

# The Pentateuch

Lesson 10

Joseph and His Brothers

Lesson Guide



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## HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or manuscript versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

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- **Before you watch the lesson**
  - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
  - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
  - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
  - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
  - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
  - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
  - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

## Notes

### I. Introduction (0:20)

The story of Joseph and his brothers taught the tribes of Israel how to live together in harmony as they faced the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land.

### II. Structure and Content (2:58)

Five major divisions of the account of Joseph and his brothers:

- Patriarchal Disharmony (37:2-36)
- Joseph's Threatening Rule (38:1–41:57)
- Reconciliation and Reunion (42:1–47:12)
- Joseph's Benevolent Rule (47:13-27)
- Patriarchal Harmony (47:28–50:26)

The record of Joseph and his brothers can be viewed as a large-scale chiasm.

Chiasm: A literary structure in which sections before and after a centerpiece parallel or balance each other.

Chiastic structure of Joseph's story:

- The first and fifth divisions describe the relationship between the patriarchs.
- The second and fourth divisions focus on Joseph's rule in Egypt.
- The third division is the turning point from disharmony to harmony.

#### **A. Patriarchal Disharmony (6:50)**

##### **1. Joseph Agitated Brothers (7:04)**

Joseph was favored by his father and his brothers were jealous of him.

Joseph boasted to his brothers about his dreams of future exaltation over his family.

##### **2. Brothers Sold Joseph (10:00)**

Joseph's brothers planned to kill him, but Judah convinced them to sell him into slavery instead.

The brothers deceived Jacob, saying that Joseph had been devoured by a wild animal.

**B. Joseph's Threatening Rule (11:10)**

Unknown to the other characters, Joseph's rule in Egypt was increasing.

**1. Judah's Sin in Canaan (12:00)**

Judah moved to center stage in this chapter.

- Birth reports of Judah's sons
- Judah's sons and Tamar

Judah refused to honor the command of levirate marriage (marriage by the brother-in-law of a childless widow).

Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and seduced Judah.

Judah repented and admitted that his sin was worse than Tamar's (Genesis 38:26).

**2. Joseph's Success in Egypt (15:13)****a. From Potiphar's House to Prison, 40:1–41:45**

Joseph received favor from Potiphar and ruled over his household.

Potiphar sent Joseph to prison after Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of misconduct.

This episode contrasts Judah's earlier immorality with Joseph's moral purity.

**b. From Prison to Pharaoh's Court, 41:46-57**

Joseph rose to power by interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh and his officials.

**c. Rule in Pharaoh's Court, 41:46-57**

Joseph rose to power, not by his own ingenuity, but by the hand of God.

**C. Reconciliation and Reunion (18:07)**

**1. First Journey (18:28)**

- Brothers' travel to Egypt, 42:1-5

Because of the famine, all of Joseph's brothers, except Benjamin, traveled to Egypt to purchase food.

- Events in Egypt, 42:6-28

Joseph recognized his brothers and tested their character.



Joseph sent all but Simeon back to retrieve Benjamin.

The brothers were afraid when they discovered the silver Joseph had put in their bags.

- brothers' return to Canaan, 42:29-38

Jacob refused to send Benjamin to Egypt to gain Simeon's release.

## 2. **Second Journey (20:33)**

- Brothers' travel to Egypt, 43:1-14

Jacob finally agreed to send Benjamin to Egypt with his brothers.

- Events in Egypt, 43:15-45:24

Joseph welcomed his brothers to a great feast but kept his identity a secret.

Joseph further tested his brothers by placing a silver cup in Benjamin's sack.

Judah offered to stay in Egypt in the place of Benjamin.

Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers.

This scene closes with Joseph kissing and talking with his brothers.

- Brothers' return to Canaan, 45:16-24

The brothers reported to Jacob all that happened in Egypt, and he agreed to return to Egypt with them.

### **3. Third Journey (25:21)**

- Brothers' travel to Egypt, 46:1-27

Jacob traveled to Egypt with his sons.

- Events in Egypt, 46:28-47:12

Jacob reunited with Joseph and settled his family in Goshen.

**D. Joseph's Benevolent Rule (26:33)**

Joseph saved countless lives in Egypt because of his wise rule.

Joseph's rule benefitted Jacob and his sons (Genesis 47:27).

**E. Patriarchal Harmony (27:34)****1. Jacob's Familial Arrangements (28:13)**

- Oath from Joseph

Jacob required Joseph's oath to bury him in Canaan.

