

God's Plan Revealed

Bible Background • GENESIS 43; 45:1-15

Printed Text • GENESIS 45:1-15 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 14:1-14

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND how Joseph viewed his past mistreatment at the hand of his brothers, RECOGNIZE how God is at work in difficult circumstances, and RESPOND to mistreatment not with vengeance but with creative, transforming initiatives.

In Focus

As Melvin sat at his mother's funeral, he couldn't believe she was gone. He deliberately did not sit on the front row with the rest of the family. Many of his relatives were treating him like an outsider—like he had no right to mourn. He hadn't come to visit after learning the cancer had spread. He didn't want his mother's last memory of him to be as a drug addict. Other relatives and friends had long abandoned him. Mama had known for years that he abused drugs, but she always held out hope. "Son, I'm praying for you," she would say. "And I know the Lord can hear me." Melvin felt he had let his mother down for not getting clean before she passed. Melvin began to cry. Never before had he felt so afraid, alone, and unloved. Then, he felt a firm hand on his shoulder. He looked up and saw his younger sister. "Big brother, I've missed you. I'm so glad you came," she whispered. Finally, Melvin looked over his left shoulder. It was the first time he had ever seen his father cry. "Welcome home, son. Welcome home." The love he felt from his family made Melvin determined to get help immediately.

What is the greatest act of forgiveness you've witnessed? Was all animosity truly forgiven?

Keep in Mind

"But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives" (Genesis 45:5, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Earring (v. 6) chariysh (Heb.) — Plowing; plowing time

B. Nourish (vv. 11) kul (Heb.) — Feed, attend to, contain, sustain, endure

Say It Correctly

Goshen. GOH-shun

Manasseh. muh-NAH-suh

Zaphnath-paaneah. Zaph-nath-PA-ane-ah (Joseph's Egyptian name)

KJV

Genesis 45:1 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.
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.

NLT

Genesis 45:1 Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, "Out, all of you!" So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was.
2 Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace.
3 "I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them.
4 "Please, come closer," he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt.
5 But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.
6 This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.
7 God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors.
8 So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.
9 Now hurry back to my father and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately!
10 You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own.
11 I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve.'
12 Then Joseph added, "Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph!
13 Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly."
14 Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin did the same.
15 Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.

The People, Places, and Times

Joseph. Of Israel's twelve sons, Joseph was his favorite. He was Israel's eleventh son and the first son of his favored wife, Rachel. This designation by his father and Joseph's God-given ability to prophesy caused Joseph's older brothers to hate him. Eventually, Joseph became a vizier, an officer second only to Pharaoh.

Goshen. A fertile river valley in the delta region of Lower Egypt where Israel and his family would live under Joseph's watchful eye. Goshen was fertile because of its proximity to the Nile River and excellent pasturage for herds.

Background

Joseph was a man who honored God in every situation whether it was suffering or success; he honored the one true and living God. Potiphar's wife tried to tempt him, but because Joseph wanted to honor his Master, he would not yield (Genesis 39:9). Although God had given him the ability to interpret dreams, Joseph always gave God the credit for being able to do so (Genesis 40:8). Even when he was before Pharaoh, he honored God. When asked to interpret Pharaoh's dream, Joseph boldly told Pharaoh there would be a specific number of years of plenty and famine would surely follow (Genesis 41:14–36). When Joseph named his son, Manasseh (which means "to forget"), he was stating that God helped him to forget his sorrow. In today's lesson, Joseph tells his brothers who he is and acknowledges that God is responsible for him being in Egypt. Later after Israel dies, Joseph will reassure his brothers that God had ordered his steps, and God did it for the good of all (Genesis 50:15–21).

In what area of your life do you need to give more honor to God?

At-A-Glance

1. Joseph Makes Himself Known (Genesis 45:1–8)
2. A Family Reunited (vv. 9–15)

In Depth

1. Joseph Makes Himself Known (Genesis 45:1–8)

After having held back his emotions as best he could for quite a while, Joseph tells his brothers who he really is. His brothers had known him by his Egyptian name, Zaphnath-paaneah, but now he boldly states, "I am Joseph" (v. 3). The brothers are afraid and stand in disbelief or amazement, unable to move or speak. Joseph sees their concern and tries to ease their minds. He calls out to them, beckoning them closer and assuring them they have no reason to fear. Joseph assures them of God's sovereignty. He understands that whatever they tried to do for evil, God meant for good and a lot of good came out of it. He does not want them to grieve or be angry with themselves for selling him (v. 5). Instead of having a vindictive attitude toward them, he gives recognition to God. God had a perfect plan in mind and was using the brothers' sinful acts to preserve a remnant of His chosen people. Joseph's statements are not meant to make light of sin or sinners, but rather to illuminate how God does things (vv. 7-8). This was not to give an excuse for sinning, but rather to appreciate and celebrate the almighty power of God in those things we could refer to as "misfortune." God is in divine control.

