I. The Story of Joseph

Theme: The story of Joseph highlights God’s providential care and Joseph’s faithfulness.

Key Verses:

Genesis 41:38  
38 And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?”

Genesis 50:19-20  
19 Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?  
20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”

Introduction

This is the fourth and final quarter in our summer studies in the book of Genesis. Three years ago we looked at the Primeval History – Genesis 1-11. Two summers ago, we studied the life of Abraham, the man of faith, the Friend of God. Last year, we covered the lives of Isaac and Jacob. Like the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the story of Joseph is familiar to most of us. We know about the dreams, the “coat of many colors,” being sold into Egypt, Potiphar’s wife, prison, Pharaoh’s dreams, being raised up, Joseph interacting with his brothers, and so on. These stories are comfortable to us like a pair of old slippers. And that’s the danger. Like a pair of old slippers, sometimes we overlook the deeper meaning of the text and slip back into our comfort zone, relying on our knowledge of the Sunday school stories we’ve known since we were children. In this course, I would like to challenge you to re-read the Joseph story afresh, to look beyond the stories to see what God was doing in redemptive history. For the story of Joseph is one of God’s preserving providence. Not only does it teach us about God, but it also shows us how to live in a pagan world without compromise. These are themes that are repeated time and again throughout Scripture and throughout the church. Let us look upon the story of Joseph with new eyes and listen with new ears to hear the truths contained there.

There are at least three ways to view OT texts; 1) the “Sunday school” way of learning the stories, focusing on the facts; 2) the traditional moralist way of interpretation, where we are to model the good behaviors and shun the bad behaviors – We learn how God works and how we are to respond to him – applying the examples in the text; 3) a typological view where we look at the big picture, the patterns, and look for deeper truths than the merely moral truths. We don’t ignore the facts or the moral messages – in fact we look at them both closely – but the key is looking at the overall flow of Scripture, and the common themes that point us to the larger truth. In this way, we can see that the Joseph story is not simply a series of examples of how to behave or not behave, but it is the story of God’s action in redemptive history. We learn how God acts in history, and we see the patterns repeated, time after time. This helps us learn more about what God has done in history, in Jesus Christ, and how we are to respond. This is different that the moralistic approach, and ultimately, much richer. We will be focusing on this approach during this class.

A. Structure of Genesis 37-50

Remember, Genesis is structured as a series of sections that begin with “These are the generations of …” or “These are the offspring of ….” There are ten such sections in Genesis, plus the creation account, for a total of eleven sections. This quarter, we will be looking at sections 11, the genealogical accounts of Jacob (37:2-50:26). The main character in the
genealogy of Jacob is Joseph, and so for simplicity sake, I will often refer to Genesis 37-50 as the “Joseph Story.”

In high school, I learned how to write a “five-paragraph paper.” The first paragraph introduced the subject and stated the thesis you were trying to establish. The next three paragraphs developed that thesis; each paragraph had a specific point you were trying to make. The final paragraph was the conclusion where you put it all together and demonstrated that your sub points added up to support your thesis. That’s a standard Western way of organizing information. You see it all the time in sermons. You have an introduction, three main points, and then applications. It is a linear organization that we are familiar with.

The Bible organizes information differently. The key element in Biblical organization is parallelism. In western poetry, rhyme or meter is key. In Hebrew poetry, it is parallel thoughts, either similar or opposite ideas compared or contrasted. But parallelism also plays a big part in the organization of Biblical prose. Often, a text will be arranged with idea 1, followed by idea 2, then 3, and so on until it reaches the main point of the structure. So far, not too different from my “five-paragraph” paper. But then, instead of summing up and ending with the main point, we get a reversal of the main points, with a new idea 3 that parallels or contrasts with the first idea 3, followed by a parallel idea 2 and then back to a new idea 1, where we started. This type of structure, where the main point is in the middle instead of the end, and there are parallel thoughts nested together, is called a palistrophe or chiasm.

The Bible is full of chiastic structures. Events early in the account are mirrored by similar events later in the cycle. Usually the key to understanding the overall organization of the section is to look at the hinge point – the pivot point where the story changes direction and begins to mirror previous events.

