

Main Idea: In Genesis 46 the Joseph story reminds us that *life is not about me*. Rather it’s about God. There are three scenes in Genesis 46, which teach us three things about God.

I. Scene #1: The Move (1-7)

*We see the promises of God.

- A. Watch what Jacob did.
 - 1. He stopped to reflect.
 - 2. He stopped to worship.
- B. Watch what God did.
 - 1. God revealed Himself to Jacob.
 - 2. God relieved Jacob's fears.
 - 3. God renewed His Promises (3-4).

Great Principle: God invites His people to live by His promises.

- 1. God promises salvation.
Romans 10:13
- 2. God promises to answer prayer.
1 John 5:14-15
- 3. God promises us victory.
2 Corinthians 2:14
Philippians 1:6
- 4. God promises forgiveness of sins and freedom from guilt.
1 John 1:9
- 5. God promises us guidance.
Proverbs 3:5-6

II. Scene #2: The Mention of Names (8-27)

*We see the precision of God.

III. Scene #3: The Meeting (28-34)

*We see the power of God.

- A. The power of God removes family barriers (28-31).
- B. The power of God removes social barriers (32-34).
- C. The power of God removes spiritual barriers.

Make It Personal: Great things happen for the glory of God once we settle the fact that *it’s not about us*.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 115

“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us. But unto your name be the glory.”

It’s easy to live a self-focused life. Just do what comes natural, and we’ll think of ourselves. But when the Lord becomes real to us, that changes. It’s not about me, and I find great joy in admitting it.

It’s all about Him.

We’re going to see this truth illustrated in the Joseph story in Genesis 46. How? By seeing Joseph move out of the spotlight. He’s the main character no longer, and indeed, never has been. This is God’s story.

And so is your story and mine.

When we began our series back in Genesis 37, the unthinkable happened. Ten siblings hated their kid brother and sold him into slavery. Good riddance. Out of sight, out of mind.

So they thought. But God specializes in turning tragic chapters in the lives of His people into triumph in later chapters in His story. He orchestrates *all things* for good for

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message is adapted from two series at WBC in 1992 and 2002.

those who love Him. There is hardly a clearer illustration of this truth anywhere in the Bible than the Joseph story.

This morning the long-awaited moment has arrived. The fragmented family of Jacob is about to be reunited. After 22 years of separation, after 22 years of buried sorrow, a father and all twelve of his sons will be together. It's a touching scene.

But something intriguing happens in Genesis 46. If you read over the chapter in preparation for today's message, you may have noticed it. A slight shift occurs. The spotlight stops shining on Joseph.

In Genesis 46, Joseph moves out of the limelight. But don't feel sorry for Joseph, for he would have it no other way. In fact, it's true of all the great Bible characters.

Take the story about David and Goliath. That story is not so much about a brave young boy as it is about a God who is great enough to use even an undersized teenage boy to accomplish His purpose. And the same goes for great characters like Daniel, Elijah, Paul, and Stephen the martyr. If we come away from their stories impressed with them, they would be the first to say, "You've missed the point. It's not about me. It's about God."

Friends, it's always about God. It's God's story, and He intends to make the glories of Himself known through the ups and downs of His people.

There are three scenes in Genesis 46, which teach us three things about God.

I. Scene #1: The Move (1-7)

***In scene one, we see the promises of God.**

Scene one begins with the spotlight on Joseph's father, Jacob. When we left off last time, he had just learned the unbelievable news that his son was not only still alive, but was in fact the prime minister of Egypt!

We're invited to watch two things happening in scene one.

A. Watch what Jacob did. Verse 1, "So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac."

Israel set out. That's the name God gave Jacob right after he wrestled with God all night in 32:28. *Israel* means "he struggles with God."²

Jacob, now *Israel*³, had been living in Hebron according to 37:14. Now he loads up his family and heads south. They made it about 25 miles and stopped at Beersheba.

Why did he stop? For two reasons...

1. *He stopped to reflect.* Beersheba was the last stop before leaving Canaan, the land God promised to Abraham. It sort of reminds me of the sign you see when traveling on the interstate, "Rest Stop Here, Next Rest Area 65 miles."

But this stop isn't to rest. I think this stop is to clarify something. No doubt Jacob has in mind something God told his father, Isaac, back in Genesis 26:1-2. "Now there was a famine in the land—besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. ²The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live.'"

² *NIV Study Bible*, p. 56.

³ This is the second time Jacob left Canaan. The first was when he fled from Esau and went to Paddan Aram in Genesis 28.

Don't go to Egypt. That's what the Lord told Jacob's dad who had his share of problems in Egypt.. And Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, had his share of problems in Egypt too (12:10).

Jacob knows all this. So he stops to reflect on what he's about to do. Sure, I want to see my son again, but am I doing the right thing going to Egypt?

