

## *Your Will Be Done – The Story of Joseph* *Level III and IV Teachers' Notes*

### Lesson 1 • Joseph's Dream, In The Well, Sold Into Slavery

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**Theme:** ADVERSITY IN THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

**Text:** Gen. 37:1-8, 12-14, 17b-28, 36

**New Testament Reference:** Luke 4:16-30

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The teacher could begin by making the following proposition: "Since I am a Christian that means I won't have any problems in my life." Ask the children to think about this statement. Is it true? Do they have problems of any kind? Does God promise that our lives here on earth will be completely free of any and all difficulties? Then lead them into a discussion about some of the adversity Jesus had to face during His life. Here might be a good time to refer Luke 4:16-30. In this particular account, people from Jesus' own town rise up in anger against Him. Relate to them how the people tried to toss Him over a cliff. With these and other examples, try to get the children to see that because of sin trouble often does touch the lives of those whom God loves. End the introductory remarks by saying something like, "Today we're going to learn about a young Christian man who had many troubles in his life. The Christian's name is Joseph."

#### **BACKGROUND**

This lesson takes place in the land of Canaan. Sometimes it's good not only to show the children where Canaan is on a Bible map, but also in a modern atlas or on a globe. This impresses upon the children the reality of the story. The account takes place, for the most part, in two separate regions of Canaan: in the Valley of Hebron and in the area around Shechem (55 miles north of Hebron).

Joseph's family was in the livestock business. They owned great flocks of sheep and goats. Joseph does not appear to play an active part in the family business, although his father attempts to get him more involved.

To help understand the brother's hatred of Joseph, mention the "coat of many colors." This coat seems to be the kind of coat princes or persons in authority would wear (see II Sam. 13:18). Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph above his other sons should also be noted. "*Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his children...Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.*" (Gen. 37:3-4)

Joseph's mother died when he was only twelve years old. Our lesson takes place when Joseph is on the verge of adulthood (seventeen); but by telling the children of his mother's death, the children will see that even as a child Joseph experienced adversity in his life.

#### **TEXT STUDY**

**v. 5-8:** "*Joseph dreamed a dream.*" (Gen. 37:5) However, this dream is no ordinary one. It was not like the ones we get at night. This was a special dream, a prophetic dream. During Bible times God would speak to His people in many different ways. Sometimes He would speak to them directly, as He did to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Often He would speak through the voice of His prophets. At other times, as here, He would speak in dreams or visions. Take the opportunity to remind the children that God today still speaks to us, not in dreams or visions, but through His written Word. Joseph relates his dream to his brothers. What the dream meant was obvious to all. In his dream Joseph and his brothers were all binding sheaves in the field. (Some explanation as to what a sheaf is may be required.) Joseph's sheaf rose above his brother's sheaves. His

brother's sheaves bowed down to Joseph's sheaf. The dream raised questions in his brothers' minds. "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" They hated him even more after his dream. Not only did he have a prince's coat, but he also had allusions of being their king. We can well imagine that they thought of Joseph as a spoiled brat. Comment on how older siblings don't like it much when their younger siblings try to run the show. This does not excuse, of course, the brothers' jealousy and hatred. You may also want to remind them again that this dream came from God, not from Joseph's proud heart. This prophetic dream was fulfilled many years later in Egypt when Joseph's brothers bowed down to him as prime minister of Egypt.

**v.12-14:** Time passed. We find Joseph's brothers far away from Hebron tending the flocks. Because sheep and goats need a tremendous amount of grass upon which to feed, shepherds constantly have to move their flocks in search of new pastures. Sometimes their search can lead them many miles away from the base camp. In our lesson the brothers had the flocks grazing in the area of Shechem, many, many miles from Joseph and his father. While it is necessary at times to take the flocks so far away, it's also important to keep up communications between the roving shepherds and the base camp. Here then, we find that Jacob commissioned Joseph to see to the welfare of his brothers and the flock. *"Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me."* (Gen. 37:14) This was a great responsibility for Joseph, not only because of the great distance he would have to travel alone, but also because of his age.

**v.17b:** Joseph arrived in Shechem, he discovered that his brothers had taken the flocks further north to Dothan (15 miles north of Shechem). In Dothan he finally met his brothers.

**v.18-24:** The brothers spotted Joseph from a distance. Immediately they made plans to kill him. Apparently at least some of them had talked about killing him before this. Now they see their opportunity. They would kill him, throw him into a cistern, and then say a wild animal attacked and killed him. Reuben, the oldest of the brothers, pleaded with them not to kill him. It's his desire to rescue Joseph and return him safely to his father (v.22). Yet he allowed Joseph to be stripped of his clothes and thrown into one of the dry cisterns. (These cisterns were bottle-shaped pits, narrow at the top, and wide at the bottom, making it impossible to escape. Rupprecht says that these cisterns are used to this day to hold prisoners. He also says that these cisterns are often without water, there being no supply for them except rain.)

**v.25-28:** While the brothers ate their meal, it appears the subject of killing Joseph came up again. Now Judah persuaded the brothers not to kill him. He suggested that they instead sell Joseph to a passing band of Ishmaelite traders. Joseph was sold for twenty shekels (\$50).

**v.36:** This verse simply tells us that the merchants sold Joseph in Egypt to a man named Potiphar.

## APPLICATION

- Remind the children of the statement from the beginning of the lesson. See what their reaction is now.
- Dramatize how frightened Joseph must have been down in the well and how terrified he must have been when he learned he was going to be sold as a slave. He may have been confused that all this would happen to one of God's children, especially at the hands of his brothers.
- Talk about some of the children's not-so-pleasant experiences. Specifically talk about how others may have treated them badly, even their friends and family at times.
- Speak to the children about the snowball effect of sin. By allowing sinful thoughts to remain in our hearts they will continue to grow until they erupt into sinful deeds. The brothers' sins of jealousy, envy and hatred led almost to murder, led to severe mistreatment of their brother (slavery eventually) and ruined their father's joy.

