

## ***PATRIARCHS: Lesson Nine, Joseph's Exaltation*** ***Genesis 41-45***

**Subject:** Joseph rescued Egypt, tested his visiting brothers, and revealed his true identity.

**Main Idea:** *God humbles His servants in order to exalt them.*

**Principles:**

1. *God's work in one life is never for the benefit of that person alone.*
2. *An important test of our humility is our willingness to put other's needs ahead of our own.*
3. *When we have our theology right, we can forgive those who have hurt us.*

### **Introduction**

This lesson is called “Joseph’s Exaltation.” In the last lesson, we noted that Joseph is a “type” of Christ. He was beloved by his father, rejected by his brothers, betrayed for twenty pieces of silver and “seemingly died (or so his father thought) and was ‘brought to life’ again as a triumphant king instead of a suffering servant.”<sup>1</sup> Also, Joseph forgave his brothers (like Christ did) and was used to save them.

Genesis 37-40 told us of Joseph’s humiliation. In our current lesson, we learn that, at age thirty, Joseph was exalted. Joseph was first humbled under God’s mighty but loving hand. Then, God exalted him. In this, Joseph’s life gives us a full picture of an important teaching in the Bible. Peter summarized that teaching this way: “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time*” (1 Peter 5:6; also James 4:10). The Bible teaches that those who are humbled will be exalted.

- We are exhorted to *humble ourselves*. We also realize that, because it is God’s will for us, *God works* toward the end of humbling us. But this is for our good, because the humble person will be exalted!
- We may experience exaltation in this life, as Joseph did. Jesus spoke of the humble being exalted in the everyday situations (Luke 14:7-11). Whether or not we are honored in this life, Peter says a “crown of glory” (a reward) awaits the humble when Christ returns (1 Peter 5:4).
- This is a very different concept from the necessity of self-preservation and self-exaltation that the world embraces. According to the Bible, the way “up” is “down”!
- Joseph’s life beautifully illustrates this for us. It is another way in which he seems to be a “type” of Christ.
- Theologians often speak of Christ’s work in terms of a two-fold state. His incarnation, suffering, death, and burial fall into the *state of humiliation*. All of these works of Christ required that He lower Himself. Christ’s resurrection, ascension into Heaven, session at the right hand of God, and return in glory and power fall into the *state of exaltation*.

Just as the Bible tells us to expect to share in Christ’s humiliation and His suffering, it also teaches that we should expect to share in Christ’s exaltation!

- Our final exaltation will occur when we are glorified at Christ's return. At that time, we will be entirely free from the effects of sin and perfected to the state God created us to enjoy.
- Christ's humiliation necessarily preceded his exaltation. The same is true for us. God humbles His servants in order to exalt them.

## I. **Joseph Made Lord Over Egypt** – Genesis 41

### A. **Pharaoh's Dream** – 41:1-4

#### i. Two years later – 41:1

1. *Disappointment*: The heavy trial of Joseph's imprisonment did not end quickly after Joseph interpreted the Chief Cupbearer's and Chief Baker's dreams for them, as he had hoped. Rather, we are left to imagine the tremendous disappointment Joseph must have felt, day after day, for the two full years his imprisonment continued.
2. *Perfect Timing*: Two years is long enough that Joseph almost certainly believed his role in interpreting the Cupbearer's dreams was long forgotten. Indeed, at times he may have been tempted to wonder whether God had forgotten him! But, in fact, God caused the Cupbearer to remember Joseph's abilities at just the right moment, the time when his interpretation would result in his exaltation in Egypt. God planned to exalt Joseph, not only for Joseph's benefit, but also for the benefit of many other people.

ii. The Dream about Cows – 41:2-4: Near the end of the two additional years of Joseph's confinement, Pharaoh dreamed that cows came out of the Nile. The Nile was the lifeline of Egypt. Both the Nile and cows were important to Egypt's economy.<sup>ii</sup> Seven healthy cows emerged first, but seven skinny, ugly cows swallowed these up.

iii. The Dream about Grain – 41:5-7: The first dream was so vivid it woke Pharaoh up, but he fell back asleep, only to have a second vivid dream. The second dream also would have concerned Pharaoh, because it related to grain, another essential to Egypt's prosperity. Seven thin, scorched heads of grain devoured seven healthy, full heads of grain.

