

## Genesis 45: Seven Lessons from Joseph on True Spirit-Led Forgiveness

Introduction: Genesis Chapter 45 is the climax of Joseph's year-long testing of his brothers. Through Jacob's sins, the family of 12 sons through four mothers was deeply fractured. Jacob did not love 10 of his sons and their three mothers. These 10 sons resented and hated his two favorite sons through his favorite wife Rachel. Yet, through God's sovereignty, He used their evil hatred to send Joseph into slavery and then prison. He then elevated the humbled Joseph to the second highest position in all of Egypt. From this position, God was able use Joseph and a seven-year famine that He planned before time began to test and transform the fractured family. The 12 brothers would become united and form the future 12 tribes of Israel. Yet, one last thing needed to happen for this all to be possible. Joseph needed to forgive his brothers, and they needed to forgive themselves. Forgiveness was the key to their final transformation. Forgiveness is also a central component in your transformation through Christ. Through Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers, God reveals seven lessons on true Spirit-led forgiveness.

First, when Joseph fully forgave his brothers, he cleansed himself of his many pains as he burst into tears. From this, God reveals that forgiveness is a blessing that frees you from pain and anger. More importantly, it allows God the Father to forgive your sins against Him and others. Second, because he had fully forgiven his brothers, Joseph encouraged his brothers by telling them that they did not need to harbor grief or self-loathing any longer. From this, God reveals that His forgiveness can also free the person who committed the sin from guilt and self-hatred. Third, without minimizing the brothers' serious sins, Joseph was able to find forgiveness by accepting that God was sovereign and caused all things to work together for good. From this, God reveals that it is easier for you to forgive others when you accept that God is in control of your life, causing all things to work together for His greater good (Ro. 8:28). Fourth, Joseph's forgiveness did not leave the brothers in a cold peace. Instead, the brothers warmly embraced. The 12 half-brothers were finally united in the Spirit as one family. From this, God reveals that true Spirit-led forgiveness allows for true peace and reconciliation. Fifth, Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers and his discretion in concealing their sins also allowed God to pour out his blessings upon the family with the finest grazing lands in Egypt. From this, God reveals that true Spirit-led forgiveness allows God to also pour out His blessings on you and others. Sixth, on their return journey to retrieve their father Jacob, Joseph warned them not to give into the temptation to quarrel further. From this, God warns that Satan will frequently try to diminish the freedom that Jesus gives by reassigning blame. If you or someone else has been forgiven, you must be vigilant not to allow Satan to use old forgiven debts against yourself or others. Finally, the man of the flesh "Jacob" initially denied that his son Joseph could still be alive. The man of faith "Israel" then relented and believed that his son Joseph was still alive. From this, God reveals that the forgiveness that Jesus offers is only possible when you believe in Him in faith.

### 1. Forgiveness Releases You from Your Emotional Pain. Gen. 45:1-3.

- Joseph's release of his pain through forgiveness. Approximately 20 years earlier, Judah suggested that the brothers sell Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37:26-27). As a transformed man, he now offered himself as a substitute sacrifice to keep Benjamin out of slavery (Gen. 44:33-34). Having seen that Judah and his brothers had truly repented, the disguised Joseph could no longer conceal his identity. Thus, he burst into tears and cleared the room of his servants: *"<sup>1</sup> Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, 'Have everyone go out from me.' So, there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup> He wept so loudly that*

*the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. <sup>3</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.*" (Gen. 45:1-3; Acts 7:13). It is often said that forgiveness is the greatest gift that you can give yourself. Hatred that is bottled up robs the angry person of happiness, joy and, if not dealt with, even the person's long-term health. Through his forgiveness, Joseph cleansed himself of his two decade-long pain.

