

# The Pentateuch

LESSON  
TEN

## Joseph and His Brothers Discussion Forum



THIRD MILLENNIUM

MINISTRIES

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

For videos, study guides and other resources, visit Third Millennium Ministries at [thirdmill.org](http://thirdmill.org).

© 2014 by Third Millennium Ministries

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, Third Millennium Ministries, Inc., 316 Live Oaks Blvd., Casselberry, Florida 32707.

Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture quotations are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 International Bible Society. Used by Permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

### **ABOUT THIRD MILLENNIUM MINISTRIES**

Founded in 1997, Third Millennium Ministries is a non-profit Evangelical Christian ministry dedicated to providing:

#### **Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.**

Our goal is to offer free Christian education to hundreds of thousands of pastors and Christian leaders around the world who lack sufficient training for ministry. We are meeting this goal by producing and globally distributing an unparalleled multimedia seminary curriculum in English, Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, and Spanish. Our curriculum is also being translated into more than a dozen other languages through our partner ministries. The curriculum consists of graphic-driven videos, printed instruction, and internet resources. It is designed to be used by schools, groups, and individuals, both online and in learning communities.

Over the years, we have developed a highly cost-effective method of producing award-winning multimedia lessons of the finest content and quality. Our writers and editors are theologically-trained educators, our translators are theologically-astute native speakers of their target languages, and our lessons contain the insights of hundreds of respected seminary professors and pastors from around the world. In addition, our graphic designers, illustrators, and producers adhere to the highest production standards using state-of-the-art equipment and techniques.

In order to accomplish our distribution goals, Third Millennium has forged strategic partnerships with churches, seminaries, Bible schools, missionaries, Christian broadcasters and satellite television providers, and other organizations. These relationships have already resulted in the distribution of countless video lessons to indigenous leaders, pastors, and seminary students. Our websites also serve as avenues of distribution and provide additional materials to supplement our lessons, including materials on how to start your own learning community.

Third Millennium Ministries is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) corporation. We depend on the generous, tax-deductible contributions of churches, foundations, businesses, and individuals. For more information about our ministry, and to learn how you can get involved, please visit [www.thirdmill.org](http://www.thirdmill.org)

# Contents

<b>Question 1:</b> Why is it important for evangelicals to become familiar with critical How is the story of Joseph organized in Genesis 37– 50?.....	1
<b>Question 2:</b> Why did Moses interrupt the Joseph story with the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38?.....	2
<b>Question 3:</b> What were the causes of disharmony between Joseph and his brothers?.....	4
<b>Question 4:</b> What should the tribes of Israel have learned from the story of reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers? .....	6
<b>Question 5:</b> How would Joseph’s last words have motivated the Israelites to enter the Promised Land and possess it?.....	8
<b>Question 6:</b> How would the Joseph stories have encouraged national unity among the tribes of Israel?.....	10
<b>Question 7:</b> In what ways would the Joseph stories have fostered diversity among the tribes of Israel in Moses’ day? .....	11
<b>Question 8:</b> What are some major themes that can be found within the Joseph stories? .....	12
<b>Question 9:</b> What are some practical ways we can apply the Joseph stories to our lives today? .....	15
<b>Question 10:</b> How does the story of Joseph encourage us to remain faithful to God even in the midst of trials? .....	17

# The Pentateuch

## Lesson Ten: Joseph and His Brothers

### Discussion Forum

With

Dr. Stephen J. Bramer  
Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.  
Dr. Brandon D. Crowe  
Prof. Thomas Egger  
Rev. Michael J. Glodo  
Dr. Douglas Gropp

Dr. Craig S. Keener  
Dr. David T. Lamb  
Dr. John Oswalt  
Dr. Tom Petter  
Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.  
Dr. Scott Redd

Dr. Douglas Stuart  
Dr. David Talley  
Rev. Dr. Michael Walker  
Dr. Larry J. Waters

### Question 1:

**Why is it important for evangelicals to become familiar with critical  
How is the story of Joseph organized in Genesis 37– 50?**

#### **Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

When we take a look at the broader literary structure of the story of Joseph, it's actually quite different from the rest of the book of Genesis. When you think about, say, the section on Abraham, you get a very strong sense that these are individual episodes but that the episodes only fit together very loosely; same thing with the story of Jacob. But by the time you come to the story of Joseph, what we find is what many people call a "novella," actually a short story... And what's wonderful about this is that this story rises and falls just like you would imagine most stories do. It begins with some kind of initial problem in ... the disharmony among the brothers, but then that disharmony is resolved at the end of the story in chapters 47–50 where the brothers are harmonious together. It's really lovely to see that that creates bookends then on this entire novella, this entire short story given over to Joseph. As you move forward in that you get a sort of rising action where things become a little more complicated in chapter 38–41 because this is where Joseph is rising to power, but it creates threats for the brothers. The brothers are not really happy about this. I mean, Joseph's rise to power in Egypt is going to threaten them... But then when you come to the end of the story, the next to the last section of the story in chapter 47, what you have is Joseph ruling, but in this case while he's ruling in Egypt, it's to the benefit of his brothers. So, you can see the contrast — the beginning and end and then these middle sections as well. And then in the very center of the story you have this very dramatic time, this poignant moment when Joseph and his brothers are actually reconciled in chapters 42–47. It's complicated in the sense that Joseph keeps testing them to see what kinds of people they are, but at the same time it ends up with reconciliation. So, there's this rise of tension and a turning point in the center and a flow down to the resolution of that tension, and that creates a unified story throughout all of these chapters that focus on Joseph and his brothers.

