

LIFE GROUPS

Genesis 47

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: Have you ever had the opportunity to meet someone very important, such as a political leader or a legendary celebrity? With that in mind, what must it have been like for Jacob to stand before Pharaoh?

Jacob—the man who had once cheated his brother out of his inheritance in return for a bowl of soup—now stood before one of the world’s greatest rulers. His son Joseph had made it all possible. Jacob had his family, all the material provision he would ever need, and an audience with Pharaoh. This fulfillment came as a result of his willingness to follow God’s leading into a new chapter of life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool’s this past week?**

2. **Read Genesis 47:1-12. What do we learn from Jacob’s comments and blessings as he is standing before pharaoh? What is so incredible about God’s providence in this passage?**

The tottering old patriarch before the imperial magnificence of the supposed god-man Pharaoh was a picture of lingering beauty. Hoisted to his feet, Jacob stood amidst what was to him alien and oppressive luxury populated by the gawking officials and

sycophants of the court of the Nile. Undaunted, Jacob was “sovereign old age personified: unimpressed by rank ... diffuse and deliberate” (Kidner).¹

When Pharaoh asked Jacob how old he was, Jacob responded with three main comments: his years had been few, and his years had been hard, but they had not surpassed the years of his fathers during their own pilgrimages (vv. 9-10). At first, these comments may sound negative, but Jacob was being honest. He acknowledged that the years of hardship and heartache were finally over.

That he was an old man, the patriarch of the clan, automatically gave more power to his blessing. Since he was the recipient of the promised blessings, his words here were more than a wish; he spoke for God in granting the blessing to Pharaoh, one that began shortly through the wise administration of Joseph.²

The entire incident provided a pattern that was worked out again and again in Israel’s history: the people of God preferred the blessing to others who had authority over the stations of this life, and in exchange they were afforded the good land. They did not always experience such blessing, but still they were responsible to act wisely and magnanimously before others as they extended the blessing of God.³

So Jacob’s blessing of Pharaoh was proper and also divinely sanctioned because God had earlier said to Abraham at the very beginning, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:3).⁴

Astonishing! Amidst worldwide famine Jacob and his sons were granted a permanent possession in Egypt “in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses”—a later name for Goshen. So in the throes of a deepening world starvation, God prospered his people. Who but a young man in a coat of many colors could ever have dreamed such a thing? Now the pitcher of God’s blessing was poised to pour out blessing upon Pharaoh (Egypt) and Israel.⁵

¹ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 532.

² Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 686.

³ Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 686.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 533.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 533.

3. Read Genesis 47:13-27. What do we learn about Joseph from his leadership during this time? What is different about Joseph's leadership from worldly leadership?

Ironically, the same famine that brought Joseph to power also brought his family to Egypt (47:4). The Lord used an international calamity to advance His purposes. As we will see, Joseph continued to make wise decisions that provided food for the Egyptians and his family, while at the same time, enriching Pharaoh's bottom line.

The second half of Genesis 47 describes Joseph's leadership during the years of famine. These verses show that Joseph worked hard to balance protection of the people with commitment and loyalty to Pharaoh. The fact that he was able to do both proves the leadership and wisdom with which God had gifted him.

In any event, after a year Pharaoh owned all the money and livestock in Egypt.⁶

In short order, all of Egypt, except the pagan clergy, were serfs. Pharaoh was indeed blessed! He could not have prospered more. He was richer than Rockefeller.⁷

As the famine worsened, everyone in Egypt was equitably fed. And the 20 percent? No one complained about it. Joseph was Egypt's national hero. They all would have been dead without him.⁸

But before we focus our democratized, critical western eyes on how God effected the blessing, we must listen to the advice of Gerhard Von Rad:

The expositor must resist as much as possible the question of the extent to which Joseph's measures stand the test of modern opinion. The ancient narrator is honestly amazed and wants the reader also to be amazed at the way an expedient was found to save the people from a gigantic catastrophe.⁹

From the beginning to the end of the Egyptian sojourn, prosperity and growth came from God's blessing. Those who acknowledged it shared in it.

It is interesting to note that the people of Egypt proclaimed Joseph as their savior—which is what God had prepared him to do (v. 25; see 45:7). So grateful were they that they willingly became the slaves of Pharaoh. Such gratitude is a model of devotion and loyalty by those saved from certain death.¹⁰

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 534.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 534–535.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 535.

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 533.

¹⁰ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 687.

