



Sunday School Lesson Summary for November 18, 2007
Released on November 14, 2007

"God Reserved a Remnant"

Printed Text: Genesis 45:1-12

Background Scripture: Genesis 43:1 - 45:15

Devotional Reading: Psalm 85

Genesis 45:1-12

1 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.

Today's Aim

Facts: to show the circumstances that surrounded the revealing of Joseph's identity after many years of absence from his family.

Principle: to explain that God preserves His people wherever they are, and works out all things for His will.

Application: to show how God uses us for His divine plans even through times of trouble.

Introduction

There was a time when families lived closer to each other than they do today. Holidays and other occasions often brought the extended family together for a time of feasting and fellowship. While some still have formal family reunions, many do not.

Sadly, the only time some families get together is when there is a death or crisis. While people are able to reconnect at such times, they can also be very stressful. Old wounds and hostilities can easily resurface. However, these can also be times of reconciliation for those who are estranged. How tragic that so many families are at odds with one another! Some family members, in fact, have not spoken in years and refuse to let bygones be bygones.

In this regard, the Bible is certainly relevant to modern family life. Genesis tells of Cain killing Abel (4:1-16), Esau plotting the death of Jacob (27:41), and Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery (37:18-28). While not every account of estrangement in the Bible has a happy ending, that of Joseph does end in reconciliation. It would not have been that way had Joseph been a different kind of person, though.

Lesson Background

When we last saw Joseph, he had become the second most powerful man in Egypt, an unimaginable height of power. Joseph then had two sons—Manasseh and Ephraim—by his Egyptian wife Asenath (Genesis 41:50–52).

The predicted years of plenty passed, and the famine arrived. The Egyptians survived by buying the grain that was stored up from the years of plenty (Genesis 41:53–56). Canaan experienced famine as well (42:5). Word came to Jacob that grain was available in Egypt (42:1, 2). So 10 of Joseph’s 11 brothers came to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph quickly recognized them, but he did not reveal his own true identity (42:6–8). The brothers knew only that they were dealing with an Egyptian official through a translator (42:23).

The brothers revealed that their father was still alive. Joseph had them arrested as spies and thrown in jail for a time. Reuben concluded that this was their punishment for having sold Joseph into slavery (Genesis 42:22). The brothers were released, given their grain, and sent back home. But Simeon had to stay behind as a hostage (42:24–26). Joseph told them they could buy no more grain if they did not bring back the youngest brother with them (42:33, 34; 43:3–5).

Joseph was age 17 when his brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:1). He was age 30 when he entered Pharaoh’s service (41:46). By the time Joseph saw his brothers on their return trip to Egypt, there had been 7 years of plenty and 2 years of famine (45:6). This means that Joseph was about age 39 when the brothers saw him in Genesis 42:6. Thus it was some 21 or 22 years since Joseph had seen any of his family members.

As we pick up today’s story, the brothers have returned to Egypt, this time with brother Benjamin, who hadn’t made the first trip. It is the second year of the famine (Genesis 45:6). The brothers’ second trip to Egypt is recorded in Genesis 43. Our text today follows the test that Joseph devised in Genesis 44. Their return home was cut short as they were forced to return to Joseph’s presence (44:3–5, 14).

Identity Disclosed (vs. 1-3)

1. What happened between Joseph’s release from prison and the events of this week’s lesson?

Last week’s lesson revealed that Joseph had been released from prison so that he could interpret Pharaoh’s dreams. After he informed the king that his dreams were a forecast of seven years of famine, Joseph’s life quickly changed. Within a matter of

moments, he went from being a prisoner with no hope of release to being in charge of the immediate future of Egypt.

After his elevation to being second-in-command to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:43), Joseph took charge of the plan to save grain during the next seven years of plenty. During this time he married (vs. 45) and had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

After the seven years of harvest ended, the seven years of famine started. The famine was not just a local event; it affected the neighboring lands as well (most notably, Canaan). When Jacob heard that grain was available in Egypt, he sent ten of his sons there to buy food. Jacob kept Benjamin, the youngest of the eleven brothers; for fear that something may happen to him.

2. Why did Joseph wait so long before revealing his identity?

There were several reasons why Joseph decided to wait so long to reveal his identity. First, Joseph wanted to be reunited with his entire family. On the brothers' first trip to Egypt to buy food, Joseph kept Simeon behind as a hostage, and Joseph demanded that they bring Benjamin with them on their next trip to buy food. When the food ran out, Jacob was forced to decide whether to send Benjamin with the brothers for more food or keep Benjamin with him and risk his family dying in the famine.

Another reason for Joseph waiting to reveal his identity is so that he could create a safe environment for his brothers. Had Joseph revealed his identity in front of the Egyptian servants; the Egyptians could have killed his brothers for their act against Joseph. Instead, once all of the brothers are in Egypt, Joseph orders all of the Egyptian servants out of the room. This would allow Joseph to reveal his identity without risking his brothers' lives.

3. What was the reaction of Joseph's brothers when he disclosed to them? (vs. 3)

We can only imagine the thoughts that were going through the brothers' minds. They could have had the following questions in mind. Was Joseph angry at them for selling him into slavery? What was Joseph going to do to them for their sin against him? Would Joseph listen to their plea for forgiveness and mercy? Verse 3 tells us that the brothers were so troubled in his presence that they could not even answer him. In verse 4 Joseph remind them that he remember them selling him into Egypt. What would be the outcome of this situation? Would Joseph get revenge on his brothers?