- Go back again to Jesus' life. Talk about how few friends Jesus really had during His earthly ministry. With respect to Luke 4, point out that it was the people that Jesus knew best who were so cruel to him. Then lead the children into a discussion about Jesus' sufferings and death on the cross. Before Jesus offered Himself up on the cross, He prayed to His heavenly Father, "Your will be done." Talk about the reason for His suffering and death—our sins. Make it clear that Jesus paid the price for our sin. At this time perhaps one of the children will ask: "If our sin is paid for, why do we still have problems in our life?" Explain that we live in a world of sin. Sin causes hatred and jealousy. It causes people to do bad things to each other. Also, because they still have their sinful flesh, they'll bring trouble upon themselves by their own sinful words and deeds. Be careful that the children are not left with the impression that God punishes us for our sins. Jesus was already punished for all our sins on the cross. *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Rom. 8:1) However, there are consequences to our sins that we sometimes have to endure. And yet, on the cross Jesus defeated sin, death and the power of the devil. This assures us that one day, in heaven, we will have a life free of all adversity, trouble, pain and sadness. (Rev. 21:4) In the meantime we say "Your will be done," and trust that God will work everything in our lives for our good (Rom. 8:28). Hint to the children that in the lessons to come we will learn how God took this "bad" thing that happened to Joseph and turned it into something really wonderful.

## **BIBLE REFERENCES**

- I Peter 1:5-6
- Revelation 21:4
- Romans 8:28
- Matthew 28:20

## **HYMNS**

528, 529, 418, 424, 372

## Lesson 2 • The Attempted Seduction By Potiphar's Wife

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**Theme:** TEMPTATION IN THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

**Text:** Gen. 39:1-23

**New Testament Reference:** Matt. 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13

### INTRODUCTION

This lesson deals with the problem of temptation in the lives of believers. It may be difficult to understand that God's will for our lives may include sorrow and trouble. There may be times when we are tempted, like Joseph, to break God's commandments. The children should understand that God wants us to resist and overcome temptation, even when the results might appear to cause us even more suffering. Be careful though—the example of Joseph shouldn't be elevated to the point where we forget that he still was a sinful human being like us. We need to leave our students with the comforting Good News about Jesus. Jesus resisted every temptation and kept all the commandments for us, and that's the reason we find forgiveness for our sins in His blood!

Note: this lesson touches on a sensitive subject—sexual sin. The older students (especially those with prior confirmation instruction) will be familiar with the term “adultery,” or at least will understand it when it is explained. You may be surprised when even the intermediate-grade children show an understanding about what's going on in the story of Joseph (kids generally know a lot more about this than we think). Keep in mind, however, that the wider scope of the account deals with temptation in general, and how God directs Christians to deal with it. This should be the main point. For younger children, it will be enough to say that Potiphar's wife tempted Joseph to sin against God by living with her as if Joseph were her husband. Of course, there are plenty of concrete examples of temptation you can draw from the lives of even the youngest of your students!

### BACKGROUND

The account takes place somewhere in what was known as Lower Egypt, in the Nile Delta in the northeast corner of the country. The Nile is one of the world's few rivers which flow from south to north, hence the name “Lower Egypt” for that northern delta region. Ancient Egypt comprised an area of about 9,600 square miles, a little bigger than the state of New Hampshire. For its small size, it was a mighty empire. Egypt had one of the world's first civilized cultures, with a recorded history dating as far back as 3,000 B.C. The rich soil of the delta gave Lower Egypt a prosperous agricultural economy, where a wealthy landowner like Potiphar could live in luxurious splendor. The economy was partly supported by the labor of slaves, including those captured from enemy countries and those (like Joseph) purchased from travelling slave-traders. The pharaohs, mighty kings who exercised absolute authority over the lives of their people, ruled Egypt.

### TEXT STUDY

**v.1:** Joseph was sold on the open slave market by the Ishmaelites who had bought him from his brothers. It's hard to imagine a more humiliating experience than being auctioned off on the slave block (compare the days of the U.S. slave trade in the south). The highest bidder turned out to be the rich landowner Potiphar, whose name means “Belonging to the Sun.” (The Egyptians were unbelievers who worshipped the Sun-God Ra, rather than the true God.) Potiphar was an important man in Egypt, captain of the royal guard, a distinguished officer in Pharaoh's court. Joseph was a slave in a strange land, among unbelievers, far from his home and family. Things certainly looked dark for him.

**v.2-5:** The LORD continued to be with Joseph! God made Joseph very successful. Every task that Joseph put his hand to, God caused to prosper. Joseph made no secret of His faith in the LORD, so that even Potiphar

himself realized that it was the LORD who was helping him. Over the years, Joseph proved his faithfulness again and again, and worked his way up from Potiphar's lowest slave, to the point where he was made the trusted manager of Potiphar's entire estate. Joseph gradually was given the run of the place, and was at liberty to do his job just as he saw fit. God blessed Joseph's work, and blessed Potiphar's house for Joseph's sake.

**v.6:** Potiphar trusted Joseph completely. He didn't even know how much money he had, but left everything in Joseph's hands. Joseph lived up to that trust, serving the LORD by doing honest work for his employer, even though Potiphar was an unbeliever (1 Pet 2:18). At this time Joseph had probably been in Egypt around ten years, and may have been about 27 years old. The text tells us that he was a very handsome young man.