#### iv. Pharaoh's Magicians and Wise Men – 41:8

1. *The Class of Priests*: Pharaoh contacted his magicians and wise men for help interpreting the dreams. This was a class of priests who, it was believed, possessed secret arts.<sup>iii</sup> One of their many responsibilities included the interpretation of dreams. Guidebooks for dream interpretation are known from the twelfth dynasty of Egypt.<sup>iv</sup> While Mesopotamia and Egypt are known to have had such a class of men, Israel was forbidden to dabble in the arts of magic.
2. None of these could interpret Pharaoh's dream for him.

- v. The Cupbearer's Recollection – 41:9-13: This dilemma caused Pharaoh's Chief Cupbearer to suddenly remember Joseph and his ability. He recommended him to Pharaoh.

## **B. Joseph's Interpretation and Advice – 41:14-40**

### i. Joseph's Introduction to Pharaoh – 41:14-16

1. *Sudden Change for Joseph*: What a sudden change of events for Joseph! He was quickly brought from the dungeon and was made presentable to appear before Pharaoh.
2. *Joseph's Humility*: Pharaoh surely anticipated that Joseph would use this opportunity to impress him, as wise men and magicians were normally eager to do (Daniel 2:6-12). But Joseph came out of the dungeon with a different perspective on life than Pharaoh and his counselors held. Joseph was quick to tell Pharaoh, "*I cannot do it, but God will*". Literally, Joseph said, "It is not in me...God will give an answer."<sup>v</sup>
3. *Pharaoh's Worldview and Joseph's Worldview*
  - a. Joseph learned humility and dependence on God through his suffering. He also learned that God is sovereign over all of life.
  - b. In Egypt, Pharaoh was considered to be a god. Yet, Joseph told Pharaoh of the existence of One who transcended the realm of his gods, the realm of nature, and the realm of humankind. His simple statement challenged Pharaoh's worldview.
  - c. According to Joseph's worldview, Pharaoh was impotent with regard to world events. All he could do was to prepare for the events God superintended. God alone is "the great mover and shaper of history."<sup>vi</sup>

### ii. Joseph's Interpretation – 41:17-32

1. When Pharaoh repeated his dreams to Joseph, Joseph did not hesitate to give him an interpretation. First, he confirmed that the two dreams shared the same meaning. He explained that the two forms of the dream indicated God's firm resolve in the matter and that He would soon do it.
2. He explained that seven years of plenty in Egypt were going to be followed by seven years of famine. The famine would be devastating.
3. Joseph emphasized that God was graciously telling Pharaoh what He planned to do (41:25, 28).

iii. Joseph's Advice – 41:33-36

1. Joseph did not stop at merely interpreting Pharaohs' dreams for him. He boldly went on to give Pharaoh advice about how to prepare for the famine. There does not appear to have been any hesitation on Joseph's part to do so. Joseph was absolutely confident that God was working through him. A humble person does not hesitate to use their God-given gifts, but they make sure the credit is given where it is deserved, to God alone.
2. He advised Pharaoh to collect food during the years of plenty to be held in reserve for the years of famine. Furthermore, he advised Pharaoh to appoint "a discerning and wise man" to be put in charge of the land of Egypt and to oversee the collection of the food.

**C. Joseph's Exaltation** – 41:37-57

i. Appointment by Pharaoh – 41:37-44

1. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph that he could not imagine finding anyone more suited to the job. He acknowledged that the "Spirit of God" was in Joseph and that "God has made all this known to you". He, then, gave orders that Joseph be made Prime Minister of Egypt, second only in the land to Pharaoh himself.
2. Pharaoh gave him his signet ring, which would have allowed Joseph the right to dictate the laws of the land by Pharaoh's own authority, and dressed Joseph in a manner that was suitable to his honorable position.
3. Then he paraded Joseph throughout the city in a manner that announced Joseph's position to all.
4. Finally, he gave Joseph an Egyptian name, the meaning of which, some suggest, was that Joseph was the sustainer of their lives (according to the call God entrusted to him.)<sup>vii</sup>
5. Joseph was thirty years old when he was exalted (41:46). He had suffered in Egypt thirteen years.

ii. Joseph's Wife and Sons – 41:45, 50-52

1. Pharaoh also gave Joseph an Egyptian wife. Doing so would have naturalized him as a citizen.<sup>viii</sup> The woman, Asenath, was from the priestly family of On ("a city which was a center of sun worship seven miles north of Cairo and also known as Heliopolis").<sup>ix</sup> Marrying into the priestly caste also had the benefit of further enhancing Joseph's power.<sup>x</sup>
2. During the years of plenty, Asenath bore two sons to Joseph. Joseph gave his sons Hebrew names. Their names give insight into Joseph's frame of mind.

