



Lesson 1

Promises Accepted and Rejected

Genesis 12:1-4; 15:1-21; 37:1,2

© 2023 Northwestern Publishing House. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Overview of the Bible Study

1. God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were well known among the Israelites. They were passed down from generation to generation and treasured by all the believers in their family.
2. God's kingdom refers to his rule over all things. God wants to rule over all people in mercy and grace. He does that through the forgiveness of sins won by the world's Savior. In the Old Testament, God's work of salvation was centered on the people of Israel. God's Word would spread into the world through them. And from them, the Savior would be born. If the nation of Israel were destroyed, it would cease to accomplish God's purpose. If the people of the world died in a famine, God's elect among the Gentiles would perish eternally.
3. The story of Joseph is the story of how God used Jacob's son Joseph at a crucial time in the history of God's kingdom. God used Joseph to ensure that his plan of salvation was kept on track. The title of this course is *My Life for the Kingdom*. The title applies to Joseph. It also applies to us as we use our gifts to take part in God's work of bringing people into his kingdom through the gospel message.

Introduction

This lesson lays the foundation for Joseph's life. It has two goals. First, we will learn about the promises God gave to Abraham and the people of Israel. Second, we will begin thinking about Joseph's suffering at the hands of his brothers.

Bible Study

Genesis chapters 12 and 15 record God's promises to Abraham.

Jacob's family knows God's promises and predictions.

7. **Read Genesis 37:1,2.** How were God's promises received by the members of Jacob's family?

By Joseph's brothers. Certain things Joseph's brothers did were done in weakness or unbelief. In the following passages, note the sins. Describe the attitude of Joseph's brothers about God's promises in light of these sins.

How the account of Joseph begins (Genesis 37:2)

What Reuben did (Genesis 35:22)

What Simeon and Levi did (Genesis 34:25,26)

What Judah did (Genesis 38)

Think about what the brothers, as a group, would soon do to Joseph.

By Joseph. Considering what you already know about Joseph's life, what was his attitude toward God's promises?

By Jacob. Jacob's life was filled with trickery, and he suffered at God's chastening hand. But what was his attitude toward God's promises?

Application

8. How might you encourage the young people around you to treasure God's promises? Joseph knew about special promises that would come true for his family. What promises of great things do young Christians have to look forward to?

Lesson 2

Joseph Suffered at Home

Genesis 37:3-30

Introduction

This lesson shows that from Joseph's youth, he was a child of the kingdom of God. The lesson has two goals. First, it deals with Joseph's dreams and how Joseph's brothers reacted to them. Second, we see how Joseph suffered because God gave him those dreams.

Bible Study

Joseph's brothers hate him.

1. **Read Genesis 37:3-14a.** Every detail Moses includes in these verses sets the pace for what was to follow. Use the following agree/disagree statements and evaluate them to discuss the condition of Jacob's family.

Agree or disagree. Jacob should be blamed for showing favoritism to Joseph.

Agree or disagree. Joseph should not have given a bad report about his brothers.

Agree or disagree. Joseph's brothers would not have reacted as they did if Joseph had told his dreams in a more tactful manner.

Agree or disagree. Joseph's suffering for his dreams was persecution that Joseph had to endure for being a believer.

Agree or disagree. Jacob reacted to Joseph's dreams in the same way his sons reacted to them.

Agree or disagree. Jacob should have reconsidered sending Joseph to find out how his ten sons were doing.

Joseph is sold into slavery.

2. **Read Genesis 37:14b-30.** In their act of dealing with Joseph, do you see any evidence of faith on the part of Joseph's brothers?

3. Review God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:2,3.

4. At this point, what were the prospects (humanly speaking) of these men being the foundation of God's Old Testament church, the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel?

5. Compare Joseph and his brothers with Cain and Abel. What did Joseph lose because he chose to separate himself from the ways of his brothers?

