



COGNWM Youth Bible Lesson – Lesson 5

A Family Becomes a Nation

We learned in earlier lessons of the promises of national greatness and wealth that God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants. In this lesson we will continue the story of Jacob's life and see how God was directing events that would lead to the fulfillment of these promises.

Recall that Jacob worked for his uncle Laban for over twenty years. An older man by now, Jacob learned to trust God to guide his whole life. As a blessing for his obedience, God greatly increased Jacob's wealth.

What did God now tell Jacob to do? (Gen. 31:3) _____

God wanted Jacob to return to the land of Canaan where his father and relatives lived. But twenty years had passed since Jacob had seen his brother Esau. He wondered how Esau would treat him upon his return. Would he try to punish Jacob for taking his birthright so many years before? Esau wanted to kill Jacob then!

Jacob sent messengers on ahead to where Esau lived. He instructed the messengers to tell Esau that his brother was returning to Canaan and hoped they could meet as friend. The messengers return with word that Esau was approaching, accompanied by four hundred of his men! Jacob quickly separated his family and possessions into two groups, hoping that one group would escape in case Esau and his men attacked. He also sent gifts for Esau on ahead of the caravan.

After Jacob had done all he could to prevent possible harm to his family, he turned to God in prayer and asked for His help and protection. Write Jacob's prayer, which is found in Genesis 32:9-12, on a separate sheet of paper. As you do this, notice Jacob's humble attitude toward God and he reminds God of His promises.

During the night before the brothers met, somebody suddenly seized Jacob and a wrestling match began. Neither one could overpower the other, and the wrestling continued throughout the night.

Sometime during the wrestling match, Jacob realized that his opponent was not just an ordinary man. Seeing that He could not prevail against Jacob, the Being struck Jacob's thigh and knocked his hip out of joint. But even while in pain, Jacob still continued the struggle.

Just before the break of day, Jacob's opponent told him to let Him go. But Jacob replied, "I will not release you unless you bless me." The Being to whom he made this request was actually the God of the Old Testament – the One who later came to earth as Jesus Christ (Gen. 32:28-30; Hosea 12:3-5).

Jacob proved during this night of wrestling that he was not a quitter. He showed that he was an overcomer – a prevailer with God. God was testing Jacob's character just as He had tested Abraham's when He commanded him to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering.

God was well pleased with Jacob and gave him a new name. His old name (Jacob) means "supplanter" – "one who takes the place of another unfairly." (Remember when Jacob unfairly took Esau's birthright?) God would not give the blessings of Abraham and Isaac to a man who had this kind of character flaw. However, Jacob proved to God that he was now an overcomer.

Jacob's new name, Israel, means "one who overcomes," or "a champion with God." Israel's character was now very different from the character of the Jacob who fled his homeland, after cheating his brother out of his birthright and blessings (Gen. 32:28-30).

God requires each of us to make this kind of change in our lives before He will give us eternal life as members of His Family. We must finally come to see how wrong our attitudes and actions have been. And then, with God's help, we must overcome wrong ways and habits and develop Godly character by obeying God's commandments just as Jacob did. We call this change "conversion."

Before the time comes when you are ready to become a baptized member of God's Church like your parents, you should be learning about God's law and His way of life. You can be building right character now by doing what you have been taught is right and not doing those things which are wrong in God's sight.

This won't always be easy and you won't be able to do it perfectly all the time. But by trying hard and asking God in prayer for His help, you can begin to build the habit of obedience to God and your parents.

The morning after the wrestling match. Esau and his army of men arrived at Jacob's camp. Rather than being angry and vengeful, Esau was overjoyed to see his brother.

Tears of happiness filled both men's eyes (Gen. 33:4). God answered Jacob's prayers! After meeting Jacob's wives and children, Esau returned to his home in the Mount Seir region.

Jacob continued his journey, eventually arriving in Bethel, where God reminded him that his name was changed from Jacob (supplanter) to Israel (overcomers). He also renewed with Jacob His promises of national greatness made to Abraham, Isaac and their descendants (Gen. 35:11-12).

