

GENESIS—WEEK 35

RECONCILIATION



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Judah and Joseph by Arent de Gelder (1645–1727)
Not on display anywhere; it's in a private collection.*

All is well. God has provided miraculously. Joseph holds no grudge against his brothers. All they have to do is go back and bring their families to Egypt to ride out the famine.

But that means they have to tell dad the truth.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

Genesis 45:4–46:27— Reconciliation
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1 Genesis 45:4–15 (ESV)

So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 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. 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 tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.’ And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Joseph uses this joyous moment to deliver one of the most blunt lessons in the Bible.

So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

It was all God’s doing—even the nasty bits.

No one likes to admit this. Faith is just fine until something happens. Then we have trouble reconciling what we witnessed with what we believe about God. Something doesn’t fit.

But the cold, hard facts are there. God is all powerful, He knows what He’s doing, and He’s good. Grieving people often try to figure out which one of those things isn’t true.

But bad things have a purpose, which we may or may not get to see. In this case, the sons of Israel do get to see. Joseph also gives them a big lesson in forgiveness. Now they have to go fetch their dad.

But the lesson in forgiveness includes a killer homework assignment—they have to tell Jacob the truth about what they did to Joseph 20 years ago.

Forgiveness is the heart of the gospel. We should strive to teach forgiveness and live forgiveness.

Is there an area in your life where you haven’t been able to give forgiveness—or, more to the point, to receive it? Is there something you can’t forgive yourself for? Few Christians can honestly answer, “No,” to both questions. Sin leaves a lot of scars. Pretending there’s no hurt and no baggage doesn’t work.

Only God can heal these wounds. If you’re struggling with a big one, the challenge is to completely turn it over to the Holy Spirit. That is not a cop-out. It won’t be easy.

2 Genesis 45:16-24 (ESV)

When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.' And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes. To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the way."

When Joseph sent his brothers back to get his father, *as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the way."* What's up with that?

They're going to have to tell Jacob that they've been lying to him all these years—that they actually sold Joseph to slave traders. They might quarrel over how to break this news and start playing the blame game.

But there's another wild card in the deck—Benjamin! He's been kept in the dark. Now he knows.

On the trip down, they just had to put up with him asking, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" Imagine the questions he's going to pepper them with on the way back. Joseph is telling Benjamin and his brothers to let go of their baggage.

That's a tall order. If they take it seriously, they'll grow on the trip home.

They're a bunch of drama queens with hall-of-fame levels of emotional baggage. Still, their example is important because we're not all that different. Everyone has issues. We may not have as much as these guys, but everyone needs the savior and everyone remembers why they need Him.

Curiously, that baggage is a good thing. Being saved means not being owned by your past, but it doesn't mean forgetting it. We must always be mindful where we came from and how we got here. If nothing else, that helps us relate to people who are on the same road.

Think back to how you found Christ. Recall how all the pieces came together. How can you be a part of that in someone else's life?

Remember that you're not in command. Prayer is the key to evangelism.

And it's not telling God what to do, but asking Him for signs and directions.

3 Genesis 45:25–28 (ESV)

So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, “Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, “It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

There is a wonderful moment in *The Silver Chair* by CS Lewis when the kids cannot decide whether to follow Aslan’s command or to follow their own reasoning. Aslan (the creator and lord of Narnia) had told them that if anyone ever asks them to do something *in the name of Aslan*, they must do it. But when they’re confronted with a tied-up madman who asks them to loosen his ropes in the name of Aslan, they worry about what he will do when he’s free. They don’t know what to do.

“Oh, if only we knew!” said Jill.

“I think we do know,” said Puddleglum.

“Do you mean you think everything will come right if we do untie him?” said Scrubb.

“I don’t know about that,” said Puddleglum, “You see, Aslan didn’t tell Pole what would happen. He only told her what to do.”

The lesson is to do what the Lord says regardless of your fears, even if that means ignoring your own calculations. In today’s passage, Jacob’s sons tell him *all the words of Joseph*—but that wasn’t their plan.

When they said, *“Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt,”* Jacob’s *heart became numb, for he did not believe them*. The Hebrew word that’s translated as “became numb” (פוג, poog) literally means ceased or became helpless. Jacob’s heart (i.e., his emotions/personality) ceased to function. In other words, the old man just shut down.

In verse 27, when *the spirit of their father Jacob revived*, he comes out of it. But in the meantime, Jacob’s sons are in a panic. This is like what Judah was worrying about when he speculated what might happen if he returned without Benjamin.

“I fear to see the evil that would find my father.” — Genesis 44:34b (ESV)

Now something like that is happening anyway.

They hoped just telling Jacob the news about Joseph would work. It doesn’t, so they tell him everything. Jacob’s sons stumble into the same lesson that Puddleglum taught the kids—just do the right thing.

So they blurt out the truth.

Trusting God is the point where faith meets works. People who trust God to keep His promises behave accordingly. People who don’t really trust God act like they don’t. It’s usually easy to tell if someone’s faith is strong by how he behaves.

But weak faith grows into strong faith over time, as people learn that God can be trusted.

4 Genesis 46:1–7 (ESV)

So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.”

Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

Jacob was nervous about moving to Egypt. During a previous famine, his dad had been specifically told by God to not go there.

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.” — Genesis 26:1-2 (ESV)

So, Jacob wisely does a double check by offering sacrifices to the LORD at the place that has been the site of many special contacts with God—Beersheba. This time, God assures Jacob that going to Egypt is okay, and going there doesn't break with His covenant promises.

Just as Jacob desired to check with God before going to Egypt, we should desire to check with God before doing anything. The mission of The DEEP is to get people in the habit of being in contact with God.

This is a crisis in America. Life is so busy that devotionals tend to get squeezed out. Trying to live a normal American life while also having daily devotionals feels like trying to text and drive. We don't have the capacity for both.

But that's a false perspective. Just as tithing is not a path to running out of money, so spending time with the LORD is not a path to running out of time.

Prayer should be a regular part of how we get through the day. You don't need to follow any particular prescription, just pray what's on your heart. Intense prayer is most glorifying.

And note that listening is an essential element to prayer. It's what keeps us connected to God. While God wants to hear whatever we have to say to him (amazingly), He has much to say to us.

Prayer should be two-way. We want God to give us what He gave Jacob at Beersheba—guidance.

Beware though, the affirmation He gave Jacob is rare; anticipate redirection.

5 Genesis 46:8–27 (ESV)

Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Yob, and Shimron. The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three.

The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, with Serah their sister. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons.

The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin. And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera the priest of On, bore to him. And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all.

The son of Dan: Hushim. The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all.

All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all. And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy.

Most modern Americans don't get much out of these long genealogy lists, but there's one thing in this passage that jumps off the page—it includes women. Some women are listed by name. Others are not named but listed in a way that shows that they matter.

This is way before its time. To really appreciate Genesis, compare it to other writings and artifacts from that primitive age.

God's sense of justice has put us to shame for thousands of years. It still does.

Our society seems to get a new social justice "cause célèbre" every year. They come and go. Often, what once looked like a great idea is eventually revealed as fatally flawed. Many supposedly great ideas even do more harm than good. That's why it's often said, "The road to hell is paved with the stones of good intent."

But God's priorities never change. Love God and love your neighbor.

That never goes out of style.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. When were you transformed by forgiveness, either given or received?
2. What do you remember about the moment when the dots connected and you saw that Christianity is true?
3. How was your faith weaker when you were a young Christian?
4. Have you ever inquired of the Lord (or asked for a sign) before doing something?
5. What current social justice “cause célèbre” seems good from a Christian perspective?