There was another reason he stopped at Beersheba...

2. *He stopped to worship.* Verse 1 says he "offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac." Something special had happened at Beersheba several decades earlier. It was there that Jacob's dad, Isaac, worshipped the true God who had established a covenant with him. Genesis 26:25 says, "And he built an altar there, and called on the name of the Lord."

The altar comes first, then prayer. To call upon God, there must first be the death of a substitute. Isaac constructed an altar, then called on the Lord.

By the way, if you've been praying to God and wondering why He doesn't seem to be listening, start here. Are you coming to Him in dependence upon the death of the appropriate substitute. Since we are all sinners, we cannot come to God on our own merit. But in His grace, He provided a blood sacrifice, His own Son, so that those who trust in His Son and not in themselves may come boldly to His throne with their needs.

Apparently, Isaac's worship experience made an impact on his son Jacob. Notice carefully that verse 1 says, "He offered sacrifices to the God *of his father Isaac.*"

It's quite possible that Jacob worshiped God on the very altar his dad had built. Now it's his turn, like father, like son. He, too, approaches God through an acceptable blood sacrifice, the only way sinful people can approach God.

Think of the impact a dad can have on his children. Isaac worshipped at Beersheba. So did his son Jacob. And just think of how that sight must have impacted Jacob's descendants, all seventy of them. As we'll see in a moment, they're all there.

True, Jacob had blown it many times before this in his life. He had deceived his brother. He had tricked his father-in-law. He had played favoritism with two different sons. He had gone through periods of doubting.

But watch him now! Jacob is worshipping the Lord for his family to see.

This is key. It's never too late to do what is right.

Men, do your children and grandchildren see you worship?

"What do you mean? We go to church every week!"

That's good, but that's not the issue. Do they see you worship the Lord? To worship God is to declare His worth. That's what Jacob did at Beersheba. He was saying, "Lord, I don't want to do anything that may discredit your glory. I want to do your will. If you want me in Egypt, I'll go. If not, I'll stay."

That's worship. You worship God when you get a job possibility and you gather your kids together and pray, "O Lord, I am Yours. What would most please You in this decision? It's not about me. I want to please You, *we* as a family, want to please You."

You worship God when, instead of taking your family to the lake on the Lord's Day, say to them, "The Lord has been so good to us, it's our privilege to gather with His people and sing to Him, and give to Him, and hear His Word, and encourage our brothers and sisters."

You worship God when you carve out time in the morning, before rushing into daily tasks, to meditate on His Word and express thanks to Him for His blessings.

So men, let's let our wives and children and grandchildren see us worshipping the Lord. Let's send a clear message to them that He means more to us than anything.

Secondly, we've watched what Jacob did. Now...

B. Watch what God did. Verse 2, "And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, 'Jacob! Jacob!'"

God spoke. That's what Jacob needed, a word from God. And by speaking God did three things for Jacob.

1. *God revealed Himself to Jacob.* Verse 3, "I am God, the God of your father," he said."

2. *God relieved Jacob's fears.* Verse 3 continues, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt."

3. *God renewed His promises (3-4).* Verses 3-4, "For I will make you into a great nation there. ⁴I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."

What's going on? God is revealing an important truth to Jacob. He is not limited to a geographic location. He's not limited to Canaan. By the way, He's not limited to America and the Western world either. The God of the Bible is omnipresent. This is His world, His universe, and He is everywhere.

The Lord gave four promises to Jacob. One, I will there make you into a great nation. Two, I will go down with you. Three, I will surely bring you back again. And four, Joseph's hand will close your eyes when you die.

Did God keep His promises to Jacob? Indeed, He did. The first promise, I will there make you a great nation, was fulfilled according to Exodus 1:7. The second promise, I will go down with you to Egypt, was fulfilled, as evidenced by the blessings Jacob gives his sons in God's name in Genesis 48-49. The third, I will surely bring you back again, was fulfilled in the book of Exodus. And the fourth, Joseph's hand will close your eyes, was fulfilled in Genesis 49:33.

We see a wonderful principle here.

Principle: God invites His people to live by His promises.

God is a promise-making and promise-keeping God. "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us (2 Cor 1:20; NKJV)." According to one person's count, there are 3,573 promises of God in the Bible.⁴

The first promise in the Bible is Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." That promise was fulfilled by Jesus Christ according to Galatians 4:4, Luke 2:7, and Revelation 12.5.

The last promise found in the Bible is Revelation 22:20, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

One of the most practical things you can do is learn and put your weight into God's promises. Here are five.⁵

⁴ <http://www.bibleinfo.com/en/questions/how-many-bible-promises-are-there>

⁵ I believe I first learned these in a Navigators Bible Study.