If you’ve been in any of my Sunday school classes before, you’ll have seen chiasms. And you’re going to see them again this quarter. The Joseph Story can be subdivided into 14 (7x2) sections, and those 14 sections can be arranged in a grand chiasm. The center or hinge point of the grand chiasm is the two journeys of Joseph’s brothers to Egypt. At this point, Joseph’s alienation and isolation from his family turns towards restoration and fellowship. Those 14 sections can also be arranged into two seven-part chiasms. The hinge of the first chiasm is in Genesis 39, showing God’s blessing upon Joseph. The hinge of the second chiasm is in Genesis 47, showing Joseph’s blessing upon Egypt. These outlines are included in your notes. And as I’ll be showing each week, each individual section can be arranged as a chiasm.

However prevalent the chiastic structure may be in the Joseph Story, there is another structure that is even more important – the parallel panel. Even more obvious than the chiasms is the repetition of motifs in a series of seven parallel panels. This parallel panel structure is also highlighted in your notes. Let’s take a closer look at it, because it dominates the organization of the Joseph Story.

The first pair of panels concerns conflict between Joseph and his brothers. In 37:2-11, the conflict comes when Joseph’s dreams foretell his dominion over his family. The subsequent story in 37:12-36 shows how the brothers take dominion over Joseph and sell him into slavery. The next pair of parallel panels deals with sexual fidelity and infidelity. While Judah is unfaithful in the land (38, story of Tamar), Joseph is fleeing the advances of Mrs. Potiphar outside the land, in Egypt (39). This structural analysis helps us to understand the placement of
Genesis 38. It interrupts the flow of Joseph’s story, but it sets the stage for Joseph’s fidelity, contrasted with Judah.

Next, we have two dream panels: Joseph interpreting the dreams of the butler and baker in prison (40), followed by Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams (41). Then we have the two trips of the brothers to Egypt. The first trip is in Genesis 42 and the second trip is in Genesis 43. After this, the divisions of the text become a bit trickier, but nonetheless the parallel panel format continues. First we have Joseph reunited with his brothers (44:1-45:15), and then Joseph is finally reunited with his father, Jacob (45:16-47:12).

Then we have an interesting little section in 47:13-27, which deals with Joseph bringing blessing upon Egypt through his rule. This is in parallel with Jacob bringing blessings upon Joseph’s sons and his own sons (47:28-49:33). Finally, we have two deaths: first Jacob (50:1-14); and then finally Joseph (50:15-26).

I’ve tried to highlight this parallel panel organization of the Joseph Story in my lesson titles. If you look at them, you’ll easily be able to see a parallel panel structure. However, because I don’t have 14 more weeks to cover the 14 panels one at a time, I have done some combination of the first two (“Boys will be Boys” – but notice the double usage of “boys”) and last two panels (“Deaths of Jacob and Joseph”). In addition, I’ve had to regroup the material slightly differently in the second half of the course than I’ve just presented due to time considerations.

B. Big Picture

Let me start out our study of the Joseph Story by first doing a “big picture review” of Genesis (based on James Jordan).

Way back in Genesis 2:8-15, three zones are described: The Garden of Eden, which is the Sanctuary where worship takes place (containing the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil); the Land of Eden, or the homeland in which you live; and the other lands (e.g., Havilah) of the world, where we work and carry out evangelism. This three-fold model is described in Genesis 2 and carried out in the rest of the Old Covenant (see handout).

After these 3 zones, we have the first three sins in Genesis. The first sin in the Garden of Eden is the sin of sacrilege or impatience. As a result, Adam was kicked out of the Sanctuary (Gen. 3:22-24). The second sin in the story of Cain and Abel is fratricide in the land. As a result, Cain was kicked out of the Land (Gen. 4:10-16). The third sin is the sin of intermarriage (between the “sons of God” who are the godly line of Seth in Gen. 5, and the “daughters of man” who are the ungodly line of Cain in Gen. 4), which leads to the Flood. As a result, mankind is kicked out of the world (Gen. 6:1-8).

The three major stories in Genesis regarding the patriarchs correct these sins. Abraham relates to God. He is told to be patient. He is always building altars to God (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9). He is tempted to seize the forbidden fruit (Hagar). The theme of Abraham is his patience in relating to God. Because Abraham was patient, he inherited the promises (Gen. 26:2-5). Faithfulness in the Sanctuary – be patient, do not seize what God has withheld.

