



August 10 • 2008

Focus Scripture

Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

Additional Scriptures

Psalms 105:1–6, 16–22,
45b

Romans 10:5–15

Matthew 14:22–33

Are you in my story, God? Are you the principal actor in my drama? Are you the silent, saving character? Dream me into your story. Awaken me to your presence. Show me your saving grace. Lift me up, God. Call forth my praise. Accept my worship. Amen.

Lifted Up

Sometimes it seems that God is absent, or manipulates human misery to achieve a purpose. The story of Joseph and his family reminds us that God is present in a living relationship with people. God protects what is promised, redeeming the day. God restores God's people, bringing good from evil and order from chaos. In challenging times, God is with us.

Focus Scripture: Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

Genesis tells the stories of Israel's ancient leaders and their experiences of God's salvation. Abraham's grandson Jacob – named Israel in Genesis 32:28 – is a central figure. The nation that emerges will take his name. Jacob's saga includes Joseph's story. Joseph's story is an epic tale of God's gracious action and intervention to fulfill the covenant made with Abraham (Genesis 12:2–3; 13:1–5). This saga moves Jacob's family into Egypt, where they survive a devastating famine and then thrive. It prepares the ground for the coming Exodus story. In Egypt the clans of Jacob's twelve sons become Hebrews, an identifiable ethnic group. They will leave Egypt as the twelve tribes of Israel.

The story of Joseph explores familiar human traits. Those listening can easily identify various characters or groups within their own life experiences. Jacob is depicted as setting the stage for the family rivalry that fuels the events in this story. The storyteller highlights the tensions within Jacob's family. Joseph is a favourite son, the son of Jacob's favourite wife, Rachel (Genesis 29:16–18, 30). Joseph's privileges place him above his older brothers, whereas in ancient middle-eastern culture, the oldest son would be a father's favoured child. Tensions arise when cultural norms are ignored.

Joseph's brothers work as nomadic shepherds. Joseph dreams and enjoys beautiful clothes. He helps out with household work. He lives within easy reach of his father's house, and reports on the activities of other family members. When Joseph arrives at Dotham, the brothers' jealousy reaches its climax. They seize the opportunity to be rid of Joseph. It seems their treachery is not their first offence against him (37:4).

Joseph is not killed, but lifted up out of the cistern and sold. His saga has just begun – the future of Israel requires him to live. The brothers disappear, but will return in a later episode. They will be significant players in Israel's future, too.

From early days, Joseph knew his life had a purpose (37:7). His dreams alerted him to God's plans. God is an active character in the story of Jacob's family.

Sometimes, we recognize God's salvation when we look back. **Psalm 105:17–22** summarizes Joseph's role in God's salvation of Israel. Through these events, the Israelites discover God is worthy of loyalty, trust, and worship. In the recalling of this saga, subsequent generations discover God is present in their lives, too.

As Joseph is lifted up, so are the disciples. In **Matthew 14:22–33** we read that Jesus' disciples are distressed and frightened, threatened by their circumstances. Jesus arrives. Peter is lifted up, saved from the dangerous underworld. Their salvation secure, the disciples are certain about Jesus' identity. **Romans 10:5–15** reinforces that God's grace and love are for everyone. God accepts all comers. Who will say "yes" to a relationship with Jesus Christ?



God is with people in their struggles. Joseph and Peter were lifted for a purpose. Through them, God's salvation was extended to many others. Many people have found purpose and direction in their experience of God's salvation. Whom do you know who is struggling? How might you strive to lift them up, so they may know God's presence through you?

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