**v.7-10:** God's will had placed Joseph in a position of power, but it was also a position in which his faith would be severely tested! In the course of his duties, Joseph was brought into everyday contact with his master's wife. She was a treacherous and unfaithful woman, with no scruples about betraying her husband, Potiphar, behind his back. Eventually, her eyes fell on the handsome young servant Joseph, and she desired him. In her lust for Joseph, she invited him to sleep with her. As mistress of the house, she was used to her servants obeying her every wish; how surprised she must have been when her servant Joseph refused to do what she wanted! He had a duty to obey his mistress, but he had a greater duty to be faithful to his master. His greatest duty of all was to obey his God, and he knew that the sin of adultery was a great wickedness against the LORD (Acts 5:29). Joseph refused to do what his conscience told him was wrong, even though Potiphar's wife kept up the temptation day after day.

**v.11-12:** One day, the woman tried again. This time everything was perfect for what she had planned. She was alone with Joseph in the house. Potiphar was away, and all the other servants were outside. She repeated her sinful temptation, and even grabbed hold of Joseph's coat in her lust. Joseph recognized the danger, and ran away immediately, leaving his coat behind.

**v.13-20:** Potiphar's wife was unsuccessful again, and no doubt was very angry at her servant for refusing to do as she requested, so she made up a terrible lie. She called the other servants and told them that Joseph had attempted to rape her. She presented his coat as evidence. When Potiphar returned, she told him the same story. It was her word against Joseph's, and the husband believed his wife. He sent Joseph to prison.

**v.21-23:** From the top right back to the bottom again! Once again, it looked as though following God's will had led him to nothing but suffering. However, the LORD never forsakes His children. He was with Joseph even in prison. Again, God made everything Joseph put his hand to prosper, and eventually he was made second-in-command at the prison. The LORD had even greater plans for Joseph's life, as we'll see in the following lessons.

## APPLICATION

- People often find themselves dealing with difficult situations in life. What about believers? Do bad things ever happen to the children of God? Yes, even more than unbelievers! "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*" (Acts 14:22) What bad experience did Joseph have to go through? He was sold into slavery and suffered humiliation. What an awful experience! Did that mean that God had forsaken Joseph? No, the Lord was with him. How do you know? God caused him to prosper.
- Potiphar's wife tried over and over again to get Joseph to commit adultery with her. One day she even grabbed Joseph's coat in her lust for him. What made her think she could get away with this sin? The house was empty and nobody was around. Joseph knew that someone was watching them. Who? God, who sees everything we do; He listens to all our conversations; He even looks into our hearts!
- How did Joseph react when Potiphar's wife tempted him to sin with her? He *ran* away as fast as he could, even leaving his coat behind in her hand! God doesn't want us to linger in places where we're

being tempted to sin, but to get out. II Tim. 2:22 says *“Flee youthful lusts.”* If our friends are doing something we know is wrong, we can avoid temptation and show them how we feel by simply leaving. It’s better to do what’s right in God’s eyes than to do something our friends might think is “fun.”

- Was Joseph rewarded for his honesty? No, Potiphar believed his wife’s lie and threw Joseph into prison. Sometimes doing the right thing is hard, and causes us suffering. Obeying God’s Word can make you very unpopular! God promises to be with us through thick and thin. Matt. 28:20 reads, *“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* How did the Lord show He was still with Joseph? He blessed his work, even in prison!
- We never know what might happen to us tomorrow. Somebody knows *exactly* what’s going to happen in our future. Who? The LORD in His loving will, has our lives all planned out for us. Sometimes, God makes our faith stronger by allowing us to go through difficult trials in life. We may be tested by strong temptations. What are some ways that young people are especially tempted to sin in this day and age? (Drug and alcohol abuse, using God’s name in vain, disobedience to parents, watching impure movies, reading immoral magazines and listening to immoral songs, cheating in school, not wanting to go to church or Sunday School.) Would the Lord ever allow us to be tested by a temptation that was so strong that we just couldn’t resist it? No, I Cor. 10:13 tells us, *“God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”*
- Ask older students in which commandment does God warn us that sleeping with someone you’re not married to is sinful? Review the sixth commandment. Is adultery the only way a person can break the sixth commandment? No, it requires us to be pure and decent even in our thoughts! Look up Matt. 5:27-28.
- Joseph did the right thing in this situation. Does that mean he never sinned? No, the Bible tells us, *“All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.”* Who was the only Person who never sinned against this commandment or any other commandment? Jesus Christ. Read and discuss Jesus’ temptation by Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11 or Luke 4:1-13). What weapon did Jesus use to help Him resist the temptations of Satan? God’s Word. We too, can find strength to resist temptation by praying to God and reading His Word, including daily Bible reading, regular attendance at worship and Sunday School. Why is the fact that Jesus never sinned so important to us? His sinless life was the perfect sacrifice that God offered up on the cross to pay for our sinfulness and earn eternal life for us.
- God wants us to love and serve Him by keeping His commandments. But what should we do when we find we’ve given in to temptation and broken them? Repent of our sin, and ask God’s forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. There is NO sin so great that we can’t find forgiveness for it in Jesus. Rom. 5:20 reads, *“Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more!”* Isaiah 1:18 assures us, *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”*

## BIBLE REFERENCES

- Psalm 73:23-28
- Psalm 119:9-16
- Proverbs 1:10
- I Corinthians 6:18-20

## HYMNS

144:2-3, 402:1-4, 410, 421:4-5

## Lesson 3 • Joseph Provides For His Brothers

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**Theme:** BLESSINGS TO OTHERS BY LIVING A CHRISTIAN LIFE

**Text:** Gen. 42:6-8, 25-28; 43:16-24, 33-34; 45:1-11

**New Testament Reference:** Luke 23:39-49

### INTRODUCTION

Joseph may well have already realized God's plan and purpose for all that had happened to him before his brothers arrived. We do know that he did understand once his brothers came to Egypt to buy food (45:5). Now all that had happened to him made sense. Joseph could see all the pieces of God's plan coming together and how each incident took him one step closer to completing the plan God had designed.

