

A Character Study of Joseph – A Man After God's Own Heart

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## **Introduction**

The first son to Jacob by his wife Rachel, Joseph was to be the salvation of his family and the nation of Israel. Intelligent, kind, humble and a pleaser, Joseph was still very much a man of strong principles as well as deep and unwavering faith in his God. Born into a large and prosperous family, Joseph (being nearly the youngest) incurred the wrath of his brothers due to a special talent and special closeness to his father, the leader of Israel, Jacob. His brothers' murderous jealousy sent Joseph on a journey from slavery to Pharaoh's planner and from imprisonment to royalty. In every instance he turned his face toward God and became an example of a nearly sinless life. Joseph is one of the few examples in the Bible of a human reaching the goal of being like Jesus Christ.

## **Major Events in Joseph's Life that Formed His Character**

In Genesis 30:22-24 Joseph is born of Rachel, the 11th of 12 sons to Israel (Jacob) amidst the contest between the sisters, Leah and Rachel. This competition is characterized by Matthew Henry as follows:

“The desire, good in itself, but often too great and irregular, of being the mother of the promised Seed, with the honour of having many children, and the reproach of being barren, were causes of this unbecoming contest between the sisters. The truth appears to be, that they were influenced by the promises of God to Abraham; whose posterity were promised the richest blessings, and from whom the Messiah was to descend.” (Henry, e-sword® commentary on Genesis 30:14-24)

In Genesis 37:3 we learn that Joseph is favored among Jacob's sons, so much that Jacob dresses him differently in a "tunic of many colors." (KJV Genesis 37:3) This special treatment sets up a building jealousy of Joseph by his brothers. Joseph spent his boyhood as a dreamer of dreams and a shepherd. In Genesis 37, we have Joseph recounting the dream of his sheaf standing upright to the bowing of his brothers' sheaves. Then, after yet another prophetic dream of Joseph's rule over his family he is even rebuked by his father Israel. Gill says, "[Jacob,] not as being ignorant of the meaning of the dream, for by what follows he had a clear understanding of it, ...but he thought fit, in his great wisdom and prudence, to put on such an air, partly to check young Joseph, lest he should grow proud, and haughty, and insolent upon it." (Gill e-sword® commentary, Genesis 37:10) Clearly, if Jacob, the "deceiver," can claim any influence on the forming of Joseph's character, this would be it. The Bible commentary on the relationship between Jacob and Joseph focuses on the love and connectedness of the two, and little is said regarding any wisdom imparted to Joseph by Jacob. Joseph's wisdom therefore, we are left to assume, is wholly imparted unto Joseph by the Almighty.

Nonetheless, the hatred of Joseph by his brothers led them to put him in a pit in faint attempt to kill, or at least be rid of Joseph. Life in the pit gets Joseph a free ride to Egypt and into slavery. Even as a model servant and slave to the Egyptian Potiphar, an officer to Pharaoh, and captain of the guard, and his wife, Joseph saw the ranges of prosperity and persecution. "... (T)he Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake..." (Genesis 39:5, KJV) Joseph lived in lavishness but still suffered the unfair accusations of the lustful woman-of-position that landed him in prison. "The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me:" (Genesis 39:17, KJV) Even then Joseph maintains his Godly attitude. There is no record that he even defended himself against the lies. Henry says, "Our enemies may strip us of outward

distinctions and ornaments; but wisdom and grace cannot be taken from us. They may separate us from friends, relatives, and country; but they cannot take from us the presence of the Lord.”

(Henry, e-sword® commentary on Genesis 39:1-6)

Once imprisoned, Joseph again stays in the Will of God by using his gift of prophecy to interpret dreams. By being obedient to his gift, without fear, Joseph stays true to the path of God’s plan for him. By prophesying the fate of the wayward butcher and the wine taster he gains the attention of Pharaoh. Then by prophesying the interpretation of pharaoh’s dreams he accomplishes the final prophetic act that puts him in a position to save his family, the nation of Israel. His prophetic gift was of God even though Joseph is not identified as a prophet in the Bible. “Prophecy was technically the task of the prophet. But all truth or revelation is prophetic, pointing to some future person, event, or thing.” (Youngblood 1033) Joseph was both rewarded and persecuted when he used his prophetic gift. But Joseph never fainted from its use, regardless of the potential outcome.