- Forgive those who have hurt you. As a role model for all believers, Jesus forgave those who crucified Him while He hung on the cross dying a painful death. "But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'" (Lk. 23:24(a)). Just as Joseph and later Jesus forgave those who hurt them, you too are called upon to forgive those who have hurt you: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." (Matt. 5:7). "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned." (Lk. 6:37). "A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression." (Prov. 19:11). "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Eph. 4:32). "bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." (Col. 3:13). Is there anyone you need to forgive?
- Forgiveness should be granted liberally and often. Joseph could have said that the sins against him were too big to forgive. Yet, Jesus warned that you should grant forgiveness liberally and often: "Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" (Matt. 18:21-22). If someone has committed an unforgivable sin against you or a loved one, Jesus still calls upon you to forgive. When you forgive the unforgivable, you too will release your pent-up pain.
- God will forgive your sins when you forgive others. Jesus also warns that you must forgive others to be able to receive God the Father's forgiveness: "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matt. 6:14-15). "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions." (Mk. 11:26). Thus, if you are looking for God's forgiveness, don't delay in forgiving others.
- Forgiving another person's serious sins will also cleanse your emotional health. An entire industry of psychiatric care exists because of the inability of the victims of serious sins to let go of their anger. For example, victims of serious crimes like rape or incest typically carry life-long scars. As another example, the survivors in a family where a murder has taken place may also carry deep pain for their entire lives. No one would deny that their pain is justified. Likewise, no one would deny that the sinners should be held accountable for their wrongs. Yet, the failure of a victim of serious sin to forgive will over time eat away at the victim's emotional health. Their damaged emotional health will then frequently turn to physical problems. Psychiatrists typically treat these problems with medications, while psychologists typically treat these problems through counseling. Although psychiatrists and psychologists play important roles in society,

most frequently fail to instruct that true cleansing comes from Spirit-led forgiveness. When forgiveness is sincere and Spirit-led through faith in Christ, He will set you free from your emotional and physical pains. “and by His scourging we are healed.” (Is. 53:5(b); 1 Pet. 2:24). “O LORD my God, I cried to You for help, and You healed me.” (Ps. 30:2). “So, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (Jo. 8:36). “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” (Gal. 5:1). “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13). If you or someone you know is suffering from a serious crime or sin, give yourself or that person the gift of freedom in Christ from emotional and physical pain. Like Joseph, forgiving the unforgivable sin will cleanse your pain.

- Those who reject Christ’s forgiveness will one day tremble in fear like Joseph’s brothers. Although Joseph was human, he is frequently seen as a foreshadow of Christ. Both were innocent of any crime. Both suffered at the hands of their jealous brethren. Both suffered as part of God’s greater plan to save lives. Like Joseph’s brothers, Jesus’ people could not see Him for who He really was when He dwelt with them. Like Joseph’s brothers, those who reject Him will one day tremble in fear when He reveals His true identity to them. “so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,” (Phil. 2:10; Ro. 14:11). “And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’” (Rev. 5:13). “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” (Ja. 2:19). If you know people who have rejected Christ, be a witness and save them from this fear.
2. Forgiveness also Releases the Wrongdoer from Guilt and Shame. Gen. 45:4-5.
- Joseph’s release of his brother’s emotional pain through forgiveness. After freeing himself from pain, Joseph freed his brothers from their grief and self-loathing: “<sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Please come closer to me.’ And they came closer. And he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup> Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.” (Gen. 45:4-5). If you claim to forgive a person yet still hold a sin over that person, that is not true forgiveness. True Spirit-led forgiveness releases the wrongdoer of pain.
  - Jesus came to release sinners from their pain. The forgiveness that Jesus offers provides eternal life for all who believe in faith (Jo. 3:16). Yet, His forgiveness does more than that. His forgiveness also offers you freedom from your emotional pains from the sins that you have caused to others. This can be seen in the tears of joy and gratitude that believers experienced when He forgave them of their sins: “Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason, I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” (Lk. 17:44-48). If you carry self-loathing from your sins, Jesus also came to free you from your pains.

