

# THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

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## *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife* *Genesis 39:1-23*

### **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this lesson to **Mr. Jean-Marie Koku Hulete**; his quest for deep biblical analysis on the subject persuaded me to embark on this godly project.

## Lesson Objectives

*By the end of this study, you should be able to:*

- a. briefly understand to analyze the prehistorical events that took place before the birth of Joseph;
- b. briefly narrate the story of Joseph from his birth to death;
- c. identify to understand the spiritual gifts of Joseph;
- d. acquire biblical knowledge about the godly lifestyle of Joseph;
- e. know and understand how the life of Joseph benefits the existing Church.

## INTRODUCTION

“**THE LIFE OF JOSEPH**” falls within the period of the patriarchs, and it is discussed in the third division of the Patriarchal Dispensation (i.e. the generational period).

The Generational period (period of bringing up God's chosen people), according to the Old Testament Canon of Scripture, proceeds the Antediluvian period (period before the flood of Noah) and the Postdiluvian period (period after the flood): It is the period of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. God calls Abraham and his family. God plans to bless all nations through them. This is the longest period identified in the Patriarchal age. It covers Genesis 12 through to 50 (Gen 12-50).

The first time to ever hear the name **JOSEPH** from the Bible is *Genesis 30:24*, and his fame was recognized at age 17 when he went to tend the flocks of Jacob his father (see Gen 37:2) with Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. Joseph then became the most popular son of Jacob whose death sealed the book of Genesis (i.e. from Genesis 37 through to Genesis 50).

Nonetheless, this particular study aims to discuss the life of Joseph covering his birth, his life in Egypt, and his death which preceded the 400 years captivity of Israel in Egypt (Acts 7:6).

## **CHAPTER 1: THE PREHISTORICAL EVENTS BEHIND JOSEPH'S BIRTH**

The historical events before the birth of Joseph outline the stories that preceded **Genesis 30:24**.

Genesis chapter 1 through to chapter 29 (Gen 1–29) holds so many important events from which the life of Joseph could be traced: The rise and fall of man (Gen 1–3), events depicting the spread of sin (Gen 4–5), the flood of Noah and its peculiar events (Gen 6–11), the generations of Abraham and Isaac as well as the life of Jacob in Mesopotamia (Gen 12–29), are all the very events that preceded Joseph's birth in Gen 30.

### **1.1 The Genealogy Of Shem From Which Abraham Was Born.**

After the flood, the three(3) sons of Noah (Shem, Ham, and Japheth...Gen 9:18-19) begat sons and daughters with their wives to fill the land again. And according to Gen 11, Abraham came from the filial generation of Shem.

According to Gen 11:10-26, Abraham was in the 9th generation from the descendants of Shem, and as the first son of his father.

✓ SHEM — Arpachshad — Shelah — Eber — Peleg — Reu — Serug — Nahor— Terah — ABRAHAM [*Reading from left to right*]

### **1.2 The Genealogy Of Abraham From Which Joseph Was Born.**

Abraham was the one with God's promise (see Gen 12, 17). God aimed to set apart a unique community from him, and that promise was fulfilled in the life of Jacob through Isaac his father (see Rom 9:6-13).

The promise of God in the life of Abraham determined which of his filial generations should be emphasized here, as far as the life of Joseph is concerned. It is written, *“This means that the children born in the usual way are not the children*

*of God; instead, the children born as a result of God's promise are regarded as the true descendants”* (Romans 9:8, GNB). Therefore, the true descendants of Abraham according to the Bible concerning God's promise, do not include *Ishmael* and *Esau* and their descendants who formed part of the gentile nations (see Gen 17:20-21; 21:13, 18; 25:12-16; 33:1; 37:27-28; 39:1).

However, **Romans 9:8** restricts us to pay attention to only this genealogy;

ABRAHAM — Isaac — Jacob — JOSEPH [*Reading from left to right*]

## **CHAPTER 2: THE BIRTH OF JOSEPH**

**Joseph** was born in the land of Mesopotamia: Jacob was his father and Rachel was his mother.

According to **Gen 29:31-35** and **Gen 30:1-24**, Joseph was the 12th child of Jacob and the 11th son (if Dinah in Gen 30:21 is excluded); he was the first son of Rachel (see Gen 30:22-24). This means that Joseph was not the 7th son as given in Gen 35:23-26; such arrangement was not done chronologically, but was meant to list the sons of Jacob starting with what his two wives begat, before the handmaids (i.e. Bilhah and Zilpah).

