

# Jimmy Goes to Sunday School

By Ward Ricker

## Episode 7 – Joseph

Mrs. Peabody was on her knees praying when Jimmy and Aaron came into the Sunday School classroom. She got up abruptly when they came in and greeted them, without explaining that she had been praying that Jimmy wouldn't show up.

Jimmy took their usual seats and waited for the other children to show up, but no one else came in. As Mrs. Peabody started the class, Aaron asked where the rest of the students were.

"There's a bad flu going around," Mrs. Peabody answered, "and they are sick this week. We will pray that god makes them better so that they can be back next Sunday."

Jimmy was curious, so he asked, "So you are telling god that he should reconsider his actions?"

Mrs. Peabody looked at Jimmy trying to decide whether to try to answer his question or scold him for it. When Jimmy saw her confused look, he said, "Never mind; it's okay. We'll just wait and see if god heals them or continues to make them sick."

Not quite sure what to say, Mrs. Peabody just started the lesson. "Well, children, last week we learned that Jacob, who god renamed Israel, had twelve sons. We are going to talk some more about his twelve sons today, but especially his son Joseph. Joseph and his brother Benjamin were Jacob's favorites out of all of them, because they were children of Rachel, who was his favorite wife. You remember that Rachel died when giving birth to Benjamin, so her two boys were all he had to remember her by. Joseph was so special that his father made him a beautiful coat made of a lot of different colors. This made Joseph feel very special, but it didn't make his older brothers feel special. As a matter of fact, his brothers got very jealous of him and hated him.

"Then one night Joseph had a dream. In his dream he and his brothers were binding up wheat into bundles called 'sheathes'. After the sheathes were made up, though, Joseph's sheath stood up straight and tall, and the other sheathes bowed down and worshipped his.

"When he told his brothers about the dream, though, they asked, 'So you think we are going to bow down to you?' and they hated him more than before.

"Then he had another dream in which eleven stars and the sun and moon bowed down to him. When he told this dream to them, they hated him still more, and even his father, Jacob, scolded him, 'What kind of a dream was that? Do you think even your mother and I are going to bow down to you?'" His father remembered the dream, though, to see what might come of it.

At this point, Jimmy ever attentive and listening to the details, asked, "But didn't you say that Joseph's mother was dead? How would she bow down to him if she was dead? Is god going to raise her up so she can do it?"

"No, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody responded. "God isn't going to raise her up, he's just going to ... ahh, ... well, just listen to the story and see how it goes." Continuing with her story, Mrs. Peabody said, "Well, sometime after this, Joseph's brothers were out tending to Jacob's flocks in Shechem. You remember we mentioned Shechem in last week's lesson, right?"

The two boys nodded, while Jimmy thought, "Yeah, where god's special people murdered all the men in a whole city."

"Well," she continued, "Jacob wanted to make sure that everything was okay, so he asked Joseph to go check on his brothers and make sure that they and the animals were all alright. So Joseph went to Shechem, where his brothers were, but when his brothers saw him coming they said to themselves, 'So here comes the dreamer. Let's kill him and throw his body into a pit. We'll see what will become of his dreams then.'

“The oldest brother, Reuben, though, didn’t like the idea of actually killing him and convinced the rest of them not to kill him but to just throw him into a pit to let him die, so they took his coat of many colors off from him and threw him into a pit like Reuben suggested. After they did so, though, a group of men called Midianites who were traders came by, and, instead of letting Joseph die in the pit, the brothers decided to sell Joseph as a slave to the traders. They then took Joseph’s coat, dipped it in goat blood, returned home, showed their father the coat and told him that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Jacob, of course, was very sad and mourned for his son for many days.”

Mrs. Peabody skipped the next part in the Bible where Judah got his daughter-in-law pregnant, and where god killed Judah’s sons, including one of them because he ejaculated onto the ground. She didn’t think that the children really needed to know about such things, so she picked up the story where she had left off with Joseph. “The Midianite traders, meanwhile, went down to Egypt and sold poor Joseph to an Egyptian named Potiphar, who was one of Pharaoh’s officers. You remember that Pharaoh was the king of Egypt, right?”

“Yes,” the boys both answered.

Mrs. Peabody continued on, “Well, Joseph worked for Potiphar for a while, and Potiphar saw that god was with Joseph and made him very prosperous, so that Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his entire house and belongings. Meanwhile, though, Joseph had grown up into a strong, handsome man—so strong and handsome that Potiphar’s wife decided that she liked Joseph better than her own husband—so she started following Joseph around when her husband wasn’t watching and tried to get him to have sex with her. Joseph, though, was a good, godly man, and he refused to do such a thing with his master’s wife and told her, ‘My master has trusted me with everything he owns. How can I do such wickedness and sin against god?’ No matter how much she asked him, he refused to give in and commit sin by sleeping with another man’s wife. However, one day Joseph came into the house when there was no one around except Potiphar’s wife, and she grabbed hold of his robe and asked him again to have sex with her. Joseph, of course, ran to get away, because he wasn’t going to commit such a sin, but when he did, his robe came off and remained in her hands as he ran away.”

