

# BUTS OF THE BIBLE

**Biblical Characters and  
the Crossroads of Life**

**Booklet 1**

Genesis -  
Deuteronomy



BCF SAMPLE

## LESSON 6

### **“YET THE CHIEF CUPBEARER DID NOT REMEMBER JOSEPH” - A LESSON ON UNFAIRNESS - (FROM GENESIS 40:23)**

#### JOSEPH HAS A PROBLEM

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How many times have we heard the words “that’s not fair!” As a matter of fact, how many times have we spoken those words, especially in our growing up years? List some situations where people are particularly prone either to say those words or at least to think them.

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In this lesson, we are going to see multiple examples of unfairness in the life of Joseph, one of the sons of Jacob, Abraham’s grandson. How Joseph handled it has direct relevance for our lives today. In fact, there are so many things to learn from the life of Joseph, that we’re going to take two lessons to get through them. Lesson 6 focuses on how to handle injustices or situations we believe to be unfair. Lesson 7 focuses on forgiveness and reconciliation.

Joseph’s life was full of troubles from his early years. So to see how they began, read *Genesis 37:1-4*. How would you describe the relationship with his brothers?

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What specific things seemed to lead to a worsening relationship?

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## LESSON 6

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### YET THE CHIEF CUPBEARER DID NOT REMEMBER JOSEPH

How would you describe the relationship with his father? Why was it this way?

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Jacob (whom God named Israel in *Genesis 32:28*) had a preference toward Joseph, and it was obvious to his brothers. Read *Genesis 37:5-11* where Joseph tells his family about two of his dreams. What did both dreams mean?

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Joseph may not have intended to alienate his brothers, but his dreams clearly did not improve the relationship. To make matters worse, Jacob sent Joseph on an errand. Read *verses 12-14*. Based on the strained relationship, how might the brothers have perceived Joseph's coming to them?

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The brothers, out of jealousy and hatred, devised a plot to get rid of Joseph. Read *Genesis 37:18-24*. There are several pivotal points in Joseph's life. The first of them is signified by the "but" in *verse 21*. The original plan was to kill Joseph and cover it up. How did this plan change and why?

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Imagine the pressure of this moment. The brothers were unified; they had both the murder and the cover-up figured out. Then Reuben (Jacob's first-born son through Leah) began to question the plan. There may have been other brothers besides Reuben that had reservations about doing this. The fact that they planned a cover-up shows that they knew what they were doing was wrong. But peer pressure is a powerful force, and it happens in a wide range of situations. Think of some examples of pressure to follow the crowd. What motives or fears might drive someone to go along with the crowd even though they know it is wrong?

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**YET THE CHIEF CUPBEARER DID NOT REMEMBER JOSEPH**

Now read *Genesis 37:25-28*. Which brother spoke up for Joseph this time, and what was his rationale?

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**LESSONS ON COVER-UPS**

Read *Genesis 37:29-36*. Reuben, who was going to rescue Joseph from the pit, was unaware of the brothers' scheme to sell Joseph. To his dismay, he found that Joseph had been sold into slavery and taken away. So the brothers carried out their cover-up plan.

These events illustrate the inclination we have as humans to cover up our sin. We see it in politics, in business, and in personal relationships. The fact that we try to cover up our sin tells us a lot about ourselves. What are some of these things?

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The interesting thing is that we did not have to be taught how to cover things up. Even Adam and Eve sought to hide when they sinned for the first time. From our earliest years we knew how to devise cover-ups in attempts to avoid getting caught. We all probably remember times as a child when we did something wrong and tried as hard as we could not to let our parents know. The human condition has not changed over thousands of years, which speaks to why the Bible is still so relevant even today. God knows His creation all too well.

Turn to *Psalms 139:1-4*. What does this tell us about God?

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This passage describes one of the characteristics of God: He is omniscient. He sees everything and knows everything. This is difficult to fully grasp but is a powerful truth about the Lord. You can also read *Hebrews 4:12-13* on your own time. It is a good reminder that our actions, even when they are not seen by people on earth, are intimately known by God (*Jeremiah 17:10*). This can be a source of fear for those doing wrong, but also of comfort for those who trust in the Lord.

What are some of the benefits for the Christian of knowing that God is omniscient?

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## YET THE CHIEF CUPBEARER DID NOT REMEMBER JOSEPH

For the believer, God’s omniscience can both provide comfort and act as a restraint. When we are wronged or when others seem not to notice us, we can take comfort knowing that God sees even when others do not. Jesus taught that God’s omniscience should affect the daily life of a believer. In *Matthew Chapter 6*, He used a contrast between the focus of the religious leaders of that day (the Pharisees) and how we should be as true believers. The following three passages use the word “but” to show that contrast. Read each passage and list the area of life Jesus is talking about.

13. *Matthew 6:2-4*

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*Matthew 6:5-6*

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*Matthew 6:16-18*

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Notice the common phrase in each of these passages: “*the Father who sees in secret.*” What is the overall lesson God is teaching us here?

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The Lord delights in our doing good without drawing attention to ourselves. Our blessing comes from Him and not from whether other people see us. Applying this today, we don’t need to succumb to peer pressure or to try to impress people. God knows when we are choosing the right way to go, even if others should mock or make fun of us.