### BACKGROUND

What we today understand as the "hard part" of Joseph's life was now over. He had been betrayed and sold by his brothers into slavery; he had been betrayed by Potiphar's wife, falsely accused and thrown into prison; and he had been betrayed and forgotten by the chief cup-bearer and left seemingly forgotten in prison for several years. Yet now God's plan for Joseph led him to become second in command in Egypt. He was enjoying earthly wealth and prosperity, yet it was still the same Joseph—eager to please and humbly submissive to God and His will for his life. God had used Joseph to interpret Pharaoh's dream (foretelling the coming good and bad years) and a grateful Pharaoh had placed Joseph in charge of all the land of Egypt (41:41) including the collecting, storing, and distributing of food. As the famine promised by God became severe it also took its toll in Joseph's homeland, Israel. This is also the means God was to use to reunite the family of Jacob.

### TEXT STUDY

Joseph may well have been waiting for his brothers or some other members of his family to eventually arrive to buy food. Since Joseph was also "in charge of all of Egypt" it seems a little strange that he would personally handle the day to day operations of selling food to all who came from around the world to buy. It is possible that Joseph, waiting for his brothers, had left orders that he was to be present when anyone from Canaan came to buy grain. Finally, late in the second year of the famine, his brothers came. The fact that Joseph recognized his brothers while they did not recognize him is not all that surprising. When Joseph last saw them they were full-grown men and would therefore have not changed much. They also came dressed in their customary native clothing. On the other hand, Joseph had grown up since being sold. Though Jewish men wore long beards as a rule, Egyptians were clean-shaven. Joseph was also looking for his brothers, his brothers thought him dead. Add to this the different language he spoke, his position of power and authority, and the foreign clothes (Egyptian) that he wore and it is not surprising that they did not recognize him.

Joseph does not immediately reveal himself and welcome his brothers. Why? Joseph had no animosity for his brothers, since he realized the hand of God in what they had done. He did, however, have a very sincere desire that they understand and repent of the sin they had committed toward him for although God turned their evil into something good (God used what they did for His own purposes) what Joseph's brothers had done was still a sin. Perhaps it was that "faint resemblance" that Joseph's brothers might have seen in him, or perhaps the sin was on their minds and always had been these many years. Whatever prompted it we read (42:21-22) that immediately when they ran into "trouble" from Joseph they blamed it on the fact that they had sold him into slavery.

Even when Joseph, who overheard and understood what they were saying (42:23), had heard that the sin they had done to him still troubled them he did not reveal himself. Being troubled by a sin is not the same as being sorry for a sin. Joseph wanted to be sure that his brothers were truly sorry, not for his sake, but for their sakes.

He had their silver put back into their bags for two reasons. First, because he loved his family and wanted to provide for them, but he also did it to confuse and frighten his brothers. He was looking for a response, something that would tip their hand as to how they felt about what they had done to him. Joseph also tested their hearts by giving to Benjamin five times as much as the brothers. Would this favoritism stir up jealousy, envy and hatred toward Benjamin as it had done toward Joseph?

Finally, notice the love Joseph had for his brothers. After all that had happened, after all that they had put him through Joseph still loved his brothers so much that he could not keep from crying in their presence. He still wanted nothing more than to bring his entire family to Egypt and provide for them all that they needed, as the Lord had supplied for him.

## **APPLICATION**

- Had Joseph turned from God and not lived by faith his whole family might have died in the famine that came—himself included. At times, God allows hardships in order to spare us from greater disaster.
- We may not always understand God's actions, and we may seldom see the effect our lives have on those around us. This lesson shows us, however, that the life of a Christian does very definitely have a blessed effect on those around us. The life of a Christian is a life of service; service to our God and service to our fellowman. Living a Christian life is not only God-pleasing for us, but also proves to be a tremendous blessing to others, especially to those who are drawn to their Savior.
- Struggle to see the will of God in the ups and downs of our lives.
- Compare finally how our Savior spent His entire life in service to others, providing not only for physical needs but also for the spiritual needs of all mankind when he sacrificed himself on the cross for our sins.

## **BIBLE REFERENCES**

- Matthew 20:26-28
- Matthew 23:10-12
- II Corinthians 9:13
- I Peter 4:16
- I Peter 2:12

## **HYMNS**

439, 441(3-6)



## Lesson 4 • Joseph Forgives His Brothers

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**Theme:** FORGIVENESS IN THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

**Text:** Gen. 50:15-21

**New Testament Reference:** Luke 23:32-38

### INTRODUCTION

When you were very little and you liked to play with toys, you had to be taught by your parents to share those toys with the children who played with you. Sharing is something that doesn't come naturally to us. Neither does forgiving. God's Word teaches us from little on that it is God's will for us to forgive others when they sin against us. God gave you the gift of faith to believe that Jesus Christ forgave you all you sins, and believing that Jesus has forgiven us is what helps you to forgive others.

### BACKGROUND

In Jacob's own words: "*Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.*" (Gen 47:9) Jacob had known much grief—grief brought about by his own sinfulness, and the sinfulness of his own sons. Yet in spite of all the evil days, Jacob's faith in the living, merciful God sustained him. God let him live to see much happier days, in the presence of his beloved son Joseph, whom he had once given up for dead. God also gave him joy in seeing his family reconciled to one another by God's grace, and prospering in the land of Egypt. In Jacob's final words of instruction and blessing to his sons, we see both the saving faith of Jacob confessed, and the promise of the Savior from all mankind's sins repeated.