Israel then traveled southward to Hebron where his father Isaac lived. On the way, Rachel gave birth to Israel's 12th son Benjamin, but she died during childbirth.

Isaac was now a very old man. Soon after Israel arrived in Hebron, Isaac died at the age of _____ (Gen. 35:27-29). Israel was now the patriarch of the family God had chosen to receive His special blessings.

Do You Remember?

- 1) Jacob wrestled all night with (Laban, Esau, Jesus Christ).
- 2) Jacob's name was changed to (Canaan, Ishmael, Isaac, Israel).
- 3) Jacob's new name means ("overcome," "supplanter," "savior").

Rachel's first son, Joseph, was born in Haran shortly before Israel started back to Canaan. Because he was the firstborn of Israel's chosen wife Rachel, and born in Israel's old age, Joseph was very special to his father. The special affection and attention his father continually gave him did not go unnoticed by his ten older half-brothers. They became very jealous of him and eventually came to hate him.

By the time Joseph was 17 years old he was already helping his brothers tend their father's flocks. One day Joseph told his brothers about a dream he had. "We were all in a field tying bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle arose and stood upright in the field while all your bundles stood around mine and bowed down before it," said Joseph. His brothers immediately thought they knew what this dream meant. "Shall you indeed rule over us? Are we going to be your servants?" they scornfully asked. Joseph's brothers hated him even more after hearing this dream (Gen. 37:2-8).

Joseph couldn't seem to do anything to make his brothers like him. When he said or did something, it usually turned against him. To them he was only a younger brother who dreamed of becoming an important person one day.

Joseph soon had another dream which he again unwisely related to his brothers. In this dream he saw the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing before him. When Israel heard

about the dream he rebuked Joseph. “Shall your mother and I and your brothers bow down before you” (Gen. 37:9-11)?

Joseph’s envious brothers plotted how they might be able to get rid of him. One day while tending their flocks several days’ journey from home, they suddenly grabbed Joseph, ripped off his coat, and dropped him alive into a nearby well.

A short time later, they noticed a caravan of Midianite traders moving by slowly on its way to Egypt. The brothers decided to pull Joseph out of the well and sell him to the Midianite traders for twenty pieces of silver.

When the brothers returned home, they deceived their father by leading him to believe that Joseph has been killed and eaten by a wild animal. Israel was heartbroken at the thought of losing his favorite son.

This was a very cruel and disrespectful way to treat an aging father. His sorrow was far greater than the sons expected. They tried to comfort him, but did not succeed. “I shall go down to the grave mourning for him” Israel said as he wept (Gen. 37:35).

Meanwhile, the Midianite caravan made its way southward into Egypt. The men had no difficulty selling the handsome Hebrew lad. Potiphar, captain of the guard for the king of Egypt, bought Joseph to be servant in his home.

You may wonder why God, who is aware of everything, was allowing these events to happen to Joseph. Actually, God was allowing all of this to fulfill a great purpose. In the end, as we shall see, Joseph and his father’s family would be greatly blessed by God. Even now, Joseph was being blessed. He was now away from his brothers who hated him. He was still alive, rather than dead in a well, and God was blessing his efforts, (Gen. 39:2). We can learn a very important lesson from this, a lesson we can apply in our own lives.

Write down verse 28 of Romans chapter 8 on the following lines. _____

In this verse is an important principle that Joseph was learning. We should learn it as well. If we seek to live the way God wants us to, He will make sure everything that happens to us will turn out for our good!

Sometimes it is difficult, or impossible, to see any good in events as they are happening. But later, when you look back on them, you can often see why God allowed them to occur. This happened many times in Joseph’s life.

Look up and write down verse 11 of Hebrews chapter 12_____

God often allows us to experience troubles and problems. They are usually a result of our own wrong actions. But God wants us to learn from these experiences. They never seem pleasant when they occur, and usually only later can their value be clearly seen. The most important thing they can teach us is the need to obey God's laws.

Potiphar quickly realized that he had made a wise choice when he brought his new servant. Because Joseph kept God's commandments. God was with him and gave him great favor in the sight of his master.