“So that was his story,” Jimmy thought.

“Well,” Mrs. Peabody continued, “Potiphar’s wife was now angry with Joseph, so she held onto the robe until her husband got home, showed it to him, and told him that Joseph had tried to force her to have sex with him and had left the robe in her hands when she fought him off. This was, of course, a lie, but when Potiphar heard it, he was very angry and had Joseph thrown into prison.

“Well, things weren’t looking very good for Joseph. First he was sold into slavery by his brothers, and then he was in prison for something he didn’t even do, but this was all part of god’s plan to make Joseph’s dreams come true and save Joseph’s family from something bad that was coming. While Joseph was in prison there were two other men who were also put in the same prison: the Pharaoh’s baker and the steward who served Pharaoh his wine. While they were there god gave each of them a dream. The steward dreamed of a grape vine with three branches, and, as he watched, the vine budded, blossomed and gave out grapes. He was then holding Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, squeezed the juice out of the grapes into the cup and gave it to Pharaoh. When he told this dream to Joseph, Joseph told him that the three branches represented three days and that in three days he would be restored to his post and serve Pharaoh his wine again. When the baker heard this, he told Joseph his dream, in which there were three white baskets on top of his head, and in the top basket were all kinds of baked goods, but the birds were eating the baked goods out of the baskets. Joseph told him that the baskets also represented three days, but that in three days Pharaoh would hang the baker on a tree and the birds would eat the flesh off from his body.”

“Ewww!” Jimmy exclaimed, but Mrs. Peabody just continued. “Well, it turned out that three days later was Pharaoh’s birthday and he gave a great feast, and he called the steward back to serve him during the feast, but the baker he hung, just as Joseph had predicted. When the steward left the prison,

Joseph asked him to speak to Pharaoh for him and let him know that he was in prison for something that he didn't do, but the steward forgot all about Joseph when he back to work. Then one night Pharaoh had two dreams."

"Wow, they really made a big deal about dreams back then," Jimmy thought.

"In the first dream," Mrs. Peabody continued, "Pharaoh was standing by a river, and seven cows who were healthy and well-fed came up out of the river. Then seven weak, skinny cows came up out of the river and stood beside them. Then, suddenly, the seven skinny cows ate the seven fat cows."

"Cannibal cows!" Jimmy thought. "Cool!"

"In the second dream," Mrs. Peabody continued, "there were seven nice, fat ears of corn that grew on a stalk. Then seven thin and scraggly ears grew out, and the thin ears ate up the seven fat ears."

Jimmy didn't think cannibal corn was as cool.

"Pharaoh woke up," Mrs. Peabody continued, "and was greatly concerned over his dreams, wondering what they meant, so he called all his magicians and wise men to him and told them about the dreams, but none of them could tell him what the dreams meant. Then the steward remembered Joseph and told the Pharaoh, 'When I was in prison there was a baker in prison with me, and we both had dreams. There was also a Hebrew man in there who interpreted both of our dreams for us and said that I would be restored to my position serving wine and that the baker would be hung, and it turned out just the way that he said.'"

Jimmy interrupted, "What's a Hebrew?"

"Oh," Mrs. Peabody explained, "that's just another word for Jew, the people of Israel who descended from Abraham through his grandson Jacob."

"So there were only twelve of them, and they were already known as Hebrews?" Jimmy asked.

"Their reputation grew quickly," Mrs. Peabody shot back and moved on rapidly. "Pharaoh was impressed by this and called for Joseph to be brought before him. He told Joseph the dreams, and Joseph told him what the dreams meant. He said that there would be seven years in which there would be plenty of food, but that afterward there would be seven years of famine, and that if they didn't store up food during the seven good years, there wouldn't be enough food to eat during the seven bad years. When Pharaoh heard this he decided to store up grain during the next seven years, and he made Joseph his second in command, in charge of making it happen."

"You mean, Pharaoh just believed him?" Jimmy asked.

"Yes, Pharaoh believed him," Mrs. Peabody answered.

"Pharaoh was very impressionable, wasn't he?" Jimmy responded.

Ignoring this comment, Mrs. Peabody continued, "Well, it turned out just as Joseph had predicted. Crops were bountiful and there was much food for the next seven years. During this time Joseph collected all the extra grain in the kingdom and stored it up. When the seven years were over, sure enough, the weather got bad and the crops failed and there were seven years of famine.