**Dr. Craig S. Keener**

One of the beautiful things about the Joseph story is how, in a brilliant literary way, it's interwoven, in a sense, with the Moses story and sets up for the Moses story, which again, is a reason I think that the stories in the Pentateuch belong together, because Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, whereas Moses, his family are slaves and they see to making sure that he's rescued. Joseph ends up being exalted as vizier over Egypt, but Moses, who is in a high position in Egypt, ends up identifying with the slaves. Joseph ends up marrying the daughter of the priest of On. Moses ends up marrying the daughter of the priest of Midian. Moses finds refuge among the Midianites. It's the Midianites who sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt. And you see these contrasts between what God used to get Israel to Egypt and what God used to get Israel out of Egypt; even the economy being built up through Joseph, and the plagues devastating the economy through Moses, even sometimes the small details like Joseph gets the title of being a father to Pharaoh, whereas Moses is a son to Pharaoh's daughter. And one thing, I think, that illustrates to us is that God works in different ways with different people and in different times, and we should be alright with that. We don't have to look at some model and say we have to be like that. God uses us in different ways, and that's good.

**Question 2:****Why did Moses interrupt the Joseph story with the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38?****Dr. David T. Lamb**

As you're reading through the story of Joseph in Genesis, you find out at the end of chapter 37 that Joseph has been sold by his brothers into slavery. Chapter 38, we have the story of Judah, one of Joseph's brothers, and Tamar. It's a little bit of an interruption to the story. It's kind of strange... When we get to Genesis 39, we find out that Joseph's now a slave in Egypt. His master Potiphar has a wife. Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph. This test of sexual temptation Joseph passes; he does not succumb to the wiles of Potiphar's wife. As we go back, we see that Joseph's brother, Judah, has a similar sexual temptation test and he fails. Judah's wife has just died, and he encounters a prostitute who he ends up sleeping with. Now, we find out later that Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, has become pregnant. Judah says, "Let's kill her." Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, decides to send some precious things that were given to her as collateral because, as the story turns out, Tamar was the prostitute that Judah had slept with. When Judah realizes that he was the father of this child, he says, "Tamar is more righteous than I." It's an amazing statement. Previously in the story, Judah has not done anything right. The next thing Judah does in the story is he basically sacrifices himself for his younger brother, Benjamin, when Joseph has orchestrated a scenario to put Benjamin, to keep Benjamin as a slave. It's an amazing thing. What happened? He failed the sexual temptation test, but he somehow learned something about piety, ironically, from his daughter-in-law who was dressed up as a prostitute. As we take this story into the New Testament, we find

out that the very first woman mentioned in the New Testament — it's not Eve, and it's not Sarah or Rebekah — it's Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah. And I think it tells us something about the gospel, how God is at work in fallen people. And who is the tribe that Jesus came from? Well, that's Judah. David comes from the tribe of Judah. Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah. God is at work in fallen people. And I think it's an amazing story. Judah failed the test, but he was able to learn a lesson from it, and we see God's grace in the midst of that anyway.

**Dr. Craig S. Keener**

The story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 is very carefully arranged. First of all, it creates a lot of suspense — I mean, you leave Joseph off, he's become a slave in Egypt — but, it also serves another purpose. I think it challenges a double standard, because in Genesis 38 Judah gives way to sexual sin. In Genesis 39, Joseph resists sexual sin. And so you have a contrast that shows that, contrary to what you might expect in ancient Near Eastern culture, God expects men to behave sexually pure just as he expects women to behave in a sexually pure way. But there's even more than that when you look at the story as a whole, because in Genesis 37, the brother who takes the lead in selling Joseph into slavery is Judah. And eventually Judah's behavior catches up with him; his sin finds him out, so that in Genesis 38 he's still not behaving correctly. His first son sins, and the Lord strikes him dead. And of course, some people have said, well, you know, this is an immoral filthy story, but actually it's not. There are some really important morals there, one of which right up front is, don't do evil in the sight of the Lord like Ur did. Then Onan is supposed raise up a seed for his brother, and the point of that is that in that culture it was expected that if one brother dies without having children, without having an heir, well, the wife is still supposed to be provided for, and there's supposed to be children who are supposed to be the heir, so the brother is supposed to go in and raise up a seed for him. But the eldest was to get the double portion, twice as much as any other brother, and as long as Ur has no descendants, then Onan gets the double portion. So, Onan is greedy and he spills his seed on the ground so that there won't be an heir. And he doesn't care about his brother's honor, he doesn't care about the custom, he doesn't care about caring for his sister-in-law, because she's going to be provided for if there's an heir. So, he spills his seed on the ground; he does evil in God's sight. God strikes him. Well, now Judah is afraid, so Judah says, okay, well, I 'm not going to give my youngest. But he doesn't even tell Tamar. He just sends her back to her father's house, and she's waiting for years until the youngest, Shelah, grows up. And so, finally, she realizes she's been tricked because Shelah is grown up. She disguises herself as a prostitute. Judah stops, and he doesn't have any cash with him, so to speak. He ends up giving her his staff and his signet ring, and then she disappears with them. And when she gets pregnant, he says, bring her out and let her be burned; she sends the staff and the signet ring. He's exposed as the one who got her pregnant, and he said, "She's more righteous than I." She doesn't get burned. But the point is that something happened to Judah at that point. It's not that Tamar did right but that Judah did worse, because he was not only a sinner, he was a hypocrite too. And later Judah acts differently. Joseph has received from Pharaoh his signet ring. The robe that they took from Joseph, well, now he's given a new robe by Pharaoh; he's exalted

as vizier over Egypt. But when Joseph is testing his brothers to find out if they've changed, and he says he's going to take Benjamin as a slave, Judah, the very one who sold Joseph into slavery says, "No, let me be the slave in his place." Judah has changed. Genesis 38 is very important because it shows that sometimes, through hardships or shame or other things, God gets our attention and turns us around. And it's a story about repentance and family reconciliation.

