

GENESIS

RockPointe Church Small Groups

Patriarchs of Scripture • Joseph: The Providence of God • Genesis 47–48 • Fall 2018

Main Point

God is faithful to His children, which means He can be trusted to keep His promises.

Background

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/VideoElement/182904>

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/illustration/98221>

Note: Requires Access to Right Now Media; if you have issues with accessing the link, copy and paste directly in your browser

Introduction

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

Faithfulness is “the quality of being true, trustworthy, and reliable in all one’s dealings with others.” Is this a quality our culture seems to value? Think of some recent examples to support your answer.

Have you ever been disappointed in God because the circumstances you faced were not what you expected? What did you think about Him during that time? How did it affect your faith in Him?

Throughout Scripture, we read about how God is faithful. God’s faithfulness relates to His trustworthiness and commitment to His children and the promises He has made them. This trait of God is on display fully in the story of Joseph. Because God is faithful to us, we are to be faithful to Him. True faithfulness, produced in us by the Holy Spirit, is a perseverance with God through the seasons of life, no matter what they bring.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read Genesis 47:1-12.

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.

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?

What are the main comments that Jacob made as he addressed Pharaoh?

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.

In what ways did the arrival of Jacob and his family in Egypt fulfill previous promises God had made? Read Genesis 46:3 for reference.

With Jacob's entire family moving to and settling in Egypt, God was advancing His redemptive purpose and fulfilling His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Pharaoh's welcome and allotment of choice land was in fulfillment of God's promise to make of him a great nation (Gen. 46:3). Through this nation, the Lord God one day would raise up the Messiah—our Lord Jesus Christ.

What keeps you from experiencing God's fulfillment of His promises in your life?

| Have a volunteer read Genesis 47:13-27.

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.

How severe were the next years of this famine? To what do the people finally resort?

What do we learn about Joseph from his leadership during this time?

Of the three things the people relinquished to Pharaoh—money, property, and independence—which would be the easiest for you to give up? Which would be the hardest?

With which are you struggling the most to give over to God today?

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.

Have you recently experienced discouraging or difficult times? What difference has the reality of God's faithfulness made in the way you faced this challenge?

| Have a couple of volunteers read Genesis 47:28–48:22.

In Genesis 47:28, we read that Jacob was nearing the end of his life. Jacob repeated to Joseph God's promises about creating a great nation from their family. In order to guarantee Joseph's sons an inheritance in God's future provision, he "adopted" them as his own sons. In the same way, we can choose to make adjustments in

our lives to accommodate God's plans for us and our children.

Reflect back on the many times God repeated His promises to Jacob. In what way do we “pass down” promises from God to our children? What can we do to keep our hope in those promises alive, even if they do not come true in our lifetimes?

How do God's promises motivate you? How do they spur you on?

We can find strength and assurance in the reality that God always keeps His promises. If we are tempted to stray from the Lord or to abandon the faith, all we have to do is recall how faithful He has been to us over the years. Some of life's most satisfying moments come when we rest in the assurance that our God, who has been faithful to us all through our lives, is faithful still. His faithfulness inspires us to be faithful to Him, even when we are tempted to stray.

Why is faithfulness such a crucial attribute for God to have?

How can reflecting on God's promises in the past help you remain faithful to God in the present?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How does Jesus' life serve as a reminder to us of God's faithfulness?

How has the Lord shown you His faithfulness this week? How have you shown your love, gratitude, and submission to Him in response?

This week, how can we use our personal experiences with God's faithfulness to encourage those currently facing hardship?

Pray

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.

Commentary

| GENESIS 47

47:1-6. True to his word, Joseph met with Pharaoh. Joseph then presented only five of his brothers, possibly to prevent the Egyptian leader from thinking the clan would present a numerical threat to the land. As expected, Pharaoh asked Joseph's brothers what their occupation was, probably wanting to make sure the immigrants could make a contribution to Egyptian society without posing a threat. When he learned that they were shepherds who wanted to settle in the land of Goshen—far away from the centers of Egyptian

civilization in Joseph's day—he was pleased. Pharaoh decreed to Joseph that the clan of Jacob was to settle in the land of Goshen, the best part of the land. Seeking to use the immigrants' talents for Egypt's benefit, Pharaoh requested that the most capable men among them care for Pharaoh's own livestock.

47:7-10. The climax of the family's visit to the royal courts of Egypt was the introduction of the clan patriarch to the most powerful man in the world, as Joseph presented Jacob before Pharaoh. Jacob's initial (v. 7) and concluding (v. 10) blessings of Pharaoh fulfilled earlier prophecies (28:14; cp. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). In the brief ceremonial meeting, Pharaoh asked Jacob one question: How many years have you lived? Jacob's response of 130 years marks him as one of the oldest men in post-flood history. He would live to age 147 (v. 28), but was surpassed by the years of his father's Abraham (175 years; 25:7) and Isaac (180 years; 35:28).

47:11-12. The land of "Rameses" is an alternate name for the land of "Goshen," and may be the result of a later scribe updating the place names, since the city named Pi-Ramesses (modern Qantir, 65 miles northeast of Cairo) served as Egypt's capital only from 1295-1065 B.C.—much later than the time of Jacob.