1. *God promises salvation.* Have you taken to heart Romans 10:13? “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

2. *God promises to answer prayer.* He tells us in 1 John 5:14-15, “And this is the confidence we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us; and if we know that he hears us we know that we have the petitions we desire of him.”

3. *God promises us victory.* In 2 Corinthians 2:14, “Now thanks be to the God and Father who always causes us to triumph in Christ.” And in Philippians 1:6, “Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

4. *God promises forgiveness of sins and freedom from guilt.* Here is a hospital for the sin-sick, 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”

5. *God promises us guidance.* And here’s a soft pillow for the fearful traveler, Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and don’t lean to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.”

God invites us to live by His promises. It’s something that brings Him glory and us joy. Are you practicing the promises of God in your daily life? Jacob may have blown it many times in his life, but that’s what we see him doing here.

Verses 5-7, “Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel’s sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. ⁶ They also took with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan, and Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt. ⁷ He took with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters—all his offspring.”

That’s scene 1, the Move.

II. Scene #2: The Mention of Names (8-27)

***If scene one taught us the promises of God, in scene two we see the precision of God.**

Notice verse 8, “These are the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob and his descendants) who went to Egypt.” And then comes a long list of the names of Jacob’s sons and grandsons:

“Reuben the firstborn of Jacob.

⁹ The sons of Reuben:

Hanok, Pallu, Hezron and Karmi.

¹⁰ The sons of Simeon:

Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman.

¹¹ The sons of Levi:

Gershon, Kohath and Merari.

¹² The sons of Judah:

And on it goes. If we're honest, we're prone to skim over lists like this one. Why did God include verses 8-27? Why would God the Holy Spirit lead Moses to take the space to record these seventy names?

I think it illustrates the precision of God. God doesn't simply see masses of people, but individuals. We have all been created in His image.

But this is no ordinary list. This list represents the fulfillment of another of God's promises, the one He made to Abraham. Around 2000 BC, God chose a pagan man, Abraham, entered His life and entered into a covenant with Him and His descendants. He said He would give Him a promised son in his old age, and form a family, that He would later turn into a nation in Egypt. Then out of Egypt and out of slavery He would deliver that nation. Ultimately, He would bless the world through that nation by sending the Messiah who would give His life and conquer death in order to rescue sinners from every nation.

Check out Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 15:13-16 and Genesis 17 and Genesis 22. There you'll see the promises God gave to Abraham. And this list of "meaningless" names is the evidence that He is doing what He said He would do.

He is fulfilling His plan to rescue sinners. In fact, I marvel at how God worked with such an unlikely family to accomplish His great plan of redemption. Just think about some of the people in the list before us.

We meet Reuben in verse 8, the firstborn who defiled his father's bed. We're told in verse 10 that son number two, Simeon, married a pagan Canaanite. Judah, who's mentioned in verse 12, had two sons that died prematurely because of their wickedness, and he himself was guilty of hiring a prostitute. Jacob's daughter Dinah is mentioned in verse 15—she had been sexually violated by Shechem the Hivite (34:2).

This is hardly a *Who's Who* family. They had glaring flaws just like many of ours. Yet God, on the basis of His grace, worked with them and accomplished His good plan in and through them.

Just like He still does.

As we look at the list we see the *precision of God*. Verse 26 mentions a number, 66, as in 66 people. "All those who went to Egypt with Jacob—those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons' wives—numbered sixty-six persons."

Verse 27 mentions 70 people. "With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all."

In the text, Moses records Jacob's descendants according to their mother's names:⁶

33 - Leah's children and grandchildren (8-15)

16 - Zilpah's children and grandchildren (16-18)

14 - Rachel's children and grandchildren (19-22)

7 - Bilhah's children and grandchildren (23-25)

70 - total sons and grandchildren

+ 1 - a daughter, Dinah (15)

71

- 5 - Er and Onan (who died in Canaan; v. 12);

Joseph and his two sons, already in Egypt (v. 20)

66 - Those who went to Egypt with Jacob (v. 26)

+ 4 - Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, Jacob (v. 27)

⁶ Taken from the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

70 - Jacob and his progeny in Egypt (v. 27)

So Genesis 46 tells us that God moved seventy family members to Egypt. Four hundred years later, the seventy blossomed into a mighty nation two million strong. Fourteen hundred years later God would send the Christ into the world through that family and nation.

Which is why we are here today, sons of God, recipients of eternal life through Christ, because of the precision of God.

God cares about the individual, my friend. No, life is not about you, nor me, but Him. Yet He knows us and cares for us. It matters to Him concerning us.

We've seen two scenes so far, the Move, which shows us the promises of God, and the Mention of names, which highlights the precision of God. And now we come to the long awaited reunion.

III. Scene #3: The Meeting (28-34)

***In scene three, we see the power of God.**

How so? By His power God removes three stingy barriers at the end of Genesis 46, the same barriers that fragment our world today.