- Joseph and sons

Jacob treated Joseph's sons as equal to their uncles.

Jacob gave Ephraim, the second born, prominence over Manasseh, the firstborn.

- All Jacob's sons

After exalting Joseph and his sons privately, Jacob blessed all of his sons.

- Jacob's death and burial

Joseph fulfilled his father's wishes to be buried in Canaan.

## 2. Joseph's Familial Arrangements (30:16)

- Reassurance of kindness

Joseph forgave his brothers (Genesis 50:19-21).

- Oath from brothers

Joseph made his brothers swear to bury him in the Promised Land (Genesis 50:25).

## III. Major Themes (34:11)

### A. Shared Emphases (35:00)

#### 1. God's Grace to Israel (35:27)

The theme of God's grace runs throughout Joseph's story.

- "That world"

God's past, ongoing and future grace was a continuous theme in Joseph's story.

- "Their world"

Moses wanted his original Israelite audience to reflect on the ways God had shown them grace.

- "Our world"

We can apply the theme of God's grace in terms of the three stages of Christ's kingdom:

- Inauguration

God's past grace was displayed to us in Christ's first advent.

- Continuation

God's ongoing grace to Joseph reminds us of his ongoing grace in our lives as well.

- Consummation

We await God's future grace in the new heavens and new earth.

## 2. **Israel's Loyalty to God (37:38)**

- That world"

Moses never cited verbal commands from God in the Joseph narrative.

- "Their world"

Moses expected his audience to evaluate Joseph's loyalty to God in light of the law they'd received.

For example:

- The brothers' plan to kill Joseph broke the sixth commandment against murder.
- The brothers broke the commandment to honor their father and mother when they deceived Jacob.
- When Judah slept with Tamar, he violated commandments against sexual immorality.
- Joseph conformed to the seventh and tenth commandments by resisting Potiphar's wife.
- Later on, Joseph and his brothers honored their father in accordance with the fifth commandment.
- The brothers' repentance and humility before Joseph reflected laws like Leviticus 5:5.
- Joseph's kindness and mercy toward his brothers was true to passages like Leviticus 19:18.

- "Our world"

- Inauguration

We should compare and contrast these examples with Jesus' perfect obedience to God.

- Continuation

We should apply the moral principles in Joseph's story to our lives.

- Consummation

The requirement of loyalty in Joseph's story should draw our attention to the return of Christ.

### 3. God's Blessings to Israel (41:00)

- "That world"

God poured out his blessings sometimes in spite of disloyalty and, at other times, in response to loyalty.

- "Their world"

Moses made his original audience aware of the ways God had blessed them in spite of their disloyalty and in response to their loyalty.

- "Our world"

- Inauguration

God poured out his blessings in the inauguration of Christ's kingdom.

- Continuation

God continues to bless his people now.

- Consummation

We look forward to how God will bless us at the consummation of Christ's kingdom.

#### **4. God's Blessings through Israel (42:18)**

- "That world"

Joseph's rule in Egypt led to blessings for others (Genesis 41:56-57).

- "Their world"

God called Moses' audience to continue to spread his blessings throughout the world.

- "Our world"

- Inauguration

Christ blessed the world in his first coming.

- Continuation

God uses the church to extend his blessings now.



- Consummation

At Christ's return, God will bless every tribe and nation in the new creation.

## **B. Special Emphases (44:34)**

The interactions of the patriarchs in Joseph's story were directly connected to the interactions of the tribes of Israel in Moses' day (Genesis 50:24-25).

### **1. National Unity (46:15)**

Joseph's story departs from the typical pattern of "exclusive succession" (God's special favor passed down over time through one main figure or patriarch):

- Adam
- Seth
- Noah
- Shem
- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Joseph and his brothers ("inclusive succession")

This inclusive distribution of Jacob's inheritance to all of his sons called Moses' Israelite audience to national unity.

Moses' emphasis on unity among the twelve patriarchs in "that world" promoted national unity in "their world."

We must apply this principle of unity in "our world."

- Inauguration

Jesus established unity when he inaugurated his kingdom.

- Continuation

We must pursue unity in our world today (Ephesians 3:4-6).

- Consummation

We will enjoy perfect unity at the consummation of Christ's kingdom.

Joseph's story provides practical guidance as we devote ourselves to the unity of God's people throughout the world.

## 2. National Diversity (54:40)

The distribution of Jacob's inheritance established enduring differences among his sons and their descendants.