Application

6. Life at school can be particularly difficult for young Christians. What temptations do young people experience at school because they are believers? How can you comfort young people who are being ridiculed at school on account of their faith?

Lesson 3

Horror at Home; Peaceful Preparation in Egypt

Genesis 37:31-36; 39:1-6

Introduction

The hatred and treachery of Joseph's brothers landed Joseph where God wanted him: close to the pharaoh of Egypt. It also launched Joseph's brothers into a time of fear and lies that would last many years. The Lord would use both of these circumstances for the good of his kingdom.

Bible Study

- Grain storage practices
- Egyptian culture
- Language
- Political life among Egypt's elite
- Administration of people
- Authority over other people
- Patience

Can you think of other words and phrases that tell us how God prepared Joseph during his time in Potiphar's household?

9. Even as Joseph put himself into God's hands and enjoyed great success, he continued to suffer. How might the following thoughts have troubled Joseph?

- I am in slavery, but my brothers are _ _____.

- My father is wealthy and powerful, and he loves me dearly. Why hasn't he ___ ?
- I am a child of Abraham, yet here I am, a _ ____.

Application

10. We know the end of the story. But Joseph didn't. And we do not know the end of the story of our lives. How might we use Joseph's years in slavery as an encouragement in the dark and mysterious times of life when we seem to be in slavery to hostile forces around us?

11. Can you share with the class a time when God taught you a lesson that later in your life you needed in order to help someone else (or to do some special work in his kingdom)?

Lesson 4

A Step Backward; a Step Closer to Pharaoh

Genesis 39:7–40:23

Introduction

The hatred and treachery of Joseph's brothers landed Joseph where God wanted him— in the household of a man close to the king of Egypt. Now the lust and lies of another person transferred Joseph to a place that was even closer to Pharaoh, the place where high-level criminals and people who had displeased Pharaoh were confined.

Bible Study

Read Genesis 39:7-20. Joseph has to make a choice between God's will and the sinful will of Potiphar's wife.

- 1.** Potiphar's wife was persistent. How did this make the temptation Joseph faced particularly difficult?

- Fulfillment of dreams

- The significance of two dreams.

- Patience

Can you think of other words and phrases that tell how God prepared Joseph for the coming years?

Application

5. Joseph wore his faith on his sleeve. That would have been easy at home, where people confessed the true God, but he was a slave in a foreign country with its own religion, its own gods, and its own priesthood. He was pressured to reject God by someone much more powerful than he and who lacked God-pleasing morals. And later he lived among prisoners, many of whom couldn't have cared less about religion.

Can you share a specific situation in your life when you confessed your faith before a hostile crowd? How did it turn out?

Lesson 5

Special Power to Serve in God's Kingdom

Genesis 41

Introduction

Joseph's time of preparation was over. God had used about 13 years of the prime of Joseph's life to prepare him for the next stage in his kingdom work. God had shaped his faith and given him the skills he needed. There was no other person in Egypt as highly qualified to save Egypt, the world, and the family of Jacob as Joseph was.

This lesson will focus on three points. First, Joseph used his experience with dreams to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Second, God blessed his kingdom by guiding Pharaoh to elevate Joseph to the position for which God had prepared him. Third, God blessed Joseph with wisdom to do his work of saving Egypt, and he also blessed him with his own family, who would become part of his church.

Bible Study

Read Genesis 41:1-32. Dreams once again play a major role in Joseph's life. Use the following questions to discuss the similarities between Pharaoh's dreams and the other two sets of dreams Joseph experienced.

1. How did each set of dreams make the dreamers feel after they woke up?
2. What was the importance of the doubling of the dreams?
3. The second set of dreams (the set Joseph heard in prison) was fulfilled. How would this have given Joseph confidence to interpret Pharaoh's dreams?
4. How much credit did Joseph take for himself for his ability to interpret dreams?

Read Genesis 41:33-44. Not only was Joseph able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, but God also gave him the power to construct a plan in reaction to the dreams. This is no less a miracle than his ability to interpret the dreams.