Gen. 48:15-16 reads: *And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day the Angel (reference to "the Angel of the Lord," the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Christ) who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them (Israel), and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."*

What greater blessing could a father ask the LORD for his children than that they believe and remain in the saving faith of Christ? Confessing his faith in his Savior from sin until the end, Jacob is "gathered to his people." He was taken to be with all the believers in the heavenly, eternal reward prepared for him. After 70 days of official Egyptian mourning (40 of which were required to complete the embalming process), Jacob's sons worked together in carrying out their father's dying wish. Jacob did not want to be buried in Egypt, but in the land of promise, in the grave which he dug for himself at the burial site purchased by his grandfather Abraham. Joseph requested permission from Pharaoh to lead the burial train back to Canaan. It was a large, prestigious group of mourners:

Genesis 50:7-8 tells us: *"So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's house."* Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen.

In Canaan, the funeral procession observed seven days of mourning. The Canaanites were amazed at the gathering and called the place Abel Mizraim, the "Mourning of Egypt."

After the death and burial of their father, Joseph's brothers were filled with apprehension as to whether he would now try to "get back at them" for their wicked action of selling him into slavery. They wondered: Has Joseph really and truly forgiven us or not? Our story gives us the answer. At the same time it answers for us another question: What kind of attitude are we to have toward those who sin against us?

## TEXT STUDY

**v.15:** While their father Jacob was still alive, the brothers probably didn't worry much about the possibility that Joseph might actually take revenge on them. Jacob was happy in the final years of his turbulent life, and Joseph seemed to be happy having his dear family around him and caring for them. But now with Jacob gone, the brothers remembered again the evil things which they had done to Joseph, who was now the second most powerful person in all the land of Egypt! Pharaoh would say "yes" to just about anything Joseph suggested. Had Joseph been waiting for this very moment to arrive, when he could finally repay them for their evil deeds? After all, Joseph had acted rather strangely before, he had put them through some acute soul-searching and outright fear on those famine missions. Getting revenge now would seem to be the "natural" thing to do, right? It must have been a very quiet trip back to Egypt.

Note: Apparently the brothers had never quite gotten over their feelings of guilt for their sin. Though Joseph had already assured them of his forgiveness, they found it difficult to receive and accept his forgiveness. "The best aid to the understanding of the entire situation is to use the approach set forth with greatest emphasis by Luther, who pictures graphically what a bitter thing sin is—easy to commit, but after it has come to light it rears its ugly head, and its prick keeps rankling, 'so that no forgiveness and comfort are strong enough to alleviate the bite and to remove the prick.' Consequently, their feeling of guilt is their primary trouble; it tends to make them suspect Joseph." (Leupold, p. 1214-1215)

**v.16-17:** It may have been that the brothers had not, up until this time, made an open confession and apology to Joseph for the sin they had committed against him. Perhaps Joseph never gave them a chance. They had however, confessed to their father what they had done. Jacob had instructed his sons to make a full confession, and appeal for Joseph's forgiveness. He knew it would be better to have it all out in the open, to talk about it and put it behind them. Still feeling guilty, their consciences were not at ease, and their imaginations were working overtime. We see here a couple of the side effects of not having that wonderful assurance that all sins are forgiven. How do we deal with the acid feelings of guilt? Not by forgetting about it—passing over sin, which brings more guilt, but by pouring on the oil of gladness, confessing our sins and receiving the full forgiveness of sins which we have freely in our Savior. "The sense of guilt for past sins is a tricky thing. The person wronged may tell us he forgives us. God in his Gospel may give us his assurance of free and full forgiveness. Still the old sin can return again and again to haunt and harrow our souls." (Franzmann, *Old Testament Commentary*, p. 209)

**v. 17:** Now, no matter what happened, it was off their chests. The brothers made a full and free confession. They no longer carried weight of a guilty conscience. Joseph shows that revenge was not at all in his plans. He thought the brothers understood that he had forgiven them, for he broke down and cried when they came to him with this unexpected request. Joseph was hurt and grieved to think his brothers mistrusted him—that they would doubt his sincerity and love. To have sincere, loving motives questioned is painful.

**v.18:** Do you remember the dream Joseph had which made his brothers furious enough to cast him into a pit and then sell him to some traders? Gen. 37:6-8 relates: "*So he said to them, 'Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.' And his brothers said to him, 'Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.*"

What so enraged them before, the brothers now freely offered—"Behold we are your servants." This action of theirs demonstrated genuine sorrow and repentance for their sin.

**v. 19:** Who is responsible for punishing the person who does something evil against me? Am I? Should I be taking justice into my own hands? Very often we think that if we don't, then justice won't be served. Even if we can't get even with our own lips or hands, we can always "take them to court." Joseph understood that only God can be a truly righteous judge. Sometimes His verdicts don't make much human sense at all. When the

believer understands that God works out all things for his good, he gets glimpses every now and then of how far above man's ways are God's ways. That's what Joseph explains in the next verse.

**v.20:** The sale of Joseph into slavery was part of God's plan whereby He would rescue many people from starvation during the great famine. Most importantly, it was God's way of keeping intact the ancestral "examples of God's control of all things to see a group like Israel's descendants and household preserved in famine as an indirect result of the treachery of men who thought only in terms of bloody vengeance." (Leupold, p. 1217)

What a man intends as an evil deed, God can ever so easily make it work out for the highest good. Rom. 8:28 says, "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*" The ultimate example of this is in the crucifixion of God's own Son, Jesus. Sinful mankind crucified the Holy Son of God, yet God made it work out for mankind's good. Rom. 5:8 tells us, "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

**v. 21:** Joseph assured them of his forgiveness, and God's forgiveness, and so spoke to their hearts. This is the action that true Christian forgiveness brings. Forgiveness is not just a word to be spoken, but it is an action that the Christian, motivated by the Gospel, can't help doing. In Joseph's case, he promised his brothers to continue taking care of them and their children. The NKJV reads "And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them." The literal translation is "And he comforted them and spoke to their hearts." This was true and genuine heart-to-heart talk. Now that the law had done its work on his brothers, making them terrified sinners, Joseph brought them the sweet Gospel of forgiveness and comfort. Except in the case of impenitence, we too should never hold back the comfort of full forgiveness.

