

"I am Joseph!"

Key Verse:
"This man [Jesus] was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you...put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross."

Acts 2:23

Extra: How did God over-rule the wicked plans of Joseph's brothers?

Level 5 lesson 33

Read: Genesis 45

Further Reading: Acts 7:11-13

JOSEPH REVEALED: Judah's appeal touched Joseph's heart, and he couldn't stand the strain of hiding his identity from his brothers any longer. Satisfied now, that his brothers were changed men, he ordered all the Egyptian attendants out of the room. Finally alone with his brothers, Joseph burst into tears and declared joyfully, "I am Joseph!" And he asked, "Is my father still alive?"

BROTHERS TERRIFIED: Deeply shocked, his brothers could not speak! Graciously Joseph encouraged them. "Come close to me" he urged, "I am your brother, Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!" Seeing their guilty fear, Joseph reassured his brothers, "Don't be distressed or angry with yourselves for selling me. It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." What a tremendous example for us, of the humble, forgiving attitude that had been so evident throughout Joseph's life.

Once more, instead of becoming bitter and resentful at the hardships which life had thrown at him, Joseph recognised and acknowledged that his life had been in God's hands all along. God had been orchestrating the events of Joseph's life to accomplish HIS purposes through him! Even as he reminded them of their evil intentions back then, "You meant it for evil," Joseph was quick to affirm, "but God meant it for good!" God had over-ruled their wicked actions to bring about His purposes and the fulfilment of His Word to Abraham (Genesis 15:13).

JESUS CRUCIFIED: In a similar way, mankind in their wickedness, crucified and killed the Lord Jesus. But it was in God's wisdom and purpose that the Lord should die in this way for our salvation. Joseph wanted his brothers to see the good hand of God in all the experiences he had gone through during the past 22 years. We too must look behind man's wickedness in crucifying Jesus, to the God whose love gave Him to die for us on the cross, so that all might be saved - including the very people who crucified Him!

Having revealed himself and explained matters to his brothers, Joseph told them to hurry back home and tell Jacob, "Your son Joseph says, 'God has made me the Lord of all Egypt: come down to me without delay.'" He promised them all a place to live and ample food during the five years of famine still to run.

When Pharaoh heard what was going on, he was delighted. "Tell your brothers," he said to Joseph, "to load their animals and return to Canaan; then bring your father and your families back to Egypt where they will be assured of the best of the land." Pharaoh even provided wagons for them, to transport Jacob and all the family members, so that none would be left behind.

JACOB AMAZED: So the brothers started for home, laden down with provisions and supplies. Joseph's parting words to them are very interesting. "Do not quarrel on the way," he warned. What do you think he meant? I think he knew that once out of earshot, it would be tempting for them to begin arguing about their past actions; who had done what, and who had been wrong, etc. Joseph had forgiven them, and now they also were to leave the events of the past in the past, and not try to blame one another. So we also, need to confess our sinful behaviours, put things right, accept God's forgiveness, and move on.

Soon they arrived home and rushed immediately to their father with the amazing news. "Joseph is still alive!" they exclaimed, "and he is governor over all the land of Egypt." Stunned, the old man could hardly believe it; it seemed too good to be true. He had given Joseph up as dead long ago. However, they insisted that it was so and showed him the wagons and gifts Joseph had sent.

Finally, Jacob announced joyfully, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive! I will go and see him before I die." Of course, Joseph was alive because he had never in fact, died. However, there is One who really did die and yet is alive today! Yes, I'm speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 10:9 says, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved!"

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did Joseph tell his brothers not to be angry with themselves for selling him into Egypt?

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2. Explain the meaning of the Key Verse at the top of this lesson.

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3. How did Pharaoh co-operate with Joseph in bringing Jacob and his sons to Egypt?

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4. What convinced Jacob that Joseph was alive?

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5. What does Romans 10:9 teach us (a) concerning the Lord Jesus (b) As the result of 'believing'?