5. Briefly review Joseph's plan for surviving the famine.

6. After Joseph finished advising Pharaoh on a course of action, another miracle took place. Can you find it?

7. There is another miracle in verses 38 and 39. Can you spot it?

Read Genesis 41:45-57. God continues to bless Joseph's labor in Egypt and his home life.

8. What do you think was the most important thing Joseph learned in Potiphar's household or during his prison years to prepare him for this time?

9. What was the first thing Joseph did in his new position?

10. Joseph wore his faith on his sleeve, and the daughter of the high priest of Egypt was given to him as his wife. With those facts in mind, describe what Joseph's home life must have been like.

11. What did Joseph mean by the names he gave his sons Manasseh and Ephraim?

Application

12. Luther once said that when times are good, realize that they will likely be followed by difficulties. But when life is difficult, know that God will send relief. How did Joseph experience that truth in his own life? Have you experienced the truth of this in your own life?

Lesson 6

Patient Planning

Genesis 42:1-38

Introduction

The coming chapters, Genesis 42–45, describe a complex series of events. Joseph would soon meet his brothers. It was about 22 years after they had sold him into slavery. It is clear that Joseph had a goal in mind, something specific he wanted to accomplish in his brothers' hearts and minds. In this lesson we will seek reasons for the events of chapters 42–45. And we will begin watching Joseph work out his plan for his brothers.

Before we begin to study these chapters, reflect on the following: Joseph treated his brothers harshly. He put them through a lot of anxiety and stress. People speculate on why Joseph did this. What are some reasons you might have or might have heard in the past for why Joseph treated his brothers as he did?

Bible Study

Joseph's role in God's plans for Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:13-16).

1. What had to happen to Jacob's family members if they were to fulfill God's long-term plans for them?
2. What role would Joseph play in God's short-term plans for his people, namely, that they temporarily live in a foreign land?
3. What role did Joseph's first dream have in helping him understand how God was using him to serve Abraham's descendants?

We can examine Joseph's actions and motives from another standpoint. It is now eight or nine years after Joseph was elevated to second-in-command in Egypt. Consider the following questions in light of that fact.

4. What could Joseph have done at any point after he was elevated to second-in-command in Egypt?

5. Why do you think Joseph did not do this? Discuss the following options.

- Joseph didn't have time to make a journey to Canaan.
- A trip back home would be too painful in view of what had happened there.
- Joseph was afraid of his brothers.
- Joseph didn't love his father anymore. Nor did he care if he ever saw his brothers again. Consider some or all of these statements in Scripture: Genesis 37:3,33-35; 42:21-23,36,38; 43:14,27,29,30; 44:20; 45:2,3; 46:29,30; 48:11; 49:33; 50:1,17.

6. Based on the love Joseph had for his father and the love he knew his father had for him, Joseph must have yearned to return to Canaan, not just for his own sake but to let his father know that he was alive. However, imagine Joseph immediately making a trip back to Canaan after he was elevated to power in Egypt and showing up at his father's house.

7. How might this have affected the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham (and to the whole world)?

Read Genesis 42:1-9a. The brothers come to buy food in Egypt and bow before Joseph. Joseph has prepared for this day.

8. Evaluate this statement: God gave Joseph his dreams not so much to comfort him during his enslavement but to direct his course of action after he was elevated to power.

Read Genesis 42:24b-38. The brothers return home only to face more problems.

14. Continue your analysis of the details.

- Joseph put the brothers' money into their sacks.

- Jacob refused even to think about letting Benjamin accompany the brothers to Egypt.

Application

15. What thoughts go through your mind when you are harmed in some way by another person? How was Joseph's life patterned after Christ's life? How can Joseph's example help you?

Lesson 7

Joseph's Plan A Went Into Effect

Genesis 43:1–44:13

Introduction

In this lesson we will see that Joseph's attempt to have Benjamin accompany the brothers to Egypt worked. Now Joseph could give the brothers a chance to treat Benjamin and their father differently than how they treated him and their father.