"When the seven years of famine hit, Jacob and Joseph's brothers were in Canaan and they ate up all the food that they had. Jacob heard that there was food down in Egypt, though, so he sent all his sons, except the youngest one, Benjamin, to Egypt to buy grain. When they arrived in Egypt, they were directed to Joseph, because he was the one who was in charge of the grain. When they came in front of Joseph, though, they didn't recognize him, because he was no longer a young boy, but had grown up to be a strong man. They bowed down in front of him and requested to buy grain to take home to their father, not realizing that they were fulfilling Joseph's dreams by bowing down to him. Joseph wanted to keep his secret from them for a while, though, so, when he talked to them, he spoke in Egyptian and had an interpreter translate for him, and he spoke to them roughly, as if he didn't know them, and even accused them of being spies.

“The brothers assured him that they were not spies, but were the sons of a man of Canaan and had come to buy grain because the famine was so bad that they didn’t have any food. They also told him that their father had twelve sons, but that one was dead and the other had stayed with his father. Joseph held them for three days and then spoke with them again. He sold them the grain, but he had Simeon tied up in front of them and told them that he would not let Simeon go until they came back with their youngest brother to show that they were telling the truth.”

Pleased that Jimmy was no longer interrupting, Mrs. Peabody continued, “When the grain was poured into sacks for the brothers to take home, Joseph told his men to put the brothers’ money back in their sacks along with the grain. When the men got home and found the money in their sacks, they were worried that Pharaoh’s representative, who they still didn’t know was their brother, would think that they had stolen their money back. They told their father what Joseph had said, that they would not see Simeon again unless they brought Benjamin back. Their father was angry with them and asked why they told Joseph about Benjamin. They said that he kept asking question after question, and they had no idea he would take Simeon prisoner. Jacob refused to send the men back to get Simeon, though, because he was afraid that something would happen to Benjamin, and he would lose him, too. However, when their grain ran out and they had nothing left to eat, Jacob gave in and decided to let them take Benjamin with them to buy more grain and bring Simeon back.

“The men left with more money to buy more grain, in addition to the money that they had found in their sacks, and they came before Joseph and bowed down again. He acted like before and treated them gruffly, but, once again, he sold them the grain. This time when they packed the grain into sacks, Joseph had them take one of his silver cups and put it in one of the bags that they gave to Benjamin. After the men left, he sent his men after them, who accused the men of stealing Joseph’s cup. Joseph’s brothers told the men that they would never steal from Pharaoh’s representative, and that if the men could find the cup in their belongings, that person with whom it was found would be killed, and the rest of them would be Pharaoh’s slaves. When they opened up Benjamin’s bags, the brothers were horrified to see Joseph’s cup in the sack.”

“I bet Benjamin was particularly horrified,” Jimmy said.

“Yes, I suppose he was” Mrs. Peabody responded, and then continued. “They went back with the men to Joseph, who chided them for stealing the cup. They admitted to being sinful, said that this was punishment for their sins, and agreed to be Joseph’s servants. Joseph, however, said that, no, only the one with whom the cup was found would be his servant; the rest of them could go home. Judah then explained to him how Benjamin was the youngest of them and that their father didn’t even want to let him come for fear of losing him, and that if they went home without him their father would die. He then asked to stay as servant to Joseph, if he would allow Benjamin to go home to his father.

“Well, by now Joseph couldn’t hide from them any longer. He told them that he was their brother Joseph. When they recognized their brother they were afraid, but Joseph said, ‘Don’t be afraid or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. God did this to preserve your lives. There are going to be another five years of famine, so go get our father and bring him down here where there is plenty of food so that he and you will live. So the brothers went and got their father, and they all settled in the land of Egypt.’”

Finishing the lesson, Mrs. Peabody was happy because Jimmy hadn’t asked too many questions or made too many devil-inspired remarks. She smiled at the students, thinking that perhaps Jimmy was finally starting to appreciate God’s stories, and asked them, “Isn’t God wonderful? Did you see how he worked things out for Jacob and his family?”

“Yes,” Jimmy offered, “that was so nice of God to take care of his chosen group of men who had slaughtered all the men of Shechem’s city after tricking them into it, while people in the rest of the world suffered and died in his famine.”

“That’s not a very good way to look at it, Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody chided him. “You’re twisting up the whole point of god’s story. Didn’t you see how god made his predictions come true, and Joseph’s brothers ended up bowing down before him, even though in their sinful hatred they had tried to stop them from coming true?”

“Well,” Jimmy said, “I still didn’t hear how Joseph’s mother bowed down before him.”

“She couldn’t, Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody responded. “She was already dead.”

“Well, that was kind of my point,” Jimmy responded.

Flustered, Mrs. Peabody asked, “Well, didn’t you like that Joseph was a good man and followed god diligently?”

Jimmy thought about Joseph and realized that, finally, one of god’s men actually was a good fellow. “Yeah,” he responded, “he was a really cool dude, but he sure had one mean sense of humor.”