As a result of Joseph's honesty and hard work, Potiphar came to trust him completely. He soon put Joseph in charge of all the servants in his household and made him manager over all he owned. Because of God's blessings on Joseph, Potiphar and his household also prospered (Gen. 39:3-6).

All went well for Joseph for many years until his master's wife falsely accused him to trying to assault her. When Potiphar heard her accusations against Joseph, he became so angry that he ordered soldiers to take him at once to the king's prison. Some might think that this was another terrible tragedy for Joseph. But don't judge too quickly.

As time passed, Joseph continued to conduct himself honestly. The head jailer saw this and asked Joseph to help keep order in the prison. God was still watching over Joseph and blessing him for his honesty, hard work and obedience to Him. After some time, the head jailer put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners and made him responsible under him, for all matters inside the prison. Yet, Joseph was still a prisoner and continued to live in the dungeon.

Do You Remember?

Fill in the blank and circle the correct answers to the statements.

- 1) Joseph's dreams seemed to show that one day he would _____

- 2) Joseph's brothers got rid of him by (killing, deserting, selling, beating) him.
- 3) Joseph became a servant in (Canaan, Haran, Hebron, Egypt).

While Joseph managed the prison, he became acquainted with two prisoners who had served in the king's court. One was the king's butler; the other his baker. Both were thrown into prison when a plot against Pharaoh was discovered. Neither man was yet found guilty of having been a part of the plot.

One day Joseph noticed that both men appeared very troubled. When he asked them what was wrong, both told him that each had an unusual dream the night before. But they could not find anyone in the prison who could tell them what the dreams meant.

Joseph told them that only God can reveal the correct meaning of a dream. He then asked the men to tell him their dreams. Joseph would then ask God to reveal the true meanings.

As it turned out, the dreams had opposite meanings. Within three days the butler would be released from prison and restored to his former position. And at that time the baker would be hanged!

“When the right time comes,” Joseph said to the butler, “please tell Pharaoh that I am an innocent man who was unfairly put in prison. Perhaps he will free me also” (Gen. 40:13-15).

Three days later during a feast held by the king, Pharaoh sent word to the prison keeper to have the two men taken out of the dungeon. He then restored the butler to his former job and hanged the baker – just as God revealed through Joseph.

In his excitement as being freed, the chief butler forgot all about Joseph and his request. Two more years went by and Joseph was still a prisoner in the royal dungeon.

One night Pharaoh had two troubling dreams. In the first dream, he saw himself standing by the Nile River. Suddenly seven fat, healthy looking cows came up out of the river and began grazing in a nearby meadow. Then, seven thin, sickly cows came up out of the river. These skinny animals walked into the meadow and ate up the fat cows! But afterward, they looked just as thin as before.

In the second dream, Pharaoh saw seven plump heads of grain growing out of one stalk. Afterwards, seven thin withered heads of grain grew out of the same stalk and ate up the plump ones!

When morning came, the king sent for all his magicians and wise men. After telling them about the two dreams, Pharaoh asked them, “Which of you can tell me what they meant?” He waited impatiently for an answer, but no one spoke up.

It happened that the chief butler was serving the king when this took place. Suddenly he remembered his experience in the prison two years before. He told the king what happened and that Joseph correctly told him three days in advance what would become of the baker and himself.

Pharaoh immediately sent for Joseph. A short while later, after being cleaned up and properly dressed, Joseph stood before the powerful king of Egypt.

“I’ve heard that you have the power to tell the meanings of dreams,’ Pharaoh said to Joseph.

“I do not have the ability to do this of myself,” Joseph replied respectfully. “However, there is a God in heaven who can and will reveal the meaning of your dreams.” The king then described both his dreams in great detail.

“Both your dreams sir, have the same meaning,” Joseph began. “God has chosen to show Pharaoh what He is about to do. The seven fat cows and the seven plump heads of grain both picture a period of seven years. Also, the seven thin cows and the seven withered heads of grain are seven years following the first seven.