Isaac is a transitional figure between Abraham and Jacob. With Jacob, conflict with his brother Esau is prominent, carrying forward the brother/brother theme. He has conflict with Esau, Isaac, Laban, and even God Himself. Jacob wrestles with God and man and as a result he inherits the

As we come to the Joseph Story, we can see that the big idea is how to relate to the world. Joseph’s story takes place mainly in Egypt, in the world. Joseph had the choice to get involved with Potiphar’s wife (intermarriage) or to stand firm. Joseph stands firm, unlike what his brother Judah was doing in the land. Joseph contrasts compromise with the world vs. standing firm. Faithfulness in the World – bear witness and stand firm.

The rest of Biblical history repeats these cycles. I don’t have time this morning to go on, but you can look at the chart on p. 7 of your handout and see how it works out. Ultimately, Christ comes to fulfill the model as our Prophet, Priest, and King – but that’s a lesson for another day.

**C. Themes**

With that brief overview, let me move on to some of the major themes in the Joseph Story. I call them the “five P’s”: promises; purity; providence; preparation; and preview.

1. **Promises**

   The Joseph Story continues the theme of fulfillment of God’s promises. God promises Abraham seed, land, and glory-influence (blessing to all nations).

   Genesis 12:1-3 1

   1Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. [LAND] 2I will make you a great nation; [SEED] I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” [GLORY-INFLUENCE]

   The story of Abraham focuses on the Seed. Who will be the mother of the Seed – Hagar or Sarah? Who will the Seed be – Ishmael or Isaac? Will the Seed line be polluted by Pharaoh or Abimelech? What will happen to the Seed (Isaac) when God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son? The promised Seed is emphasized in Abraham’s life.

   In Jacob’s life, the Land comes more into play. Jacob has to leave the Land, and is exiled from it for 20 years. But the Land is important to him, and he eventually returns and settles in the Land. Jacob’s two “close encounters” with God are as he is leaving and returning to the Land. He has an opportunity to live with Esau outside the Land, but does not do so. He even purchases property in the Land, a deposit on the promises.

   When we come to Joseph, we can see the emphasis is not on Seed or Land, but on glory or influence; that is, how to become a blessing to the world. Joseph’s story takes place mainly in Egypt, outside the Land, in the world. Joseph enters Egypt as a slave – a man of no influence or glory. But through the story of Joseph, we see him rise in stature and power, first in Potiphar’s household, and later in Pharaoh’s household over all of Egypt. Joseph gains glory and influence and becomes a blessing to all nations. So we see that the Promises of God are being advanced in the Joseph Story.

2. **Purity**

   How does Joseph gain glory and influence? Joseph gains glory by being willing to give it up. The big temptation in the Joseph Story, the test that Joseph passes, is the test of Potiphar’s wife. Joseph could easily have succumbed to her advances, but he remains pure and flees from sin.
Joseph had gained great stature in Potiphar’s household – he was in charge of everything. And yet, because he chose to flee from Potiphar’s wife, he ended up with nothing – in prison. The choice before Joseph was this: compromise his faith by sinning, or risk losing his life and all he had by remaining pure. Joseph gave up everything he had to remain faithful to God. And ultimately, God gave him everything back one hundred-fold. Joseph was raised to be the master, not of Potiphar’s household, but of Pharaoh’s household and all of Egypt.

If patience before the Father is at the heart of the Life of Abraham, if wrestling with the Son of God is key to the Jacob Cycle, then it is service to others that is the essence of the Spirit-filled man, Joseph. Joseph was a man of service. His service to his father was rewarded with the glorious robe, although his brothers stripped it from him; his service to Potiphar was rewarded with a mantle of authority over his whole house, although Mrs. Potiphar took it away from him; and ultimately he was given a robe of authority over the entire house of Egypt by Pharaoh.

Jordan summarizes: “What does it mean to be a man governed by God's Spirit? How are we to relate to the world of unbelief? It is the story of Joseph that shows us. Joseph was ready to serve, but not ready to sin. Such service is typified by his becoming the replacement baker and cupbearer to Pharaoh, and to the entire world (Gen. 40; 41:9-13, 46-49; 44:2). Joseph served bread and wine – the food of kings – to the entire world! (see Gen. 41:57; 42:2).” Purity in service – remaining pure, resisting temptation, regardless of consequence – is another major theme in the Joseph Story.

