

AT HOME FAITH TIME FOR PRETEENS

PRETEEN SECTION

Make sure your parents read the Bible story too! You may read together, or separately.

BIBLE STORY: JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS, PART 2 (GENESIS 42-50)

The famine in Egypt spread all the way up the Mediterranean Sea to where Jacob lived. So did the news that there was food in Egypt!

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you just keep looking at each other?” He continued, “I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.”

Then ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him.

Notice: *Why is Jacob protective of Benjamin?*

Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. “Where do you come from?” he asked.

Notice: *Why doesn’t Joseph tell his brothers who he is?*

“From the land of Canaan,” they replied, “to buy food.”

Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies!”

“No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.”

“No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.”

Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies! And this is how you will be tested: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But you must bring your

Notice: *Why is Joseph testing his brothers?*

youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” This they proceeded to do.

They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us.”

Reuben replied, “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.”

They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

Notice: What causes Joseph to weep?

When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them.

Their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!”

Then Reuben said to his father, “You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back.”

But Jacob said, “My son will not go down there with you.”

Now the famine was still severe in the land. So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go back and buy us a little more food.”

But Judah said to him, “If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, ‘You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.’ Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life.”

Remember: What was Judah’s role in Joseph’s “murder”?

Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift—a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”

So the men took the gifts and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare a meal; they are to eat with me at noon.”

The steward took the brothers into Joseph’s house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. He also brought Simeon out to them.

When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought, and they bowed down before him to the ground.

As Joseph looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother’s son, he asked, “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?” And he said, “God be gracious to you, my son.” Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, “Serve the food.” When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

Notice: *How is Benjamin treated differently than his brothers?*

Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.” And he did as Joseph said.

As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, “Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.’”

When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. But they said to him, “Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! Why would

we steal silver or gold from your master's house? If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves."

"Very well, then," he said, "let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame."

Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"

"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."

But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

Then Judah went up to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. If the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!'

Notice: Does Judah live up to the pledge he made to his father?

"Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father."

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt."

Notice: Does Joseph blame his brothers for what happened?

Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

When Pharaoh heard that Joseph's brothers had come, he invited all of Joseph's family to move to Egypt.

Jacob was surprised to learn that Joseph was alive, but he was afraid to leave the land God had given him. So he prayed to God for guidance.

And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!"

"Here I am," he replied.

"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."

Notice: What promise does God give Jacob?

Then Israel's sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives to Egypt. With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all.

Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their children.

Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and lived until he was hundred and forty-seven. Then he breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

Notice: *What are Joseph's brothers worried about?*

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

LET'S SUMMARIZE!

Answer each question yourself.

What is God doing in this story?

What does this story tell me about God?

What does this story tell me about me?

What does this story tell me about my relationship with God?

MEMORY WORK: IMPORTANT BIBLE VERSES

Below are some important Bible verses. A wise professor once said, “The only Bible we truly have is the one in our heart.” Learning Bible verses by heart deepens our connection with God and helps us hear Jesus’ voice clearer in our lives. Try to memorize one whole verse at a time.

An easy memorizing tip: Make up actions to go with the verse. For example, if you were memorizing, “God’s grace is the hope of the world,” you might point up for “God”, shape your hands like you’re holding a gift and move them forward for “grace”, lift up your hands and eyes for “hope”, and then move your hands out in a big circle for “world”. Your mind learns things better when you learn in multiple ways – words and actions together make memorizing easier!

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

EXODUS 34:6

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.

THINGS TO NOTICE

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is often considered the most important verse in the Bible for Jews.

Exodus 34:6 is the most quoted verse in the Bible (meaning other parts of the Bible quote it).

Ephesians 2:8-10 is often considered the most important verse in the Bible for Lutherans.

AT HOME FAITH TIME FOR PRETEENS

PARENT SECTION

As you discuss questions with your preteens, these thoughts might help you go deeper.

CONVERSATIONS – BIBLE

Why is Jacob protective of Benjamin?

Benjamin is Jacob's youngest son. Benjamin is also Joseph's full brother (remember, Jacob had 4 wives) and the only living child of Jacob's favorite wife (Jacob doesn't know Joseph lives). After losing one son, Jacob is afraid he'll lose another son. Have you ever been scared that after one bad thing happens another bad thing will happen?

Why doesn't Joseph tell his brothers who he is?

At first, you might wonder if he's afraid or still angry. Or maybe he's surprised to see them! Maybe he wants to soak up this moment of his dreaming coming true? If you saw someone who had harmed you in the past, would you go talk to them or would you avoid them? How could you be certain you could trust them or that you'd be safe around them?

