



**Sunday School Lesson**  
**Genesis 45:1-28**  
 by Lorin L. Cranford  
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**Quick Links to the Study**

I. Context

- a. Historical
- b. Literary

II. Message

- a. Joseph revealed himself, vv. 1-3
- b. Joseph explained the situation, vv. 4-15
- c. Pharaoh responded to the news, vv. 16-24
- d. Good news for Jacob, vv. 25-28

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This third study in the four part study of the Joseph Story focuses on the interaction between Joseph and his brothers who are now in desperate need of food that only the Egyptians can provide.

**I. Context**

**a. Historical**

This historical setting in chapter 45 is where Joseph reveals his true identity to his brothers who have come seeking food from the Egyptians. The end of the previous study in chapter 41 came with the declaration (v. 57, NRSV): "Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world." This set the stage for the narrative found in 42:1-45:28 that details how Joseph was reconnected to his family because of the famine. Chapter 45 is the climatic part of that episode where Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers. This then led to all of Joseph's larger family, including his father Jacob, being relocated in Egypt with Joseph now taking care of them. The process of relocation and settlement in the Land of Goshen in northern Egypt will be the focus of the remaining chapters (46-50) of the Joseph Story.

The time frame for chapter 45 -- actually chaps 42 through 47 -- is the seven years of severe famine that followed the seven years of plenty described in [41:46-57](#). From [45:11](#) we can determine that this episode took place about two years into the seven year famine.

In [42:1-25](#), we discover the initial visit of the brothers to Egypt seeking food for the clan who were still living in the land of Canaan. Jacob sent all the remaining brothers to Egypt except for Benjamin, who had the same mother as Joseph and also was the youngest son. Their mother Rachel had died while giving birth to Benjamin ([Gen. 35:16-21](#)). In the brothers' first meeting with Joseph ([Gen. 42:1-25](#)), he recognized them but they did not recognize him, and Joseph hid his true identity from them. Giving them a hard time by putting them in prison for several days while he interviewed them, he required verification of the accuracy of their words by bringing the youngest brother -- Benjamin -- to Egypt. Simeon was bound before the other brothers and kept in Egypt as a guarantee that they would return, after they had put up the required money for purchasing food supplies. As they began the journey back to Canaan with the grain, they discovered that the each brother's purchase money was in the sacks of grain they were taking back home. Shocked they were then in deep fear about having to return to Egypt, fear that they would be accused of thievery.

Once they arrived back home ([Gen 42:26-38](#)), they explained the whole situation to their father Jacob who was distraught over the whole mess. He had already lost Joseph -- in his mind-- and now was losing