A. The power of God removes family barriers (28-31). Verse 28, "Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen."

I wonder why he sent Judah? It seems to indicate he has given Judah the leadership role in this family. Later when Jacob is dying and he gives his final blessing, he will rebuke his first-born, Reuben, for defiling his father's bed, and then rebuke sons number two and three, Simeon and Levi, for their violence in massacring the Shechemites (ch 34). That put son number four in the leadership position.⁷

So Jacob sent Judah ahead for directions. Just think of the logistics. They're traveling in a large caravan. Children, wives, babies, wagons, flocks of sheep, herds of goats. They sure don't want to be roaming for miles looking for Goshen.

To say that what happens next is emotional is an understatement. Verses 29-30, "When they arrived in the region of Goshen,²⁹ Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.³⁰ Israel said to Joseph, 'Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive.'"

Ponder those words, "wept for a long time." Their eyes had not met for 22 years. Jacob had given up his son as dead long ago. Joseph wondered if he'd ever see his father again. How they savored this moment!

By God's power, Jacob and his son were now reunited. But there's more.

It's been several weeks, perhaps months since Joseph expressed his forgiveness to his guilty brothers in Genesis 45. Has he had second thoughts?

Verse 31, "Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, 'I will go up and speak to Pharaoh.'"

Don't miss the significance of this detail. Joseph spoke *to his brothers*. He tells them that he will go to bat for them, that he will make sure their needs are met.

⁷ Jacob will say in Genesis 49:8-10, "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you...The scepter will not depart from Judah."

Amazing. Another evidence that God has the power to restore broken families. Here we see Joseph, yet again, showing love in word and action to the very brothers that had hated him and sold him into slavery.

I can't help but wonder if Joseph didn't address his brothers for his father's benefit too. I would think that Jacob would have had trouble forgiving his sons for their horrendous sin against their brother and against him. But Joseph's loving treatment of his brothers surely helped salve the wound for his father.

I'm challenged by the emphasis the Bible places on family relationships. God instituted the family. The family is important to God. God wants to do things in our families so that people will see Him there.

As a pastor I talk with many people who are hurting because of family turmoil. I'm so glad there is hope for families torn by sin. God has the power to restore broken families, as Jacob can attest.

B. The power of God removes social barriers (32-34). Notice verses 31-34, "Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, 'I will go up and speak to Pharaoh and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were living in the land of Canaan, have come to me. ³²The men are shepherds; they tend livestock, and they have brought along their flocks and herds and everything they own.' ³³When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, 'What is your occupation?' ³⁴you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians."

That last phrase is key. *For all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.* Why is that significant? It says something about Joseph's wisdom and tact. He knows Egyptian custom. He knows they detest a certain category of people, which happens to be the category to which his family belongs.

But he takes action to overcome that barrier. He's not naïve, neither is he pushy and rude. He simply addresses the problem with respect, courtesy, and confidence that the Lord is at work.

One of the impressive things about Joseph is how he brought unlikely parties together, and put them on speaking terms. Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 5:9? "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

That's Joseph. He is a peacemaker. God used him to remove family barriers. Then God used him to remove social barriers.

What kind of effect do you have on people around you? Are you a tool that God can use to minister reconciliation?

E.g.--

C. The power of God removes spiritual barriers. I'm convinced that the greatest barrier to bring down is not a family barrier, nor a social barrier. It's a spiritual barrier. There's a barrier, a wall between people and God. The story of Joseph illustrates for us how God can remove that barrier.

In many ways, Joseph is a portrait of Christ. He endured great personal cost. He went through rejection and loss for the benefit of others. Joseph brought people together who weren't on speaking terms. How much more so did Christ!

All of us are born into this world with a problem. We're not on speaking terms with God. The reason is sin.

Isaiah 64:6-7 says, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...And there is NONE THAT CALLS UPON YOUR NAME..."

Even the best of men and women, even reputable citizens, are not on speaking terms with God. The Bible says that ALL are unclean in God's holy sight.

O friend, do you see? That's why Jesus Christ came into this world. To remove the spiritual barrier! To put us on right terms with Almighty God.

1 Tim 2:5 declares, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus."

Yes, God is ABLE. No matter what the need, He is able. He is able to remove Family Barriers, and Social Barriers, and Spiritual Barriers.

We've turned the corner today in our study of Joseph. Joseph moved out of the limelight in the story. We've seen God today. We've considered the Promises of God. We've watched the Precision of God. We've marvelled at the Power of God. We've done so by examining the life of a person who got out of the limelight.

Make It Personal: Great things happen for the glory of God once we settle the fact that *it's not about us*. Are you willing to do that? Will you surrender your life to God and say, "Here I am. Use me however you see fit to bring honor to Yourself."