

Commentary on Genesis 50:15-26

International Bible Lessons

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The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, January 22, 2012**, is from **Genesis 50:15-26**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse by verse **[International Bible Lesson Commentary](#)** below. The **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, which are also available on the **[Bible Lesson Forum](#)**, will aid teachers in class preparation and in conducting class discussion. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive **[International Bible Lessons Commentary Index](#)**. The weekly **[International Bible Lesson](#)** is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at **<http://InternationalBibleLessons.org>** and in **[The Oklahoman](#)** newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Genesis 50:15-26

(Genesis 50:15) Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?"

Eventually, Jacob died and Joseph's brothers still felt fear and guilt for their mistreatment of Joseph. In spite of Joseph's previous assurances, they feared he still might punish them for selling him into slavery. As second-in-command to Pharaoh, Joseph could easily imprison them or even execute them for what they had done. It is often difficult for people to accept the fact that God or someone else has truly forgiven them and will not punish them or hold resentment against them.

(Genesis 50:16) So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died,

It appears Joseph's brothers must have finally confessed to Jacob how they had sold Joseph into slavery and had lied about it to their father, making him suffer for years until Joseph reappeared in Egypt. Or, Joseph may have explained everything to Jacob. Joseph's brothers knew they had done wrong, a wrong so grievous that they knew they deserved punishment and they wanted to escape it. Knowing human nature and their own spiritual condition to a certain extent, they could not believe that Joseph could forgive them as easily as it appeared to them. Therefore, they turned to telling a lie once again.

(Genesis 50:17) 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore

please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

Here again, we learn that Joseph’s brothers knew that they had committed a crime against Joseph, or perhaps Jacob had told them that what they had done had been a crime, a breaking of the law of both God and man, that deserved punishment. Perhaps if they had received just punishment immediately from Joseph, instead of forgiveness, their crime would not have remained on their guilty conscience and they would not have feared future punishment. Now, through a lie, they seek Joseph’s assurance of forgiveness once again. Perhaps because they were telling a falsehood, they could not call themselves “the servants of our God,” but instead called themselves, “the servants of the God of your father (Jacob).” We might wonder why Joseph wept when he heard them, perhaps he wept from recalling the memory of his recently deceased father and the reconciliation with his brothers years earlier.

(Genesis 50:18) Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, “We are here as your slaves.”

In this verse, we see the dreams of Joseph fulfilled once again explicitly. They had sold him into slavery, and now they were willing to become his slaves. Joseph’s dreams were not his aspirations to be a great success above his brothers and rule over them, but a revelation from God about His future for Joseph. When Joseph told his dreams to his brothers and father (beginning when he was about 17), his dreams probably appeared to his brothers as the aspirations of a son their father favored above them, not as divine prophecies, so they hated him and could not speak kindly to him (Genesis 37).

(Genesis 50:19) But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God?”

Joseph stood in the place of Pharaoh above his brothers, but he remained humble and refused to stand in the place of God over them and met out any punishment upon them—no matter how much everyone knew they deserved to be punished. Joseph would not pass judgment upon them as God might. Joseph refused to take the place of the King of the universe over his brothers. Joseph chose to leave their punishment to God (if God chose to punish them); however, they had repented of the evil they had done to him, and hopefully they had asked God to forgive them too.

(Genesis 50:20) Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.

From his early dreams, the dreams he had told his brothers, Joseph could look back with hindsight and see how God intended to bring him to Egypt to save the lives of numerous people. He also knew and acknowledged before his brothers

that they had intended to do him harm; yet, he forgave them (he had forgiven them years earlier; see Genesis 45:5, 7). In a similar way, God intended for Jesus to die on the cross to save a far more numerous people over centuries of time, but those involved in Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion intended to do Jesus harm. Even though their intentions were evil, Joseph forgave his brothers, and Jesus looked down from the cross and said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing (Luke 23:34). God can bring good out of the evil intentions and actions of others (see Romans 8:28).