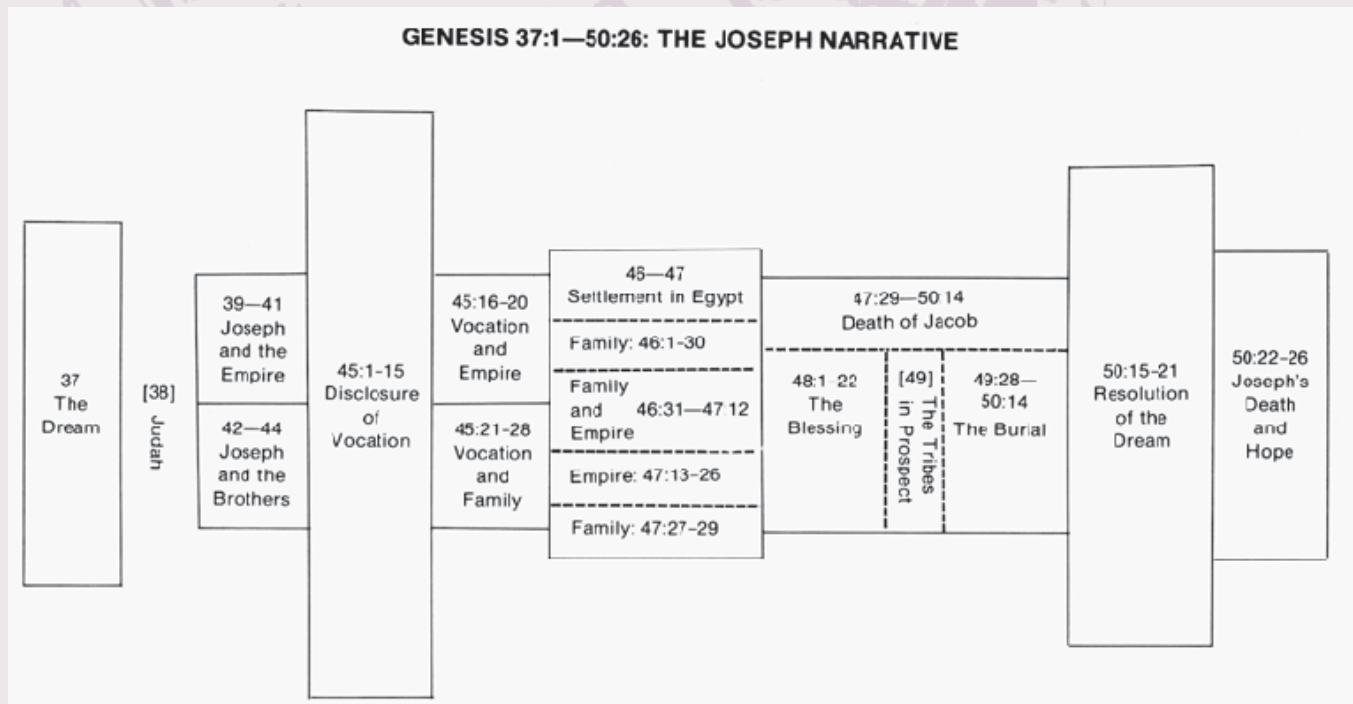
Simeon and then Benjamin was possibly going to be lost as well. No decision was made about whether or not to return to Egypt until the grain supplies ran out and they once again needed food to live on ([Gen. 43:1-34](#)). After considerable discussion and debate among the brothers and their father Jacob, they agree to return to Egypt with Benjamin. The oldest brother Judah pledged to take care of Benjamin. When Joseph first saw his younger brother Benjamin from a distance he decided to prepare a great banquet for his brothers at his home. Still frightened out of their wits, the brothers began trying to explain the presence of the money for the first supplies of grain in their sacks earlier, along with presenting money for the second supply of grain. The sight of Benjamin up close was more than Joseph could handle, so he left the room for a while to recover. The remainder of the meal was eaten with Joseph setting separate from the brothers, because, as the text (43:35b) declares, “the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.”

As the brothers prepared to return back home to Jacob in Canaan ([44:1-34](#)), Joseph conceived a plan to keep Benjamin with him in Egypt. Joseph’s silver cup was placed in the sacks of grain that Benjamin was taking back home, along with his purchase money for the grain. After the brothers had been sent on their way, Joseph’s Egyptian steward was dispatched to ‘uncover’ the thievery by Benjamin. All the brothers were then brought back to Joseph’s house in deep fear of what might happen to them, and especially to Benjamin. Joseph indicated that only the ‘guilty party’ would be punished and the others were free to go. Benjamin would remain behind as Joseph’s slave in punishment for the theft. At this point ([44:18-34](#)), Judah who had pledged to Jacob that he would take care of Benjamin pled with Joseph to allow him to remain as the slave and to let Benjamin return home to his father.

This brings us to the beginning of our study passage, chapter 45.

**b. Literary**

Perhaps the literary function of chapter 45 can be best demonstrated through taking another look at the chart found in the *Interpreter’s Bible* volume on Genesis (cf. iPreach online series):



The *Believer’s Church Bible Commentary* on Genesis (iPreach online) has a very helpful summation of the flow of the narrative in chapters 42 through 45:

The first scene (42:1-5) takes the reader back to Canaan, back to the setting of the first chapter of the saga (Gen. 37). Presently Jacob, the family father, must find a way to deal with the famine that has afflicted the area. The second scene (42:6-26) shifts to Egypt, where the sons of Jacob appeal to the powerful Egyptian ruler for grain. [*Egypt, the River Nation*, p. 318.] The ruler's concern for their real purpose creates a mysterious overtone to the meeting. This ominous feel deepens when in the third scene (42:27-28) one of the brothers discovers money in his sack. The fourth scene moves back to Canaan and a distraught Jacob (42:29-38). The family has food to eat, but the complete destruction of the family seems imminent.