Infraction Pardoned (vs. 4-8)

4. In what ways did Joseph try to reassure his brethren? (v. 4)

Okay, so Joseph would not get revenge on his brothers. Instead, in trying to reassure his brothers, Joseph implored them to be neither grieved nor angry with themselves for their prior actions. Since it was customary for strangers to stand at a distance from royalty, he commanded them to come closer. Looking at things from the divine perspective, Joseph clearly saw the hand of God in these events. To be sure, he had learned over the years that God can bring good out of evil. Joseph's life is an excellent example of Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

5. Who did Joseph see working behind the scenes? (vs. 5)

As Joseph looked back on his experience of slavery, he realized that God had been paving the way for his family's preservation. He could therefore declare, "God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen 45:5). Joseph "encouraged them with words that came from a loving and forgiving heart. Yes; they had done wrong, and they were guilty; yet, he told them not to dwell on their sins but on what God had done for all of them. God overruled the brothers' hateful attitude and cruel actions and worked it out for good" (Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Cook).

As Christians we must remember that God can take any bad situation and work it for the good. Sometimes, we are placed in situations that may seem dire, but God can elevate us to higher positions. Sometimes, we are not placed in hard situations because of our actions; rather, in those situations, we can be a blessing to those in need.

6. How long had the famine lasted thus far? (vs. 6)

Verse 6 tells us that the famine had been in the land for two years. Therefore, the famine would last another five years. Even so, Joseph had been sent on ahead by God to prepare the preservation of Jacob's family (v. 7). We do not know how much Joseph understands regarding the significance that his extended family will have in the greater plan of *God*. But it is doubtful that Joseph understands how sweeping and far-reaching God's plans really are!

Abraham's concern was to have a son; Joseph is concerned about placing what family members there are in a place where they will be safe and secure. Security, abundance of food, good living conditions, and a sense of peace may help his extended family to flourish. What is happening to them is all part of a great plan of God. Joseph is simply an instrument in carrying out the plan.

One significant consequence was that the nation of Israel could then come into being a few centuries later.

7. How did Joseph describe himself in relation to Pharaoh? (vs. 8)

Joseph states that God made him “a father unto Pharaoh, and lord over of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.” We must not mistake this for God either approving of sin or being the author of sin. Sin is still the choice of the individual, and everyone is still responsible for his or her sins.

“Here is the great mystery of God’s hand in Joseph’s life. You will recall that his brothers sold him into slavery in part to prevent the realization of his dream that they would one day bow down to him. In order to insure that this day would never come, they took matters into their own hands and committed an evil act for which they were responsible. But God in His overruling providence used their evil behavior to bring Joseph into the position of authority before which his brothers were obliged to bow.” (Begg)

Instruction Given (vss. 9-12)

8. What did Joseph ask his brothers to do? (vs. 9)

Joseph immediately commissioned his brothers to return to the land of Canaan and bring the entire family to Egypt. They were to reassure Jacob that Joseph had been made “lord of all Egypt” (vs. 9) and that ample food was available to them there. The words haste and tarry not means that the brothers must obey if the family is to survive.

9. Where was Joseph planning for his family to live in Egypt? Why? (v. 10)

“[Joseph] would have them live in the land of Goshen, which lay nearest to Canaan, and which perhaps was more thinly populated by the Egyptians, and well furnished with pastures for cattle. He desired they might live separately, that they might be in less danger both of being infected by the vices of the Egyptians and of being insulted by the malice of the Egyptians” (Henry, Matthew Henry’s Commentary, Zondervan).

10. What would likely happen to Joseph’s family if they remained in Canaan (vss. 11, 12)?

Since the famine was going to last for another five years, it would have been extremely difficult to impossible for them to survive. For the family to remain in Canaan would only ensure their suffering.

To further assure his brothers of what hat he promised, Joseph stressed that these words were coming to them from the very lips of their long-lost brother, not via some servant. Both they and Benjamin could see that it was really Joseph who was speaking.

Once Pharaoh learned that Joseph’s brothers were in Egypt, he joined with Joseph in inviting them to come to Egypt to live there.

Upon returning to Canaan, Jacob's sons informed him that Joseph was alive. Jacob was stunned. He did not believe what they were telling him. In other words, this news was too good to be true. Reassured by God in a vision, Jacob decided to journey to Egypt to be reunited with Joseph. At this time, Jacob's family numbered some seventy people (Gen. 46:27; Deut. 10:22; Acts 7:14).

The family's survival was important so that the nation of Israel would exist. Ultimately, from the nation of Israel would come our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Conclusion -- Servanthood Wins Out

The greatest attribute in the character of Joseph is that of servanthood. But the important aspect to this is not his service to Potiphar, the prison warden, or even Pharaoh. The important thing is his service to God. Joseph's faithfulness to God resulted in the saving of many lives. These included not only those of Egypt and Joseph's own family, but of many in the countries surrounding Egypt.

This is also a special instance of the concept of the suffering servant in the Bible. In the early years of his life, Joseph suffered for maintaining his integrity. Those who should have been closest to Joseph were his betrayers; but God used the experience to bring about physical redemption for Jacob's family. In that sense he is a "type" of Christ. Centuries later, God used Christ's obedience to make eternal redemption available to all humanity.

Joseph had the wisdom to see God's hand in all things. Instead of seeking revenge or complaining, we too should emulate Joseph and see the hand of God at work. There is no point in seeking revenge or in worrying. Spiritually, it is always beneficial to wait on the Lord before making an important decision. Prayer during a time of waiting is invaluable; snap decisions run the risk of leaving God out of the picture. Character is never formed in a hurry; it requires plenty of time. "I will wait upon the Lord,... and I will look for him" (Isaiah 8:17). God is in control.

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, let us ever be mindful that You can work through all events to accomplish Your will. Help us not to be discouraged in the down times. Help us to see them as preparation for greater things ahead. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thought to Remember

God has a plan that is greater than our current situations.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

In our last lesson of this quarter, we will see the significance of bestowing blessings on others and recognize how God has blessed us. Study Genesis 48:8-21.

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