(Genesis 50:21) So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Not only did Joseph forgive his brothers and speak kindly to them, but he also planned to do them positive good and care for them (a sign of his spiritual maturity). In a similar way, when Jesus Christ forgives repentant sinners who trust in His forgiveness, He also gives them the gift of eternal life, the power to live a holy life, and hears their prayers. Joseph literally did good to those who had persecuted him, and he blessed them, exactly as Jesus has taught us to do (see Matthew 5:9-12). Perfect love casts out fear, and Joseph's love for his brothers cast their fears of him out of their minds (see 1 John 4:18). In this same way, the perfect love of God for us (that He has expressed for us so dramatically in the gift of His Son) casts out our fears of God.

(Genesis 50:22) So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived one hundred ten years.

Even after the years of plenty and famine had ended, Joseph and his brothers remained in Egypt rather than return to Canaan. If God had led Joseph to return after the famine, they would have obediently returned. Instead, Joseph continued to rule over the land (having successfully taken Egypt through the famine) and his family lived in a privileged position (perhaps with his children and grandchildren taking some leadership positions in the Egyptian government—we do not know).

(Genesis 50:23) Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were also born on Joseph's knees.

Ephraim was Joseph's second born son; however, he received the blessing of the first born son from Jacob (who also was a second born son, but who received the firstborn blessing of his father, Isaac—though Jacob deceived Isaac, Jacob was not deceived when he blessed Ephraim). Jacob adopted Ephraim and Manasseh into his family (see Genesis 41:52 and Genesis 48:14-20). Though there was never a tribe of Joseph, there were tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Joshua, who led the Hebrews into the Promised Land, was of the tribe of Ephraim.

(Genesis 50:24) Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

As far as we know, Joseph did not live as long as his brothers. He reigned in Egypt as long as he lived, for he received the royal privilege of being embalmed. Joseph foretold the future once again, but he did not give them a timeline; however, God had told Abraham, “Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years” (Genesis 15:13). By keeping the Hebrews in Egypt and out of Canaan for this long, they would not be corrupted by those in Canaan who became increasingly evil: “And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16). At that time, a generation was about one hundred years.

(Genesis 50:25) So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, “When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here.”

Joseph knew for a fact that God would fulfill His promises to Abraham (see above), and to Isaac and Jacob. God would give them the Promised Land according to His perfect timing. Joseph wanted his bones buried in the Promised Land, as he had buried Jacob in the Promised Land, but only after the Hebrews left Egypt to possess the land of God’s promise. They were not to take him back as they had taken Jacob (see Genesis 50:1-12). His bones (in a coffin and probably in a prominent place because of his high position in Pharaoh’s court) would serve as a visual reminder to succeeding generations of God’s promise and Joseph’s request. Moses did exactly as Joseph requested (see Exodus 13:19).

(Genesis 50:26) And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

According to the practices of the Egyptians, Jacob and Joseph were both embalmed (as was the custom for royalty); otherwise, people are buried very quickly following their death. Embalming made it possible to transport Jacob to the Promised Land during Joseph’s lifetime, and embalming made it possible to transport Joseph more than 400 years later. Today, Egyptian mummies show the long lasting effects of their embalming techniques. As was the custom for Hebrews, Jesus Christ was not embalmed before they laid Him in the tomb; yet His body did not decay (see Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:27).

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What are some of the things Joseph said and did to assure his brothers that he had forgiven them? What are some of the things God has said and done to assure those who believe in Him that He wants to forgive them for their sins? Why is assurance of forgiveness by God and others usually important to us?
2. What did Joseph's brothers say to him that indicated their repentance was sincere?
3. Instead of just ignoring what his brothers had done, why do you think it was important for Joseph to tell his brothers that he knew they had intended to do him harm?
4. What can or should someone do when they know in advance that someone intends to harm them? What can or should someone do after they have been harmed by someone who intended to harm them? Are there any lessons from the way Joseph handled his situations that help you in your answers?
5. Do you think God intends everything for good that others intend for evil? Why or why not? How does your understanding of God's intentions influence the way you face the future? Compare what Joseph said to his brothers about God's intentions with what Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

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