Though the Bible did not specifically talk about the uniqueness of Joseph when he was born (Gen 30:23-24), the society he lived in experienced the wave of his full potentials in terms of glory, knowledge, wisdom, and his authority in many things, according to **Gen 37–50**.

### **CHAPTER 3: THE GIFTS OF JOSEPH**

Discussing the **GIFTS of Joseph**, I simply want to talk about “Spiritual Gifts” (1 Co 12:1) or “Gift of the Spirit” or “Gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). We could believe that each of the twelve(12) tribes of Israel was talented in one way or the other, but Joseph was gifted in so many ways by God Almighty. And, that makes him unique in the history of the 12 tribes.

*The following briefly discusses the gifts of Joseph:*

**(a) Gift of dream/vision:** The context of the dream here is not about what is caused by Satan or multitude of business (Eccl 5:3), but that which comes from God. *Divine dreams* mostly carry predictions concerning the future of God's chosen community. *Vision* in most cases is considered as revelation. And, every revelation (according to the Scripture) is prophetic. [Divine] dream can be considered as vision if only it is able to project through the future of the subject of God's rule.

*Joseph was a dreamer*, and most of his dreams were regarded as visions. Since every divine dream or vision is prophetic, the dreamer or visionist is regarded as ‘prophet’.

Biblically, there are three main categories of prophets as identified in Hebrew; the **ro'eh** or “seers” (dreamers and visionists), the “**nabi**” (the predictors), and the “**hozeh**” (seen as the visionists and directors of God's people). With these terms, the Hebrew word used generally for a prophet of God is nabi, from a root meaning “to bubble forth, as from a foundation.” In the time of Samuel another word, ro'eh, “seer,” began to be used (1 Sam 9:9). Afterwards another word, hozeh, “seer,” (2 Sam 24:11), was employed. In 1 Chronicles 29:29, all these three words are used: “Samuel the seer (ro'eh), Nathan the prophet (nabi), Gad the seer (hozeh). The word diviner (kosem, in Hebrew) was only used for a false prophet (Josh 13:22). Biblically, the “seers” were the group of prophets who were only dreamers and visionists (Jer 23:25-28, 31-32). Thus, only the prophets as the “nabi” group, were to foretell future events; to predict. Some of the prophets in the “ro'eh” group like Samuel, also made declarations of events to come (Jer 11:6-23).

Joseph was a dreamer or visionist, or simply a “prophet”: Beginning his way into God's plan and purpose for the generations of Israel into slavery, his first dream recorded in Gen 37:5-8, basically declared him as “seer” (ro’eh).

### **The Dreams Of Joseph**

There are **six(6) dreams** recorded throughout the life of Joseph; they were conveyed in three pairs. Joseph had the first two dreams (Gen 37), the two fellow prisoners of Joseph in Egypt also has the second pair (Gen 40), and Pharaoh had the last pair of dreams (Gen 41); the first pair explains the mission prior to Joseph's destination (in Egypt) while the other pairs describe the rise of Joseph.

1. *First dream, the dream of sheaves (Gen 37:5-8):* This was about sheaves of wheat. The sheaves of the eleven brothers bowed down to Joseph's sheaf. This meant that Joseph would have dominion to rule over this brothers.
2. *Second dream, the dream of the sun, moon, and 11 stars (Gen 31:9-11):* In this dream, Joseph saw the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. The *sun* symbolized Jacob's glory, the *moon* symbolized the glory of Rachel the mother of Joseph, and the *eleven stars* symbolized the glory of the eleven brothers of Joseph; all the symbols of the vision or revelation used spoke about “glory, dominion or power” (see 1 Co 15:41; Rev 12:1). The dream meant that God would raise Joseph above all glory and power given to mankind on earth (see Gen 41:37-46).

***(b) Gift of interpretation of dreams:*** Joseph is well known by the Church as one of the best interpreters of dreams in the history of mankind, according to the Bible.

Basically, his first dream was interpreted by his eleven brothers (Gen 37:8) and his second dream by his father (Gen 37:10). Though his father and brothers understood the dreams, the best interpretation of the dreams could depend on Joseph himself.

The gift of interpretation was applied plainly by Joseph in the second pair of the dreams narrated by his fellow prisoners in Egypt (Gen 40:5-23) and the third pair by Pharaoh Apophis or Pharaoh Thothmes III in Gen 41:1-36 —*and each of the dreams was prophetic.*

The dreams of Joseph's fellow prisoners were about “restoration and punishment” (life and death). The wine steward was restored in three days after the dream (Gen 40:9-15, 20-21, 23): The chief baker was punished/killed after three days (Gen 40:16-19, 22).