In the fifth scene (43:1-14), the continuing famine forces a new decision regarding the family's future. Jacob sends his sons, including Benjamin, to Egypt in spite of the danger. The sixth scene (43:15-34) transports the reader back to Egypt, and all seems to go well. But the seventh scene (44:1-13) proves nearly catastrophic when a stolen cup is found on Benjamin. The eighth scene (44:14—45:24) stretches the family danger to the limit, but then resolves it, when the Egyptian governor introduces himself as a brother and receives them as family. The concluding scene (45:25-28) returns to Canaan to celebrate an end to both dangers, famine and separation of the family. The only matter left unfinished is the reunion of the family in one place.

Clearly the episode follows the movement of the brothers. But narratively they are not the main characters in the chapter. The brothers function primarily in a passive role, doing what they are told, often in panic. Only rarely do they actively take a role that leads to the eventual resolution of the danger. The active agents in the narrative are the two men who never met: Jacob and Joseph. Jacob primarily reacts. He must respond to circumstances that he cannot control—the famine and the power of the mysterious Egyptian ruler. Joseph holds the power and attempts to use it toward one end, to see his full brother, Benjamin.

## OUTLINE

Introductory Scene 1: Canaan

The Brothers Before Jacob, 42:1-5

Scene 2: Egypt

The Brothers Before Joseph, 42:6-26

Scene 3: At the Inn

The Brothers Alone, 42:27-28

Scene 4: Canaan

The Brothers Before Jacob, 42:29-38

Scene 5: Canaan

The Brothers Before Jacob, 43:1-14

Scene 6: Egypt

The Brothers Before Joseph, 43:15-34

Scene 7: Outside the Egyptian City

The Brothers and an Egyptian Official, 44:1-13

Scene 8: Egypt

The Brothers Before Joseph, 44:14— 45:24

Concluding Scene 9: Canaan

The Brothers Before Jacob, 45:25-28

Our study passage, [45:1-28](#), overlaps the scenes 8 & 9 in the above outline. Chapter 45, however, does naturally divide into subsections pretty much along the lines of the paragraph breaks in the New Revised Standard Version translation. We will follow those in our study.

## II. Message

In this climatic meeting with the brothers, Joseph first revealed his true identity to his brothers (vv. 1-3), then to calm their fears he explained how God had worked in the situation (vv. 4-15), resulting in a tearful reconciliation. News of this reached the pharaoh who responded joyfully and encouraged lavish generosity toward Jacob and his sons (vv. 16-24). When the brothers returned home to Canaan to bring the good news Jacob was overjoyed to learn that Joseph was still alive (vv. 25-28). He was then determined to travel to Egypt to see his long lost son.

### a. Joseph revealed himself, vv. 1-3

**NASB**

1 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. 3 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

**NRSV**

1 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

**NLT**

1 Joseph could stand it no longer. "Out, all of you!" he cried out to his attendants. He wanted to be alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. 2 Then he broke down and wept aloud. His sobs could be heard throughout the palace, and the news was quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace. 3 "I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them.

**Comments:**

This is one of the most touching scenes in the entire Joseph Story. Through a succession of tests that scared the living daylights out of the brothers with imprisonment and the detainment first of Simeon then Benjamin, Joseph had determined that the brothers were genuine and were men of honorable character. At this point Joseph's emotions got the best of him and he wanted a very private moment alone with his brothers. This came largely in reaction to Judah's powerful plea in behalf of Benjamin ([44:18-34](#)). The emotions exploded inside Joseph and he wept so loudly that those outside the room heard it. Then Joseph identified himself verbally to his brothers, leaving them in stunned silence. They had already become very fearful of this powerful Egyptian ruler who had played rough with them; now to learn that this was actually the brother they had sold into slavery years before must have been overwhelming to them. At this moment, they were more apprehensive about the future than ever before.

This scene reminds me of the occasional scenes on TV where long lost relatives are reunited. Especially touching are the situations where children were separated after the death of parents etc. and then were adopted by different individuals and subsequently lost contact with one another for years. One particularly touching story occurred in the early 90s while I was living in Heidelberg Germany. After reunification, much of the dark side of the Marxist East German government came to light. One of the German TV networks ran a series of episodes narrating the reuniting of families that had been separated for decades with some family members living in West Germany while others were trapped in East Germany. One of these stories especially touched me. A young East German couple had dared criticize the government privately at home. Their kindergarten age son innocently mentioned this at school; the teachers reported this to the government authorities as required by law. The secret police showed up at the parent's home later and took away their son. The couple was forced to flee East Germany for their lives. With reunification in 1990 the secret police records began to be made available for inspection by German citizens. The mother -- the father was now dead -- never knew what happened to her son some fourteen years earlier. The government records enabled her to track down her now 19 year old son. The TV network helped in this and filmed one of the most touching reunions between mother and son that I have ever witnessed.