(a)

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(b)

My Name is Age

From Canaan to Egypt

Key Verse:
“Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died.”

Acts 7:15

Extra: How was this move to Egypt a part of God’s plan for the human race?

Level 5 lesson 34

Read Genesis 46 Further Reading: Acts 7:14-16

As Jacob and his household journeyed to Egypt, there were obviously some lingering doubts in Jacob’s mind. After all, Abraham his grandfather had gone to Egypt years before without God’s blessing and it had brought disgrace and shame to him. And Jacob’s own father Isaac had been explicitly forbidden to go there (Genesis 26:2)!

So it is that we find Jacob, as he neared the border, offered a sacrifice to God at a place called Beersheba. There, in the night, God graciously spoke to Jacob in a vision and reassured him of His blessing and continued presence with them all, with three wonderful promises.

PRECIOUS PROMISES: “I am God,” He said, “the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there: I will go down with you to Egypt; and I will surely bring you back again.” Now Jacob could go forward with complete assurance that He was in the will of God. “I will go down with you,” “I will make you a great nation,” and “I will surely bring you back again” are three wonderful promises. These must have been a comfort to him and his household as they proceeded south to the land of Egypt. Of course, in all of this we must see God’s purpose being worked out. Jacob’s journey to Egypt and the long stay there was simply another great step in the fulfilment of God’s plan for Israel - and indeed for the whole of the human race.

Greatly encouraged, Jacob, along with his sons and their families, left Beersheba with their borrowed wagons piled high with provisions and belongings. In all, there were 66 members of Jacob’s family travelling in the group, as well as a number of employees and servants. The names and numbers of each family are given in verses 8 to 27. Of course, we can add Jacob and Joseph, along with Joseph’s two sons born in Egypt, making a total of 70 people (v27) in the entire family of Jacob.

ARRIVAL IN EGYPT: After some time they arrived in Egypt, for this would surely have been a slow trip. Verse 28 records that the district they came into was known as Goshen. Goshen was situated just east of the Nile Delta, which you can see on a Bible map. This was where Joseph (who knew their needs so well) had arranged that the Israelites should live, because it was the best grazing land for their flocks. Judah, continued on southwards to Joseph, to tell him the family had arrived in Goshen. We can hardly imagine Joseph’s excitement as he readied his chariot and journeyed north to meet his father Jacob, or Israel, as he was known now (vs29,30).

EMOTIONAL REUNION: What an emotional meeting it must have been! For almost twenty-five years they had been separated. Jacob had thought Joseph was dead. Joseph, prior to his brothers coming for corn, didn’t know whether his father was dead or alive. No wonder then when they met, Joseph fell on his father’s neck and wept tears of joy for a good while. As for Jacob, he was no doubt joyful and content. Verse 30 says that in his old age, having seen Joseph face to face again, he was willing and ready to die. However, God in His grace allowed him another 17 years during which he witnessed the glory of Joseph’s exalted position in Egypt.

Joseph agreed to inform Pharaoh of his family’s arrival and warned his brothers that in answer to his questions about their occupation, they must be perfectly honest and straightforward, and explain clearly that they were shepherds. He would also explain their position to Pharaoh so that he would see how necessary it was for them to live in the wide area of Goshen to have adequate pasture for their flocks. This would also ensure a measure of separation from the Egyptian people, who considered shepherds to be “an abomination.” This was because the Israelites ate their cattle and sheep and offered them in sacrifice to Jehovah, while the Egyptians revered and worshipped the beasts of the field as gods.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did Jacob have some doubts about going to Egypt??	.....
2. How did God reassure Jacob?	.....
3. What land did they come to in Egypt and where was it situated?	.....
4. What did Joseph do when he met his father? Why?	.....
5. Why was it necessary for Jacob’s family to live in Goshen?	.....