4. What wisdom can we learn from Joseph and apply to our own lives?

Joseph's actions cannot be measured by the moral standards that the Hebrew Bible, especially the prophetic tradition, has inculcated in Western civilization. Rather, they must be judged in the context of the ancient Near Eastern world, by whose norms Joseph emerges here as a highly admirable model of a shrewd and successful administrator. Nonetheless, a moral judgment on the situation is subtly introduced into the narrative by shifting the onus of responsibility for the fate of the peasants from Joseph to the Egyptians themselves. The peasants initiate the idea of their own enslavement (v. 19) and even express gratitude when it is implemented!¹¹

The wise leader discerns that prosperity comes from God alone and so must make decisions in accordance with the will of God—that is, what God has revealed about his plan of blessing in fulfillment of the promise.¹²

Wisdom is essential to any ruler, but wisdom from above is required for theocratic administrators.¹³

Also in the New Testament we learn that spiritual leaders need wisdom to guide the people of God into the place of blessing in fulfillment of the promises. Leadership cannot be oblivious to God's dealings in the past, for in them they see the outworking of God's program of blessing. Nor can leadership ignore the world around God's people, for God's people must flourish first in this world and, in so doing, bring blessing to a lost world.¹⁴

“The content of this wisdom is the cross-centered gospel. Identifying “Christ crucified” as God's wisdom sets aside all human wisdom and points us to the way of the cross.” – Gospel Coalition Essay

“Believing ourselves wise apart from obedience to God is the great sin of the human heart.” – Abigail Dodds

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 535.

¹² Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 687.

¹³ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 687–688.

¹⁴ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 688.

“As we increase in our obedience to God, all that he commands increasingly makes sense to us.” – Abigail Dodds

5. Read Genesis 47:28-31. How did God show He keeps His promises in this passage? Why did ask Jacob ask to be buried back in Canaan?

Genesis is silent about these years, but a fast-forward to his ultimate age of 147 years suggests uneventful, unruffled tranquillity for both father and son. How sweet it must have been for Jacob and Joseph. No doubt these years were used to further inform and deepen Joseph for the further role he would play in God’s plan. We are meant to see that all of this was God’s careful doing. The duplicate periods of seventeen years are but tiny windows into God’s sovereign plan. Remember that it was God who also orchestrated the seven years of prosperity and the seven years of famine.¹⁵

Thus we understand that God literally compelled Israel to move to Egypt by force of circumstances for a prosperous four-hundred-year period of incubation.¹⁶

Jacob so wanted to be buried in Canaan in the cave of Machpelah with the bones of Abraham and Isaac that he doubly bound his viceroy son to personally take his bones back to Canaan. In doing this he consciously imitated Abraham when he made his servant Eliezer place his hand under his thigh and swear that he would not take a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites, but from his own kin in Mesopotamia (cf. Genesis 24:1–4).¹⁷

Upon Joseph’s solemn oath, the old bedridden patriarch bowed as best he could and worshiped.

Why this almost desperate demand for assurance that his bones be interred in the promised land? Certainly Jacob knew that wherever he died, he would go to be with his fathers. The reason for the demand was that burying his remains in Canaan was a declaration of his faith in the promise of the land to Abraham and his seed forever (15:17ff.)¹⁸

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 536.

¹⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 536.

¹⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 537–538.

¹⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 538.

“But the patriarch trusted God despite this, for he knew that His ways are not our ways and that the Lord will fulfill His will even when it is difficult for us to discern it. And so God kept His promise to bless and increase His people in Egypt, for that is the kind of God He is — One who is always true to His word.” – Ligonier Article

6. What can we do to keep our hope in God’s promises alive, even if they do not come true in our lifetimes? How do God’s promises motivate you?

As God’s children, we become subjects of his persistent prosperity as he brings calamity and well-being to effect the prosperity of our souls. Everything we endure and enjoy—all our relationships, all our honors, all our defects, all our serendipities, all our disappointments, all our gains and losses—are meant for our ultimate prosperity.¹⁹

Rest assured that everything that comes to us in this life, whether we regard it as good or evil, is meant to prosper us. And more, those who regard us with favor will be blessed as they heed our words about Christ. And finally, one day these old rattling bones will be on their feet dancing.²⁰

In all ages God’s people are constantly learning—and being amazed at—how God works to bring about his promises, at the same time developing faith in his people. *Believers must respond to God’s supernatural dealings in the circumstances of life by making their decisions in accordance with the wisdom of divinely guided leaders, in assurance of the fulfillment of the promises, and in the knowledge that the future of the covenant will be developed from them.*²¹

7. Read Jeremiah 29:11 & Romans 8:28. What do these passages teach us about God and His promises?

The apostle Paul’s New Testament counterpart is, of course, Romans 8:28—“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” The other memorable epigram is voiced by God himself through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” In that prophet’s day, at the beginning of the hardships of the captivity, God assured his people that all his plans for them were for their wholeness (*shalom*). There was not an ounce of evil in the conception, implementation, and consummation of

¹⁹ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 537.

²⁰ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 539.

²¹ Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 681.

those plans. The apparent evil they suffered was for their good—to give them “a future and a hope”—ultimate prosperity! Seeing and believing this will change your life.²²

PRAYER

Pray for a better understanding of God’s faithfulness. Thank God for the ultimate expression of His faithful love—the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Also pray that once we understand God’s faithfulness and trustworthiness, our lives will change.



FURTHER STUDY

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/prospering-in-egypt/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/fruitfulness-egypt>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-wisdom-of-god/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/obeying-god-will-make-you-wise>

²² R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 537.