Joseph’s help to Pharaoh ushers him to a position of power and influence. “And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:41, KJV) Pharaoh appoints Joseph to a position of Minister of Food where he strategized the tactics to take care of Egypt and the nations Egypt depends on through the seven year famine. The fulfillment of Joseph’s prophecy of famine sets the stage for Joseph to be reunited with his family. Joseph is presented with a choice of whether to be bitter and vindictive or to show the compassion and forgiveness of Christ. He chooses the latter. “And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.” (Genesis 45:5, KJV) “And Joseph made ready his

chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.” (Genesis 46:29, KJV)

### **The Effect of These Events in Joseph’s Life**

From the earliest times of his life, Joseph appeared to be above the competitive nature of his family, from his mother and her sister to the jealousy-fueled competition with his brothers. Joseph just seemed to be on a path where such ungodly things faded into the background of his mind. As a result they just never seemed to have a bearing on how he made his choices. As described from Matthew Henry’s commentary earlier, Joseph always sought the presence of the Lord. But most importantly, Joseph’s obedience put him in a position to receive God’s grace in times of hardship. “But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy...” (Genesis 39:21, KJV)

Jacob’s love of Joseph and Joseph’s clear sense of purpose as a servant gave him confidence in every situation he faced. Even when he was in a position of power with Potiphar and Pharaoh, it just became a place where his single minded focus on being in God’s Will was amplified to the good of others. So, in a sense, the major events of Joseph’s life didn’t seem to shape him, he shaped the course of his life through obedience to God’s Will. It is clear that God’s Hand, Grace, and Blessing were on Joseph; as each time he was challenged by the world, he chose to refuse the worldly course and follow a selfless path of servanthood and obedience. Joseph’s life clearly is a picture of Christ as we will explore next.

### **Joseph as a Picture of Christ**

Joseph shows himself to be an extraordinary picture of Christ. As the table below (and the expanded appendix) shows, there is a very strong parallel between the two. These parallels

can be seen in the closeness to his father, the rejection by his brethren, the hatred and awe demonstrated by the world, and finally the salvation wrought on a nation; the salvation of mankind in the case of Christ. The following table charts a course through a Godly life filled with persecution, servanthood, and life choices throughout.

<u>Joseph Reference</u>	<u>The Comparison/Parallel</u>	<u>Christ Reference</u>
Gen 37:2.....	A shepherd of his father's sheep .....	John 10:11
Gen 37:3.....	His father loved him dearly .....	Mat 3:17
Gen 37:4.....	Hated by his brothers.....	John 7:1, 5
Gen 37:13-14 .....	Sent by Father to brothers .....	Hebrews 2:11
Gen 37:20.....	Others plotted to harm him.....	John 11:53
Gen 37:23.....	Robes taken from him/them .....	John 19:23
Gen 37:28.....	Sold for the price of a slave.....	Mat 26:15
Gen 37:28.....	Taken to Egypt .....	Mat 2:14
Gen 39:7.....	Tempted.....	Mat 4:1
Gen 39:16-18 .....	Falsely accused.....	Mat 26:59:60
Gen 39:20.....	Bound in chains .....	Mat 27:2
Gen 40:2, 3.....	Placed with two other prisoners, one saved and one lost ..	Luke 23:32
Gen 41:40.....	Exalted after suffering .....	Phil 2:9-11
Gen 41:46.....	Both 30 years old at the beginning of public recognition ..	Luke 3:23
Gen 42:24; 45:14; 46:29	Both wept .....	John 10:35
Gen 45:1-15 .....	Forgave those who wronged them.....	Luke 23:34
Gen 45:7.....	Saved their nation .....	Mat 1:21
Gen 50:20.....	What men did to hurt them, God turned to good.....	1 Cor 2:7, 8

(MacArthur 89)

Really the comparison can be summed up in Joseph's reply to his brothers after they bury Israel, their father. The brothers beg Joseph that they may not suffer the wrath born of their treatment of him. "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. (Genesis 50:19-20, KJV) In these simple phrases, "for am I in the place of God?...but God meant it unto good. " Joseph demonstrates the core of Christ's heart toward man. MacArthur casts it this way, " This concise question tweaked (the brothers') memory of his explanation of how God had put him where he was (cf. 45:3-8), in the place God intended him to

be at the time... Joseph's wise, theological answer has gone down in history as the classic statement of God's sovereignty over the affairs of men." (MacArthur 89) Joseph's single minded pursuit of God's Will and Christ's obedience to His Father's Will, the cross, yield the ultimate parallel result; the salvation of God's people.