The Israelites in Egypt

Key Verse:
“Joseph also provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with food.”

Genesis 47:12

Extra: What do you think of the way Pharaoh treated the Israelites?

Level 5 lesson 35

Read Genesis 47 Further Reading: Psalm 105:23-25

FAMILY INTRODUCED: As arranged, Joseph set up a meeting in order to introduce his brothers and his father to Pharaoh, the King of Egypt. Verses 1-10 of our reading tell us how Joseph firstly advised Pharaoh of their arrival in Goshen, and then took five of his brothers to see the King in person. In answer to Pharaoh’s question about their occupation, they told him, “We, your servants, are shepherds,” just as Joseph had advised them to. Anyone would have thought that this would have been fatal, because as we considered last lesson, “every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians.”

FAMILY SETTLED: However, in response to their request that they be allowed to live in the land of Goshen, Pharaoh willingly granted them the best of the land to settle in with their families and flocks. This was quite a remarkable tribute to the esteem in which Pharaoh held Joseph, and the real provision of the Lord for Jacob and his whole family. After all, He had promised Jacob that he would “make him a great nation.” Here we see another instance of Almighty God at work in the lives of even unbelievers, to bring about His own sovereign purposes for His people.

Jacob’s meeting with Pharaoh was an interesting one. When they met, we read that Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and not, as we might expect, the other way around! In the course of their conversation, Pharaoh inquired as to how old Jacob was. Jacob’s humble reply was that he had lived for 130 years but that these years were only few when compared with his ancestors, and furthermore, they had been filled with evil and trouble. Of course, much of that trouble had been as a result of his own selfish and deceitful actions.

FOOD SUPPLIES: Following the meeting, Joseph oversaw the settlement of his father and family in the land of Goshen (or Rameses as it was also known) as Pharaoh had allowed. Of course, Joseph also saw to it that there were sufficient food supplies for his family’s needs, as they began their new life in Egypt.

Verses 13 to 26 give us a very real picture of the social consequences of the terrible drought that had gripped Egypt and the surrounding lands. Many people even today, particularly on the continent of Africa, and parts of Australia, have to deal periodically with similar conditions. Drought and famine can so quickly bring financial ruin to people dependent on the rain for their livelihood.

So it was here in Egypt that many people used up all their savings, buying food to keep themselves and their families alive. When their money was gone they were forced to trade their livestock (sheep, horses, cattle and donkeys) in exchange for grain to make bread. Finally, with no rain in sight, even these assets were exhausted, and the people were forced to sell their lands in order to buy grain. Joseph also gave the people seed with which to sow their land, telling them that they were to give a fifth of any resulting crops to Pharaoh, but retain the other four parts for food for their own families and households.

FAIR SUGGESTION: “You have saved our lives!” the people told Joseph. “May it please my lord; we will be slaves to Pharaoh” (v25). Now, Joseph has been sometimes criticised for this policy. However, we should remember that the people themselves suggested it; faced with death by starvation, even slavery was quite an appealing option! Far from complaining about it, they were simply grateful that through Joseph’s God-given insight and forward planning there was food to eat at all!

The remaining verses (27-31) record the great increase in the numbers of the children of Israel, and reveal the circumstances surrounding the death of Jacob, after he had lived seventeen years in Egypt. His special request that he be buried not in Egypt, but in Canaan “the land of his fathers,” shows that Jacob’s faith in the promise of God remained strong, right up until his death. One day his people, the Israelites, would be brought back to their own country again!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did Pharaoh willingly grant the best of the land to Jacob’s family?	.....
2. How did Jacob describe his life to Pharaoh?	.....
3. How did the people express their thankfulness in being saved from death?	.....
4. What do you think of Joseph’s advice?	.....
5. How was Joseph honoured?	.....

Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons

Read Genesis 48

Further Reading: Psalm 112

Key Verse:

“By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff.”

Hebrews 11:21

Extra: How may we live and end life’s journey well?