## APPLICATION

- In Luke 23:32-38, Jesus shows us that forgiveness is based on love. True love is a genuine care and concern for the interests of the other person, even when that other person is our enemy. Even while hanging on the cross Jesus prayed for all mankind—including us. He prayed that the Father would forgive us, because all of us were by nature enemies of Christ. Yet He forgave us our sins by His own death on the cross. Amazing *love!* True, genuine, unselfish care and concern for His enemies! This is what is meant in Rom. 5:8.
- As the brothers were guilty of the sin of selling Joseph into slavery, so we also are guilty of sinning many times every day. We sin against God by what we do (sins of commission) and what we do not do (sins of omission). Because of our transgressions against God's commandments we deserve His wrath and eternal punishment. (Here would be a good place to have your students discuss the Confession of Sins on page 6 of *The Lutheran Hymnal*: "Almighty God...we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against You by thought, word, and deed...") See also Ps. 51:4 and Rom. 3:23.
- Yet, though we have sinned against God, He freely forgives us in Jesus Christ our Savior. He declares us not guilty of our wrongdoing for the sake of the shed blood of His Son, in whom we have believed. Discuss the Absolution, on p. 6 (also 16) of *The Lutheran Hymnal*. See also Isa. 53:5 and Eph. 1:7.
- In our story, Joseph showed love to his brothers by freely forgiving them. What prompted him to do this was the knowledge that his God loved him and had forgiven him. We want to forgive those who sin against *us*—yes, even our enemies!—always remembering how our merciful LORD has forgiven *our* sins. Ask the students for concrete examples of ways others may sin against them (calling them names, teasing them, being nasty, hitting them, etc.) and to discuss the appropriate response for one who is a forgiven child of God (ignore it, don't retaliate, show patience and kindness, forgive and forget, etc.)

- Joseph forgave his brothers unconditionally. He did not hold back his forgiveness until his brothers showed themselves worthy. Likewise, when we extend forgiveness to others who wronged us it is to be an unconditional forgiveness, with no strings attached. We are not to withhold forgiveness until the offender “wins himself back into our good graces.” That wouldn’t even be forgiveness. Again, the LORD here is our great example. He demonstrated His own love toward us, “*in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Rom. 5:8)
- The Lord used the bad action of Joseph’s brothers for a good purpose: to save the lives of many people. In the same way God uses the bad things that happen in our lives for our good and for the good of others. How is He able to do this? Because He is God! As God He possesses all power and authority in heaven and on earth. All things (the history and events of the world and of our own lives) are under His control and direction. What a man intends as an evil deed, God can turn into the highest good (See Rom. 8:28). The ultimate example of this is in the crucifixion of God’s own Son, Jesus. Sinful mankind crucified the Holy Son of God, yet God made it work out for all of mankind’s good. See also Matt. 28:18 and Luke 18:27.
- List concrete examples of bad things that happen in our lives which God can and does change into a blessing: sickness, accidents, loss of job, shortage of money, death of a loved one, etc. Also, discuss what kind of good things God can cause to come out of the “bad”: the strengthening of our faith by turning more and more to His Word, learning to rely solely upon God for help, bring us into a closer relationship with God, teaching us patience to wait upon the Lord by saying “Your will be done,” reminding us that the treasures of God’s Word (forgiveness, spiritual life, eternal salvation) are the most important ones.
- The idea of you “getting even” with someone else, is not from God, it’s from the devil. Vengeance is up to God, not us. Wronging someone else because he wronged you makes God angry. Rom 12:19 reads, “*Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.*” God vented His vengeance on Christ instead of you and me. For you and me there is nothing left to pay. Because of Christ, God sees nothing in us to “get even with.”

## BIBLE REFERENCES

- Luke 23:34
- Ephesians 4:32
- Matthew 18:21-35
- Matthew 5:44
- Colossians 3:12-13
- The Lord’s Prayer

## HYMNS

171:11, 458:6

## Lesson 5 Joseph's Death And Jesus' Resurrection

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**Theme:** FINAL VICTORY IN THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE.

**Text:** Gen. 50:22-26; Ex. 13:19; Heb. 11:22

**New Testament Reference:** Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-9

### INTRODUCTION

At the age of 12 Jeremy was still in second grade. He had been born with a terminal illness which had affected his body and brain. He could not run. He would never be able to read and write. The children often made fun of him. His teacher, Miss Miller, had a very difficult time remaining patient with him. He distracted the whole class with squirming and grunting noises. She wondered whether it was fair to the other children to have him in the class. One day after telling the account of Jesus' resurrection on Easter she gave each of the children a large plastic egg. "Now," she said to them, "I want you to take this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life." She intended to call Jeremy's parents that night to explain the project but circumstances intervened. As she began opening the eggs she wondered what Jeremy had done. The first one held a flower and they talked about how the spring flowers were a sign of new life. The second egg contained a plastic butterfly. They talked about a cocoon that looks dead, yet changes into a beautiful butterfly. Then she opened Jeremy's. She gasped and the children laughed. It was empty. She quietly set the egg aside and reached for another. But Jeremy said, "Aren't you going to talk about my egg?" "But its empty", Miss Miller replied. "Yes", Jeremy responded, "like Jesus' tomb was empty, too". Time stopped. (*Focus on the Family*, April 1988 p.2,3)

What is death for the Christian? Is it the end of life? Or is it the beginning of life? It is the end of life in this world. It is also the end of all the evil that is part of life in this world—disease, pain, sorrow, sin. Death for the Christian is also the beginning of everlasting life: free from disease, pain, sorrow and sin; in the presence of Christ; with fullness of joy.