### **Dr. Brandon D. Crowe**

As you read through Genesis, you come across sometimes some odd stories, and one of those is the story of Judah and Tamar, which occurs right next to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. And, although this story could lead to some questions that may pique our curiosity, we should be assured that this story is not there simply to pique our curiosity, but it's there to tell us something about God's unfolding plan of redemption. What's interesting about this story is Judah, in his encounter with Tamar, is shown to be in the wrong, whereas Tamar is shown to be in the right. She does something that appears to be deceptive, yet after this encounter, Judah identifies Tamar as righteous. And we might ask, why would this odd encounter between Judah and Tamar lead to this assessment? And the reason appears to be, because of Tamar's interest in continuing the promise that was given to Abraham. She was more righteous than Judah in this context because she was interested in continuing the family line of Judah, which turns out to be the most important line for the Messiah from God's people, tracing back to Abraham. And so, when we come to the New Testament, we actually see that Tamar is in the genealogy of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, and we can trace this back to this odd encounter in the middle of Genesis. And what this shows us is that God had been working out his plan already in Genesis to establish the line of the Messiah through the tribe of Judah, and this scene in the middle of Genesis shows us that God already had that purpose in mind, and he was ensuring that his plan was being worked out, and he used the efforts of Tamar to this end.

### **Question 3:**

#### **What were the causes of disharmony between Joseph and his brothers?**

### **Dr. David T. Lamb**

When I teach the story of Joseph, we always have an interesting discussion about what was behind this tension. I mean, if you think you have bad siblings, let's assume that, let's *hope* that your siblings have never sold you into slavery. I mean, Joseph had sibling problems. So, when we talk about this, we see basically four causes of the tension between Joseph and his brothers. In Genesis 37 Joseph has these amazing dreams, and he's so excited to tell his brothers about them and how, in his dreams, the equivalence of his brothers all end up bowing down to him. And the students always say, "Well, Joseph seems kind of like a spoiled brat." And we've got to say Joseph is one of the major factors contributing to the tension. But one of the problems is Joseph's father, Jacob, has given Joseph this special coat, which has either got bright

colors or long sleeves, depending on which translation you follow, but it's a special coat. He practices favoritism, which you would think Jacob would know the problems with that because he experienced that from his own parents. But Jacob is contributing to the problem. And then obviously Joseph's brothers are contributing to the problem because they could have just shrugged off their, maybe, arrogant or spoiled younger brother and said, "Well, that's just Joseph." But they get angry, and they decide they want to kill him. But then the fourth character, which I always find as a little bit interesting, is who gave Joseph these dreams? Well, God ultimately was behind this. So Joseph, Jacob, Joseph's brothers, and ultimately God. And as we get to the end of Joseph's story in Genesis 50, we realize Joseph sees the sovereign hand of God in his whole tragic, amazing story. And we see this back in Genesis 37; God is ultimately behind it. As we encounter it also in Genesis 50, God is ultimately behind this.

**Dr. Scott Redd**

The causes of disharmony between Joseph and his brothers relate to very understandable circumstances. Here you have a wealthy father who is approaching older age, and his sons are mindful of that and mindful of his inheritance and how it will be divided up amongst the sons. Of course, in the ancient Near Eastern tradition, the oldest son would get the greater portion of the inheritance. But as we see in the story of Joseph, he actually is the one who is receiving the most favor from his father, and so jealousy arises amongst all of the brothers. Now, Joseph doesn't help his case very much in the way in which he blithely reports to them his visions of victory and success over them, and so of course that jealousy is heightened because of the favor that, at least, he seems to be shown, not merely by his father, but by God through these possibly prophetic dreams. So, the disharmony that we see develop amongst the brothers is quite understandable, and yet it also sets the stage for what we're going to see is a wonderful story of reconciliation that will be a model for God's people in the years to come.

**Dr. John Oswalt**

When we look at the Joseph narrative, we see the confirmation of a statement made that there are no functional families in the Bible, they're all dysfunctional! And certainly there is some truth in that comment. The disharmony between Joseph and his brothers begins, first of all, in parental favoritism. You would think that Jacob would have learned the problems with parental favoritism because of his father and mother playing off him and his brother against each other. But the truth is, poor parenting often breeds poor parenting, and so here we have Jacob clearly favoring his eleventh son over all the others, and he clearly set up Joseph in a rather tragic situation. But there's another factor, and that is Joseph's lack of wisdom. He received those two amazing dreams, and had he been more than seventeen, maybe he would have kept his mouth shut about that, but instead he goes out and says, "Hey, guys, what do you think those dreams mean?" As if there was any question. And we're told by the Scripture, "and his brothers hated him." Well, their hatred is not justified. Hatred is never justified. On the other hand, it's understandable. So, both from Jacob's side and his favoritism and from Joseph's side in his lack of wisdom, the situation is set up.



**Question 4:****What should the tribes of Israel have learned from the story of reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers?****Dr. Scott Redd**

The reconciliation that we see take place between Joseph and his brothers provided a model of hope for the people of Israel as they were coming out of slavery, as they were anticipating their conquest in the land, and as, in the meantime, they're wandering in the wilderness as one people. Here we see brothers, who are terribly divided and terribly at war with one another, not only being reconciled but celebrating one another at the end of the story, and being able to share in their father's inheritance as one reconciled family. Likewise, the Israelites coming out of Egypt might have been concerned about the inheritance they were to receive in the Promised Land. How would the land be distributed? Who would receive the best portion? And so, you can imagine that there would be a diversity of opinion as to who should receive the best of the father's inheritance, and it's possible, we know from the biblical account that tensions did arise. And yet, what we see in the story of Joseph is that, while God's people are divided by these tribes, tribes that have their own unique gifts and responsibilities, they should also be reconciled as one family, one family under God, a covenant people.