- Restore those who have hurt you from their pain. Part of forgiveness includes restoring the person who hurt you in a spirit of gentleness: “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, *restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness*; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.” (Gal. 6:1). In the Old Testament, restoration also required “restitution”. In the case of embezzlement, theft, extortion, or theft of lost property under false pretenses, God required as a “guilt” offering that the sinner give back the stolen property to restore the victim (Lev. 6:1-4). The Hebrew word for “guilt offering” is *Asham*. It means indemnity, reparation, or restitution. In other words, it means that the sinner must make the victim whole. Saying that you are sorry does not by itself fulfill God’s law. In the case of any type of theft, the sinner was to restore all stolen funds plus at least a fifth of the value of the stolen property as a penalty or 120% total (Lev. 6:5). Where the theft deprived someone of their livelihood (symbolized by animals), the penalty was twice the value of the stolen property (Ex. 22:4). If the sinner had no remorse, the penalty was four times the value of the property: “He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion.” (2 Sam. 12:6). Christ did not nullify a sinner’s obligation to restore a victim of sin. After Zaccheus accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, he promised to pay restitution four times above the amount that he had defrauded from others in the past: “Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.’” (Lk. 19:8). This suggests that Zaccheus had defrauded others in the past without any remorse (2 Sam. 12:6). Jesus did not correct him or say that this was unnecessary. Are there victims of your sins that you need to restore to make whole?

### 3. Forgiveness is Easier When You Accept that God is in Control. Gen. 45:6-13.

- Joseph’s forgiveness came through recognizing God’s sovereignty and control. Joseph did not minimize the brothers’ sins. Yet, he was able to forgive because he had faith that God used their evil acts for a greater good: “<sup>6</sup> *For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.* <sup>7</sup> *God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.* <sup>8</sup> *Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.* <sup>9</sup> *Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, ‘God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay.* <sup>10</sup> *You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have.* <sup>11</sup> *There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished.’* <sup>12</sup> *Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you.* <sup>13</sup> *Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here.’” (Gen. 45:6-13). Joseph restated his power to reassure his brothers of God’s greater purpose. He did not pretend that their evil acts caused no harm to him. Yet, he found forgiveness in knowing that God used their evil to save the family. After Jacob’s death years later, the brothers again feared that Joseph would retaliate. Yet, he then again reassured them that God was in control: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.” (Gen. 50:20).*

- God's greater purpose in sending the Jews into bondage. God previously told Abraham that He had planned in advance for Abraham's descendants to spend 400 years in slavery: "God said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.'" (Gen. 15:13). Some might question why God would send His people into bondage. Yet, Judah showed what would have happened if Jacob's family had stayed in the Promised Land. Like Judah's family, they would have intermarried with Canaanites, slept with temple prostitutes, and adopted the idols and morals of the Canaanites. God called the Jews to be the light to the world (Is. 42:6). Yet, they would have only broadcast darkness from their conduct. By contrast, the Egyptians considered the Hebrews to be loathsome and would not even eat with them: "the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians." (Gen. 43:32(b)). "you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians." (Gen. 46:34). In Egypt, they would not have the same opportunities to sleep with prostitutes and marry Egyptians. Thus, God had a plan to remold His people where they would be kept separate from other evil influences. "But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today." (Dt. 4:20; Is. 48:10; Ps. 66:10; Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9). At the time, the Jews could not have understood God's greater plan for them. Yet, they still had to trust Him.
  - Always trust that God is control, even when bad things happen. Like Joseph, Paul understood that God can use the evil acts of people for His greater glory: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Ro. 8:28). He wants you to trust Him, even if His plan does not make sense to you. "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD." (Is. 55:8). Unless you accept that God is in control and trust Him, it will be harder to forgive people when they hurt you. When bad things happen to you, do you trust in God's greater plan for you?
4. Forgiveness Can Bring Reconciliation and Peace. Gen. 45:14-15.
- Joseph's warm embrace and reconciliation with all his brothers. Joseph's forgiveness did not leave his brothers feeling cold. Instead, he warmly embraced them as friends: "<sup>14</sup> Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. <sup>15</sup> He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him." (Gen. 45:14-15). Joseph and his brothers were transformed and reconciled by the Spirit. In a similar way, God transformed Esau and Jacob: "Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept." (Gen. 33:4). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, He can also reconcile you with your enemies.
  - The father's warm embrace of the prodigal son. In the New Testament, a similar story unfolded with the return of the prodigal son. The son repented of his sins. He expected the father to rebuke him and let him live as a hired servant. Instead, the father warmly embraced him: "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." (Lk. 15:20). If your forgiveness is Spirit-led it should also cause you to reconcile with those who once hurt you. A cold peace is not a Spirit-led reconciliation.