47:13-17. Just as the Lord had revealed to Joseph, the famine was so severe that neither Egypt nor Canaan could produce food. However, because of Joseph's wise planning, the people could still purchase the grain he had stored up. But as the famine progressed, the region's inhabitants spent all their money. Joseph therefore authorized a barter system to trade livestock for food.

47:18-22. Consistent with cultures throughout Asia and Africa at that time, the Egyptians asked their government to buy them as slaves once all their resources were exhausted. Slavery was a universal practice in the region, and even impoverished Israelites were permitted to sell themselves as slaves during the Old Testament period (Lev. 25:39-43). Such slavery was often temporary and could be terminated when the debt was paid (Deut. 15:12).

Joseph accepted their offer. Members of the Egyptian priesthood were exempted from the land contract since the land was given to them by Pharaoh. The Hebrew text suggests that Joseph took the additional step of relocating people to the cities during the famine; if the Hebrew text represents the accurate reading, perhaps Joseph adopted this policy in order to make the food distribution program more efficient.

47:23-26. Though the citizens gave up ownership of their land, Joseph permitted them to continue working their old fields. The requirement to give a fifth of their produce to Pharaoh was far less than the two-thirds to one-half rate that eighteenth-century B.C. Iraqi farmers paid Hammurabi after expenses. Egypt's citizens gratefully accepted Joseph's program. Joseph's policies produced such a stable society that they remained in effect in the days of the biblical writer hundreds of years later.

47:27. While the Egyptians were losing their possessions, land, and freedom because of the famine, the clan of Israel/Jacob prospered. The contrast at this point between Egypt and Israel could hardly be more complete, though the situation would be reversed later (Ex 1:8-11).

47:28-31. As Jacob's death approached, he called for his son Joseph (cp. 46:4) and made him swear a solemn oath while his hand was under Jacob's thigh—an act that expressed great trust, and accompanied only the most serious requests (cp. 24:2-4). Jacob asked that his son not bury him in Egypt, but rather, that he be buried in the promised land with his fathers in their burial place near Hebron in the cave at Machpelah (23:19; 25:9; 35:27-29; 50:13).

| Genesis 48

48:1-7. Joseph, accompanied by his two eldest sons, visited Jacob again. Summoning his strength on this last day of his life, Jacob sat up in bed and spoke with Joseph of how God Almighty (El Shaddai) gave a second revelation to him at Bethel, more than 50 years earlier (35:9-12). Recounting God's promise to make him fruitful and numerous, Jacob now became even more fruitful by adopting Manasseh and Ephraim, counting them as his primary heirs (1 Chr. 5:1). Ephraim and Manasseh would receive the blessings of the first- and second-born, instead of Reuben and Simeon, who had previously dishonored Jacob (Gen. 34:25-30).

Any other sons born to Joseph would be recorded under the names of their older brothers, and their inheritance would be split with the sons of Ephraim and Manasseh. All of Jacob's descendants would receive the land of Canaan as an eternal possession. The mention of Rachel references the events associated with Benjamin's birth (35:16-20).

48:9-12. Jacob used his last measure of strength to bless his sons, beginning with the two newly adopted ones. Before blessing them, Jacob kissed and embraced them (cp. 27:26-27). Though his eyesight was poor because of old age (cp. 27:1), God let him see once more, not only Joseph, but also his offspring.

48:13-16. Joseph presented Ephraim (at his right-hand side) and Manasseh (at his left hand side) to Jacob in hopes that Jacob would reach out with his right hand and confer the greater blessing to the elder son, Manasseh, who was standing to Joseph's left. But Jacob crossed his arms and put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the younger, thus symbolically conferring the greater blessing on him. Jacob then blessed Joseph, but because his two hands were on Joseph's sons, it was they who received the blessing. Calling on the God of his father's Abraham and Isaac, who had been his shepherd (cp. Ps. 23:1; 80:1; Ezek. 34:11-12; John 10:11) all his life, Jacob's requests on behalf of Ephraim and Manasseh included that they would be called by the names of Jacob, Abraham, and Isaac—that is, that they would identify with God's covenant people, rather than with Egyptian culture and religion.

48:17-20. Frustrated because it seemed that his blind father had made a mistake, Joseph took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head. Emboldened by prophetic insight, however, Jacob refused to move his hands, because by God's own hand, Ephraim's blessings were ordained to exceed Manasseh's. Manasseh would become a tribe, but his younger brother Ephraim would become something more—a populous nation. Even so, both would be blessed so richly that in the future Israel would invoke blessings by asking God to make someone like Ephraim and Manasseh. The placement of Ephraim's name before Manasseh's

foreshadowed his later superiority. Because of Ephraim's leading position in later Israelite history, prophets often referred to the entire northern kingdom of Israel as "Ephraim" (Isa. 7:5; Jer. 31:20; Ezek. 37:16; Hos. 5:13; Zech 10:7).

48:21-22. Jacob promised Joseph that God would be with him (39:2,21,23) and would bring him back to the land of his fathers—i.e. to Canaan (50:25; Ex. 13:19; Jos. 24:32; Acts 7:14-16).