Why is Joseph testing his brothers?

Joseph wants to see if his brothers have changed or if they'll do the same thing to another brother. Do they feel sorry for what they did to Joseph, or are they the same bullies they were before? When someone has broken your trust, how do you find out if you can trust them again? What does it take to regain someone's trust?

What causes Joseph to weep?

It could be the memory of Joseph's past pain. It might also be because he still loves his brothers; he will weep over his brothers later in the story. What things have made you cry? When you're crying, how have you found comfort for your pain?

What was Judah's role in Joseph's "murder"?

Judah is the one who suggested selling Joseph into slavery to make money off his "death". Does Judah seem the same now? How has he changed? We are not always the same people we were in the past. One part of "repentance" – truly being sorry for something – is doing things differently the next time you face a similar situation. What Judah did with Joseph was really bad, but the fact that he's trying to do things differently now is a sign that he's repented – he's

changed his ways. After you do something wrong, how do you change your ways so that you don't do the same thing wrong again?

How is Benjamin treated differently than his brothers?

He received 5x the food! That's a lot! What do you think everyone else thought of this special treatment? At birthdays, we sometimes give special treatment to the birthday person, giving them an extra large slice of cake or a larger portion of ice cream. How do you so someone that they are special to you?

Does Judah live up to the pledge he made to his father?

Yes! When Benjamin's life is in jeopardy, Judah begs to take his place. This is how Joseph knows he has truly repented of what he did to Joseph. When you've made a mistake or done something wrong, how do you show others that you're truly sorry?

Does Joseph blame his brothers for what happened?

No. Even though what happened was wrong, Joseph believes God was present with him the whole time, guiding a bad situation to create good for many people. Have you ever gone experienced something that seemed bad at first but in the end brought about lots of good? Maybe you moved far away; that might feel really bad. But now there are such good things in your life that, even though you still miss your old home, you are glad you're where you're at now.

What promise does God give Jacob?

To make him a great nation. That sounds like the promise God gave Abraham! Even though Jacob is leaving the land God promised to his family, God reassures him that the promise isn't over. It's still going to come true! That's how all of God's promises work. When God made promises to you at your baptism – to love you and forgive and always be with you – nothing can cancel that promise. It will always be true, no matter what.

What are Joseph's brothers worried about?

They are afraid Joseph hasn't forgiven them yet. They are scared Joseph will still punish them. What can you do when you're afraid of punishment? When someone hurts you, how do you show them you still love them and truly forgive them?

LET'S SUMMARIZE!

Answer each question yourself. I've put in some of my answers but remember: Our answers don't have to be the same. You may have heard and seen things I didn't even notice!

What is God doing in this story?

Saving lives, answering prayers

What does this story tell me about God?

Even though people do bad things, God can still make anything work for good.

What does this story tell me about me?

Fear and regrets can control my life for a long time if I never deal with them.

What does this story tell me about my relationship with God?

God is guiding me and caring for me even when things look bad.

CONVERSATIONS – IMPORTANT BIBLE VERSES

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

This verse is often called “The Shema” (from the first word of the verse; “shema” is Hebrew for “hear/listen”). For Jews, this verse is almost like the Lord’s Prayer for Christians; many Jews recite it daily, especially right before they go to sleep at night. Most Jewish people have this Bible verse attached to the doors of their homes in special boxes called “mezuzot”. Jesus also called this verse the most important commandment in the entire Bible.

Why is this verse is so important? What does it mean to love God with everything you are?

Exodus 34:6

This verse is the self-description of God’s character that God told Moses. It has 5 important points. God is: 1) merciful, 2) gracious, 3) slow to anger, 4) abounding in steadfast love, and 5) abounding in faithfulness. Take a moment and talk about what each of those phrases means. What words would you use to describe God? Does this picture of God match your picture? In the Creation story, it says we are made in God’s image or likeness. Are you like God’s description of God’s self in this verse? How are you the same or different?

Ephesians 2:8-10

Lutherans often call this verse a summary of the Gospel. The important words in the verse are 1) saved, 2) grace, 3) faith, 4) not works, and 5) created for good works.

Another way to say this verse is: God saves (saved) us as a gift (grace). Trust that gift (faith). You don’t have to do anything to earn this gift (not works). But the gift is so wonderful is makes sharing God’s love the biggest joy of our life (created for good works).

Have you ever tried to prove that you’re good enough for something? Why is it so important that we don’t have to earn God’s love, that God simply loves us no matter what?