

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: February 24, 2019
Lesson Title: "Reunited"
Lesson Passage: Gen. 45:1-15

ABOUT THIS LESSON

When Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to seek food, Joseph reveals his identity to them. Then he makes arrangements for them to move the whole family of his father, Jacob, to Egypt. The pivotal truth in this lesson is that the hand of God is working in all of this, to carry out His divine purpose.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain why Joseph's brothers had not previously recognized him, though he immediately knew them. (2) Explain how God's purpose was carried forward by the events in the story of Joseph and his family.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Observe that God sometimes uses the "detours" in our lives to carry out His purpose. Refer to a biblical example in Acts 16:7-10. (Paul was eager to preach the gospel in Bithynia; but God blocked his way. Instead, he was instructed to go into Macedonia.) A *CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE*: A seminary student was looking forward to service on a mission field after his graduation, but was disappointed when the mission board cancelled the position for which he had been approved. But he was invited to join the seminary faculty and for the next 27 years he helped numerous students prepare for missionary service. Relate this to the lesson: In our Bible passage, we will see how God used the detours in Joseph's life (slavery and imprisonment) to carry out His divine purpose.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. As a prelude to the scenario in Gen. 45, review Gen. 42:6-8: Note that "Joseph knew his brothers, but they did not know him" (verse 8). EXPLANATION: (1) Since he was only 17 when they had last seen him, Joseph would have matured physically; but his brothers were already mature men when he was carried into Egypt, and they would not have changed in appearance all that much. (2) Joseph spoke to them through an interpreter (42:23), giving the impression that he did not understand their language. (3) The trappings of power and wealth surrounding Joseph made it difficult for them to imagine their brother in such a situation.

2. Comment on the following excerpt from the RSV translation of Gen. 45:1-2: "Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood before him...And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard

it." Pose this question: "How could this powerful ruler, who had previously been the essence of dignity and stateliness, suddenly become so emotional? Suggest this explanation: Judah's speech, recorded in Gen. 44:18-34, was the turning point. The picture of their aging father, hounded by anxieties, dying with grief at the loss of a second son (44:31), must have been upsetting. And Judah's offer to become Joseph's slave in order to win the freedom of Benjamin (44:33) seems to have convinced Joseph that his brothers had truly changed.

3. *Explain why Joseph sent all the Egyptians out of the room (Gen. 45:1), before he revealed his identity to his brothers*: This was not because he did not want them to see him weep (He "wept aloud," and the "Egyptians heard"), but because this was a private family affair. Joseph had plans for his kinsmen (45:9-10) that, for the moment, concerned only him and his family. He did not want this "report to be heard in Pharaoh's house" (v. 16) prematurely.

4. *Stress the significance of Joseph's words in 45:5*: (1) Obviously, this was intended to relieve the brothers' sense of guilt and regret prompted by the memory of their brutal treatment of Joseph years earlier ("do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here"). (2) However, the theological significance of Joseph's revelation was even more important. It was really God who had caused Joseph to be taken to Egypt, and who had elevated him to his present position of power, for the express purpose of preserving Jacob's family. "God sent me before you to preserve life" means that this assured the continuity of Abraham's lineage, heirs of the covenant promise (Gen. 12:2-3).

5. *The terms "remnant" and "survivor" in Gen. 45:7 echo a theme that appears throughout the book of Genesis*. For example, in the story of the Flood, Noah is rescued by divine providence from the worldwide catastrophe and is made the father of a new humanity. And the saving activity of God was demonstrated by His rescue of Lot from the devastation of Sodom. Similarly, in Gen. 45:5-8 Joseph assures his brothers that, out of the darkness of cruel circumstances, God has once again preserved a remnant of His people.

6. *Observe that the rest of the Bible passage (Gen. 45:9-15) describes Joseph's for bringing his family to Egypt, where he will see to it that they are well cared for*.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Invite class members to tell about harsh experiences in their own lives in which God seems to have been working out His gracious purpose. (For example, in one Sunday School class, a young mother said, "When our son, Jamie, was born with Down's Syndrome, we were devastated. But for the past six years Jamie has been an unspeakable blessing in our family, for he has taught us more about the meaning of love than we ever could have imagined.")