

God of Our Fathers: Genesis

Lesson 17: Joseph and His Brothers

Lesson Introduction

- Think about a time when someone hurt you. Describe your feelings.
- What insights did you gain about your own capacity to forgive?

Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, learners will:

- Describe how the story of Joseph differs from other accounts about the patriarchs
- Discuss the broader reason Joseph went to Egypt
- Discuss Joseph's treatment of his brothers
- Express understanding of who God is

Background for the Scripture

One scholar has noted that the story about Joseph is about “family strife, forgiveness, reconciliation, providence, provision, and humility” (Russaw, 2014). In Genesis 45:1-15, Joseph finally identifies himself to his brothers and begins to take steps to restore his relationship with them. Russaw reports that in the fifth verse,

After identifying himself as their long-lost brother, Joseph tells Jacob's sons, “And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.” Joseph proactively acknowledges that The Divine positioned him to save the lives of others. (Russaw, 2014)

According to one scholar, as Genesis ends, the nation “has no land, no law, and only seventy-five people” (Benware, 1993, p. 50). Yet God's promise to Abraham to make him “a great nation” resonates with us, for we have come to know God as a promise keeper.

The story of Joseph is lengthy. This Bible study volume includes only a small portion of this rich saga. I urge you to read some of the other stories about Joseph that warrant a closer look:

- Joseph Dreams of Greatness: Genesis 37:1-11
- Joseph Sold by His Brothers: Genesis 37:12-36
- Judah and Tamar: Genesis 38:1-30

- Joseph and Potiphar's Wife: Genesis 39:1-23
- Dreams of Two Prisoners: Genesis 40:1-23
- Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dream: Genesis 41:1-36
- Joseph's Rise to Power: Genesis 41:37-57
- Joseph's Brothers Go to Egypt: Genesis 42:1-25
- Joseph's Brothers Return to Canaan: Genesis 42:26-38
- Brothers Bring Benjamin to Joseph: Genesis 43:1-34
- Joseph Detains Benjamin: Genesis 44:1-17
- Judah Pleads for Benjamin's Release: Genesis 44:18-34
- Joseph Reveals Himself: Genesis 45:1-28
- Jacob Brings Whole Family to Egypt: Genesis 46:1-34
- Famine in Egypt: Genesis 47:13-26
- Last Days of Jacob: Genesis 47:27-31
- Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons: Genesis 48:1-22
- Joseph Forgives His Brothers: Genesis 50:15-21

Genesis 45 (KJV)

45 Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.

² And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard.

³ And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.

⁴ And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

⁵ Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

⁶ For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest.

⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

⁸ So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

⁹ Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not:

¹⁰ And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast:

¹¹ And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

¹² And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you.

¹³ And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.

¹⁴ And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.

¹⁵ Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

¹⁶ And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, Joseph's brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants.

¹⁷ And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Say unto thy brethren, This do ye; lade your beasts, and go, get you unto the land of Canaan;

¹⁸ And take your father and your households, and come unto me: and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land.

¹⁹ Now thou art commanded, this do ye; take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father, and come.

²⁰ Also regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is your's.

²¹ And the children of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way.

²² To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment.

²³ And to his father he sent after this manner; ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way.

²⁴ So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way.

²⁵ And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father,

²⁶ And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not.

²⁷ And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived:

²⁸ And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.

Examining the Scripture

1. How does the story of Joseph differ from the other accounts about the patriarchs?
2. What does Joseph tell his brothers about the reason he went to Egypt? (v. 5). What does this statement suggest about God?
3. Discuss a possible explanation for Joseph's treatment of his brothers once he held the advantage over them.

Applying the Scripture

1. Reflect on this statement by Klein: "We may not experience miraculous interventions by God into our lives, but often we can look back over the years and see God's secret providential hand" (Klein, 2015).
2. What are your thoughts and reactions to this statement?

Quest to Know God Activity

1. What does this scriptural account reveal about God?
2. List two or three characteristics you discerned about God as you went through this lesson.
3. What statement can you make about the God of our fathers that you can pass down to future generations?