Here is what God will do. These will first come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. Then there will come seven years of terrible famine – famine so severe that the seven years of plenty⁶ will be totally forgotten” (Gen. 41: 1-31).

The king was so shocked by Joseph’s words that he sat speechless on his throne. ‘In view of these coming events,” Joseph continued, “let Pharaoh find a wise, honest, and capable man to set over the farm production of the land of Egypt during the seven years of plenty. Let him appoint officers throughout the land who will collect one-fifth of all the produce of the land during the years of plenty. Let them store this grain by the authority of the king so that it may be saved for the years of famine. In this way the nation will not perish.”

Can you imagine yourself in Joseph’s place at this time? You are a foreigner who has been in the royal dungeon for about three years. You are suddenly brought out of prison, cleaned up and dressed, and now you are standing before Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Would you have the courage and faith to tell this powerful ruler that seven years of plenty are coming, followed by seven years of terrible famine and drought? Would you then continue to instruct him on how to prepare for it? Joseph did! He knew God was faithful. He was certain God would do exactly what He revealed in the dreams!

After carefully considering the matter, and deciding that Joseph’s advice was good, Pharaoh asked his advisors, “Where can we find such a man as this to oversee our farming? What better man could there be but Joseph, in whom the Spirit of God dwells?” They agreed that Joseph should do the job.

Pharaoh then spoke to Joseph and said, “I have set you over all the land of Egypt. All my people shall be ruled according to your word. Only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you” (Gen. 41:39-41). So in one day, Joseph went from the dungeon to the second highest office in Egypt!

Joseph was only thirty years old at this time (v. 46). He worked for Potiphar about ten years and had been in prison about three years. During this time, God gave him the training and experience he needed to become a qualified leader and ruler of Egypt. He learned to be both a servant and a master.

God was carefully guiding Joseph’s life. He will also guide our lives if we allow Him. If we look to God and ask Him in prayer to lead and direct our ways, He will do so just as He did for Joseph.

Though we may not become great national leaders in this life, we will become even greater leaders in God’s government in the New World to come. But this depends upon our continual trust and obedience to God throughout our lives.

Joseph was given the Egyptian name Zaphnath-Paaneah, which means “The man to whom secrets are revealed.” He was also given Asenath, the daughter of a high official in Egypt, as his wife. They had two sons whom the named Manasseh and Ephraim.

Do You Remember?

- 1) How many years was Joseph in Prison? _____
- 2) Who revealed the meaning of Pharaoh’s dreams to Joseph? _____
- 3) Whom did Pharaoh choose to oversee preparations for the great famine in Egypt?

During the seven plenteous years, God blessed the Egyptian farmers with records crops. Under the direction of Joseph, one-fifth of these crops were stored in the cities throughout the land of Egypt. Because of the vast amount of food which was being stored, Joseph finally gave up trying to keep accurate records (Gen. 41:47-49).

When the seven years of famine began, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold food to all who came to buy it. This included people from other nations around Egypt, who were also affected by the famine. Among those who came to buy grain were Joseph’s’ brothers. They were sent to Egypt by their father Israel.

Joseph’s youthful dreams of his family bowing down before him were about to come true. His brothers made two trips to Egypt to buy food, each time appearing before their brother Joseph whom they did not recognize. After the second trip, Joseph no longer wanted to withhold his true identity from them. They were shocked

when he told them who he was, and then shed tears of joy during this happy reunion.

“Don’t blame yourselves for what you did to me many years ago,” Joseph told his brothers. “It was God who sent me here so that the lives of many people, including yours and your father’s, would be preserved during this famine.” He also told them that the worst of the famine was still ahead. “Two years of famine have passed, but five more years are yet to come,” He warned.

“It was God, who sent me here,” Joseph reminded them. “He has made me overseer of all of Pharaoh’s house and ruler, under him, over all of Egypt.” (Gen. 45:8). Joseph then instructed his brothers to return to Canaan and bring their father and all their families, flocks and possessions to the land of Goshen in northeastern Egypt where they would then live.