- a. *Manasseh*: Joseph's first son was named Manasseh. Joseph said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."
  - i. Such a statement affirms what we have already come to believe, that Joseph had deeply suffered by being separated from his family.
  - ii. The name also indicates that Joseph was experiencing emotional healing from his trauma. The fact that he was able to stop missing his family so terribly indicates that Joseph was deeply comforted by his new family. Asenath came from a religious background. She surely learned about God from Joseph. We are given a picture of a happy home life.
  - iii. Finally, some see in this name an indication about why Joseph did not immediately contact his father once he was exalted. Martin Luther suggested Joseph forgetting his father's household indicates that he learned, by his suffering, that God did not want him to depend on his father, as he had previously, but on God alone. Possibly, then, Joseph did not contact his father right away because he saw himself in the middle of God's will in his role in Egypt. He would await God's timing and trust in Him alone.<sup>xi</sup>
- b. *Ephraim*:
  - i. Joseph's second son was named Ephraim. At his naming, Joseph said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." Joseph could never forget his suffering entirely. He mentioned it at the birth and naming of both his sons. Yet, again, his mention of fruitfulness indicates Joseph began to see Egypt from a dual perspective: it was the land of his suffering and also the land of his fruitfulness.
  - ii. Joseph was beginning to see his boyhood dreams of exaltation fulfilled.
- iii. Joseph's Responsibilities – 41:45-49, 53-57
  - 1. Joseph traveled throughout the land, collecting and storing up food in each city.
  - 2. At the end of seven years, the famine began. Joseph opened the storehouses of grain and sold it to the Egyptians.
  - 3. The famine extended beyond Egypt. "All the world" came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph. "All the world" is a figure of speech to indicate all the countries near Egypt.

4. God had given Joseph lessons that were critical to his success.
  - a. He equipped Joseph with administrative experience, general life experience, and people management skills during his years in Potiphar's house and the prison.
  - b. Joseph also learned God could help him when tempted (39:9-10).
  - c. Above all, God taught Joseph humility. One can assume he never forgot that he was replaceable, that God, if He chose, could return him to a position of servitude and humility in one swift, unforeseen moment (just as quickly as he had been exalted.)
  - d. He crafted Joseph into a man who was broken enough to be used by Him for the benefit of many, all to God's glory!

**Summary Statement:** Joseph's one life impacted many. He saved the lives of the Egyptians and the lives of people from many other nations. In this, we see a partial fulfillment of God's promise to the Patriarchs that God would bless the world through them. Many people ultimately benefitted from Joseph's humiliation *and* from his exaltation.

**Principle:** *God's work in one life is never for the benefit of that person alone.*

**Application:** Certainly, all who receive Jesus benefit from His work. Have you considered that, likewise, *you* are to be a blessing to many people? That is God's will for your life!

- God did not save you only for your own benefit. He saved you in order that many others might also benefit. We are to be witnesses of Christ's work in our lives so that others may also know Him (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). We are to share with and serve God's people (Romans 12:5-13). We are to help the needy (Luke 12:33). We are not here to serve ourselves but to serve others!
- Who is directly benefitting from God's work in you at this time in your life? If you cannot quickly name many different people, you have misunderstood God's plan for your life. God does not want us to become self-centered saints. He will exalt selfless servants. He saved us for the benefit of many others.

We can also consider this principle from the opposite perspective. You and I are impacted by God's work in the lives of others.

- Most all of us can quickly name godly individuals who have influenced our lives for good.
- But we are also impacted by God's *discipline* in the lives of others, especially those with whom we live and work most closely. God may be allowing someone close to you to experience the natural consequences of his or her own bad choices. You may be suffering as a result.

- How would your attitude change toward this person and toward your circumstances if you realized that God’s work in their life is also part of His plan to reshape *you*?

**Transition:** In one swift moment, Joseph went from being a prisoner in Egypt to lord of Egypt. His exaltation was not only for his own benefit. His father’s household was among the many who benefitted.