**Dr. John Oswalt**

Genesis 50 is surely one of the most poignant chapters in the whole Bible as we see the interrelationship of Joseph and his brothers. And when we think about why Moses would have included that, and why he included it in that way, I think it's clear that there are lessons there for the tribes of Israel. The brothers, when their father dies, assume that Joseph is now going to take revenge; they're certain of it. And there's a degree in which that is projection. They're sort of saying, "Well, that's what we would do. We would get even if we had the chance, so obviously he's going to do that." And I don't think they are prepared for the degree in which Joseph's relationship with God had changed his whole perspective. And his amazing statement, "Am I in the place of God?" I don't have to get revenge on you guys. My life was never in your hands. My life was always in God's hands. Yeah, you were agents in it all, and you had bad motives in it all, but your bad motives were not the thing that really ran the program. And I think Moses is saying to them, and to us, that it's possible for us to have that altered focus where we no longer see the other person as the enemy that we have to get revenge on, but that we can truly believe what Paul says in the New Testament, "Vengeance is mine... says the Lord." If we have really placed our lives in God's hands, then we don't need to get our own back because we can trust God; he's going to take care of us. And, I think, had that idea ever prevailed among the tribes of Israel, you wouldn't have had the struggles between Judah and all Israel that begins to emerge almost immediately during the time of Joshua and continues on and on and on. It's always the assuming of bad motives. It's always the necessity, "I gotta get my own back," and never coming to the place of saying, "I'm not in the place of God. I'm in God's hands and I can trust him."

**Dr. Tom Petter**

There are a lot of compelling stories in the Pentateuch, but the Joseph story is, to me, it's got to take the prize just by virtue of the fact that it's the longest of the narratives in Genesis. I mean, of all the patriarchs, Joseph gets a big chunk of the parchment, as it were, of the space. And the Joseph story is one of, of course, strife between brothers — "been there, done that" — and by the time you hit Genesis 37, you've seen it over and over again: the brothers who don't get along, and a little brother who gets the inheritance at the expense of the older brother. And now, we're turning up the notch quite a bit because it's way down... you've got twelve brothers here, and almost down to the last one, this guy has these dreams, and he says, "I'm going to rule over you." And of course that speaks to Israel, to the audience later on because now they're forming their identity as tribal groupings. It's no longer the brothers, it's a full-on... It went from debate of the house of the father, to the clan, the *mishpachah* or "the family," now it's a tribe, right? And so there's a lot of teaching going on here, looking back at the story of Joseph... All the injustices of Joseph's life fit into a scheme so that Joseph becomes the savior of his brothers. And without Joseph saving the brothers, they all die, there is no line of Judah, there is no Jesus, there is no David. He is the savior of Israel, of the rest of his brothers. And so, you come to the end of the story, and the brothers finally realize who Joseph is, and Joseph has this magnanimous response to them: "Yeah, you were a bunch of crooks to me. You absolutely were. But God..." And he elevates the game and he says, "You meant it for evil, but God is using it for good. Look at where we are now." And I think for Moses' audience, when tribal warfare is the name of the game — it's the "M.O.," *modus operandi* — when you think of that, what Moses is trying to teach by giving this story to the people is, if Joseph, one of your ancestors, was able to forgive his brothers, you can certainly overlook the tribal disputes that are sure to come among yourselves. And unfortunately, though, the call was not heeded. You read in the book of Judges where you're supposed to have this tribal coalition... If one nation is in trouble, every other nation has to go help. Well, in Judges 5 there is a big fight with the Canaanites, and they need every hand on deck, as it were, and you've got Reuben doesn't show up; you've got a whole bunch of Judah; you've got a whole bunch of them that don't answer the call. And so it's very sad. So, the deductive, the teaching dimension of the Pentateuch, especially in Genesis, is lost on the early Israelite tribes in the land. But it's not lost in the whole picture of redemption because Joseph becomes a savior figure, right? He becomes the savior that puts himself through sufferings in order to save his brothers. And of course, this will be fulfilled in the suffering servant who comes to save us, those who were not worthy to be saved, right? They didn't deserve to be saved, the brothers of Joseph, and neither do we, because while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

### Question 5:

## How would Joseph's last words have motivated the Israelites to enter the Promised Land and possess it?

#### Prof. Thomas Egger

The book of Genesis ends with a prediction, you might say. It's Joseph speaking to his brothers and he's looking ahead. There they are in Egypt, and if you think about how that story has unfolded — the Joseph story, where Joseph has risen to power and great prominence and fame, renown in Egypt, he has great favor with the pharaoh there, and he and his broader family receive this choice land, the land of Goshen, to dwell in, and he's going to provide for them and their families — it looks as if they're going to have a great cushy life, like maybe Egypt is their destination. And yet, at the end of Joseph's life, he summons his brothers and their families and he says to them, "God will surely visit you and bring you up from this place." In spite of all the splendor, the power, the provision, the recognition that they have in this place, it is not the place, ultimately, to which God has called their family and promised to them. And so, he uses this interesting, in Hebrew the grammar is interesting. It's a repetition of the same word twice for emphasis. So he says "*paqod yipqod*" — "God will *surely visit* you." And he says that twice there at the end. He makes them promise that when God does visit them and bring them up from the land, they'll take his bones with them. When the book of Exodus then opens and God appears to Moses at the burning bush and calls him to be the deliverer of the people from the land of Egypt, God uses that same grammatical construction with that same verb, and he says, "I now *surely visit* you and what has been done to you in Egypt." And the people, in chapter 4, when they hear this same language — it says, "When they heard that God had now *surely visited* his people, they believed and they worshipped." And everything that unfolds after that, now, is in fulfillment of this great promise and expectation. Now, did the people have that hope alive the whole time they were in Egypt because of Joseph's promise? Had that promise kind of fallen out of popularity, or had they stopped repeating it to themselves? We don't know, but when Moses comes and announces the day of visitation has come, they know that this now... the story is off and running. The long-promised event has come. God is visiting his people. And finally, when they're on their way out of Egypt, after the death of the firstborn in chapter 13, it reminds the reader that they stopped, they took up the bones of Joseph, who had been embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt, they take up his bones and Joseph's bones go out with them. And his words of promise are repeated. Just as he had said, "God will surely visit you and bring you up from this place."

#### Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

The last words of Joseph to his brothers in the book of Genesis, in chapter 50, are very important for understanding the emphasis of the story of Joseph and his brothers. But often when people think about the last words that Joseph spoke, their minds go to 50:20-21 where Joseph says, "Now, I know all of you, you did these things for your own evil purposes, but God meant this for good, so don't worry about it. It's okay." We naturally gravitate toward that passage, verses 20-21, because they are easily

applied to the Christian life, like in passages like Romans 8:28 that God works all things together for good to those who love him. And that's fine, and that is what Joseph was saying... But those are not the last words that Joseph speaks to his brothers. Actually, the last words are found in 50:24-25, and in those verses, this is what Joseph says. He says, "Now, God is going to bring you up out of this land, and I want you to be sure to bring my bones up out of this land with you." And, in fact, in verse 25, he makes the brothers swear that they will do this. And so, the focus of the last words of Joseph in the book of Genesis are not so much on "God meant this for good," the goodness of God's providence, but rather on the hope that Israel is going to one day leave Egypt and go to the Promised Land. In fact, Joseph has his brothers swear that they will do this together, bringing even his body, his bones with them to the Promised Land. And what this emphasizes, of course, is that Joseph is looking at his brothers and saying, "Now, you're going to do this. You're going to leave this land of Egypt and go to the Promised Land together. Swear that that is the case." And they do. Those are the last words of Joseph, and they emphasize the main theme in the story of Joseph and his brothers: the unity of the patriarchs of Israel as they leave Egypt and go to the Promised Land.

### **Dr. Douglas Stuart**

God's ultimate plan for Israel as a family when they were in Egypt was to bring them out of Egypt. He left them there for a lot of years. They learned a lot of patience if they were paying attention, because they were there for 430 years the Bible tells us. But he finally brought them out, and it was his plan that they should come into the Promised Land that he had originally promised to Abraham, then again to Isaac, then again to Jacob, and so on, and that they could count on his promise to give them that land that they didn't deserve. Now, it's a parallel to our own situation. Who are we if we belong to Christ, if we've accepted him as Savior and Lord? We're people who have become citizens of heaven. We aren't there yet, but it's a promise. We've got a place that we're going to join God in, the place he's always been in forever, and he's inviting us to come and live with him in his place. So, the Israelites are kind of prefiguring that, they're getting a taste, a touch of what a wonderful thing it is to have God provide a place for you. Now, Joseph figures into that in a special way with his very last words in the final chapter of the book of Genesis. And those words are, "Promise me." He says to his brothers on his deathbed, "Promise me you will bring my bones, my remains, out of this land and bring them up with you when you go into the Promised Land. Now, that was three hundred and some years later that it actually happened. It was a lot of years later that the promise was fulfilled. But, the Egyptians were very good embalmers; they were the best embalmers in the ancient world. They knew how to preserve a body, which is why we have so many Egyptian mummies still today, and we study them, and we look at them, and we can even tell in some instances the contents of what they were eating for their last meal. So, they did the same for Joseph, and in the form of a well-preserved Egyptian mummy, he rode on a cart up to the Promised Land of Canaan just as God had promised. Well, what's the point of it all? The point of it is that God's a fulfiller of promises. When God promises you something, it's going to happen. It's true. And God's promises from things like that, that even Joseph could be buried in the Promised Land because one

day, one day, centuries for his body, into the future, he would be part of the people who made it to the Promised Land. He'd be there only in his dead physical body, but he believed that promise, and so he made them promise him in their human promise that they wouldn't forget God's great promise.

### **Question 6:**

### **How would the Joseph stories have encouraged national unity among the tribes of Israel?**

#### **Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

The Joseph stories would have encouraged national unity among the tribes of Israel because it's a great story of how fraternal strife developed and how fraternal reconciliation was achieved. And the beginning of the story, where perhaps Joseph's arrogance about his future destiny as a ruler over them caused fraternal strife, at the end of the Joseph story, we see Joseph humble and accepting God's sovereign hand through the circumstances. And perhaps you would find there a lesson against pridefulness, depending on what tribe one was from. But we also see the humbling of the brothers. They see through their youngest brother, who was appointed eventually to be an authority over them, they see how God's sovereign hand had preserved them from famine in the Promised Land. And so, their humiliation, their humbling themselves at the end of the Joseph story, would show those other tribes that fraternal strife was not the way to go but rather fraternal unity. And above all things, for them, their own powerful brother's professed humbling of himself would have been a great example to them of what humility was like.

#### **Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.**

The Joseph stories would have contributed to unity among the tribes of Israel by giving them a paradigm of what God wanted. They were not to be jealous of one another; they were not to be deceptive; they were to be unified. And the change that we see in Judah goes a long way toward driving that point home, because Judah changes remarkably. And then Joseph forgives him. So, there's a place for change of character, and there's also a place for forgiveness even when you'd been wronged. And Joseph and Judah became two major tribes in the nations, and so they become a good example of what God wants in their offspring and their descendants, and the whole covenant community.

#### **Dr. Scott Redd**

The Joseph stories encouraged national unity amongst the tribes of Israel by giving them the story of their beginnings, a story that's marked by both betrayal and sin and deep wickedness, but also by righteousness, God's provision and reconciliation. They know that they're a diverse group of people; they know that they have diverse beginnings and that, ultimately, they'll have diverse ends, according to the prophetic song of Jacob at the end of the book of Genesis. But in the midst of that, God blesses them as a people, as we even see in the Joseph story. He blesses them and he

reconciles them even though they fall into such deep hostility towards one another. God is faithful even though they are not. And so, they should be united under that sign of God's faithfulness, united as they see that expressed in the Joseph story, and they too should seek unity, not only in the wilderness wandering, but in the conquest and the distribution of the land that is to come.

