years in prison for something he didn't do. But at last, God rewarded his faith in a marvellous way. Suddenly...

...Joseph was made a great prince of Egypt as a result of his interpreting one of the Pharaoh's dreams. And because of Joseph's God-given wisdom and ability he was made ruler over all the land of Egypt, second only to the king himself.

Through seven years of bountiful harvests, Joseph stored up food in great storehouses for the Lord had told him that famine was coming.

And famine came! In every land fields and pastures scorched under the hot sun. There was no food anywhere for the cattle, or for the people. And Joseph's brothers in Canaan were hungry along with the rest.

But there was food stored up in Egypt! And when Jacob's sons heard about it, they came all the long way from Canaan and waited in line to ask for help.

They bowed before Joseph, the great prince of Egypt, without guessing at all that this was their brother. How strange Joseph must have felt when he recognized his brothers. The dreams that had made them so angry had actually come true! God himself had caused it to happen!

And when Joseph finally told his brothers who he was and forgave them for the way they had treated him, the brothers could see that Joseph was blessed because he obeyed God. But this wasn't something that happened overnight. Joseph's whole life had led up to this...

As a child, Joseph had loved his father and learned to obey him.

As a young man, God had blessed Joseph's obedience and made him a favourite son.

Even when he was in chains, Joseph trusted the Lord.

And because of his unwavering faith in God, Joseph received honor and respect all the rest of his life.

And if we today meet trial and trouble with the same trust and obedience to God, we can look forward with great expectations to that wonderful day of our reward. For God's Word says:

*"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)*