The dreams of Pharaoh [Apophis] was a “famine prophecy”, interpreted by Joseph. About the prophecy (Gen 41:1-31), the phrase “*God shall shortly bring it to pass*” (Gen 41:32) explained what God was “‘*about to do*’ in the lives of that very existing generation” (Gen 41:25-31). Actually the vision was fulfilled within 14 years; 7 plenteous years (Gen 41:47, 48, 53) plus 7 years of dearth [i.e years of famine] (Gen 41:54, 57).

**(c) Gift of administration:** This is the gift of leadership, for management and positive governance. Joseph's leadership began at home, even at the time he was tasked to take care of flocks at age 17 (see Gen 37:2).

The next stage of Joseph's administration was when he was established by Potiphar to take charge of his house and everything he owned (see Gen 39:1-6).

The third time to witness Joseph's gift of administration was when the jailer put him in charge of all the other prisoners and made him responsible for everything that was done in the prison (see Gen 39:21-23).

The most powerful part of Joseph's administration was when Pharaoh Apophis made him the governor over all Egypt (see Gen 41:37-55).

**(d) Gift of wisdom and insight:** This was testified by Pharaoh himself after Joseph interpreted the dreams to him (see Gen 41:39). His “wisdom and insight” was divine, and was applied in all his works to please God (see Gen 39:9; 40:8).

**(e) Gift of helps:** This particular gift outlines one's service to God and man. 1 Corinthians 12:28 also mentions this gift possessed by patriarch Joseph, in Christianity.

The gift of HELPS forms part of the “Nurtural Gifts” (i.e. the gifts that analyze and determine how Christ governs the Church, as well as how He provides both spiritual and physical needs to/through the Church established on earth). In almost



all aspects of supports, the Lord's Church is prepared for perfection to uphold the heavenly splendor (Rev 21:1-3) through Helps; this becomes one of the major ways through which God blesses and nourishes His growing community on earth.

In fact, God answers people's prayers mostly through those gifted with “Helps.” This gift in most cases works as “Love;” basically, certain parts of it is supposed to be possessed by every Christian (see Matt 25:44-45).

*However, the purpose of the “Helps” is characteristically given according to its function, below;*

**(i)** Christians with the gift of Helps take upon themselves to carry each other's burdens, as a unique way to fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).

**(ii)** Those with the gift of Helps also possess the gift of Giving (Lk 6:38; Acts 20:35); such are full of good works and acts of charity e.g. Tabitha [Dorcas] (Acts 9:36-41).

**(iii)** They are kind, compassionate and forgiving (Eph 4:32).

**(iv)** They show very intense feeling of love [to those in need] (Jn 15:12).

**(v)** They assist people according to their needs (Prov 3:27).

**(vi)** They visit and assist the fatherless and widows in their affliction (James 1:27).

**(vii)** They share what they have with others and do good to present them as holy sacrifices before God (Heb 13:16).

**(viii)** They give to those who ask, and lend people who borrow from them anything without any condition (Matt 5:42).

**(ix)** They lend the Lord by helping the poor graciously (Prov 19:17).

**(x)** They contribute to the needs of God's people and treat strangers with pure love (Rom 12:13).

**(xi)** They offer from their gift(s) without demanding payment (Matt 10:8).

**(xii)** They watch out for what is better for others (Phil 2:4).

**(xiii)** They plan and work on how to provide people's body needs (James 2:14-17; see also Lk 3:10-11; 1 Jn 3:17; Lk 12:33).

**(xiv)** They serve God's holy people (Heb 6:10).

**(xv)** They help refresh others (Prov 11:25).

**(xvi)** They help build each other up in life (1 Thes 5:11).

**(xvii)** They open their hands generously to their neighbours, the needy and the poor (Deut 15:11; Prov 22:9).

Joseph was ready to help in anything, in any time (see Gen 37:12-17). He deeply understood his service to God and man, and even served to forgive his brothers (Gen 42–45; 50:15-23).

**(f) Gift of love:** The gift of love is the gift of helps. Helping in pure heart is a divine service to God and mankind. Joseph exhibited this gift in all his works, especially when he revealed himself to his brothers (Gen 45).

