

Early Descendants of Abraham

Excerpts from the Bible (NIV). *Italics* denote summaries of the Bible.

Abraham → Israel (Genesis 25 – 35)

Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah (25:19b-20a). Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant (25:21). When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb (25:24). The first to come out was ... Esau. After this, his brother came out (25:25-26a). The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob (25:27-28). (NIV)

Jacob schemed to get Esau's birthright (inheritance rights of the firstborn), and got it (25:29-34). Later, Rebekah schemed to have Isaac bless Jacob instead of Esau, and the plan worked (27:1-35). Esau talked about killing Jacob, and Jacob fled to Haran (27:41-43; 28:10). In Haran, Jacob married Leah and Rachel (29:16-30). Jacob had twelve sons through Leah, Rachel, and their maidservants (35:23-26). Eventually, Jacob returned to Canaan (31:3; 35:27). On the way back, Jacob "struggled with God," and was renamed "Israel" (32:22-30).

Joseph (Genesis 37 – 50)

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age, and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him. (37:3-4a). Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more" (37:5-8a).



Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph..."Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." And he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron (37:12-13a, 14b). *When his brothers saw Joseph approaching, they wanted to kill him, but Reuben convinced them otherwise (37:21-22). Instead... they stripped him of his robe – the richly ornamented robe he was wearing – and they took him and threw him into the cistern. (37:23-24a). When ... Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt (37:28). (NIV)*



An Egyptian official, named Potiphar, bought Joseph (39:1). Potiphar liked Joseph and put him in charge of his household (39:4). Potiphar's wife was attracted to Joseph, and when Joseph refused her advances, she accused him of attempting to sleep with her (39:7-18). Potiphar burned with anger, and threw Joseph into prison (39:19-20). Some time later, the king's baker and cupbearer offended the king (Pharaoh), and they were thrown into prison with Joseph (40:1-3). One night, both servants had dreams and Joseph, with God's guidance, interpreted their dreams correctly – the baker would be executed and the cupbearer would be released (40:5-22).

Two years later, Pharaoh had two troubling dreams, which no one could interpret (41:1-8). Then the cupbearer remembered Joseph in prison (41:9-13). So Pharaoh sent for Joseph so he could interpret his dreams (41:14-15). With God's guidance, Joseph explained that God had revealed what would happen (41:16, 25). There would be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine (41:28-30). Joseph recommended they store up food during the good years so they would have food during the famine (41:34-36). He also recommended that Pharaoh choose a wise man to administer this project (41:33). Pharaoh chose Joseph, and he became "second-in-command" over Egypt (41:39-43).



When the famine came, Egypt had food (41:54), and all the countries came to Egypt to buy food from Joseph (41:57). When Jacob (Israel) learned that there was food in Egypt, he said to his sons, "...Go down 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 (42:1a, 2b-4a). When Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground (42:6b). Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him (42:8). (NIV)

Joseph accused his brothers of being spies and demanded that they bring their youngest brother Benjamin (42:14-15). He sent them back to Canaan with grain, but kept Simeon in prison (42:19-20, 24b). The brothers began to feel they were being punished by God for treating Joseph so badly (42:21-22). When the grain was gone, the brothers had to return to Egypt (43:1). They could not return without Benjamin, so Israel allowed him to go, though it grieved Israel (43:3-14). While they were in Egypt, Joseph tested his brothers by placing his silver cup in Benjamin's sack, then accusing him of stealing it, and threatening to make Benjamin his slave (44:1-17). His brothers were greatly distressed, and pleaded with Joseph (44:13, 18-34).

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 (45:1). 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, "...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... God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (45:3-7). (NIV)

When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come...Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals, and return to the land of Canaan, and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land'" (45:16-18).

Later, after Israel's family (seventy in all) moved to Egypt, Israel died, and Joseph's brothers became worried (46:27; 49:33; 50:15). They said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for the wrongs we did to him? (50:15) 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" (50:20). (NIV)

Discussion Questions

1. From the Scripture included in the handout, what is your impression of Abraham's family (that is, Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, Jacob, and Jacob's sons)? What do you think about their relationships with one another? What problems are evident?¹
2. Joseph seems to be a relatively "good person." Yet, after his brothers abandon their idea of murdering him, he is thrown into a cistern, sold to slave traders, and later, wrongly accused and thrown into prison. Why do these things happen? In general, why do bad things happen to "good people?"²
3. Joseph's brothers treat him very badly. Years later, when Joseph makes himself known to them, they are very afraid. How does Joseph respond, and why?³



Reflection/Application

- When something "bad" happens in your life, how does it affect your thoughts about God?⁴ How does it affect your thoughts about yourself, and the other people involved?
 - As a Christian, how do you respond when something "bad" happens in your life?⁵ Is your response characterized by trust in God and his purposes?⁶ The Bible says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (*Romans 8:28, NIV*) Read *Romans 8:28-39*.
4. What progress, if any, do you see in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham?⁷

📖 "So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in a vision ... '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.'" (*Genesis 46:1-4a, NIV*)

¹ Isaac & Rebekah showed favoritism to particular sons, resulting in problems. Jacob and Rebekah were deceitful. Esau hated Jacob and wanted to kill him. Jacob showed favoritism to his son Joseph. Joseph's brothers wanted to kill or harm him, and eventually sold him to slave traders and lied to their father. There were other problems also.

² Joseph isn't perfect, but he does appear to be a relatively good man. There are various factors involved in Joseph's treatment; including a father (Israel) who shows favoritism, jealous brothers, and a lustful woman (Potiphar's wife). In general, the problem is sin. Why do bad things happen to "good people?" First, it should be noted that "no one is good" relative to God's perfect standard (*Romans 3:10-12, 23*), though some people may be "good" relative to other people. Why do bad things happen? Because we live in a broken world. It is broken because of sin (see Lesson 2).

³ Joseph was forgiving. He saw the good in the course of events. If Joseph had not gone to Egypt, many might have perished because of the famine, including his own family. God had made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their family would become a great nation. God worked through the bad situation to accomplish his purposes. This story provides a wonderful illustration of the tension of human responsibility and the sovereignty of God. The ultimate example is found in Jesus Christ – a truly good man killed by wicked men (Read *Acts 2:22-24*).

⁴ The nonbeliever may doubt God because of evil and suffering. See the article *Evil & Suffering* on the ICF website.

⁵ Of course, our response will vary depending on the type of "bad thing" experienced. Think of a recent "bad thing." Think of the worst type of bad thing you have experienced as a Christian.

⁶ Of course, Joseph was able to see God's good purpose in the bad things that happened to him (*Genesis 50:20*).

Many times, we can see how God uses bad things for good (especially when we look back on life). At other times, we cannot see any good. In those times, we just need to trust in the one true God, who is good and purposeful.

⁷ The family has increased in number, to 70 people (*46:27*). The family is blessed to live in the best of the land of Egypt (Goshen) and continues to grow in number (*47:27*). Through Joseph, many are blessed through the distribution of food during the famine. God's promise to Abraham had included Israel's time in Egypt (*15:12-19*).