3. Providence

For the previous two quarters of our study in Genesis, we have used textbooks by Professor Iain Duguid of Westminster West Seminary. They were great books, easy to read and full of practical application. His book on Abraham emphasized waiting for the promises of God – The Gospel According to Abraham: Living in the Gap between Reality and Promise. His next book on the Jacob Cycle emphasized the theme of God’s grace in pursuing the scoundrel Jacob (Supplanter) and transforming him into Israel (Prince with God). That book was called The Gospel According to Isaac and Jacob: Caught in the Grip of God’s Relentless Grace.

Unfortunately, Dr. Duguid has not yet published a book on Joseph. I was hoping he was working on one and that it would be available in time for this class, but no such “providence.” And that leads me to suggest a good title for Dr. Duguid, if he were to write a book on Joseph – The Gospel According to Joseph: Proving the Power of God’s Preserving Providence.

For the story of Joseph, the overarching theological idea is the triumph of God’s Providence. The Shorter Catechism defines God’s providence in this way: “God’s works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions.”

This is clearly seen in the Joseph Story. No matter what happens to Joseph, God protects His chosen man. God is with Joseph when his brothers sell him into slavery. God is with Joseph as he rises in favor with Potiphar. God is with Joseph after Mrs. Potiphar has him sent to prison. God is with Joseph as Pharaoh raises him up over Egypt. God is with Joseph as he is reunited with his family. Every step of the way, God is with Joseph, protecting him, and preparing him for glory, influence, and blessing. Even though events seem to be transpiring against Joseph, the unseen hand of God is directing everything for His glory. There is no chance, luck, or coincidence in Joseph’s story; it is the Providence of God that is in control.
Boice puts it this way: “When [the little things of life] are happening, we seldom realize how important they are. But looking back, we can see that God was at work—often when we were least aware of his working. That is why we must never chafe against circumstances God brings to us. We call them ‘mere circumstances’ and treat them lightly. But they are not ‘mere circumstances.’ They are God’s weaving of the tapestry of our lives. The important thing for every believer is to be living in the light of God’s presence, knowing that his or her life is being guided by God’s hand. You may look at your life and see dark threads and wonder how God can possibly use those threads to produce a thing of beauty. But you should look to the life of Joseph and remember that God uses even the wrath of men to praise him.”

The theme verse of the story comes at the very end. When Jacob eventually dies, the brothers fear that now is the time for Joseph to finally exact his revenge. After all, it makes sense to them, because that’s how they think and act. But Joseph is thinking and acting on a higher plane, a Godly plane, a Spirit-filled plane. He says in Gen. 50:20a, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.” The responsibility of man is not negated, for the brothers are responsible for the evil they have done, but they are not able to overturn the purposes of God. The Providence of God trumps the evil of men. Compare Romans 8:28 – “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” The Providence of God is a major theme in the Joseph Story.

4. Preparation

The Joseph Story ends sort of like The Empire Strikes Back. Han Solo is frozen in carbonite. The evil emperor still reigns. It may be the end of the movie, but it is not the end of the story. It demands a sequel. The Joseph Story ends the same way. Joseph is dead, but he is not buried. The people of God are not in the Land where they should be. We need resolution, we need completion, we need “the rest of the story,” as Paul Harvey would say. The Joseph Story prepares us for the sequel – the Book of Exodus.

Although the house of Israel is safe in Egypt (for now), we know that is not where they belong. But God has chosen Egypt and the Land of Goshen at this time to be an incubator for His people, because He knew that they could never develop as He wanted while living amongst the pagan corruption of the Canaanites. Judah’s experiences with Tamar in Genesis 38 confirm that.

When we get to the book of Exodus, we see that Israel has grown in numbers, but their status has changed from welcome guest to slave. And the story of Joseph prepares the nation for that transition. Ross puts it this way: “The Joseph Story shows that just as Joseph lived in bondage in Egypt before his deliverance and supremacy over Egypt, so would the nation. Just as suffering and the bondage formed tests for Joseph to see if he kept his faith and was worthy of the promise, so too the bondage of the nation was a means of discipline and preparation for the nation’s future responsibilities. These narratives also teach the covenancers how to live in bondage when they know that the promise of God belongs to them, for participation in the blessings of the covenant requires obedience. They are to do what is good and shun what is evil, never losing sight of their destiny. They are to fear God, love the brethren, forgive one another, and make provision for the future.”