When Israel heard that Joseph was still alive and was ruler over all Egypt under Pharaoh, he fainted in surprise. It was difficult for Israel to believe what he was told until he saw the many wagons Joseph sent to carry the families and their belongings to Egypt. They soon packed up their belongings and after many days’ journey arrived in the land of Egypt (Gen. 46:27).

Israel lived a total of seventeen years in Egypt. During this time, his children’s families increased greatly in numbers. His descendants would later become the nation of Israel, and would be called Israelites.

Believing his life was about over, Israel sent for Joseph and his two young sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. When they arrived Israel reminded Joseph about God’s promise of national greatness and prosperity to him and his descendants (Gen. 48:1-4).

He then told Joseph that he was adopting his two sons. Manasseh and Ephraim, as his own. They would now be equal to his own twelve sons. They would be “as Ruben and Simeon” (v. 5). This meant that God would give them the greatest family blessing since Reuben and Simeon were Israel’s two oldest sons.

The two boys then approached their aged grandfather. Joseph arranged the boys so Manasseh (the oldest) would be under his grandfather’s right hand and Ephraim under his left, because the right hand blessing would be the greater. As Israel stretched out his hands to ask God’s blessing upon the two boys, he crossed his arms. This would give the birthright blessing to the younger brother, Ephraim.

Because Israel's eyesight was very dim, Joseph thought his father had confused the two boys. However, when he tried to correct what he thought was a mistake, Israel told Joseph he knew what he was doing. "Manasseh," he said, "shall become a great nation. But his younger brother shall be greater, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations' (Gen. 48:17-20).

Israel then called the rest of his sons together. "Gather around me and I will tell you what shall befall you in the latter days," he said. He described the kind of nations each of his twelve sons would become. The forty-ninth chapter of Genesis records the prophetic words God inspired Israel to speak. Read this chapter with your parents and discuss the meaning of the prophetic remarks Israel made about each of his sons.

The families of these twelve sons of Israel have become the most important nations on earth today. Many of them can be easily identified by the descriptions given in this chapter. The identity of these nations is one of the important keys to understanding Bible prophecy. If you and your parents would like to learn more about this fascinating subject – read our 13 articles "American and Britain" in prophecy.

After blessing his sons, Israel told them not to bury him in Egypt. "Bury me with my fathers in the cave near Mamre in the land of Canaan – the cave Abraham bought as a burial place for Sarah, and there Abraham, Isaac, and Rebekah, and Leah are buried."

Israel was 147 years old when he died. Joseph ordered his servants to embalm his father. After 70 days of national mourning, a great number of people journeyed to Canaan for the burial. Showing their respect and honor to Joseph and his father, all the top ranking Egyptian government officials, nobles, and elders of Pharaoh's house and all the nobles and elders of Egypt attended the funeral (Gen. 50:7). After the funeral all returned to Egypt.

The Israelites multiplied and prospered greatly in the land of Goshen during Joseph's rule. He was now the head of the families of Israel. Joseph lived to see his great, great grandchildren.

When he was about to die, Joseph reminded his descendants and brethren that God would bring them out of Egypt and lead them back to Canaan, the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He asked them to carry his bones out of Egypt with them when they went.

Joseph died at the age of 110. His body was embalmed and placed in a temporary coffin and grave so it could be carried back to Canaan when the time came to return (Gen. 50:24-26).

Bible Memory – Twelve Tribes of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, Benjamin.

Word Association

Cross out the word that does not belong in each line.

1. Jacob Esau Cousins Brothers Friends
2. Wrestling Match Struggle Christ Idols Night
3. Champion Overcome Loser Israel Jacob
4. Esau Field Bundles Grain Dream
5. Judah Potiphar Reuben Benjamin Simeon
6. Fat cows Thin cows Withered grain Plump grain Butler
7. Joseph Prisoner Murderer Servant Dream interpreter
8. Ruler Master Joseph Zaphnath-Paaneah Famine
9. Pharaoh Ephraim Manasseh Asenath Joseph.
10. Canaan Twelve sons Lost tribes Nations Families