## **CHAPTER 4: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH IN EGYPT**

The life of Joseph in the land of Egypt started in the house of Potiphar, according to **Genesis 39**.

In **Genesis 37:36**, the Midianites constituting part of the Ishmaelites (Gen 37:27-28; 39:1) sold Joseph to Potiphar, one of the officers of Pharaoh and captain of the palace guard. Joseph lived with Potiphar and his wife for some time before he was jailed (see Gen 39:2-20).

In Egypt, the Bible records how Joseph spent some time in prison. As he was given the power to take charge of the other prisoners and many other important things (see Gen 39:21-22), we would believe he was never tortured or treated cruelly in prison.

Considering **Genesis 40 & 41**, Joseph used his gift of interpretation of dreams, on the side of the two fellow prisoners and king Pharaoh. God through such remarkable events blessed Joseph gloriously. In **Gen 41:50-53**, Joseph married *Asenath the daughter of Potipherah* priest of On and bare Manasseh and Ephraim (who later replaced Joseph in the history of the twelve tribes of Israel); he married and started his generation before the prophecy of famine was fulfilled.

**Genesis 42–48** describes the fame and authority of Joseph in Egypt, his unity with his family, and how the 75 people traveled to Egypt (including Jacob) to stay there for 30 years (Acts 7:9-16) before the actual slavery of 400 years began (Acts 7:6; compare Exo 12:40-41).

## **CHAPTER 5: THE DEATH OF JOSEPH**

The death of Joseph concludes the whole book of Genesis; the 50th chapter of the book recorded his death.

***Joseph died at age 110*** (Gen 50:22-23). It is written, “*So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt*” (Genesis 50:26, KJV).

Before His death, he forgave his brothers fully (Gen 50:15-22); he prophesied about the salvation of Israel after their captivity in Egypt (Gen 50:24); and also asked his people to carry up his bones from Egypt in case of their exodus (Gen 50:25; see Exo 13:19; Joshua 24:32).

## **CHAPTER 6: HOW THE PRESENT CHURCH BENEFITS FROM THE STORY OF JOSEPH**

The story of Joseph provides the Church today so many important lessons. Some of the lessons have been briefly outlined below;

***(1) The act of self-discipline:*** This is one key thing we can learn from the life of Joseph. His discipline was demonstrated in his denial to have sexual intercourse with the wife of Potiphar (Gen 39:7-19), and his discipline at work concerning his hardworking spirit and high level of concentration which forced him to complain to Jacob about his brethren (see Gen 37:2).

**(2) *His zeal to apply his gift:*** Joseph with the six major gifts discussed in chapter 3 of this study did not joke with any of them. The Bible encourages all saints to apply the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on them (see Matt 25:14-30; compare 1 Tim 4:14-16).

**(3) *His spirit of forgiveness:*** Joseph did not think to please his flesh to pay his brothers with the evil they committed against him. Instead, he fully forgave them (Gen 50:15-21). The Church is expected to do same (Rom 12:17-21).

**(4) *He had better plans for the future of his generation:*** Looking at his prediction in Gen 50:24-25, we would believe he was not thinking of only the past and present, but also planned well for the future.

**(5) *He thought of the welfare of others:*** Joseph was not selfish; he was also not jealous. His attitude toward the two fellow prisoners in Gen 40 speaks it all. The Church is expected to learn from such.

**(6) *He aimed not to please man but God:*** Joseph never sought glory and fame for himself regardless of his gifts and/or capabilities (see Gen 39:9; 40:8). The Church must learn this godly behavior of Joseph; we need to please God and not man (1 Thes 2:4; Col 3:23).

**(7) *He cherished unity:*** Upon all the evil his brothers planned against him, he never sought to divide or establish his own tribe aside the eleven. Instead, he united with them (Gen 45–47; 50:20-21). God is against division (Rom 16:17-18; 1 Co 3:3).

## **CONCLUSION**

**THE LIFE OF JOSEPH** provides the Church a considerable scheme of life which when adopted, can help build the inner man according to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are expected by the Lord to live an exemplary life that can help persuade others positively like Joseph.

Joseph never sought to please himself or any other man, but to do things according to God's own pattern. That spirit of Joseph must live within the Church this day, to help us live righteously before God till death.

**THE END!**

LESSON PREPARED, SUMMARIZED AND EDITED BY **BRO. SETH NYARKO**, BIBLE TEACHER – AKIM ACHIASE CHURCH OF CHRIST (LAB).

**CONTACT:** 0249289180 / 0209177976