

Study: The Joseph Story

Text: Genesis 45: Joseph Reveals His Identity (45:1–28)¹

I. Joseph Makes Himself Known (45:1–15)

A. Joseph Weeps for His Brothers (45:1–2)

1. What does v. 1 say that Joseph could no longer do?
 - a. The Hebrew verb is used only twice in Genesis, both of Joseph—here and Gen 43:31. Look up Gen 43:29–31 and review those verses.
 - b. What is similar between these two accounts?
 - c. Acc. to Gen 43:31, is Joseph able to control himself on that occasion? Acc. to 45:1, is he able to control himself now?
2. What does Joseph order to be done to those standing by (v. 1)? So who is present at Joseph's self-revelation to his brothers?
3. Even though the room is cleared, who does the text say could hear Joseph's weeping (v. 2)?

B. Joseph Comforts His Brothers (45:3–13)

1. Identifies Himself (45:3–4)
 - a. When Joseph reveals himself, he makes a statement and he asks a question. What are they (v. 3)?
 - b. What answer do the brothers give in v. 3? Why do they respond this way?

¹ The outline of the passage we are following basically follows the outline provided in K. A. Mathews, [*Genesis 11:27–50:26*](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 82.

c. If you were one of the brothers, would you feel dismayed or elated at this point? Why?

d. Understanding that the brothers are in shock and appear unable to respond, Joseph presses in (v. 4).

(1) What does he ask them to do?

(2) He repeats his statement from v. 3 (“I am Joseph”), but he adds two more descriptive expressions to tie himself to the men and their mutual past. What additional information is provided?

2. Interprets the Divine Purpose (45:5–8)

a. In vv. 4–5, 7 two significant verbs occur a total of four times between them (each occurs twice)—verbs that speak to intent.

(1) What are the two verbs?

(2) Who is the object of the verbs in all 4 occurrences?

(3) Who is the subject of the verbs in those occurrences?

b. In light of that survey of verbs, look at Gen 37:27–28. Do Joseph’s brothers in fact *sell him* into in bondage in Egypt? Do they intend to do so? Does Joseph know that they do, according to 45:4–7?

c. At the same time, Joseph sees and confesses that another intention is at work in the very same wicked activities of the brothers.

(1) Who does Joseph see acting through the brother’s selling him?

(2) What purposes does Joseph ascribe to him in vv. 5 and 7? Are these benevolent or malevolent purposes?

(3) In the Scriptures we have seen that our God is a God of providence. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines God's work of providence this way:
God's works of providence are, his most holy, (Ps. 145:17) wise, (Ps. 104:24, Isa. 28:29) and powerful preserving, (Heb. 1:3) and governing all his creatures, and all their actions. (Ps. 103:19, Matt. 10:29–31)

How do we see God governing and directing humans, even sinful humans, to his very wise and good purposes in the following passages?

Acts 2:23–24

Acts 4:24–28 (esp. 28)

John 19:10–11

d. In Gen 45:8 Joseph brings the matter of human and divine agency into sharpest focus.

(1) Who does Joseph say *sent him* here?

(2) Who does Joseph say *did not send him* here?

(3) Is Joseph contradicting himself (since in the prior verses we see him acknowledging the brothers' sinful role in this matter)? If someone were to come to you and suggest this is a contradiction, how would you respond in light of what we have learned above?

e. How does (or should) knowing these truths about God and your world (filled with sinful people!) help you process tragedy, disappointment, and suffering?

3. Instructs His Brothers (45:9–13)

a. In 45:9–13 Joseph gives his brothers some instructions. At the beginning and the end of these instructions is a single, dominating concern. Who is mentioned in vv. 9 and 13? What is to happen to him? When should it happen?

b. In 45:9, Joseph asks his brothers to reveal to Jacob that Joseph is alive and encourages them to use two titles to describe him. What are they? How would each title hit Jacob?

c. Similarly in v. 13 he tells the brothers to describe what?

d. These statements of Joseph's exalted position make possible the carrying out of the instructions for Jacob and his family.

(1) Where will they stay?

(2) Who all will come?

(3) For at least how long will they stay there? Why that timeframe?

C. Joseph Weeps with Benjamin (45:14–15)

1. What attitude does Joseph show toward Benjamin in v. 14? Why do you think he feels this way?

2. Given the brothers' sinful actions against Joseph, you might imagine that he would exhibit an altogether different disposition toward the other brothers.

a. What would have been a "reasonable" response to the brothers?

b. How does Joseph respond (v. 15)? Does this surprise you? What must Joseph understand in order to respond this way?

II. Jacob Hears About Joseph (45:16–28)

A. Joseph Receives Pharaoh's Instructions (45:16–20)

1. Who finds out about the presence of Joseph's brothers? Is he pleased or displeased about it (v. 16)?

2. Through the words of Pharaoh to Joseph we see God changing the fortunes of the covenant family living in want and famine in Canaan. Take note of the *richness* of Pharaoh's offers to Jacob and his family:

a. What is the quality of the land that Pharaoh offers to Jacob (v. 18a)?

b. What is the quality and quantity of the food that Pharaoh offers to Jacob (vv. 18b, 20)?

c. Who subsidizes the cost and means of moving the family to Egypt (v. 19)?

B. Joseph Provides for Jacob's Journey (45:21–24)

1. As the brothers prepare to head to Canaan, the text reports the lavish gifts that Joseph bestows on them for the journey.

a. At Pharaoh's behest, what two things does Joseph provide in v. 21?

b. Apparently out of his own good will, what does Joseph provide to all the brothers in v. 22? Remembering the significance of clothing (and the change of clothing), what does this gift tell you about Joseph's disposition toward the brothers? How does this contrast with the brother's removal of Joseph's clothing in Genesis 37?

c. Joseph lavishes even more gifts upon Benjamin—what (v. 22)?

d. How many donkey-loads of good does Joseph give to Jacob? For what purpose (v. 23)?

2. What final instruction does Joseph give the brothers upon their departure (v. 24)? Why do you think he says this?

C. The Brothers Inform Jacob (45:25–28)

1. When the brothers arrive in Canaan, what two “news headlines” top their report to Jacob (v. 26)?
2. How does Jacob initially respond in v. 27? Why? Is that a reasonable response?
3. What is it that changes Jacob’s incredulity into belief (v. 28)?
4. What does Jacob finally confess in v. 29? What does he resolve to do?

Mathews (p. 820):

His exclamation, “My son Joseph is still alive,” reverberates the brothers’ announcement (v. 26), indicating his full acceptance of their claims concerning Joseph. “My son” (*bēnî*) repeats his reference to Joseph for whom he wept: “In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son” (*bēnî*, 37:35; cf. 42:38). God benevolently grants the patriarch the opportunity to “see” his son in this lifetime! The poignancy of the moment recalls Abraham’s love for Isaac, “my son,” whom God also preserved (22:7–8, 12). Now he has no hesitation to take the long trek to Egypt, for he must see his boy. “I will go and see him” expresses his deep-seated desire to see Joseph for himself (cf. “must go,” NRSV, NJB, NAB).

D. Discussion questions:

1. What do you learn about humanity from this passage?
2. What do you learn about God from this passage?