This scene in Gen. 45 reminds us of the providential working of God to bring families back together. Although it doesn't always work out this way, in this instance it did and the scene is heartwarming. These brothers are now back together. Yet at the end of verse 3 they are also still fearful. The next scene relieves this apprehension when Joseph explains himself and what has been taking place.

**b. Joseph explained the situation, vv. 4-15**

## Comments:

### NASB

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 "For the famine *has been* in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. 7 "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. 8 "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 "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 delay. 10 "You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. 11 "There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine {to come,} and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished.'" 12 "Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. 13 "Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. 15 He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.

### NRSV

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 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. 9 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 delay. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there — since there are five more years of famine to come — so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' 12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

### NLT

4 "Come over here," he said. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother whom you sold into Egypt. 5 But don't be angry with yourselves that you did this to me, for God did it. He sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. 6 These two years of famine will grow to seven, during which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God has sent me here to keep you and your families alive so that you will become a great nation. 8 Yes, it was God who sent me here, not you! And he has made me a counselor to Pharaoh — manager of his entire household and ruler over all Egypt. 9 "Hurry, return to my father and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. Come down to me right away! 10 You will live in the land of Goshen so you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that you have. 11 I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you and your household will come to utter poverty.'" 12 Then Joseph said, "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph! 13 Tell my father how I am honored here in Egypt. Tell him about everything you have seen, and bring him to me quickly." 14 Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin also began to weep. 15 Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and then they began talking freely with him.

Joseph now speaks to his brothers with words of reassurance. Their being called closer to him was to break down the tone of official barrier with a powerful ruler and make the interaction more personal. Joseph didn't mince words with his initial statement, "Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt" (v. 4b). But he quickly qualified this charge of guilt with words of reconciliation. Particularly important are the declarations "for God sent me before you to preserve life" (v. 5b) and "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" (v. 8). These words reflect the spiritual insight that Joseph acquired through the 'school of hard knocks.' His experience in Egypt had contained deliverances from likely execution and a meteoric rise to power that no human being could have produced within his own powers. To Joseph's credit he both recognized the hand of God in all this and even more importantly publicly acknowledged God's leadership role in his life.

In verse nine his speech to his brothers turns to their father and the welfare of all the clan. The brothers are instructed to return home to Jacob to bring everyone in the clan back to Egypt to live under Joseph's generous care. Joseph indicated that five more years of severe famine lay ahead; thus he could care for them better in Egypt than he could in Canaan.

The climax of this segment comes in verses 14 and 15. A tearful reconciliation took place and was followed by some long conversations. One can only imagine what they talked about now that their fears were allayed and they were reconciled to their lost brother.

What can we learn from this pericope of scripture? One thing that strikes me is the wisdom and spiritual insight that came out of living life positively on Joseph's part. Because he took this approach to life, God was able to teach him some invaluable lessons, particularly about his mission in life. Quite interestingly, the Joseph Story generally highlights -- and this passage especially draws attention to it -- how God's will applies to successful coping with daily life. And it is through that successful response to daily living that the larger, long-term purposes of God are realized not just for the individual at the moment, but also for generations both before and following the individual.

None of us can see with any real clarity what God is accomplishing long-term in the lives of others in and through our lives, especially the generations of people coming after us. But, as we respond in faith and faithfulness to the Lord in the ups and downs of our life, God is free to impact countless numbers of other people. Joseph was an essential link in the chain of promises made to Abraham. His example encourages us to be faithful since we can see from Joseph the limitless possibilities for good coming out of how we live out our lives.

### **c. Pharaoh responded to the news, vv. 16-24**

#### **NASB**

16 Now when the news was heard in Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brothers had come, it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. 17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go to the land of Canaan, 18 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 will eat the fat of the land.' 19 "Now you are ordered, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come. 20 'Do not concern

#### **NRSV**

16 When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. 17 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, "Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan. 18 Take your father and your households and come to me, so that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you may enjoy the fat of the land.' 19 You are further charged 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.