## II. Joseph Tested His Brothers – Genesis 42-44

### A. The First Journey – 42:1-38

#### i. The Decision to Go to Egypt – 42:1-5

1. *Jacob’s Household in Canaan:* The scene shifts from Egypt to Canaan. The seven years of plenty had passed. Therefore, Joseph had now been gone from Canaan for twenty years. The severe famine stretched beyond Egypt and we learn that Jacob’s family was suffering because of it.
2. *Jacob’s Initiative:* Jacob asked his sons why they just kept looking at on another indecisively. Why had they hesitated to go to Egypt for grain? Their hesitation gives us the first of many insights into the guilty stamp on the consciences of his sons. *To consider going to Egypt was to be reminded of Joseph, whom they had sent there many years earlier.* Although they seemed to have assumed he must have been dead by now (44:20), they would have preferred to avoid any and all things that reminded them of their guilt. This is important to keep in mind with regard to Joseph’s testing of his brothers.
3. *Benjamin Remained:* Jacob would not allow Benjamin, Rachel’s only remaining son, to go with them out of fear of losing him as he had lost Joseph. So his ten remaining sons left for Egypt.

#### ii. Joseph’s Recognition of His Brothers – 42:6-8

1. When Joseph’s brothers arrived in Egypt, they did not recognize Joseph. Joseph had grown from a boy into a man. Furthermore, he was dressed, shaven, and spoke as an Egyptian (through an interpreter, even though it was not necessary, [42:23]).
2. Although Joseph was in charge of selling grain, he surely had many supervisors who assisted in such a great task. It seems providential that Joseph was present when his own brothers appeared.
3. The first thing we are told about this encounter is that Joseph’s brother bowed down to him. After Joseph correctly interpreted the dreams of the Chief Baker, Chief Cupbearer, and Pharaoh, he was undoubtedly all the more convinced that his own dreams would eventually be fulfilled. Increasingly, they were (37:7, 9-11; 42:9).

iii. Joseph's Accusation Against Them – 42:9-17

1. *Joseph's Motivation*: It may seem surprising that Joseph concealed his identity from his brothers. He “pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.” What was his motivation for doing so?
  - a. Later in the account, we discover that Joseph's heart toward his brothers was tender. Thus, the purpose in his treatment of them could not have been revenge, as it may first appear to us.
  - b. Joseph wisely tested his brothers (42:15-16) to see if God had transformed their characters. The tests were intended to stir up their guilt and give Joseph the opportunity to see their response. He made “a powerful appeal to his brothers' consciences so that they would recognize and admit their sin against him.”<sup>xii</sup> Therefore, the tests revealed how and if they had *already* changed while also *creating an opportunity* for change. His desired end was reconciliation. Joseph is depicted in Genesis as a man who not only could interpret dreams but who was a man of great wisdom and insight in general, much like the prophet Daniel, who lived many centuries later (Daniel 1:17, 20).
2. *Joseph's First Test*: Joseph first tested his brothers by accusing them of being spies.
  - a. We recall that one of the reasons Joseph's brothers had despised him was because of the bad report he brought their father about some of them (37:2). Jacob had sent him to them for the very purpose of *gaining information* about his brothers. It was not his own plan to “spy” on his brothers. It was his father's plan. When his brothers saw him approaching, they could not bear the idea that he would return to his father with a report.
  - b. Joseph's accusation that his brothers were spies probably caused them to feel the sting of the same accusation they had leveled against him.
3. *Joseph's Brothers' Defense*: Joseph's brothers defended themselves by offering information about their family. They told Joseph they came from a family of twelve brothers, the youngest of whom remained with their father and one who “is no more” (42:13).

iv. Joseph's Challenge Regarding Benjamin – 42:18-24

1. *Joseph's Second Test*

- a. Their revelation of this information allowed Joseph to put them to a second test. He told them they could prove their innocence by bringing their youngest brother to him in Egypt. Joseph said he would allow one of them to return to get the youngest brother while the rest remained imprisoned.
- b. Through three days of confinement, they experienced just a little of Joseph's terror at being thrown into the cistern by them all those years ago (37:23).
- c. Apparently Joseph thought about his plan over a three-day period. At the end of that time, he decided to keep only one brother in custody and allow the other nine to return. By keeping just one, the brothers' consciences were reminded that they sent Joseph alone into Egypt, and they were forced to consider the misery of his isolation.
- d. Joseph's revised plan also ensured his father's growing household continued to be cared for and that Jacob suffered the heartache of losing only one additional son rather than all nine of them!