- Seek out reconciliation before you petition God. Jesus warned that reconciliation is so important that you should do it before you approach God in prayer. “Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; *first be reconciled to your brother*, and then come and present your offering. *Make friends quickly* with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.” (Matt. 5:23-25). “. . . do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.” (Eph. 4:26-27). The other person may reject your offer to be “friends”. Yet, you still must try. Have you tried to warmly embrace a person who has hurt you?
5. Forgiveness Also Brings God’s Blessings. Gen. 45:16-23.
- Through Joseph’s forgives, his entire family received God’s blessings. Forgiveness not only freed the brothers of pain and unified them, it also allowed God to bless their families: “<sup>16</sup> Now when the news was heard in Pharaoh’s house that Joseph’s brothers had come, it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. <sup>17</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: load your beasts and go to the land of Canaan, <sup>18</sup> and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land.’ <sup>19</sup> Now you are ordered, ‘Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come. <sup>20</sup> Do not concern yourselves with your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’” <sup>21</sup> Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. <sup>22</sup> To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments. <sup>23</sup> To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey.” (Gen. 45:16-23; Acts 7:14). Joseph would have had to previously clear this proposal with Pharaoh. Upon Jacob’s family’s return to Egypt, Pharaoh later confirmed it. “The land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know any capable men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock.” (Gen. 47:6). In a similar way, God will also bless you when you forgive others.
  - Keeping the sins of another confidential allows God to bless reconciled sinners. Joseph’s ability to bless his family depended not only upon his forgiveness. It also was possible because he kept the sins of his brothers strictly on a need to know basis. “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” (Matt. 18:15). “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.” (Prov. 11:13). According to the Jewish commentator Rashi, Joseph cleared the room of his servants before he spoke openly to his brothers about what happened to avoid embarrassing them. As another commentator observes: “I can think of only two reasons why Pharaoh should be so pleased to hear of the arrival of Joseph’s brothers. The first reason is obvious: Pharaoh had the greatest respect for Joseph. Joseph had virtually saved his kingdom and would greatly enhance his position in Egypt (cf. 47:13-26). Anything that pleased Joseph would make Pharaoh happy. There is yet another explanation for the joy of Pharaoh which I believe to be very

instructive. It also helps us to better understand why Joseph sent out his Egyptian servants when he revealed his identity to his brothers. It would seem that Joseph never informed Pharaoh of the injustice done to him by his brothers. Joseph did insist to the butler and the baker of the Pharaoh that he was innocent, yet he did not reveal the guilt of his brothers. . . . While Joseph maintained his own innocence, he never exposed the guilt of his brothers or of Potiphar's wife. As a result, Pharaoh did not have to overcome any feelings of anger toward Joseph's brothers and thus could warmly welcome them as long-lost relatives who had finally found their way to their brother. Silence about the sins of others makes their restoration a much easier process." (Bob Deffinbaugh, 45. *The Fundamentals of Forgiveness (Genesis 45:1-28)* (2004) Bible.org). Have you kept the sins of those who have hurt you on a need to know basis? Or, do you gossip about their sins to others? If so, you make reconciliation and God's blessings harder.