### **Question 7:**

**In what ways would the Joseph stories have fostered diversity among the tribes of Israel in Moses' day?**

#### **Dr. Scott Redd**

The Joseph stories fostered not merely a sense of unity, but also a sense of diversity amongst the Israelites receiving the text in Moses' day. We see in the Joseph stories the full realization that God's people were a diverse group. They had different interests; they had different strengths. According to the blessings in the song of Jacob, at the end of the book of Genesis, we actually see that they'll have different futures. And so it was, from the beginning, a part of God's people that they would be diverse and that they would have diverse ways and means in which they interact in God's covenant. So, God's people in Israel and the people of Israel should also recognize that, as descendants of these patriarchs, as descendants of Joseph and his brothers, they too were a diverse group. They would have different strengths, different responsibilities within the people of God, particularly the Levites. And as a result, they would have different futures in ways in which they interact and the ways in which they serve God over the course of redemptive history. So, they should not merely acknowledge, but they should celebrate their diversity, and yet see in the midst of that that they are also one people under God.

#### **Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

As important as the theme of unity among the people of God is in the story of Joseph and his brothers, we have to also remember that the reason unity is emphasized is because they were diverse. And diversity, in fact, in this story of Joseph and his brothers is not just negative, it's also positive. For instance, in chapter 48 and 49, these are the times when Jacob gives his blessings to his children. Chapter 48 is about Joseph, and it's divided. In fact, Joseph gets the double portion of Ephraim and Manasseh. Ephraim and Manasseh are grandchildren of Jacob, and they're treated as equal to the other tribes. Now, that's diversity, a problem for all the other uncles, as it were, of the other tribes who should have been treated as doubly important as Ephraim and Manasseh by common sense, but chapter 48 tells it very plainly that this is what God and the patriarch Jacob ordained. And then when you go through chapter 49 you find that every single one of the tribes is given a particular role, a particular place, certain things are said about them, positive and negative. And these blessings that Jacob gave to his sons, actually in many respects, establish the fact that there's going to be diversity among them, and if the people of God, as they move toward the Promised Land in the days of Moses, are going to live according to what God wants

for them, they're not just going to be together as if all of them are going to be the same, as if all of them are going to be living in exactly the same place with all the same responsibilities and all the same privileges. The words of Jacob both to Joseph — Ephraim and Manasseh in chapter 48, and then chapter 49 to the rest of the sons of Jacob — those chapters prove that there's going to be diversity among them, but in that diversity they are to be unified, as the rest of the story tells us.

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

I believe the Joseph stories would have fostered diversity within the tribes of Israel because in the blessings that Jacob imparts to each of his sons individually, there are unique blessings. And so, those blessings from Jacob actually become, if you will, tribal personalities. You look at each of the tribes of Israel throughout their history as reflecting characteristics and attributes of Jacob's blessings. And so, that would have been a diversity that they would have embraced. They would have also embraced the diversity of status within the family because they would have learned the lesson from the strife of the Joseph story that they should not perceive one another as rivals. Judah would have an exalted role later on, but all the tribes would have the blessing of their covenant father, Jacob, and should embrace the tribal identities of their brother tribes as well.

**Question 8:**

**What are some major themes that can be found within the Joseph stories?**

**Dr. Larry J. Waters**

The major themes in the life of Joseph are made up, I think, of about five. First of all, I think his life. And one of the themes that we find is that his life was pivotal. Wherever he went and whatever he did, the area and what he did, changed everything. When he had the dreams, it changed the family; it changed the men that were in the prison with him; it changed Egypt when he had the dreams and interpreted them for Pharaoh. Very interesting that he is very pivotal in the story itself of how God is working out the redemption of his people. Secondly, I think that his life is exemplifying the idea of the theme of purity because he overcomes temptation; he overcomes hatred. He is a forgiving person. And this purity of his life, this integrity of his life, just flows out of the story itself. Also, I think we find that his life is very providential. Providential. And there are two passages of Scripture for this, which I think are very key to understanding the providential side of it, and that is Genesis 45:5-8. In verse 5 it says,

**Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life (Genesis 45:5, NASB).**

In verse 7 it says,

**God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance (Genesis 45:7, NASB).**

And in verse 8,

**Therefore it was not you who sent me here, but God [sent me] (Genesis 45:8, NASB).**

And then, of course... one of the most familiar passages is Genesis 50:20:

**As for you, you meant [it] evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive (Genesis 50:20, NASB).**

This belief in God's destiny for him, this belief in the providence of God flows all the way through the story, but all the way through the Bible as well, even to Romans 8:28: "For God works all things together for good to them who love God and those who are called according to his purpose." Alistair Begg said this:

**An awareness of providence enables us to treat others with humility — even those who have injured or wronged us. When we recognize that God is ultimately in control of our circumstances, we can release others and their actions to Him and be free of the bitterness and resentment that rots the soul. Joseph's profound understanding of providence was the key to his attitude toward his brothers and, indeed, toward life itself.**

It's also prophetic. I think his life is very prophetic, and we talked about that earlier, and that is that his request to carry his bones was a prophecy of the exodus. It was also, I think, some feel, a prophecy of the resurrection; he wants to be in the land so that he will be resurrected with his people. And then finally, I think his life is, and shows the theme of, being a picture, being an example so that a life well lived, his life and lifestyle are a life worth living, worth emulating. Our character should never be altered by our circumstances. I think that's part of his story. And when tempted with Potiphar's wife and to do harm to his brothers, Gene Getz said this:

**In spite of Joseph's limited knowledge of God's laws, in spite of the bad example both in his family and in Egypt, in spite of his own natural desires and tendencies, and perhaps most significant, in spite of the natural opportunity to cooperate in a relatively safe, secret sin, Joseph still resisted.**



He is also our example of great forgiveness. Now, Donald Barnhouse said this:

**To see God in all things, both good and evil, enables us to forgive easily those who injure us.**

So, his life has themes throughout it, but five, I think, are very key: he's pivotal, he is pure, he is providential, he is prophetic, and he is a picture of a life that we should live. I think all of those are applicable to our lives.