## 2. *Joseph's Third Test*

- a. The brothers had no control over the powerful ruler of Egypt. They saw what he required of them as divine retribution, saying, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us" (42:21). Reuben heaped further guilt on them, reminding them that he had tried to stop them from harming Joseph. After over twenty years, they had not stopped feeling guilty about what they had done.
- b. Hearing their confession, Joseph turned away from them and wept. Their words were a painful reminder of what had happened to him. Yet he was grateful God was working to bring their guilt into the open.
- c. Joseph chose to keep Simeon imprisoned. Reuben was firstborn, yet Joseph heard him tell of his innocence. So he chose the next eldest, Simeon. Simeon had been guilty, along with Levi, of bringing trouble on their father by massacring the Shechemites when Joseph was a young boy (34:25-30). We are left without information to imagine other reasons for Joseph's selection of Simeon.
- d. Would the brothers forsake Simeon in Egypt, as they had forsaken Joseph?

- v. The Brothers' Return Journey – 42:25-28: Joseph sent his brothers home with grain for their families. Unbeknown to them, he also put the silver (with which they had paid for the grain) back in their sacks, probably so that the grain might be a gift. However, when they stopped for the night, one of them discovered the silver. “Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, ‘What is this God has done to us?’” Their guilty consciences were further exposed.
- vi. Jacob's Sons' Discussion with Him – 42:29-38
  1. We previously learned that Jacob had never had gotten over his grief at losing Joseph (37:34-35; 42:4). His sons must have dreaded the conversation they would have with their father upon their return.
  2. They recounted the story of their encounter with the gruff ruler of Egypt to Jacob, together with the defense they had provided by giving details about their family of origin. Finally, they told Jacob that they had been told they could not trade further in Egypt without bringing Benjamin back with them.
  3. Then, they discovered that all nine of them still had their silver in their bags. This terrified them.
  4. Jacob responded sullenly and angrily, blaming them for depriving him of both Joseph and Simeon. This is an interesting statement, for it hints that Jacob suspected his sons had had a part in what he believed to be Joseph's death.
  5. *Reuben's Offer*: Reuben, the eldest, offered to take Benjamin to Egypt. He undoubtedly felt guilty that Simeon was still there. He offered to allow Jacob to put his sons to death if he did not return Benjamin safely. However, the thought of losing two grandsons, in addition to Benjamin, was of no comfort to Jacob. He flatly refused to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt, saying that if anything happened to Benjamin, they would be responsible for bringing his “gray head down to the grave in sorrow” (42:38).

## **B. The Second Journey** – 43:1 – 44:34

- i. The Decision to Return to Egypt – 43:1-14
  1. Eventually, the food Jacob's sons obtained in Egypt ran out.
  2. *Judah's Leadership*: This time, Judah exerted leadership.
    - a. He reminded his father they could not go to Egypt without Benjamin and assured his father he would not return from Egypt without him. Judah appealed to his father on the basis of their dire need for food, “so that we and you and our children may live and not die” (43:8).

- b. Then Judah made a remarkable statement, “If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life” (43:9). Genesis 38 portrayed Judah as a selfish man, unwilling to take responsibility for his own daughter-in-law. We see that Judah had changed.
    - c. Finally, Judah appealed to Jacob’s common sense: “As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice” (43:10).
  - 3. Jacob allowed them to leave, telling them to take extra gifts with them for the man in Egypt with whom they would have to deal once again. He realized he had no choice. If they did not risk going, all of them would perish from the famine.
  - 4. So the brothers left for Egypt, with Benjamin, with payment for more grain and with the silver that had, they believed, mistakenly been returned to them on their first trip.
- ii. Joseph’s Brothers in His Home – 43:15-34
  - 1. *The Missing Silver Explained*: Much to their surprise, the brothers were taken immediately to Joseph’s private residence upon their arrival in Egypt. This frightened them, for they wrongly assumed they were being blamed for not leaving their payment on their first trip. They believed they were being trapped by Joseph and forced into his service.
    - a. Therefore they initiated a defense to Joseph’s steward before any accusation was ever leveled against them. They told the steward they believed their silver was mistakenly returned to them and that they had brought it back with them in goodwill.
    - b. Apparently, Joseph’s steward was aware of all Joseph was doing, for he ignored their defense and claimed he had, indeed, received their silver on their previous journey. Then he brought Simeon out to rejoin them. One can only imagine Simeon’s relief!
  - 2. *The Brothers Were Served*
    - a. Much to their surprise, the eleven brothers found themselves being served by Joseph’s household staff. They and their animals were refreshed from their trip.
    - b. At Joseph’s arrival, they presented him with their gifts. Joseph inquired about their father.
    - c. Again, the brothers prostrated themselves before Joseph.