Bible Study

Read Genesis 43:1-17. Jacob relents and lets Benjamin go to Egypt with his other sons.

1. How did the Lord use the famine to keep his plan to bless the church on track?

2. Compare Reuben's offer to his father (Genesis 42:37) to Judah's offer (Genesis 43:9). Which was more mature?

Reuben: If I don't return with Benjamin, you can _____ .

Judah: If I don't return with Benjamin, I will _____ .

Read Genesis 43:18-25. Joseph proceeds with plan A.

3. Why could Joseph now proceed with plan A?

4. Joseph's steward began to take a major role in the story. What might we conclude about the steward's faith from how he spoke to the brothers? (Might this be another fruit of Joseph wearing his faith on his sleeve?)

Read Genesis 43:26-34. The brothers are treated to a meal at Joseph's house.

5. Joseph had a reason for everything he did. Think through the events as they transpired that afternoon. Explore how they were all a part of plan A.

- Joseph again asked his brothers about their father.
- At the dinner table, Joseph seated his brothers in order of their age.
- Joseph gave Benjamin five times as much as he gave his other brothers.
- Joseph gave his brothers ample time alone in his house. (Note that the Egyptians and Joseph ate by themselves.)

Read Genesis 44:1-13. With his steward's help, Joseph sets up the situation that would give his brothers the opportunity to confess their sins.

6. The steward accused the brothers of stealing Joseph's cup. The brothers were sure that none of them was guilty. What penalty did they propose if the cup was, in fact, found in one of their sacks (verse 9)?

7. How did the steward adjust the penalty (verse 10)? Can you guess why he did that?

Application

8. Joseph displayed wisdom, trust, and love. Consider putting those qualities into practice in your life. Arrange the three words in the order you think they would be displayed in your life.

Lesson 8

Jacob's Family Was Healed

Genesis 44:14–45:15

Introduction

In this lesson we see that Joseph's plan worked as well as he could have imagined. Now the brothers had something to give to their father. Now the facts could all come out, and the church would not be broken but, rather, healed.

Bible Study

Read Genesis 44:14-17. Joseph himself takes the final step to set up the opportunity for the brothers either to abandon Benjamin or to provide what they need to heal their family.

1. The brothers again proposed the penalty for what Benjamin seemed to have done. What did they propose (verse 16)?
2. What did they mean when they said that God had found out their guilt?
3. How did Joseph adjust the penalty (verse 17)? Why do you think he did that?

4. What impact do you think the words “in peace” had on the brothers?

Read Genesis 44:18-34. Judah pleads for his father.

5. Evaluate: Judah’s words were not really a confession of the brothers’ past sin.

6. Evaluate: Joseph’s God-given wisdom set up the situation that enabled the brothers to do something better than confess their sin against him personally.

7. Evaluate: What had Joseph given his brothers that would allow them to return home and confess their sins to their father?

Read Genesis 45:1-15. Joseph does what he has yearned to do for many years—reveal himself to his brothers and comfort them.

8. Which do you think is a better title for this lesson: “Joseph reveals himself to his brothers” or “Joseph’s brothers reveal themselves to him”?

9. The title of this course is *My Life for the Kingdom*. How does Joseph summarize his life’s work in verse 7?

10. In verse 8 Joseph shows a depth of understanding and Christian maturity that all God’s people should imitate. Complete this sentence: Christians may suffer for any number of reasons, but in the end, _____.

Application

11. Name at least one specific way you can view your life in the context of God’s kingdom.

12. Name at least one thing you can do to help a troubled situation and further the spread of God's kingdom among the people involved.

Lesson 9

God's Kingdom Work Remained on Course

Genesis 45:16–47:26

Introduction

We have seen Joseph's plan worked out for the good of God's people. Now the brothers could confess their sins and the church would not be broken but, rather, healed. Now the family could go down to Egypt to live and grow and become the nation that would occupy the land of Canaan.