**Rev. Dr. Michael Walker**

When preparing to teach or preach a sermon series on the story of Joseph, there are a few things that really rise to the surface as being of special importance from this story. The first would be the importance of trusting in God's providence. We've all found ourselves in circumstances that were extremely challenging, and we have probably all said to ourselves, "I can't imagine how something good could come from this." And if we have had that experience, Joseph had that experience so much more deeply or intensely. He found himself sold into slavery in Egypt. There, found himself wrongly imprisoned. And his response was to trust in God's providence. He didn't despair. He didn't lose hope. But instead, he responded — and this is the second significant theme — he responded with obedience to God. And his steady obedience to the Lord really paved the way and ends up telling the story of him rescuing the brothers who had sold him into slavery, and so many more, by being God's instrument there in Egypt. And finally, the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation is not only so important to the story of Joseph, you know, but it's so important to the story of every one of our lives and important to the story of every community of followers of Jesus Christ. And when we see or read about Joseph greeting his brothers, and when we imagine the surprise that his brothers had when Joseph reveals himself and their fear, and then experience the power of Joseph's embrace of them, it's a glimpse, it's a taste of what we too can experience when, like Joseph, we trust in the Lord's providence and respond to challenging circumstances with obedience and are willing to extend forgiveness and grace to one another like he has given to us.

**Dr. Douglas Gropp**

The Joseph story is set apart from the other patriarchal narratives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to some extent because Joseph isn't particularly a recipient of that promise that comes to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Rather, it's the twelve sons of Jacob as a whole that are recipients of the promise of the seed, the land and a relationship to the nations. The Joseph story is unusual in that it's a much more extended, involved, inter-tangled story than the shorter stories about the other patriarchs, but it does have one central theme, and that theme is God's preservation of a people for himself. The people are being preserved from the famine, which creates a crisis in the Land of Promise so that they're forced to go into Egypt, so that the promise doesn't seem to be being fulfilled in their case, and Joseph, through his faithfulness, becomes the agent of God achieving his purposes of preserving the life of his people. And this is in spite of the fact of his brothers' treatment of him so that, in a sense, God is favoring

his whole people represented by these twelve patriarchs in spite of their undeserving character in the way they treat Joseph their younger brother.

### **Question 9:**

### **What are some practical ways we can apply the Joseph stories to our lives today?**

#### **Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.**

There are three main ways that we can apply the Joseph stories to our lives today. The first is that through confession of sin, Judah and his brothers confess their sin; through forgiveness, Joseph had to forgive them, we can have unity as the people of God. We're going to hurt one another, and so it's very important that we confess our sin when we do that and that we're willing to forgive others when they confess their sins. And in that way, through that kind of selflessness and commitment to unity, God can produce in us what he wants to see. The second lesson that this story shows us is that people can change; even selfish, cruel, deceptive, unlovable people like Judah can change by the grace of God. But change doesn't come automatically. Sometimes that change will only take place through some very difficult lessons where God forces us to come to grips with who we really are. And that's what Joseph's tests, where he takes his brother through this series of tests, and kind of conjures up images from the past, and they are reminded what they did to their brother. And it must have been very painful for Judah, but he did change, and he came to the point where he was willing to sacrifice his future for the good of daddy's favorite, his new favorite, Benjamin, and for his father, whereas, before, he was ready to kill Joseph. A third important lesson comes from just looking at the experience of Joseph. Joseph was a victim. He was a victim of the jealousy of his brothers. He didn't ask for this kind of conflict. His father set it up by making him his favorite. And so, Joseph was a victim, and he was victimized. And he could have become bitter, but he remained faithful to God through all of these difficulties, even when the situation looked bleak. He was in a prison, God didn't seem to be around, but of course the text tells us that God was with Joseph even in the prison. And Joseph came through all of that because, I think, he remained faithful and loyal to God. He remained moral, did what was right, and trusted God's providence to bring him through, and in the end he was rewarded and blessed for that.

#### **Dr. Stephen J. Bramer**

When I think of the Joseph story, I think of all sorts of practical moral lessons such as resisting temptation and not becoming bitter when someone has something against you. But it seems to me that there's a couple of large practical lessons that we need to learn from the story. God's word always comes true. In Genesis 15, God told Abraham many, many years before that his descendants would be in the land, that it would not be their own for 400 years. And God's word comes true. He takes Abraham's descendants down to Egypt, but God is not surprised by this. God's word will come true. In Genesis 37, Joseph has his dreams, and you just wonder, how in the

world will that ever come true where his brothers, and even his parents, will bow down to him? But we see God's word coming true... I think another thing that we can learn from the Joseph stories is that evil people cannot ultimately thwart God's predicted plan. Evil doesn't make the living of that story easy for the righteous person, but God is so big that even when evil people get involved, God is able to bring about his will. At the end of Genesis, Joseph says to his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." And I think that goes throughout the story, that God is in charge, and he's bringing about his plan, and evil ultimately cannot prevent that. I think another lesson that we can learn from the Joseph story is that our God is a creative God, that he is able to use sin and rebellion and forgetfulness of people and inactivity, and yet he's able to bring all of that into part of his plan. And so, when I'm looking around and wondering just how is this going to work out for God's glory, God can do it if I am willing to trust him. I sometimes say the most common word in heaven will not be "hallelujah" or "praise the Lord," but will be "oh," "Oh!" because when we get to heaven we'll understand how everything in our life actually worked together to accomplish God's purpose.