- d. Noticing Benjamin among them, Joseph was “deeply moved” and “hurried out and looked for a place to weep.” It seems that Joseph would have revealed himself to them, but although they had not abandoned Simeon, Joseph’s testing of them was not yet complete.
  - e. Once Joseph returned, he had them seated for a banquet in order of their ages, leaving his brothers absolutely astonished! Then he assured Benjamin received five times the amount of food the others received, the only safe way he could express the deep emotion within him for Benjamin.
- iii. Joseph’s Challenge Regarding His Cup – 44:1-15
- 1. *Freedom to Return to Canaan*
    - a. Following the feast, Joseph released his brothers to return to Canaan. He gave them the food they came to purchase and once again, returned their silver in their sacks. All eleven brothers, Simeon and Benjamin included, left Egypt.
    - b. To them, this must have been a moment of celebration. They believed they had cleared themselves of the accusation of being spies. They believed, from that point forward, they would be free to trade in Egypt (42:34). And, perhaps to their greatest relief of all, they were bringing Benjamin back safely to their father, as promised.
  - 2. *Joseph’s Fourth Test*
    - a. But Joseph had arranged yet another test for his brothers. He had had his personal cup, a chalice that was a symbol of his authority, placed in Benjamin’s sack. The Egyptians leaders used such cups for divination. Although Joseph did not do this, he knew his brothers would understand the implication of stealing something so important from him. So he had “set up” Benjamin.
    - b. He allowed his brothers to travel a short distance from the city before he sent his steward after them (doubtless, accompanied by soldiers) to accuse them of the theft.
    - c. Completely surprised, Joseph’s brothers vowed that any of them found with the cup would be put to death and the rest of them would become Joseph’s slaves.
    - d. Joseph’s steward appeared to concede to their suggestion but actually amended their condemnation, saying the one to blame would become the slave and the rest would be free.
    - e. Having left Joseph’s house that very morning with such a feeling of relief, the brothers then experienced the greatest calamity of all: the cup was discovered in Benjamin’s sack!

- f. None of them attempted a defense. Each realized that God had unveiled their *true guilt*, which they had carried many years, through these seemingly unfortunate circumstances. They considered themselves guilty, even though they each knew they had no role in any theft. When they returned to appear before Joseph, their only response was, “God has uncovered your servants’ guilt.” (One must wonder about Benjamin’s thoughts and reaction. He knew he was not guilty!)
  - g. Joseph pushed the test to its limits by refusing to keep them as his slaves. He insisted that *only Benjamin* would remain with him. “The rest of you,” he said, “go back to your father in peace” (44:17).
    - i. It was clear to Joseph from what his brothers had told him that his father favored Benjamin, as he had been favored. This was the basis of his test: would his brothers be as eager to get rid of the favored Benjamin as they had been to get rid of Joseph years earlier? Would they gladly make their escape and abandon their father’s new “favorite” to enslavement in Egypt, *exactly as they had done to Joseph*?
    - ii. Joseph’s words, “return to your father in peace,” could not have been a weightier reminder that their sin was not only against Joseph but also against their father. There had been no peace in Jacob’s household since the day they had sold Joseph into slavery (something Joseph may only have suspected). Jacob had refused to be consoled over his loss. The brothers fully understood that they could never return to their father in peace without Benjamin!
- iv. Judah’s Speech – 44:16-34
1. At that moment, Judah stepped forward and delivered a most moving speech, in which he repeatedly showed deep concern for his father’s well-being and unwillingness to leave Benjamin behind.
  2. He explained to Joseph that he had guaranteed Benjamin’s safety to their father. He feared that if he returned without Benjamin, his father would die out of sorrow (44:31). He could not stand to return and see his father grieve the loss of another son.
  3. Then Judah made an offer that really proved to Joseph that he was a changed man. He asked Joseph to *keep him in Benjamin’s place!* The previously self-centered Judah had become a self-sacrificing man.