Bible Study

Read Genesis 45:16-28. Joseph provides everything his family needs for a safe and quick journey into Egypt and the land of Goshen.

1. The supreme patience Joseph had shown for many years now gave way to impatience: "Hurry and bring my father down here" (Genesis 45:13) and "Come down to me. Do not delay" (45:9). Note what Joseph said in 45:24: "Do not quarrel on the way." What might the brothers have quarreled about? Why would that have slowed them down?

2. Pharaoh was overjoyed with the news about Joseph's family. He gave the brothers food and vehicles to transport their families. They could leave all their belongings in Canaan.

Put yourselves in the brothers' shoes when they arrived home. Make a list of the things they now had "in their pockets" that would enable them to confess their sin and express their repentance to Jacob.

Read Genesis 46:1-7. Skim verses 8-27. Jacob's family travels to Egypt. On the way, God appears to Jacob.

3. Jacob was nervous about leaving the Promised Land. Of what did God assure Jacob?

4. Note how God described Israel's stay in Egypt in Genesis 46:3,4. Relate this to what God had said to Abraham in Genesis 15:13,14.

5. What especially comforting promise did God give Jacob at the end of verse 4?

6. In verses 8-27 we see Jacob's family as a unit, and each member of the family is listed by name. How does this list indicate that God had blessed Joseph's plans? What does this list indicate about God's love for his church?

Look at Genesis 46:28–47:12. Joseph settles his family in the land of Goshen.

7. The land of Goshen was rich delta country in the northern part of Egypt, where the Nile River flows into the Mediterranean Sea. Jacob's family would be able to work as shepherds there. They would be somewhat isolated from the rest of the Egyptians who lived to the south along the Nile River and could grow into a large nation without the fear of being assimilated into the general population.

Considering the idolatrous nature of Egypt's worship, why was it a great blessing that God's people could be by themselves in Goshen?

Look at Genesis 47:13-26. This is a record of Joseph's administration of the land during the years of famine.

8. Note the progression in these verses. Joseph let the people of Egypt buy food. When they had no more money, he let them pay with their livestock. When they had no more livestock, he acquired their persons and their land.

It almost seems as if Joseph was cruel to the Egyptians—something that would be very uncharacteristic of him. Consider the following explanation of Joseph's administration of Egypt:

Joseph knew that Abraham's descendants would live for a long time in a foreign land. It was clear that Egypt was that land. What Joseph did for the land of Egypt would have a direct bearing on the people of Israel and the fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior.

So far everything Joseph did resulted in blessings for his family. The account immediately before this one is Joseph settling his family in Goshen, a place where the Israelites could securely grow into a large nation.

And if God's people were being blessed, the Egyptians would also be blessed. They would have a witness to the truth right in their land, and God's elect among

the Egyptians—and his elect throughout the world, for that matter—would hear and believe. With this in mind, whatever conclusion we arrive at regarding how he administered Egypt during the famine should be a positive one.

The following conclusion contains some speculation, but it is completely in line with everything Joseph had done so far. Joseph's actions would serve God's people and also the Egyptians. Joseph knew his family would be in Egypt for a long time. Ancient Near Eastern countries often lacked stability. Intertribal disputes or civil war would cause Egypt to become unstable and might jeopardize God's plans for his people. Although God foretold that the Israelites would suffer at the hands of the nation where they lived, they still needed a stable place in which to live and grow into a large nation.

If the whole nation was owned by Pharaoh and he had a right to 20% of the produce, this would create a long-lasting, stable central government. And the fact that the Egyptians willingly agreed to Joseph's conditions gave all future pharaohs the right to keep the status quo. Note that in Moses' record of this arrangement, made hundreds of years afterward, he notes that Joseph's system of government was in effect "to this day" (Genesis 47:26), which may be a comment on its stability for the good of the Israelites.