So, the Joseph Story is preparation for the next stage in God’s unfolding care for His people.
5. **Preview**

Finally, the Joseph Story is a *preview* of coming attractions. Specifically, in many ways, Joseph is presented to us as a type of Christ, a picture of the greater Deliverer to come. James Boice quotes a list of similarities by Blaise Pascal:

> Christ Prefigured by Joseph: Innocent, beloved of his father, sent by his father to see his brothers, is sold for twenty pieces of silver. Through this he becomes their lord, their savior, savior of strangers, and savior of the world. None of this would have happened but for their plot to destroy him, the sale, and their rejection of him. In prison Joseph, innocent between two criminals, Jesus on the cross between two thieves. Joseph prophesies the salvation of one and the death of the other, when to all appearances they are alike. Christ saves the elect and damn's the reprobate for the same crime. Joseph only prophesies; Jesus acts. Joseph asks the man who will be saved to remember him when he comes into glory. And the man Jesus saves asks to be remembered when he comes into his kingdom.

We also learn in this section of Scripture that the Royal Line of the Messiah is to come, not through Joseph, as you might expect, but through Judah. Judah may be the ancestor of Messiah, but it is the life of Joseph that is presented to us as the preview of the Royal Ruler. Joseph is rightly viewed as a type of Christ.

**D. Motifs**

Well, those are some of the major themes presented to us in the Joseph Story: promises, purity, providence, preparation, and preview. In the remaining moments of the class, I’d also like to point out briefly some of the recurring motifs that we will see during our study of the Joseph Story. These are symbols, pictures, ideas, images, etc. that continually pop up as we read the Joseph Story.

1. **Wisdom**

Ross points out: “There are wisdom motifs throughout the Joseph story. Joseph was called a wise and discerning man in Genesis 41:33 and 39, and his life certainly displayed that characteristic. Joseph feared the Lord more than people (cf. Pr. 1:7; 2:5-9); he gave wise counsel (16:13; 16:21); he avoided the adulterous woman (6:24-29); he was diligent in his preparation when there was plenty (21:5; 24:27); and he did not act out of revenge against his brothers (20:22; 24:29).”

Joseph is the wise man, the Spirit-filled man, the man who understands the Word of God and applies it wisely in all situations. In this, he is a model for believers today. While God spoke directly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He does not do so to Joseph. It is true that God gave him dreams, but Joseph had the God-given wisdom to understand and interpret them.

Jordan points out: “Joseph had to rely on the general promises God had made to all His people. No special promise was given to him. He had to rely by faith on the revelation God had given to previous generations, because no special verbal revelation came to him. In this regard, he is just like us: He had to regard the “Bible,” the history of previous events, as his promise. Such faith, we may say, is a higher and tougher form of faith. It is faith without any external support in miracles and special revelations. Most pointedly, it is faith that is generated by the Holy Spirit in a more comprehensive way than before.”
2. Dreams
There are three pairs of dreams in the Joseph Story. The dreams come to Joseph, to Joseph’s fellow prisoners, and to the Pharaoh. The Angel of the Lord does not appear; God does not speak directly. But the Sovereign Lord is still seen to be in control of His creation through these dreams, both for the Godly line and the ungodly line.

3. Clothing
Clothing is a very important motif in the Joseph Story. Jacob’s gift to Joseph of the special tunic is the focus of the brother’s jealousy. Joseph is invested with this robe because of his service to Jacob (37:3), but the brothers strip it off of him (37:23). Jacob mourns the loss of Joseph by tearing his clothes (37:34). Later, Joseph rises to the head of Potiphar’s household, but his tunic is stripped off by Mrs. Potiphar when he flees her advances (39:12), leading to his imprisonment. When Joseph appears before Pharaoh, he is first given a change of clothes (41:14). When Pharaoh elevates Joseph, he is clothed in fine linens (41:42). After being reunited with his brothers, Joseph gives them all changes of clothing, but gives Benjamin five such garments (45:22). The garments in the Joseph Story serve many functions: symbolizing love, provoking jealousy, demonstrating authority and status, etc.