#### **NLT**

16 The news soon reached Pharaoh: "Joseph's brothers have come!" Pharaoh was very happy to hear this and so were his officials. 17 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers to load their pack animals and return quickly to their homes in Canaan. 18 Tell them to bring your father and all of their families, and to come here to Egypt to live. Tell them, 'Pharaoh will assign to you the very best territory in the land of Egypt. You will live off the fat of the land!' 19 And tell your brothers to take wagons from Egypt to carry their wives and little ones and to bring

yourselves with your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’ “ 21 Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. 22 To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred *pieces of silver* and five changes of garments. 23 To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey. 24 So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, “Do not quarrel on the journey.”

20 Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’ “ 21 The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. 22 To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. 23 To his father he sent the following: 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. 24 Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, “Do not quarrel along the way.”

your father here. 20 Don't worry about your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.” 21 So the sons of Jacob did as they were told. Joseph gave them wagons, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he supplied them with provisions for the journey. 22 And he gave each of them new clothes – but to Benjamin he gave five changes of clothes and three hundred pieces of silver! 23 He sent his father ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten donkeys loaded with grain and all kinds of other food to be eaten on his journey. 24 So he sent his brothers off, and as they left, he called after them, “Don't quarrel along the way!”

**Comments:**

This pericope divides into two sections: vv. 16-20 and vv. 21-24. The first part describes the reaction of the Egyptian pharaoh to the news about Joseph being reunited with his brothers. He reacted with almost the same level of joy and excitement that Joseph had. His instructions to Joseph echo those that Joseph had already given to his brothers about moving to Egypt. He enthusiastically endorsed the idea of Joseph moving his larger family to Egypt, and promised the best land in Egypt for them. Joseph had already indicated that the land would be that of Goshen in the northeastern part of Egypt, which was some of the most fertile cropland in the entire country.

The second part, vv. 21-24, then records the response of Joseph to these instructions. He carried out what the pharaoh had commanded. Extravagantly generous gifts were given to the brothers, and special gifts were sent to Jacob. Of particular mention is that of a set of garments for each brother. The ‘coat of many colors’ given to the boy Joseph had led to this detour in Egypt in the beginning. Now the little brother was giving top of the line clothes back to his brothers. This was a tangible sign of their reconciliation. Also highlighted in these verses is the extra generosity toward Joseph’s brother Benjamin. Finally, at the very end comes the paternal admonition from ‘little brother’ to these brothers: “Don't quarrel along the way!” He evidently realized that his generosity could led to jealousy among the brothers.

When good things happen to us in life, they become more enjoyable when others share in our joy and good fortune. Many centuries later the apostle Paul would admonish Christians with a similar principle (Rom. 12:15, NRSV): “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” Thus the pharaoh sets a positive example even for us as Christians to follow. In the hundred plus weddings that I’ve conducted over the past forty years I have typically used a proverb from an unknown source that says, “When a couple shares a sorrow it is halved, but when they share a joy it is doubled.” All of these point us to reacting to the good fortune of others with joy and excitement.

**d. Good news for Jacob, vv. 25-28**

**Comments:**

**NASB**

25 Then they went up from Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. 26

**NRSV**

25 So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 26

**NLT**

25 So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 26

They told him, saying, “Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” But he was stunned, for he did not believe them. 27 When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28 Then Israel said, “It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

And they told him, “Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt.” He was stunned; he could not believe them. 27 But when they told him all the words of Joseph that 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. 28 Israel said, “Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die.”

And they told him, “Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt.” He was stunned; he could not believe them. 27 But when they told him all the words of Joseph that 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. 28 Israel said, “Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die.”

What a homecoming these brothers had when they arrived back at their father’s home in Canaan. The old man Jacob could hardly believe his ears with the news that his beloved Joseph was still alive. All of the gifts sent by Joseph served as verification that these brothers weren’t making up another lie about Joseph, as they had done years before. Jacob found new reason to live and then became determined to travel to Egypt to see his beloved son.

This is reminiscent of a story that Jesus would tell many centuries later about a lost son who returned home. The father said in the story of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:24, NRSV): “for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!”

The bitter sorrow of Jacob described in [37:31-35](#) has come full circle and is now turned into joy. Years before Jacob had declared (37:35, NRSV), “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Although he lived for years mourning the loss of Joseph, God did not permit him to realize his pessimistic declaration. Instead, that sorrow was turned in excitement and joy. Jacob would live out the remainder of his life with his family reunited and together. Fewer blessings are greater to a father!