**Summary Statement:** Joseph’s tests successfully moved his brothers to unveil their guilt and act with integrity.

**Principle:** *An important test of our humility is our willingness to put other’s needs ahead of our own.*

**Illustration:** My selfishness is often revealed by my impatience with others. Because I live in a somewhat rural area and rely on a car for transportation, I am often aware how impatient a person I can be when I am driving. I get frustrated too easily with the many drivers on the road who are in no hurry whatsoever. I wonder why they won’t get out of my way! I also realize my impatience when I shop. There are always lines in which to wait. I sometimes feel inward irritation at storeowners and workers who seem unaware that those in line have other things to do. I feel as though they are wasting *my time*. I must regularly remind myself that my time is not my own and that *each of the people I encounter have needs* – needs which I may help meet by my kind words and responses to them.

Sometimes our selfishness shows up as spiritual pride, the worst kind of pride. Jesus accused the Pharisees of making themselves more important than others. They wanted people to treat them with special honor. Jesus told His followers they were not to be like the Pharisees. He said, “The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matthew 23:1-12; also, Luke 14:11, 18:14).

When I was a younger adult, in my thirties, I had the responsibility of overseeing certain Bible studies in our large church. One day, I learned that our pastor had granted an “outside” group permission to teach Bible studies on our church property. A number of those who had attended the Bible studies I was responsible for chose to participate in these other studies. I responded very poorly. Inwardly, I took pride in the studies I oversaw. I was offended that the pastor had invited this group into our midst without consulting me, and I was upset that some were choosing to attend the other study. I wasn’t thinking of others’ needs, but only of myself. I had a hard lesson to learn. There is no room in the body of Christ for competition. Our goal is the same: to help others know God and His Christ, all for His glory.

A couple of years later, my season of oversight for the Bible studies ended. Another two years after that, at the incessant pleading of a friend, I reluctantly visited one of the studies held by this para-church group. Little did I know that God would use that group and their studies as the vehicle by which He would produce unprecedented spiritual growth in me. I remained a part of those studies for ten years. The training I received there equipped me, in large part, to write the *GOD of the WORD* studies these many years later.

Looking back, I realize that if I had really been considering the best interest of others and not my own selfish pride, I would have immediately investigated this group that our pastor had wisely invited, with an interest in seeing how God might use them to benefit our church, and even what they might teach me. If I had been humble enough to do this, I am certain I would have encouraged others, from the beginning, to benefit from what they offered. I also would have benefitted.

**Application:** How might pride be keeping you from putting the needs of others first? Judah was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his father and brothers. What kind of a personal sacrifice is God currently asking you to make for the welfare of someone else?

**Transition:** Judah, a formerly self-centered man, had been transformed into a humble servant. Ultimately, God has exalted him by granting him the honor of being the forefather of Jesus Christ. He also honored him by recording his unselfish act for all eternity in the Scriptures. Finally, Jacob exalted Judah through his blessing as Jacob lay on his deathbed (Genesis 48:8-12), as we will see in the next lesson.

### III. Joseph Made Known to His Family – Genesis 45

#### A. Joseph Revealed His Identity and Theology – 45:1-8

##### i. Joseph Revealed His Identity to His Brothers – 45:1-4

1. With the guilt Joseph's brothers carried within them so long finally unveiled and their willingness to accept the consequences of their actions, Joseph was finally free to reveal his identity to them. Indeed, he was so touched and relieved by Judah's speech that he "could no longer control himself" (45:1). Joseph wept so loudly that Pharaoh's household was informed about it. Many years of anguish were release. Weeping is not an unmanly display of emotion. We ought to give ourselves permission to cry also.
2. Joseph told his brothers, "I am Joseph!" and, having heard Judah speak repeatedly of his father's grief, could not withhold his concern for him.
3. His brothers were stunned by the revelation. However, Joseph spoke to them without an interpreter, and they would have recognized his dialect as their own. Additionally, he revealed his knowledge of details only Joseph would have known, that they had sold him into slavery in Egypt!