**Dr. David Talley**

I love the fact that Genesis focuses so much on Joseph's life, and I think there are so many takeaways for us, applications that are beneficial for us as believers today. One of the obvious aspects of Joseph's life, in my opinion, is that he seems to be walking in obedience; he's a godly young man who seems to make good decisions. But often times those decisions end up not working out very well for him. And as we step back and look at his life, it teaches us a very important lesson that, oftentimes, as we walk in obedience, life isn't going to work out the way we want it to, but that does not mean that God is not there behind the scenes accomplishing his purposes. Joseph shares this dream with his brothers, and they get angry with him and they sell him to a slave caravan, and so he ends up in slavery as a result of that. All he's doing is sharing a dream that God had given him, and he ends up in a very bad place. But we step back from the story and we recognize God's at work. God is sending Joseph before his family so that they can eventually have food during a very severe famine that's going to take place back in the land. And while he is down in Egypt, Joseph again runs into a series of problems where he seems to be a godly individual. He flees from Potiphar's wife, and he's doing the right thing there. She falsely accuses him; he ends up in prison. Again, God is behind the scenes. He's the one that's orchestrating all these details. Joseph's trying to be faithful. It's not working out for him, but God is still advancing his purposes. Through these events, Joseph eventually ends up in a very profitable place in the kingdom because he is remembered as one who interprets the dream, and there's a dream that needs to be interpreted, and so Joseph is called forth. God gives him wisdom. He's able to do so, and he rises to power in the land. Now he has the authority to save all of this food that not only is going to save Egypt, but it's going to provide food for his family. And so, his family ends up coming down to Egypt. They don't recognize him. He recognizes them. And at the end of the story we see the greatest lesson of all. Joseph looks at his brothers and he says, "You meant this for evil, but God meant it for good." Joseph was able to sit back and look at the details of his life, which I think would be difficult for many of us to go through, and

he was able to see God's hand in it. And as a result of that, he didn't hate his brothers; he didn't put them to death. Instead, he blessed them. He was good to them because he realized God had been at work all along.

### Question 10:

**How does the story of Joseph encourage us to remain faithful to God even in the midst of trials?**

#### Dr. David T. Lamb

I love the Joseph story. It's one of my favorite parts of Scripture, Genesis 37 to Genesis 50. There's so much that we can learn from the story of Joseph... All of us at points in our lives are going to have crises. Hopefully, your crises will not be as bad as Joseph's. Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery, spent a period of time as a slave... His master's wife tried to seduce him. He resisted the temptation, but because she accused him falsely of basically sexual assault, he was thrown into jail, and he was in jail for a long time. We don't know how the breakdown of the text falls, but we know that from age 17, basically, to age 30 he was either a slave or a prisoner. During this point in time, he gives dream fulfillments to two of Pharaoh's servants, basically a butler and a baker. And he tells the butler, who's the one that gets the good dream fulfillment, "Remember me when you get reinstated." But what happened? The butler forgot him. Yet another series of people that had forgotten Joseph. Joseph had a rough life. And when we're in similar situations, it's easy to blame God, but the text makes it really clear that in the midst of all of Joseph's suffering, God was with him. And I don't know how Joseph knew that, but the narrators make it very clear: God was with Joseph. And, I think, to be asking ourselves in whatever crises we are facing, presumably not nearly as severe as Joseph's, if Joseph could somehow experience God and God's presence in this, we, in whatever crises we are facing, should be able to learn from him and say, "God is with me. I'm going to resist temptation and I'm going to keep focused on my God, and I know that God's dream, his promises, will be fulfilled, but I might have to wait awhile."

#### Dr. John Oswalt

Joseph had gone through one terrible circumstance after another. His father had treated him with favoritism that put him in a bad light with his brothers. He had made some unwise choices in shooting off his mouth to his brothers about his dreams. He had been sold into slavery. When he had been faithful in slavery, his master's wife had lied about him. He ended up in an Egyptian dungeon. And in the dungeon, when he told the dreams of the baker and the butler, and the butler was, in fact, delivered, and Joseph said, "Please remember me," and the butler said, "Oh yes, I'll remember you" — for about thirty seconds. I think most of us, if we think God is with me, then everything's going to work right in my life. If I have troubles, well, that means God isn't with me. But in fact, *in fact*, in all of those bad circumstances — not circumstances that God had caused but circumstances God had permitted — in all

those circumstance, God was at work for Joseph. And somehow Joseph knew that, because when he is a slave of Potiphar he is so trustworthy that Potiphar gives him all the authority in the house. When he is seduced by Potiphar's wife, he says, "How can I do this thing and sin against God?" When he is in the dungeon — Egyptian dungeons were not nice places — where he certainly could be expected to be living in an abyss of self-pity, no, he is trustworthy; he's put in charge of other prisoners. And when he comes in in the morning with breakfast, he's aware that those guys have had a bad night, not absorbed in himself. What that says to me is that we today can have that same experience of God's working in our lives and trust in his working in spite of difficult, painful circumstances that will enable us to be upright and true and faithful, and therefore, God can accomplish his purposes through us.

---

**Dr. Stephen J. Bramer** is Professor and Department Chair of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary.

**Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.** is Department Chair and Professor of Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary.

**Dr. Brandon D. Crowe** is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary.

**Prof. Thomas Egger** is Assistant Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo** is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando Campus.

**Dr. Douglas Gropp** is Associate Academic Dean and Professor of Old Testament at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas, TX.

**Dr. Craig S. Keener** is the F.M. and Ada Thompson Chair of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.

**Dr. David T. Lamb** is Associate Professor of Old Testament at Biblical Theological Seminary.

**Dr. John Oswalt** is the Visiting Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary.

**Dr. Tom Petter** is Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

**Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.** is President of Third Millennium Ministries and Adjunct Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando Campus.

**Dr. Scott Redd** is Campus President of Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington D.C. and Assistant Professor of Old Testament.

**Dr. Douglas Stuart** is Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

**Dr. David Talley** is Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies, and Chair of the Biblical and Theological Studies Old Testament Department at Biola University.

**Rev. Dr. Michael Walker** is Theologian-in-Residence at Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas.

**Dr. Larry J. Waters** is Professor of Biblical Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary and Lead Editor of the seminary's academic journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra*.