Is death, then, for the Christian, defeat or victory? The unbelieving think it is defeat. Death drags them down kicking and screaming. Or they die in despair, accepting death only because they know they can't avoid it. Faced with another's death, the unbelieving are either inconsolable, or they try to make light of it ("We all gotta go sometime.") For us Christians, death is victory. It is victory over sin, death, and Satan. With our departure from the world we leave all of those things behind us forever. It is not a victory which we have won, but one which has been won for us by the Savior with His atoning death, and sealed for us by His victorious resurrection.

Joseph has served faithfully as the "prime-minister" in charge of the "famine relief program" in Egypt. Because of his relationship with Pharaoh, the children of Israel have been allowed to live in the good land of Goshen in the "best of the land"(Gen. 47:11).

On his deathbed, Jacob instructed Joseph to bury him with his own ancestors, Abraham and Isaac, in Canaan (See Gen. 47:27-31). He had Joseph take an oath in the matter, thus binding him to perform Jacob's request. A precedent is set, which Joseph would also follow on his own deathbed.

Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, before he dies (Gen. 48). Jacob intentionally blessed the younger son Ephraim before his older brother Manasseh, giving the younger son the greater blessing that is usually given to the firstborn. After blessing the grandsons, Jacob said to Joseph, "*Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers.*" (v.21)

## TEXT STUDY

v. 22: Joseph lived in Egypt for the rest of his life, as did all his brothers and their families. Israel's time in Egypt was far from over at this point as God had revealed to Abraham (Gen. 15:13). Joseph's age at death shows how the span of human life was shortening. Isaac lived to be 180; Jacob, 147, Joseph, 110. Jacob, at age 130, said, "*few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.*" (Gen.47:9)

v.23: Joseph was granted the extraordinary blessing of seeing his great-great-grandchildren through Ephraim and great-grandchildren through Manasseh. No doubt, his great joy was to tell them how a future descendent was going to conquer sin and death for all men—how this descendent would win the blessing of eternal life for men. Joseph had learned this living hope from his father. He lived to tell His children and his children's children about the resurrection life with God through Christ.

v.24: Notice how Joseph emphasized the contrast between himself and God: "I am dying; but GOD will surely visit you." Since Joseph was such a powerful man in Egypt, his brothers and their families undoubtedly drew a lot of comfort and security from the fact that they had him as their protector and provider. Joseph teaches them to look to God, expressing faith in the divine promises of deliverance made to the fathers, promises which they and their descendants would need to remember in the long years of slavery ahead.

The covenant was God's unconditional promise to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

- 1) innumerable descendants
- 2) the promised land of Canaan to these descendants
- 3) one Descendant who would be the promised Savior

God confirmed this promise with an oath (Gen. 22:15-18). In God's mind it was a sure thing. Nevertheless, this covenant would not be fulfilled in the near future. God had also foretold to Abraham, "*Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years... But in the fourth generation they shall return here.*"

The statement Joseph made to his brothers indicated he not only knew of the covenant, but he also believed in it. He believed that his own people would return to Canaan. He also believed in the promised Seed, the Savior who would descend from them. Joseph also knew that his people would be oppressed in Egypt. Chances are, he knew what was said to Abraham in chapter 15 (see above), since Abraham probably told Isaac, Isaac told Jacob, and so on.

The words "surely visit" are a statement of confidence, which we could paraphrase, "God will definitely visit you in your distress to help you. The Hebrew word for "visit" means to visit someone so as to produce a change in his status, either for good or bad. Here the context indicates a good change. Joseph probably wouldn't have made this emphatic statement if he didn't think that the Jewish people would be oppressed while they stayed in Egypt.

Joseph had been the most powerful and important man under Pharaoh in all Egypt during the time of one of its great kingdoms. He was instrumental in increasing and maintaining that civilization. You have read about the fabulous wealth and art which was buried with Pharaohs as Tutankhamen and other Egyptian greats in the pyramids. Joseph could have had such a pyramid with all its wealth. He could have thus "immortalized" his name and work with an earthly monument. You will not find an Egyptian pyramid or monument with Joseph's name on it. For Joseph disowned the glory and fame of Egypt and this dying world. Even in death he disowned Egypt's "immortality" to number himself with the real immortal people of God.

He died laying his life, bones and coffin in God's promise, "*God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up*

my bones from here.” That promise had been given to Jacob before he went down to Egypt: (46:3, 4) *“I AM God, the God of your Father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.”* This was a part of the promise made to Abraham, that in His promised Descendant (22:18, Gal. 3:16), *“all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (12:3). God said to Abraham, *“Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.”*

**v.26:** Joseph was embalmed and his body placed in a coffin so that the oath of verse 25 could be fulfilled. Notice that here the Egyptians’ great knowledge and skill in embalming (mummification) was a gift of God here put to good use. Joseph’s body remained in Egypt for 360 years until the exodus, all the while giving to Israel silent testimony of his faith in the promises of God.

**Ex. 13:19:** Moscs fulfilled the request of Joseph and kept the oath that was sworn by Joseph’s brothers. Since Joseph’s brothers did not live to see the day of the exodus, the oath passed on to their descendants. The coffin was carried with the children of Israel, wherever they went. When they finally entered Canaan, it was buried in Shechem, on the piece of land bought by Jacob when he was there (Gen. 33:19; Josh. 24:32).

