

Commentary on Genesis 45:3-15
International Bible Lessons
Sunday, January 15, 2012
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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, January 15, 2012**, is from **Genesis 45:3-15**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse **International Bible Lesson Commentary** below. The **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, which is also available on the **Bible Lesson Forum**, will aid teachers in class preparation and in conducting class discussion. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive **International Bible Lessons Commentary Index**. The weekly **International Bible Lesson** is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at **<http://InternationalBibleLessons.org>** and in **The Oklahoman** newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Genesis 45:3-15

(Genesis 45:3) Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

After Joseph gave his brothers a series of tests to determine if they had changed in their attitudes and spirit, he revealed himself to them, and they were amazed to discover that he was ruler over all of Egypt under Pharaoh's authority alone. By this time, Joseph knew that his brothers were alright, but he wanted to be certain that his father was still alive. Joseph had never lost his love for his father. The dreams that Joseph told his brothers and his father when he was only seventeen years old were fulfilled when his brothers came to him and bowed down to him.

(Genesis 45:4) Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

At first, his brothers could not believe he was still alive. They had supposed this Egyptian ruler could not speak or understand Hebrew when they spoke in front of him at various times, but Joseph not only understood them, he sat them in birth order when he fed them their first meal together and they did not understand how he knew to do this. Before he revealed himself to them, he had learned from their conversations how their hearts had changed. Joseph spoke to them now in their own Hebrew tongue, and he wanted them to recognize him even though he had no beard (as was the Egyptian custom). He made clear that he knew (and only he would know in addition to

them) that they had sold him into slavery and he was now ruler of all Egypt.

(Genesis 45:5) And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

After he had tested them, he knew they regretted their sins against him. But rather than emphasize their sins or condemn their evil actions of the past, Joseph chose to see that what they had done was God's way of getting him to Egypt so He could preserve many lives (both Egyptian, Hebrew, and others who would travel to Egypt). God showed His love for the Egyptians as well as the Hebrews.

(Genesis 45:6) For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest.

Joseph's sons were born during the years of plenty, and in naming his first son he had put the memory of his family behind him. Now, after two years of famine, Joseph is reunited with his family. He has seen the suffering that God has prevented through him, and he knows that the suffering that God has prevented through him far outweighs any suffering he has ever experienced. Now, he wants to prevent any suffering of his father and family. Without Joseph's

preparations, his father and brothers could not survive five more years of famine.

(Genesis 45:7) God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.

Joseph continued to give them reasons not to be angry with themselves. God sent him ahead (it is unlikely that Jacob would have ever suggested that his beloved son Joseph seek work or take a vacation in Egypt) the best way open to Him (through Joseph's brothers selling him as a slave). God wanted to preserve Joseph's family as a part of the promise He had made to Abraham regarding the vast number of descendants that God would give him. Sending the whole family to Egypt would also protect them from becoming involved in or suffering from the heartbreaking moral decline of the Canaanites prior to Joshua reentering the Promised Land with Abraham's descendants.

(Genesis 45:8) So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Joseph had come to see how God can work even in a situation that seems bad and unjust to us. After learning how much his brothers regretted their sins against him, Joseph reported to them that God had taken a special charge over his life so he could become

as a father to Pharaoh (guiding all of his decisions and taking charge over his domain). Joseph had not planned this or made this a goal in life; God had done all of this to save many lives.

(Genesis 45:9) Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay.

Joseph then sent his brothers home to bring their father and their families back to Egypt. They could not survive five more years of famine in the land of Canaan. Moving to Egypt with their flocks was their only hope to avoid the extreme poverty (if not death) that would result from the death of their flocks in the famine in Canaan. One wonders how much they would have honestly told Jacob about how they had sinned against Joseph and their father Jacob when they saw Jacob and reported that Joseph was in Egypt.

(Genesis 45:10) You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have.

As the ruler over all Egypt, Joseph could choose where he wanted His family to live and so he chose the best land for shepherds to graze sheep. He also chose with

the intention of keeping the Hebrews and the Egyptians apart from one another, for the Egyptians had a prejudice against shepherds and the Hebrews needed to maintain their distinct identity as the children of Abraham. Joseph intended them to remain in Egypt with all of their possessions at least until the famine ended (they stayed until the time of Moses).

(Genesis 45:11) I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’

Joseph had such complete control over Egypt that he could provide whatever he wanted for his family. By the providence of God, God provided for the needs of Jacob and his family years in advance of the famine (even before Joseph was seventeen years old). Though Jacob had some money to buy food, without Joseph’s help he would have spent it all over the next five years of famine, and his sheep would have died without water and grazing land in Canaan.

(Genesis 45:12) And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you.

Benjamin was Joseph’s only brother by their common mother, Rachel. By claiming Joseph as his brother, he gave them more evidence that he was indeed Joseph.

Here we learn too that Joseph spoke to them in Hebrew and not through an interpreter as he had prior to this time. They may have remembered (and now understood why) Joseph gave Benjamin such large portions of food when they dined with him.

(Genesis 45:13) You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.”

Joseph knew that his father must have worried about his disappearance. Joseph may not have known yet about the lie they had told his father, that he had been killed by a wild beast. He knew they regretted their behavior, and his primary concern now was for his father, that his father would know that Joseph's dreams had been fulfilled and that he wanted to take care of his father and family rather than force them to bow down to him (as they might have interpreted his dreams).

(Genesis 45:14) Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck.

Since his other brothers were children of Leah and two of Jacob's concubines, Joseph had special feelings for the youngest brother of the family, Benjamin. Rachel was the mother of them both. They wept together after being reunited, for Benjamin had

nothing to do with Joseph being sold into slavery and he was told the same lie by his brothers—that Joseph was dead. One of Joseph’s tests regarded how his brothers would treat Benjamin, and they passed that test, though it must have been of real concern to Benjamin at the time.

(Genesis 45:15) And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Joseph expressed his love and forgiveness for all of his brothers by kissing all of them as was the custom of the time. He did not demand that they repent, kneel down before him, or beg their forgiveness. They may have sought his forgiveness as they talked. They would learn about their lives and their individual families as they had changed during the years they were separated. Joseph serves as an example of how people need to forgive and also look to see the hand of God in their lives even when suffering times of hardship.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Joseph expressed concern that his brothers might become distressed and angry with themselves. What does this expression of concern tell us about Joseph’s character?

2. What reason or reasons does Joseph give his brothers for not being angry and upset with themselves for doing wrong to him? Can you think of a time when someone wronged you and later you could see how God intended it for good or brought good out of the wrong that was done to you? How did this knowledge make you feel? Did it make you change your mind in any way?

3. If Joseph kept believing in his dreams of greatness, what types of things did he do to help make his dreams come true?

4. Who are two of the people that Joseph expressed the greatest concern for in the Bible Lesson on Genesis 45:3-15? Why do you think these two would be of special concern for him?

5. In what way or ways does Joseph demonstrate the manner in which Jesus Christ would like for His followers to treat others?

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