### **The Effect of Joseph's Life on My Life**

For a long time in my life I have struggled with fairness. I thought life should be fair. I even thought God wanted life to be fair. I believed a just and loving God would reward good behavior with grace that would produce prosperity and happiness in the world's context. After a life filled with disappointment, I finally have come to understand that my prior perspective was completely devoid of the "kingdom mentality" or "kingdom perspective." I vaguely knew about the stories of Joseph and of Job, but never really understood them. Only through searching the scriptures did I finally find gems like, "And unto man he said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.'" (Job 28:28 , KJV) And also, "But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him." (Psa 4:3, KJV) I am not intended to "fit" in the world. I am to set myself apart, sanctify myself, and be a servant to others. If I can find joy in that, I then have a successful life in the making.

I guess it is trite to say that guys like Joseph and Job *got it*. But it is not trite to say that God put their stories in His Word so I could get it. Joseph's approach and view on life in this world has helped me strengthen my Kingdom Mentality, that is to say, step outside the worldly view of my existence and attempt to view my life from God's eternal perspective. I have learned, perhaps late in life, that living a successful and happy life is not about material or fleshly things. These things tend to draw me away from God and His Will. I have also learned that it takes an



incredibly well-grounded faith to be materially prosperous in this world and maintain your walk with God. Joseph shows me how it is done as he traverses the hills and valleys of his life. Paul's words ring in my ears, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." (Philippians 4:11, KJV)

Jesus and Joseph are the epitome of perseverance and focus on God. With no disrespect intended, the way I see it, in the words of a modern philosopher, Rocky Balboa, "It ain't about how hard you hit. It's about hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward." (Rocky Balboa) WWJD? Pick Himself up, dust Himself off, and get back in the ring. Jesus, you are my hero. Joseph, you are a close second. I must concentrate on these things. I must PUSH.... Pray Until Something Happens. Seek God's face, and be in His Word daily. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2Chronicles 7:14, KJV)

## Appendix – Expanded Comparison of Joseph To Christ

I have expanded the table from MacArthur with the actual scripture verses.

Joseph References (KJV ref.)	The Comparison	Christ References (KJV ref.)
(Gen 37:2) These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; ....	A shepherd of his father's sheep	(Joh 10:11) I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.
(Gen 37:3) Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors.	His father loved him dearly	(Mat 3:17) And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.
(Gen 37:4) And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.	Hated by his brothers	(Joh 7:1) After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.... 5) For neither did his brethren believe in him.
(Gen 37:13) And Israel said unto Joseph, .... 14) ...Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, ....	Sent by Father to brothers	(Heb 2:11) For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,
(Gen 37:20) Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.	Others plotted to harm him	(Joh 11:53) Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.
(Gen 37:23) And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colors that was on him;	Robes taken from him/them	(Joh 19:23) Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.
(Gen 37:28) Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver: ...	Sold for the price of a slave	(Mat 26:15) And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.
(Gen 37:28) ...and they brought Joseph into Egypt.	Taken to Egypt	(Mat 2:14) When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

## Appendix (cont.)

Joseph References (KJV ref.)	The Comparison	Christ References (KJV ref.)
(Gen 39:7) And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.	Tempted	(Mat 4:1) Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.
(Gen 39:16) And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home. 17) And she spoke unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: 18) And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.	Falsely accused	(Mat 26:59) Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; 60) But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses,
(Gen 39:20) And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.	Bound in chains	(Mat 27:2) And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.
(Gen 40:2) And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers. 3) And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound.	Placed with two other prisoners, one saved and one lost	(Luk 23:32) And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.
(Gen 41:40) Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.	Exalted after suffering	(Phi 2:9) Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10) That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11) And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Gen 41:46) And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.	Both 30 years old at the beginning of public recognition	(Luk 3:23) And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,

## Appendix (cont.)

Joseph References (KJV ref.)	The Comparison	Christ References (KJV ref.)
<p>(Gen 42:24) And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.</p> <p>(Gen 45:14) And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept;...</p> <p>(Gen 46:29) And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.</p>	Both wept	(Joh 11:35) Jesus wept.
Gen 45:1-15 – (Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and forgives them.)	Forgave those who wronged them	(Luk 23:34) Then said Jesus, <b>Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.</b> And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.
(Gen 45:7) And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.	Saved their nation	(Mat 1:21) And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.
(Gen 50:20) But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.	What men did to hurt them, God turned to good	(1Co 2:7) But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, <b>even</b> the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: 8) Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

(MacArthur 89)

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