Often people speak as if the main promise to Abraham and Israel was the land of Palestine. However the real blessing promised Abraham and His descendants was a blessing for all people (12:3). Palestine was given to Abraham’s descendants only on the condition of obedience (Deut. 28). Christ was the real promise (Gal. 3:8, Acts 3:24-26, I Peter 1:10-12). It was eternal life in Christ that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all set their faith in. Jesus said (John 8:56), *“Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”*

**Heb. 11:13-16:** *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”*

The Bible uses a very significant phrase at the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: *“he was gathered to his people”* (25:8, 35:29, 49:29,33). This expression is very different from “and he died” or “and he was buried”. It speaks of living. It speaks of reunion. It speaks with firm assurance of the life to come with Christ. Thus long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died on this earth, God said to Moses (Ex.3:6): *“I AM the God of your father--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”* It is to this significant verse that Jesus pointed when He wanted to demonstrate that the Old Testament promised a resurrection (Matt. 22:32): *“God is not the God of the dead but of the living.”*

Notice how Joseph’s life is summed up. We are not told how many chariots and horses he owned, how he restructured Egypt, or how he was honored by Pharaohs. When Joseph’s life is summed up we are told he “spoke about the exodus of Israelites from Egypt and gave instruction about his bones.”

## APPLICATION

- The request Joseph made to have his bones buried in Canaan is a good example for us today. Joseph made his request for the benefit of his descendants, to remind them that God would surely take them out of Egypt. Christians in this day and age can also make funeral requests that will serve the spiritual welfare of Christians left behind: for example, a funeral text chosen in advance that will comfort and benefit the bereaved; Scriptural thoughts to be put on a tombstone or funeral hymns that emphasize the victory of Christian death. How can even your death, your coffin, your gravestone, your legacy focus people’s faith on God’s promised life? Christian burial is an expression of our confidence in the promise of resurrection and everlasting life.

- Persevering in the Christian faith is absolutely necessary. A faith that lives for awhile and dies will not save the person who dies in unbelief. We can't stand before God on the basis of a faith that used to be, but no longer is. Even as Joseph did, many Christians have to remain in the faith for a whole lifetime. Thank God that He gives us the means of grace and the Holy Spirit to preserve our faith until the end. Stress the importance of hearing the Word and using the Sacraments throughout our entire life.
- Christian faith bears fruit continually, even in the last days of life. Even as elderly people, Christians can live their faith, though they may lack the gifts and the resources that younger Christians have. The words that they speak to the younger generation, the prayers that they utter for their families and their fellow believers are examples of the "fruits" of faith that elderly Christians can have.
- Joseph endured severe hardships in his youth. Do you suppose that those sufferings and injustices bothered him at the end of his life? Certainly not! He saw clearly the loving hand of God in all his life, turning the evil of his brothers' intentions into good for himself, his family, and countless others. So we should not be discouraged by the trials in our lives, knowing that God will use them to strengthen us and lead us safely to a blessed end.
- Joseph clearly faced death with confidence. He wasn't terrified of it because he trusted in his Savior God. We have no need to be afraid of death because our Savior Jesus Christ has taken away the sting of death.
- Consider the lives of men whom this world calls success stories. Many who reached pinnacles of success admitted that even there at the pinnacle there was no real happiness—no real success. Every success of this world eventually comes crashing down into so much cosmic dust in death. How many of the rock stars or athletic stars really gain anything. They may gain a bit of "immortality" in records that last, how long? A decade, maybe? Real life and immortality can be found in Jesus Christ alone.
- Did you "sit" on your father's or grandfather's knee today? People are so hectic and busy in America that family life is often neglected. Parents are running out to meetings. Children are running out to activities. When your parents are asleep in Jesus the time you have spent "on their knees" playing catch, talking, learning skills together etc. and especially sharing life in Christ will be much more meaningful than the time you spent listening to music, hanging out with the guys/gals, etc.

Joseph believed in the Savior who was coming in the future. He believed in the Gospel based on God's promise. We believe in the Savior who has come in the past. We believe in the Gospel that has been fulfilled. We see the same Savior that Joseph did, but from a different perspective.

## Jesus' resurrection from the dead

The resurrection of Jesus is a firm fact of Scripture. Jesus made it a point of being seen by many witnesses after He rose from the dead. The apostles that were sent to preach the Gospel had to be witnesses of the risen Christ.

Now the resurrection of Jesus was more than a Bible fact. It is one of the central points of the Christian faith. Had there been no resurrection of Christ, Christ's work of atonement would have no saving effect on our lives. 1 Cor. 15:17-18 says "*And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*" The resurrection of Jesus is very important for all Christians, for those who have died and for those who now live. Even though Joseph died centuries before Jesus lived, the resurrection of Jesus is a part of his salvation. Even though we live centuries after Jesus, His resurrection is equally a part of our salvation.



The resurrection of Christ proves a number of things:

- 1) He was the Son of God. Rom. 1:4 reads, *“Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”*
- 2) His death was an acceptable and complete payment for my sins in God’s sight. Therefore God declares me not guilty of all my sins. Rom. 4:25 tells us, *“Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”*
- 3) His resurrection makes our resurrection certain. *“Because I live, you will live also.”* (John 14:19)  
*“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”* (John 11:25-26)

Joseph died with faith in the Savior to come. Thus Joseph will rise from the dead to live, body and soul, in heaven. When the Holy Spirit preserves our faith until the end of our lives, we, too, can be assured that we will rise from the dead to everlasting life.

## **BIBLE REFERENCES**

I Cor. 15

I John 3:2

Rev. 21:1-4

John 14:19

John 11

2 Cor. 4:16-5:1

## **HYMNS**

196, 200, 201, 204, 206

