

Joseph Forgave His Brothers

I pray that you can forgive your brothers for their sin against you.

Joseph's brothers gave this message to Joseph after their father Jacob died. They said that their father wanted it relayed to him. Why did Joseph's brothers say this? They feared that now Joseph would take revenge on them for their hateful deed against him.

The wonderful story of Joseph tells of a believing boy who wanted to be obedient to his believing father and Heavenly Father. Once when Joseph was about 17 years old, his father sent him to check on his brothers who shepherded Jacob's flocks. His brothers hated Joseph because he was a believer and wanted to do what is right before God. When they saw him coming they decided to kill him, but then chose instead to sell him as a slave into Egypt. Then they told their father that a wild animal had killed Joseph. Jacob cried for many days.

Joseph was alone in faraway Egypt, but the Bible says that the Lord was with him and he was happy and successful. Joseph came to Egypt as a slave. He was made overseer over the house of Potiphar, an officer of Egypt's Pharaoh. Potiphar's wife lied about Joseph and he was put into prison. Even in prison "the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper" (Gen. 39:23).

Because God had once given Joseph wisdom to interpret dreams, he was eventually taken out of prison and brought before the Pharaoh to interpret his dreams that no one else could interpret. The dreams told of seven good years and seven lean or poor years. Pharaoh understood that God was with Joseph and made him ruler over the entire land. God gave Joseph wisdom to store food during seven good years when the crops grew well.

Eventually Joseph's brothers had to go down into Egypt to buy food because the land of Canaan experienced famine. At first, Joseph acted like he did not know his brothers and began to sternly question them. They said that they are 10 brothers, with the youngest one left at home, and one dead. The brothers became fearful that now God was punishing them because they sold Joseph. Joseph asked that they bring their youngest brother to prove they were being truthful. He wanted to see his younger brother Benjamin.

When the brothers brought their food home to Jacob and told what they had experienced, Jacob feared letting his youngest son Benjamin go to Egypt, but eventually there was no choice because their food ran out. When Joseph saw his brother Benjamin, he was so overcome with joy that he went into his own room and wept. Eventually Joseph couldn't help but tell his brothers who he was. He cried so loud that the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. He hugged his brothers and said, "I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?... Come near to me... I am Joseph your brother" (Gen. 45:3,4). He told them not to worry or be "angry with yourselves... for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5). "And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept... Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them" (Gen. 45:14,15).

Following all of this, Joseph had his father and the entire family moved to Egypt. When they met, Joseph and his father hugged and wept for a long time. They had not seen each other for 22 years. After 17 years in Egypt, Jacob died.

After Jacob's burial in Canaan, Joseph's brothers worried that Joseph was now going to take revenge on them for selling him. They sent a messenger to Joseph saying that before death, their father said to ask Joseph to forgive his brothers' sins. Joseph wept when they spoke to him and said, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good... to save much people alive... And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them" (Gen. 50:19-21).

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Think about and discuss with your parents what we learn from the story of Joseph:

What blessings can you see in Joseph's life when he was obedient to God?

If you were Joseph, would you have felt bitter and carried a grudge towards the brothers for what they did? Would it have been hard to forgive? (Mark 11:26)

What should you do if someone has said something bad about you, or done something to you that has made you mad, or hurt you, or made you feel sad? (Matt. 18:15-18; Gal. 6:1,2; John 13:1-15)

Who said that the believers can forgive sins? (John 20:22,23)

How do we apologize and forgive? Do we just say, "I'm sorry" and "That's okay"? (Luke 24: 46,47; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14)

Have you remembered how much God has needed to forgive you? (Eph. 2:8)

How many times should we forgive our brother or sister? (Matt. 18: 21,22)

Does God remember forgiven sins? Should we? (Isa. 38:17; Ps. 103:12)

What is our power to battle against sin? (Rom. 1:15,16)

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