What can we do to remember, like Joseph, that God is in control even when situations seem evil or chaotic?

2. A Family Reunited (vv. 9–15)

Again, in an effort to make his brothers feel more confident and secure, Joseph promises to take care of his father and all his family during the next years of the famine. He urges his brothers to hurry back to Canaan to get this news to their father Israel and let him know about Joseph's authority in Egypt. Joseph has enough power to help them all. "I will nourish thee," promises Joseph (v. 11). He is delighted to be in the position to help his father and his family. He is excited for his father to know where God has placed him and eager to relieve his father of the stress of the famine. Joseph's reunion with Benjamin is especially emotional, since Benjamin is his only full brother and since Joseph had missed Benjamin's childhood when his other brothers sold him into slavery. They hugged and began to weep on each other's necks (v. 14). Then Joseph hugs and weeps with all of them, and everyone "talked freely" (v. 15). Joseph's words and actions make his brothers realize that he was not holding a grudge and was genuinely affectionate toward them. Knowing what God has done for all of them and would do in the future; Joseph is compassionate toward the brothers who had hurt him so much. He does not let past experiences with his brothers defeat the purpose of all that the Lord allowed him to go through. Instead, Joseph is warm toward them, and they are able to reciprocate these feelings. Joseph's reunion with his family was emotional and tearful.

How does your family deal with strong emotions?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did Joseph send everyone outside the room except his brothers? (Genesis 45:1)
2. How did the brothers react when Joseph revealed his identity? (vv. 1-4)
3. Why did God send Joseph to Egypt ahead of his brothers (v. 5)?

Discuss the Meaning

Satan's plan was to use Pontius Pilate, Judas Iscariot, the mob in the streets, and the cruel Roman soldiers to end the plan God had for Jesus Christ. How did these men's actions fulfill God's divine plan of salvation for humankind through His only Son, Jesus Christ? Compare and contrast this example from the New Testament with the actions of Joseph's brothers, before and after they encountered him in Egypt.

Liberating Lesson

Philippians 4:11 tells us that in whatever state we find ourselves, we must be content. In other words, we must accept that the situation will be resolved because God is there and worthy of our praise. He has a plan and a purpose in everything He allows us to go through. Whether we understand His plan or not, we must never forget that God is all we need. The tragedy is happening all around us. Too many youths are dying and injured due to gangs, gun violence, substance abuse, bullying, and even suicide. Our first instinct is to ask why. While we must be active in our communities to help recognize and combat these issues, we must also realize that God is helping us and speaking even in the midst of these circumstances. It may appear as though the enemy is having his way, but we can be assured that God's plan is being fulfilled for His perfect purpose.

Application for Activation

Joseph's brothers didn't know what to expect after finding out who Joseph was, the position he held, and remembering what they had done to him. Joseph relieved them of their worries by embracing them. As we interact with our families, our brothers and sisters in Christ as well as other people, let us adopt Joseph's attitude, especially with family members. Let us remember to be kind to others always. Our ability to respond to situations as victors, rather than victims, depends on our ability to recognize the hand of God in every situation. We can do this as we incorporate prayer, Bible study and other spiritual disciplines in our lives. This week set aside time each day to spend with God. Thank God for the challenging times you have faced and allowed Him to use you for His glory.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Genesis 45:1–15

True to God’s word, Egypt knew seven good years of prosperity and plenty (Genesis 41:46ff), just as Joseph had said when he interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams. As the good years ended and the seven years of famine began, all of the lands around Egypt experienced the famine, but initially, Egypt did not. When the people began to feel the effects of the famine, they pleaded with the Pharaoh to feed them. He directed them to do whatever Joseph instructed (vv. 53–57). Among the people seeking food from the storehouses under Joseph’s rule were ten of his brothers (Genesis 42:1ff). He recognized them, but they did not recognize him. Joseph questions them, imprisoning them, holding one of them for ransom, and secretly returning their payment for the grain. On their second trip to Egypt, they convinced Israel to let Benjamin come, and Joseph treats his brothers to a feast, but interrogates them again, threatening to make Benjamin stay in Egypt as his slave for “stealing” a cup, which he had actually planted in Benjamin’s stacks. To stop this from happening, Judah tells Joseph the long story of all Israel’s protests to bringing Benjamin to Egypt and how Judah had promised on his own life that Benjamin would return to their old father (Genesis 43:1–44:34).

