

International Conversation Cafe

Old Testament: The Story of Joseph, Genesis 37, 39-50

Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Bad things do happen to good people. There are many stories in the Bible about people who suffer. Sometimes God's purpose is revealed. Sometimes the reason is never known.

Joseph (1905-1805 BC) was the favorite son of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. Joseph's ten older brothers hated Joseph because their father treated Joseph better than them. One day, Jacob sent Joseph on an errand to find his brothers who were herding sheep, to see how they were getting along. When the older brothers saw him approach in the distance they said, "Here comes the dreamer. Come, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say a ferocious animal devoured him." Genesis 37:19

That is exactly what they did. However, as Joseph languished in the cistern, a caravan of traders came by, on their way to Egypt. Instead of murdering Joseph, they sold him as a slave. This was the first bad thing that happened to Joseph.

*Have you ever been hurt by someone bigger and stronger than yourself?
Have you ever seen someone intentionally hurt someone else? (We call this person a bully.)*

In Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, an official to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. "The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered. Potiphar put him in charge of his household and he entrusted to his care, everything that he owned." However, Potiphar's wife was attracted to Joseph. When Joseph refused her sexual advances, she made up a story that Joseph tried to rape her. That enraged Potiphar and he put Joseph in prison. This was the second bad thing that happened to Joseph. Genesis 39

*How do you feel about someone who tells lies about another in order to get them in trouble?
Have you ever had an experience like this? Can you tell about it?*

While Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹the LORD was with him. He was kind to him." So the man who was running the prison was pleased with Joseph. ²²He put Joseph in charge of all of the prisoners. He made him accountable for everything that was done there. ²³The man who ran the prison didn't pay attention to anything that was in Joseph's care. The LORD was with Joseph. He gave Joseph success in everything he did. Genesis 39

Do you think that success comes from God? Why or why not?

While Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh's baker and wine taster were thrown in prison. Each of them had a dream that Joseph interpreted. Their dreams came true just as Joseph had predicted; the baker was put to death and the wine taster was restored to his position ²³But the chief wine taster didn't remember Joseph. In fact, he forgot all about him." Genesis 40

This was the third bad thing that happened to Joseph.

Can you tell about someone who had many bad things happen to them? How did they respond?

Two more years passed. Then Pharaoh had a dream that no one could interpret and the wine taster remembered Joseph. So Pharaoh listened to Joseph's interpretation of his dream "39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'God has made all of this known to you. No one is as wise and understanding as you are. 40 You will be in charge of my palace. All of my people must obey your orders. I will be greater than you only because I'm the one who sits on the throne.' Genesis 41

This was a change in Joseph's fortune.

About this time a great famine came to Egypt and the surrounding countries. Jacob sent his 10 sons to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph was in charge of managing the grain supply and storage. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. Joseph tested them to see if their attitudes toward their younger brother and father had changed. Genesis 42 - 45 tells a fascinating story. When Joseph was satisfied that his brothers showed remorse over how they treated him and that they truly cared about their father and youngest brother, he sent all the Egyptians out of the room and revealed his identity to his brothers.

So there wasn't anyone with Joseph when he told his brothers who he was. 2 He sobbed so loudly that the Egyptians heard him. Everyone in Pharaoh's house heard about it.

3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

But his brothers weren't able to answer him. They were too afraid of him.

4 Joseph said to his brothers "Come close to me." So they did. "

Why were Joseph's brothers afraid?

How do you think Joseph felt about his brothers?

Then he said, "I am your brother Joseph. I'm the one you sold into Egypt. 5 But don't be upset. And don't be angry with yourselves because you sold me here. God sent me ahead of you to save many lives." Genesis 45

Joseph gave a reason for his suffering. What was the reason?

How did knowing God's purpose help him accept the difficulties in his life?

After Jacob died, the brothers once again became fearful that Joseph would pay them back for the evil they had done to him. "19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Do you think I'm God? 20 You planned to harm me. But God planned it for good. He planned to do what is now being done. He wanted to save many lives." Genesis 50

How do you feel about this story?

Do you think it has any application to your life? How?



Jones, Owen. Joseph Weeps. C.1869. 550 x 394 (53 KB) from "The History of Joseph and His Brethren" (Day & Son, 1869) http://www.gallery.oldbookart.com/main.php?g2_itemId=30588