Level 5 lesson 36

SICKNESS COMES: When Joseph heard that his father was very sick (v1), he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim, and went to visit him. Joseph was probably concerned that these two sons, being born in Egypt of an Egyptian mother, might have felt that they were outsiders; not really part of the family, nor entitled to a place amongst the sons of Israel. If this perception were not countered strongly and swiftly, he obviously felt it may lead them to forget their father’s house and adopt the nationality and belief of the Egyptians. Joseph certainly did not want that to happen; he wanted them to be fully recognised and accepted into the family as genuine descendants of Jacob.

STATUS CONFIRMED: Jacob, on hearing of his distinguished son’s arrival, “rallied his strength and sat up on the bed,” and addressed his son Joseph. “God Almighty appeared to me ... in the land of Canaan and blessed me.” Then he reiterated God’s wonderful promises in verse 4: “Behold I (God) will make you fruitful, and multiply you ... and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.”

Obviously, as he neared death, the family status of Joseph’s two sons was also uppermost in Jacob’s mind as he speaks with Joseph. “Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine,” he declared, “just as Reuben and Simeon are mine.” What reassurance for Joseph! Only then, did Jacob realise that there were others with Joseph, as his sight was all but gone at this stage. “Who are these?” he asked. Joseph replied, “My sons.” “Bring them to me,” Jacob said, “that I may bless them!” The two young men drew close to their grandfather and the aged patriarch “kissed them and embraced them.” Joyfully he exclaimed to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face, and now God has allowed me to see your children also!”

Then it was time for the official blessing, with the outward sign being the laying of Jacob’s hands on the heads of the two sons. Joseph, naturally, expected that Manasseh, the eldest son should get the greater blessing, while Ephraim the younger, should have the lesser blessing.

This was the normal procedure and so Joseph stood his two sons before Jacob so that Ephraim stood near to Jacob’s left hand and Manasseh near to Jacob’s right hand.

SURPRISE CHOICE: To Joseph’s surprise, Jacob crossed his hands, laying his right-hand on Ephraim and his left-hand on Manasseh. This was not a mistake on Jacob’s part. He did it knowingly (v14), conscious of God’s will and choice that the younger son (Ephraim) should have precedence over the elder (Manasseh). Note the beautiful words (vs15,16) Jacob utters as he pronounces his blessing on Joseph, and particularly on his two sons. “God,” he says, “before whom my fathers walked, the God who has led me all my life long to this day. The angel who redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be on them, and the name of my fathers ... and may they increase greatly upon the earth.”

Joseph was pleased with such a wonderful blessing, but was very concerned that Ephraim seemed to have been given preference. Jacob appeared to be mixed up and to have made a mistake, so Joseph actually attempted to change Jacob’s right hand on to the head of the firstborn (Manasseh). However, Jacob firmly refused to change - he knew exactly what he was doing! He was simply adding one more lesson of God’s sovereign choice to the examples of Abel, Shem, Abraham, Isaac and indeed, himself.

At the same time, it is good to see that Manasseh was not unblessed, but simply had a lesser portion. And so we read that when Israelites in the future desired to wish anyone well, they would express their feelings by saying, “God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh” (v20). Our lesson finally concludes with Jacob telling Joseph that he (Jacob) was about to die. Displaying a wonderful, firm faith in the Lord, he confidently told Joseph that God would be with him and bring him again into the land of his fathers (Canaan). So Jacob died, trusting in God. He had a varied life, not always exemplary in many respects, but he finished his life well. May you also live and end life’s journey well, trusting in God and our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1 .Why did Jacob bless Joseph’s sons?	.....
2. Why did Jacob give the greater blessing to Ephraim, who was the younger?	.....
3. In his blessing, what did Jacob tell Joseph and his two sons?	.....
4. Why was Joseph concerned?	.....
5. Before Jacob died, how did he show his faith in God?	.....