##### ii. Joseph's Conviction Regarding God's Sovereignty – 45:5-8

1. Joseph invited his terrified brothers to come close to him. What a beautiful picture of what Christ does for us! The unveiling of our sin before a holy God is, rightly, terrifying. But Christ invites us to be forgiven and *draw near* to Him. Jesus invites us into a restored relationship.

2. Joseph's words to his brothers, in verses 4-8, prove that he had *already forgiven* them. His tests had not been vindictive. Exposing guilt and offering forgiveness were prerequisites to having their relationship properly restored.
  3. Joseph's words, on this occasion, also revealed his theology. He told his brothers that, while *they* had sold him into slavery, *God* was the One behind the scene, working through their evil for His own good purposes. God had sent Joseph ahead of them to Egypt for the preservation of many lives, including their own.
  4. Nothing is more important than what we believe about God. All of our attitudes and actions are a reflection of our theology. Joseph's theology was what enabled him to endure his trials. He had concluded, "it was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:8). If Joseph had not known God as loving and good, he could have been bitter and angry with God. Instead, he had an accurate view of God and that translated into a healthy attitude toward his suffering.
- iii. Joseph's Visit with His Brothers and Message to His Father – 45:9-15
1. Joseph told his brothers to hurry back to their father and tell him Joseph was alive and was lord of all Egypt.
  2. He instructed them to have his father and their households come to Egypt without delay, where he would provide for them. He informed them that five years of famine were still ahead, something they could not have known otherwise.
  3. He encouraged them to speak convincingly to Jacob of Joseph's honor in Egypt.
  4. Then he embraced, kissed and wept over each brother, beginning with Benjamin.

## **B. Joseph's Brothers Return with News**

- i. Pharaoh's Invitation to Joseph's Family – 45:16-20: Pharaoh responded graciously to the news that Joseph's brothers had come to Egypt. He also encouraged them to come to Egypt, offering them the best of the land and providing carts and other provisions for their journey.
- ii. Joseph's Provisions and Instructions – 45:21-24: Joseph added other provisions. Each brother received new clothing, but Benjamin received five sets, plus three hundred shekels of silver. Then he sent them on the way with the wise caution not to argue among themselves on the way. It seems he was concerned they would begin passing blame for what they had done to Joseph, rather than focusing on the joy of their reconciliation with him.

- iii. Jacob Received the News About Joseph – 45:25-28: When the brothers returned home, they stunned their father with the news. Initially, he could not believe them. But once he saw the provisions that had been sent and considered all Joseph told them to say, he was convinced. His grieving spirit was revived and he determined to go to Egypt.

**Summary Statement:** Joseph forgave his brothers and invited them to Egypt because he understood that God’s good plan was behind all the pain he had suffered.

**Principle:** *When we have our theology right, we can forgive those who have hurt us.*

It is very important that we do not think of theology as merely an academic discipline that is of little value to our hearts. While theology is the study of God and all His works, the doctrinal passages of the Bible were written to shape our thinking *with the end goal of changing our behavior* (the entire Book of Romans is just one example). What we believe about God affects our behavior every single day, whether we realize it or not. (This is the reason why I have incorporated doctrinal teachings into our lessons. In our *Patriarchs* study, I have particularly emphasized doctrines that concern the application of redemption, such as regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.)

Joseph believed God’s plans superseded any plans his brothers had made.

- He understood God to be so powerful, so involved, and so loving that no difficulty could come upon him without God’s approval. He believed God was able to work *all things* together for his good (Romans 8:28).
- There are many evils in the world and God is not the author of these (James 1:13). But He *permits and uses* these evils for a greater good.
- Our difficulty is that our thinking is too limited. If we do not *perceive* the good, we assume it does not exist. God is eternal. In His economy, one day is “as a thousand years” (2 Peter 3:8). Sometimes the good does not occur in our lifetime. Sometimes the good that occurs involves gradual *inner* transformation that we cannot easily measure.

**Application:** What does your willingness *or your hesitancy* to forgive others say to them about the way you view God?

It may take a great deal of grace and humility on your part to forgive someone who has hurt you.

## Conclusion

What we believe about God is also critical to becoming a truly humble person. If we don't know God's power, if we haven't experienced His love, if we don't understand that He transcends everything, we will spend our lives feeling the need to defend ourselves. Once we grasp that God is in charge and that His plan is good, we no longer have to do that. We can rest in Him and wait for Him to exalt us. In His right time, He has promised to do just that.

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