Application

9. Jacob's final words were about the Promised Land. How might you apply his words and attitude during the final years of your life?

Lesson 10

God Prepared His People for the Promised Land

Genesis 47:27–50:26

Introduction

Joseph served the kingdom of God for the rest of his life. This lesson focuses on other events in Joseph's life that helped the people of Israel prepare for their future in the Promised Land.

Bible Study

Read Genesis 47:27. God blesses his people.

1. In the last lesson, we noted two things Joseph did to give his people security in the land of Egypt. Moses concludes his account of these events with a summary statement. What did God do to Abraham's descendants?

Read Genesis 47:28-31. Jacob makes his children give him a promise.

2. Jacob's death was drawing near. What was his final wish? How important was this to him? What impression do you think Jacob's wish had on his family?

Skim Genesis 48. Joseph receives the right of the firstborn.

3. The firstborn son always received a larger inheritance than the others, specifically, a double portion, that is, twice as much as the other heirs. Who was Jacob's eldest son? Why had he lost the right of the firstborn (see Genesis 49:3,4)? How did Jacob substitute Joseph for Reuben?

Skim Genesis 49 and read verses 22-29. This chapter records Jacob blessing his sons.

4. From your knowledge of the story, interpret the details of Jacob's blessing to Joseph.

Read Genesis 50:1-14. Jacob's sons fulfill their promise to bury him in the Promised Land.

5. Look at this account from the standpoint of the kingdom of God. What witness did the Lord give to the following people?

- Pharaoh

- The people of Egypt
- The leadership of Egypt
- The people of Canaan
- The world

Read Genesis 50:15-21. The brothers' guilt is dying hard.

6. If you were to pick one verse that summarizes Joseph's attitude toward his entire life, what would that be?

Read Genesis 50:22-26. Joseph dies and is buried in Egypt.

7. Jacob wanted to be buried in Canaan immediately upon his death. Joseph, however, was buried in Egypt. Think of these two burials as a pair. What would Jacob's burial continue to teach the people of Israel? What would Joseph's burial continue to teach the people of Israel? (Note Hebrews 11:22, "By faith Joseph, as he neared the end of his life, mentioned the Exodus of the sons of Israel and gave instructions about his bones.")

Application

8. Imagine this scenario: years down the road, Jehoshua, a youngster from the tribe of Issachar, asked his father, "Did our fathers really sell their brother Joseph into captivity in Egypt? Why would God make them the leaders of our people? Why would he let our 12 tribes be named after such horrible people?"

If you were Jehoshua's father, how would you have answered him? Can you apply your answer to yourself?

Time Line of Joseph's Life

Genesis gives us enough information to build a basic time line of Joseph's life. Joseph is 17 years old when we meet him in Genesis 37:2. He becomes second-in-command over Egypt when he is 30 years old (Genesis 41:46). If we assume that he is sold into slavery not long after the story begins (when he is 17 or 18), he spends 12 or 13 years as a slave. We know it is two years between the time he interprets the official's dream in prison and when he

becomes second-in-command. We have to guess how long Joseph was in prison before that. A year or two at the most seems likely, but we cannot be sure. So Joseph would have been in charge of Potiphar's household for around nine years and in prison for about four years. The years of plenty last for seven years. The brothers come to buy food in the second year of the famine (Genesis 45:11). Jacob lives in Egypt for 17 years (Genesis 47:28). Joseph dies at 110 years old (Genesis 50:22).

To summarize:

We meet Joseph—age 17.

Joseph is sold to Potiphar—age 17 or 18.

Joseph is thrown into prison—age 26 or 27.

Joseph is elevated to second-in-command in Egypt—age 30.

Joseph's brothers come to buy food—age 37.

Joseph's brothers go a second time to buy food, and Joseph is reunited with his father—age 39.

Joseph lives in Egypt for 17 years while his father is still alive.

Joseph lives with his family in Egypt for 54 years after his father dies, for a total of 71 years.