- Joseph's final test of his brothers. Joseph previously tested his brothers by giving Benjamin extra portions of food: "He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So, they feasted and drank freely with him." (Gen. 43:34). Here, he tested them one last time by giving Benjamin extra gifts. Like Joseph, God will also test your forgiveness to make sure it is genuine. It was also a test to see if the brothers had given up their covetousness. Thankfully, they passed the test. Benjamin or Joseph might receive honors that they would not receive. In real life, someone will frequently receive an honor or a gift without earning it. Like Joseph's brothers, you must learn not to covet what someone else has or feel jealous.
6. Forgiveness Must be Guarded When Temptation Arises. Gen. 45:24.
- Joseph's warning to his brothers to be vigilant against their old ways of the flesh. Before leaving, Joseph warned the brothers against assigning blame as they tried to explain his existence and their actions to their father: "<sup>24</sup> *So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, 'Do not quarrel on the journey.'*" (Gen. 45:24). In his disguised form, Joseph had previously witnessed Reuben attempt to place blame on his other brothers for selling Joseph into slavery (Gen. 42:22). Reuben had no right to stand on the moral high ground. He participated in the cover up. The brothers would soon owe an explanation to Jacob for their lies. Each would be tempted to find greater fault in someone else. Instead of living as forgiven people, they would have sought to enslave each other in guilt. This guilt would have been from Satan, not the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit was knitting the 12 future tribes together, Satan would try to divide them.
  - Be on guard against Satan's efforts to destroy your forgiveness and peace. You are called upon to be on guard against sin. You are also called upon to be on guard against Satan's efforts to undermine the forgiveness granted to someone who has repented: "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." (Lk. 17:3). If God has forgiven a sin, it is not just forgiven. It is also forgotten. "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and *I will not remember your sins.*" (Is. 43:25; Heb. 8:12). If you are using someone's old sins against them, it is not of God. Likewise, if you are condemning yourself for a sin that Jesus has forgiven, your faith is lacking. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jo. 1:9). Do you trust in His forgiveness?

7. Forgiveness that Comes From God Requires Faith. Gen. 45:25-28.

- Jacob's initial failure of faith, and "Israel's" eventually acceptance of Joseph's survival. When the brothers finally told their father the truth, Jacob at first would not believe. Then, the man of the promise "Israel" finally believed. <sup>25</sup> *Then they went up from Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob.* <sup>26</sup> *They told him, saying, 'Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.'* *But he was stunned, for he did not believe them.* <sup>27</sup> *When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.* <sup>28</sup> *Then Israel said, 'It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.'*" (Gen. 45:25-28). We do not know what confession the brothers made to Jacob. Yet, whatever they said, Jacob would not believe. The brothers had previously deceived their father into believing that Joseph was dead by dipping his special tunic in goat blood (Gen. 37:31-3). Jacob believed that Joseph was dead because he trusted in his sight. Each time he failed to believe, God called him Jacob. When he finally believed in faith, God called him Israel. Although his faith was weak, Israel would be blessed to live 17 final years of his life with his son Joseph (Gen. 47:28).
- Forgiveness between the brothers allowed Israel to be born again. It says that "*the spirit of their father was revived.*" (Gen. 45:27). In other words, "Israel" was born again of the Spirit (Jo. 3:7). God had twice named Jacob as Israel (Gen. 32:28; 35:10). Yet, he had not yet lived up to the promise of his new name. He continued to walk by his flesh. Like every believer, Jacob had a dual nature of the flesh and the Spirit. For most of his life, he lived by the flesh and not the Spirit. Only in the last 17 years of his life did he live by faith. Everything that the book of Hebrews celebrates in his life occurs in his final years (Heb. 11:21-22). The nation of Israel also had a dual nature as it struggled between its flesh and its belief. This was also symbolized by its two names: "But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, *O Jacob*, and He who formed you, *O Israel*, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!'" (Is. 43:1). Don't squander the best years of your life living by the flesh like Jacob. Are you living by the Spirit?
- Have faith in the new life offered through Jesus' forgiveness. Israel's spirit was revived because Joseph was able to forgive his brothers and give his father hope. Like Israel, you must believe by faith in the forgiveness Jesus offers in order to receive new life in the Spirit. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, . . ." (Heb. 11:6). "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;" (1 Pet. 3:18). Have you fully accepted in faith that your sins were nailed to the cross and forgiven? forgiven?