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.

Hearing Judah’s willingness for self-sacrifice and the precarious age of his father, Joseph can no longer keep up his act. Joseph was unable to restrain his emotions any longer or withhold his identity from his brothers. He cries out to dismiss everyone around, all except his brothers. Joseph likely felt too embarrassed to cry in front of his subordinates, besides wanting to keep this special family reunion private. In this private moment, Joseph wept aloud out of his loving devotion to his brothers despite a dire situation. Joseph wept so uncontrollably that everyone in the building heard their wise, prudent, discerning leader weeping.

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.

Upon revealing who he was, Joseph immediately inquires of his father’s condition and whether he is still alive. Even though the brothers had told him earlier that his father was indeed alive, they had said this when they knew Joseph as an Egyptian official (Genesis 44:20). Perhaps after hearing Judah’s long explanation of how Israel was only one grief away from the grave, Joseph was asking this of them again with a son’s emphatic love and longing for his father.

Perhaps they had exaggerated the truth when they thought he was only an Egyptian official making polite conversation. Now knowing Israel is his father too, they will tell him the full truth. At first Joseph's brothers could not answer him because they were "troubled" (Heb. bahal, baw-HAL), meaning "disturbed, alarmed, terrified"—most likely they were shocked by Joseph's "presence" (Heb. paniym, paw-NEEM), meaning "face" and position. Either understanding of the word is possible here; they could be shocked at the sudden emotion in Joseph's face or shocked at being in the presence of one they thought dead or trouble by knowing the brother they had treated so harshly was now positioned as ruler of a world super-power. They surely remembered the occasion years ago when they had hated Joseph and conspired to kill him.

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.

But Joseph, overjoyed to see them, calls out to them, "Come near" (Heb. nagash, naw-GASH), meaning approach him, to get a closer look at the brother they had indeed sold to the Midianites when he was only a teenager. After speaking harshly to them since their first trip to Egypt, Joseph now softens his tone, adding "I pray you" (Heb. na', NAW) to his command. The phrase "whom ye sold into Egypt" is not meant to remind them of their foolish and diabolical plot, but rather to impress upon them the truth of his identity. Only Joseph himself would know the brothers had done this.

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.

In a gracious turn of events, the same Joseph who had been left to die and eventually sold into slavery encourages his brothers not to be "grieved" (Heb. 'atsab, aw-TSAB), meaning "hurt, vexed" by his revelation and not to be "angry" (Heb. charah, khaw-RAH), meaning "kindled, incensed" against themselves for past actions. One would think that any anger in this situation would be anger on Joseph's part against his brothers, but here he shows great compassion to them, asking them to put away their own anger against themselves. Joseph assured the brothers that God had used those very events to send him ahead of them to Egypt "to preserve life" (Heb. michyah, mikh-YAH), meaning "provide sustenance" for them now that a famine was upon the region. Although his brothers' actions had not been a dream, Joseph the dreamer was using his interpretive skill to represent God's love and redemptive plan.

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.

Knowing these first two years of famine have been harsh for the Canaanites, Joseph tells his brothers the divine revelation that there will yet be five more years of famine. He tells his brothers that the ensuing five years would produce no "earring" (Heb. chariysh, khaw- REESH), meaning no plowing time (i.e. the time to remove the "ears" of grain) and no harvest. But he also assures them that God, not their angry jealousy, placed him in position for a "posterity" (Heb. she'eriyyth, sheh-ay-REETH) or portion during the seven good years. Because Joseph had been established as overseer, their lives were going to be preserved. The famine would kill many, but God provided deliverance for the family through Joseph. Joseph assures his brothers of God's providential hand in the situation. God had established him as "a father" (another title for a viceroy or official spiritual advisor) and a "lord" (Heb. 'adown, aw-DONE), meaning "firm, strong, master" over Pharaoh's immediate household, and "ruler" (Heb. mashal, maw-SHAL), meaning "someone with dominion" overall inhabitants of the land during the famine. This is an amazing amount of power blessed on a boy who was sold into slavery and imprisoned falsely. Only the living God could have orchestrated that change in his life!