### a. Judah and Descendants

Moses moved Judah to center stage several times to confirm the prominence God had ordained for Judah:

- Judah successfully intervened on Joseph's behalf.
- Judah's immorality is contrasted with Joseph's integrity.
- Judah stepped forward in Joseph's presence and pled for mercy.
- Jacob declared that Judah's tribe would be exalted to an unrivaled position of leadership (Genesis 49:8-10).

Jacob's blessing to Judah is a clear reference to the Messiah of David's house.

Moses wrote to promote national unity in "their world" and to maintain this unity in light of Judah's prominence.

Judah's exaltation has many implications for "our world."

- Inauguration

Jesus fulfilled the promise of a supreme King from the tribe of Judah.

- Continuation

Jesus reigns throughout the continuation of his kingdom.

- Consummation

Jesus will reign forever over the new creation.

**b. Joseph and Descendants**

Joseph is highly idealized in Genesis 37–50.

Joseph...

- served Potiphar faithfully
- resisted Potiphar's wife
- was without flaw in his service to Pharaoh
- wisely tested his brothers when they came to him
- was tenderhearted toward his brothers even after the evil they had done to him
- showed love for his father and for Benjamin
- blessed many nations as the leader of Egypt
- was "the prince among his brothers"

Jacob blessed Joseph's sons as if they were his own, so that Joseph received the double portion as Jacob's firstborn.

Jacob blessed Ephraim over Manasseh (Genesis 48:19).

Moses highlighted Ephraim in his account to validate his choice of Joshua as his successor.

Modern followers of Christ must acknowledge the diverse blessings and roles that God has ordained in our world.

- Inauguration

Jesus blessed his people with a variety of gifts.

- Continuation

The Holy Spirit still pours out gifts as he wishes.

- Consummation

We'll see diversity when God honors those who have followed Christ.

#### **IV. Conclusion (1:07:10)**



3. The reconciliation between the brothers developed over three highly dramatic journeys to Egypt by Joseph's brothers. List and describe the major events that occurred during each journey.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How did Joseph's benevolent rule in Egypt benefit the people of Egypt? How did it benefit his own family?





7. In his narrative of Joseph and his brothers, Moses included the special emphases of national unity and national diversity. How did Moses expect these themes to impact his original audience?

## Application Questions

1. Joseph suffered many injustices, yet he remained obedient to God and was eventually rewarded for his faithfulness. How might his example encourage you to stay faithful to God in the midst of difficult circumstances?
2. God gave Joseph and his brothers grace many times throughout this story, though sometimes it may not have seemed this way to them. How does this help you to recognize God's grace and benevolence in your own life, even in the midst of life's challenges?
3. Like Moses' original audience, those to whom we minister need to remain loyal to God in all circumstances. How can you effectively encourage those in your church or ministry to remain faithful to God when sometimes our culture seems to be growing more hostile to Christianity?
4. At his return, Christ will provide his people with eternal blessings, just as he has promised in his Word. How might this promise of future blessings encourage and strengthen you in your present circumstances?
5. Christians are not only granted blessings, but we are also called to extend God's blessings to others. What are some areas of need in the communities around you? What are some ways that you and your church might extend God's blessings to those both inside and outside the community of believers?
6. We are united to all believers in all cultures as one people in the body of Christ. How should this impact the way we perceive our brothers and sisters in Christ — especially those who seem to be very different from us? How can we maintain unity with them?
7. The Joseph stories teach us that God desires diversity among his people. How has God gifted you in ways that are distinct from the believers around you? What gifts has he given others that he has not given you? How might this diversity of gifts cause you to see your need of others?
8. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

## Glossary

**chiasm** – Literary structure in which sections before and after a centerpiece parallel or balance each other

**Ephraim** – Joseph’s second son who received the greater blessing over his brother Manasseh; Joshua’s ancestor

**Israel** – Hebrew word meaning "God struggles" or "God fights"; new name given to Jacob after he wrestled with the angel; also, the nation descended from Jacob

**Israelite** – A member of the nation of Israel

**Manasseh** – Joseph’s firstborn son

**Potiphar** – Egyptian officer who bought Joseph after he was sold into slavery; Potiphar’s wife unsuccessfully tried to seduce Joseph

**Tamar** – Widow of Judah’s sons who seduced Judah after he refused to allow her to marry his youngest son; mother of Perez and Zerah

**that world** – The world that biblical authors wrote about

**their world** – The world of Scripture’s original audience