4. Doubles
Repetition of events or “doubles” is very prominent in the Joseph Story. As I already pointed out, the structure of the entire story can be considered as seven pairs of panels, with the two stories in each panel having a similar theme. But also consider the following: 1) Joseph has two dreams in Canaan; 2) the Baker & Butler have two dreams in prison; 3) Joseph spends two years in prison after interpreting the dreams; 4) Pharaoh has two dreams; 5) two sons of Judah die in Genesis 38; 6) Judah and Tamar have twins; 7) Joseph has two sons – Ephraim and Manasseh; 8) there are two periods of seven years (plenty & famine); 9) Joseph is imprisoned twice (by brothers and by Potiphar); 10) there are two sexual escapades with cloaks as proof (Judah/Tamar; Joseph/Potiphar’s wife); 11) Joseph receives a robe of authority from Jacob and also one from Pharaoh; 12) two journeys by the brothers to Egypt to get food during the famine. I’m sure there are more, but a dozen should suffice to make the point. The repetition serves to reinforce the main themes of the Joseph Story.

5. Weeping
Weeping is another recurring motif in the Joseph Story. Here are some examples: 1) Jacob’s grief at losing Joseph (37:33-35); Joseph weeps when he sees his brothers the first time (42:24); Joseph weeps when he reveals himself to his brothers (45:2, 14-15); Joseph weeps when he meets Jacob (46:29); Joseph weeps when Jacob dies and at his funeral (50:1, 8-10); Egypt mourns Jacob’s death (50:3, 8-10); Joseph weeps when his brothers still don’t trust him (50:17).

6. Older/Younger
As you might expect, we have the motif of the older replaced by the younger, a common motif throughout the book of Genesis. Previously, we have seen: 1) Abel (Seth) for Cain; 2) Shem for Ham and Japheth; 3) Abram for Nahor and Haran; 4) Isaac for Ishmael; and 5) Jacob for Esau. Now, here in the Joseph Story, we have: 6) Judah over his brothers; 7) Joseph over his brothers; 8) Perez over Zerah (Gen. 38); 9) Ephraim over Manasseh.
7. **Going to Egypt**

Finally, going down to Egypt is another recurring motif. Joseph goes down to Egypt in slavery. The brothers come down to Egypt twice in search of food during the famine. And finally, Jacob and his entire family go down to Egypt to be reunited with Joseph and to live in the land of Goshen. It won’t be until the Exodus of Moses that this motif will be reversed.

**Conclusion**

Well, that’s a lot of information to cover as background and introduction to the Joseph Story. I hope you will look forward with me to going through the text this summer and seeing what God has to teach us. If you don’t remember anything else from this morning, let me at least re-emphasize two major or key ideas that permeate the Joseph Story.

The first is the Providence of God. Kidner calls the Joseph Story the “locus classicus” of providence. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Whatever else you learn this quarter, remember that the Joseph Story is about God working all things together for good through His Providence.

God is sovereign – His will inevitably comes to pass. However, man is also held responsible. And so, secondly we see that Joseph is the great example of the faithful, Spirit-filled man. Joseph remains pure in his service, preferring obedience to God above the temptations of sin. Joseph is a shining example for us of how to live for Jesus Christ in a fallen and sinful world. We need to be like Joseph – ready to serve, but not ready to sin.

Joseph is only one of a few major Bible characters that I am aware of in which no great sin or flaw is revealed. Abraham sinned with Hagar, Isaac sinned by trying to bless Esau, Jacob sinned in trying to gain the blessing and birthright by deceit. Moses struck the rock, Samson sinned with Delilah, David sinned with Bathsheba, Solomon married many wives and drifted away from God. The list goes on. But Joseph and Daniel (who in many ways is like Joseph – exiled from the land in his youth; interpretation of dreams; raised to leadership in pagan land; maintained purity despite opposition) are presented as mature, holy men who work in the world but don’t sin in the world.

However, there are some commentators who don’t share quite the same view of Joseph. So in closing, I’ll leave you with three potential “sticky” points regarding Joseph that we will have to consider this quarter: 1) in Genesis 37, some see Joseph as immature, a whiner, a tattletale; he is not mature in his attitude of “lording it” over his brothers; 2) in Genesis 45, some see Joseph’s strategy of testing the brothers unnecessarily cruel and unusual; and 3) in Genesis 47, some see Joseph’s “enslavement” of Egypt as harsh, cruel, and sinful. Joseph – immature, whiny tattletale, or misunderstood younger brother? – you decide next week!

Close in Prayer.

Next week: Lesson 2 – Boys Will Be Boys – Gen. 37:2-36