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:

Joseph then charged his brothers to hurry and return to their father with the good news of his life, appointment, and favor. Joseph sends his brothers away with a message of hope and celebration. He invites his brothers and father to come and dwell in the land of Goshen (GO-shen), a Hebrew word for a place whose name means “drawing near,” a region in northern Egypt east of the lower Nile. It was a fertile area with much access to the riches of trading. There they could be near him and enjoy all the rights, privileges, and protection suitable to his kin. (The Children of Israel lived there from the time of Joseph until the time of Moses.) Joseph’s invitation extended to his father, brothers, nieces and nephews; their “flocks” (Heb. tso’n, tsone), meaning “small cattle and flocks”; their “herds” (Heb. baqar, baw-KAWR), meaning “large cattle and oxen”; and “all that thou hast,” meaning all their possessions. Joseph is not just inviting them to visit or just inviting his father and favorite brothers. He intends to move the entire clan and establish them under the protection of Egypt.

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. It would be while they were in Goshen— or more importantly, near Joseph—that he would directly “nourish” (Heb. kul, KOOL), meaning “sustain, maintain, contain” all of his brothers’ and father’s households, and thereby prevent them from being overcome by “poverty” (Heb. yarash, yaw-RASH, “impoverished, disinherited”). There is no need for them to continue trekking back and forth between Canaan and Egypt every year. No need for them to buy grain from Egypt with silver. Joseph will gladly use his divinely appointed position in Egypt to take care of his entire extended family. He will keep them from deadly poverty and lack.

Perhaps because the encounter was truly incredible, Joseph appealed to his brothers to verify his identity, especially Benjamin. He and Benjamin barely knew each other, but Joseph knew that Benjamin was his only full brother and thinks of him most dearly. Joseph urgently needs his brothers to understand that it is he, Joseph, who “speaketh” to them (Heb. dabar, daw-BAR), meaning “declare, promise.”

His speech has a special weight in Egypt. In spite of how his brothers had treated him and the poverty they now experienced, Joseph cared for them.

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.

What concerned Joseph at this point was his father, Israel. Joseph entreated his brothers to inform their father that he (Joseph) was doing incredibly well in Egypt—he was highly esteemed. In order to get Israel to come quickly, Joseph insisted that his brothers tell Israel of all of Joseph’s “glory” (Heb. kabod, kaw-BODE), which refers to abundance, riches, splendor, importance and majesty. In other words, in the midst of a famine, God had seen to it that Joseph was flourishing. God had made the impossible, possible. Then Joseph could no longer contain himself. He had experienced several encounters in Egypt with his brothers who did not know who they were dealing with while Joseph had known precisely who they were (Genesis 42– 44). Joseph had chosen to reveal the truth of his identity, and then he had graciously offered his forgiveness and his help. He wept with joy and embraced Benjamin. Joseph did not let his honored position hinder his pure tears of joy upon seeing his family again—a family that he probably thought that he would never see again. This was a heart-wrenching moment. Not only did Joseph weep over his baby brother, but also he wept over the brothers who had sold him into slavery and had plotted to kill him. When these brothers saw Joseph’s genuine, forgiving spirit was not going to take revenge against them, their guard came down and they began to freely talk to him. Joseph sent his brothers back to Canaan for their father and the whole family so that they could live in Egypt and survive the

famine. What Satan had meant for evil, God indeed worked for good. God used Joseph's personal suffering to bless Joseph's family for generations to come. It was a time of healing and restoration that only a loving and merciful God could bring to what had been an extremely dysfunctional family.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

During Trouble, Maintain Hope in God
(Psalm 43)

TUESDAY

Benjamin Sent to Joseph with Gifts
(Genesis 43:1-15)

WEDNESDAY

Stolen Cup Found in Benjamin's Grain
(Genesis 44:1-13)

THURSDAY

Brothers Offer to Become Slaves to Joseph
(Genesis 44:14-17)

FRIDAY

Judah Pleads with Joseph for Benjamin
(Genesis 44:18-26)

SATURDAY

Jacob Will Die Without Seeing Benjamin
(Genesis 44:27-34)

SUNDAY

Joseph and His Brothers Reconcile Their Differences
(Genesis 45:1-15)