An understanding of God’s omniscience should also act as a restraint from doing wrong. As a Christian, our obedience should stem from gratitude for God’s love for us, as demonstrated by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. But the fact that God knows exactly what is going on in our lives, including our propensity to sin, should be a strong motivation not to tell that lie, not to steal, not to harm another person, and so on. For Joseph’s brothers, this is the part of God’s omniscience that they ignored. It was not even a consideration as they plotted against Joseph.

Did you ever think of why we have so many video cameras now installed in stores, or so many security precautions? It is because we know it is human nature to sin and hide things. Shoplifters don’t tell the clerk as they are going out the door, “I’m taking this without paying for it.” No, they hide it to keep from being seen. Joseph’s brothers apparently thought their plot would never be discovered, but God knew all along, and even recorded it in the Bible for all of us to read and learn from.

## ANOTHER SET OF INJUSTICES

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Now let’s continue with Joseph’s story in *Genesis 39*. Read *verses 1-7* as background.

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**YET THE CHIEF CUPBEARER DID NOT REMEMBER JOSEPH**

Joseph was sold in Egypt as a slave to a government official named Potiphar. God gave Joseph success in Potiphar's house, until Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him. Here we see the next "but" in Joseph's life. Read *verses 8 and 9*. What was the reason that he said he could not participate in this sin?

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Joseph clearly understood God's omniscience and he recognized his privileged position. He respected his master and was determined to honor him, but more importantly, he knew that to lie with Potifer's wife would have been a sin against the Lord.

But Potiphar's wife persisted, and Joseph kept resisting. In *verses 11-18* (you can read them on your own), Potiphar's wife, rejected by Joseph, devised her own plot. When Joseph fled her advances, she grabbed his garment and claimed that he had taken advantage of her. Read *verses 19-20*. What was the injustice that was inflicted on Joseph?

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What sort of responses are we tempted to have when we've been treated unjustly?

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Read *verses 21-23*. With Joseph now in prison, what did the chief jailer (warden) do to him?

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Joseph apparently had an exceptional testimony with the warden. Joseph didn't sit around feeling sorry for himself, but willingly took on the responsibilities given to him. His ascension wasn't just because he was a nice person. Joseph was probably recognized as trustworthy, hardworking, honest, and fair in the way he dealt with people and responsibilities. But what is also the reason for Joseph's success? Look again at *verses 21 and 23*.

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This is important to remember in our own lives. Through unfair or difficult times, the Lord can still display His kindness and blessing to us. This may or may not involve physical success like Joseph, but we can have spiritual peace and contentment in spite of adversity.

## LESSON 6

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### YET THE CHIEF CUPBEARER DID NOT REMEMBER JOSEPH

Now read *Genesis 40:1-5*. Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker ended up in Joseph's jail, and Joseph was appointed to oversee them. Both of them had troubling dreams, which they told to Joseph. Joseph first interpreted the dream for the cupbearer, whose dream predicted a favorable outcome. Because Joseph knew that the cupbearer would be back in favor with Pharaoh, he made a request of him. What was the request in *verse 14*?

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We know from *verses 16-19* that Joseph's interpretation of the chief baker's dream did not predict such a happy outcome as that of the cupbearer's. Now read *verses 20-23*. Here is another crossroad in Joseph's life, and a third injustice. What happened to him this time?

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Being forgotten was no small oversight for Joseph. He spent another two years in prison after the cupbearer's release.

### CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

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Think back through your own life. You probably remember one or more times that you have been forgotten or ignored. Maybe it was a raise in pay you thought you deserved. Maybe it was some kind of opportunity you expected to have, but never developed. Maybe it was someone simply not appreciating something you had done for them. Injustices will happen in life. People will forget about you at times. But here are some Bible verses to remember when you have been put in that position.

- *1 Corinthians 13* describes the characteristics of biblical love. At the end of *verse 5*, what is one of those characteristics?

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This is not easy. Our nature is to remember injustices, and even keep track of them in our minds, so that we can gain an advantage or even take revenge at some point. When we are tempted to do that, we can look to Jesus as the ultimate example of how to respond to unfair and unjust treatment.

- Read *1 Peter 2:21-23*, which describes how Jesus responded in the midst of His most difficult and painful trial. Following Jesus' example, what are we *not* to do?

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## YET THE CHIEF CUPBEARER DID NOT REMEMBER JOSEPH

The “but” in the middle of *verse 23* introduces what we *are* to do instead. What is that?

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What is the attribute of God that is mentioned here that we can remind ourselves of?

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It is in our fleshly nature to dwell on injustices. This only leads to holding grudges, bitterness, worsening relationships, and even retaliation. But God shows us His better way. We simply place ourselves under His care and control. He gives us the great hope that, even in very difficult circumstances, He is the ultimate judge of our lives and character.

We do not want to minimize the challenges of having been treated unfairly, perhaps even treated unfairly under the law. Responding the way Jesus did can be very difficult, and at some point the unfairness may need to be addressed. But our motivation as a believer should be to act out of love for the other individuals, helping them to learn how to treat others, not merely to defend our own rights. This is a huge opportunity to show the world the difference Jesus can make in our life.

As we close Part 1 of the lessons on Joseph’s life, consider whether there are areas in your life where you are still holding on to injustices that may have occurred in the past. In light of Jesus’ great sacrifice for you, you can let go of them and entrust yourself to Him who judges righteously. This can be a life-transforming truth and can, in turn, be an example to others. For further biblical truth on this topic, you can also read *Luke 6:35-36*; *Romans 12:14, 17*; and *1 Peter 3:8-9* on your own time.

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