

Joseph(4)

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Joseph in Egypt—Reuniting with His Family

Joseph had become a ruler over all of Egypt, the second in command to Pharaoh himself (Genesis 40:39-44). During the seven-year period of agricultural abundance, two sons were born to Joseph and his wife Asenath: Manasseh and Ephraim. When the seven-year period of famine began and the people of Egypt cried out for food, Pharaoh gave Joseph full authority to begin opening the storehouses and selling grain to the people. The famine was widespread, and people from surrounding nations came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph (Genesis 41:50-57).

The land of Canaan was also experiencing the famine, and Jacob (Israel) sent ten of his sons (except his youngest, Benjamin) to Egypt to buy grain. When they appeared before Joseph, they did not recognize him (they assumed he was dead), but Joseph recognized them. Joseph did not reveal his identity to them at this time (Genesis 42:1-8). Joseph deceptively accused his brothers as being spies, and required of them to bring Benjamin to Egypt. Joseph confined them in prison for three days before releasing them to take grain back to their home and to bring back Benjamin under the threat of death. The brothers reasoned among themselves that this calamity was brought on to them by God for what they had done to Joseph; they did not realize that Joseph understood their conversation. To hold them to their word, Joseph took Simeon from them and bound him (Genesis 42:9-24).

Joseph not only gave orders to fill his brothers' bags with grain, but he ordered that their money to purchase the grain be put in the tops of the bags and also that they be given sufficient provisions for their journey back to Canaan. On their journey home one of the brothers opened his bag of grain (to feed his donkey) and noticed the money. This was distressing to the brothers, who likely thought that they would be accused of stealing the grain as punishment from God for what they had done to Joseph (Genesis 42:25-28).

Jacob did not want to send Benjamin with his brothers back to Egypt. He thought he had already lost Joseph and that Simeon was now lost. He could not bear losing Benjamin, also. However, Reuben, and later Judah (by offering sons or themselves as surety), convinced Jacob to send Benjamin with his brothers back to Egypt after they had used all the grain that they had brought back from their first trip. They were also to take double the money and valuable gifts to present to the man (Joseph) of Egypt (Genesis 42:29 – 43:15).

Joseph received his brothers, but still concealed his identity from them. The brothers explained the money they had found in their grain sacks and also offered the additional money and gifts. Joseph then brought Simeon to them and gave them a great feast in his house. The portion Joseph gave to Benjamin was five times greater than he gave to his other brothers (Genesis 43:16-34).

When Joseph's brothers left for home, Joseph again instructed his steward to put their money back in their grain sacks, as well as his own silver cup in Benjamin's sack. Again, however, Joseph apparently tested their integrity and faithfulness by accusing them of stealing. As he promised his father, Judah offered himself as a slave to Joseph so that Benjamin could return to his father (Genesis 44).

Joseph was convinced that Judah was being truthful and was so overcome with emotion that he wept loudly. He then revealed his identity to his brothers. Naturally, they were shocked to see that he was

alive and feared that Joseph would return evil for what they had done to him. He consoled them by explaining that their action to sell him had been according to God's will. God had actually sent Joseph to Egypt to become the lord of Pharaoh's household and ruler over all the land of Egypt so that he could deliver his family from the ravages of the famine. Joseph then instructed his brothers to bring their father, Jacob, and his entire family to Egypt (Genesis 45).

Through a vision in the night, God spoke to Jacob and confirmed that he was to take his family to Egypt. God promised to make of him a great nation there and that He would also bring that nation back to the land of Canaan (Genesis 46:1-7). Joseph presented his family to Pharaoh, who commanded that they be allowed to live in the best land of Egypt (a region called Goshen) and that they also be put in charge of Pharaoh's livestock (Genesis 47:1-6).

The people of Israel prospered in the land of Egypt and multiplied greatly. Jacob lived another 17 years while in Egypt before dying at the age of 147. He made Joseph promise to bury him in the family's burial place, which was where Abraham and been buried (Genesis 47:27-31; 50:1-14). Just before he died, Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, giving the greater blessing to Ephraim who was younger than Manasseh. Jacob claimed them as his own sons, giving them equal position with his other sons (Genesis 48). This blessing became significant much later when Israel entered its promised land (I will address this in another lesson). He also pronounced prophetic blessings on all of his sons (Genesis 49:1-27).

After the death and burial of Jacob, the brothers were still afraid that Joseph would judge them for what they had done to him (even though 17 years had passed since they settled in Egypt). They begged for his forgiveness of their sin against him. Joseph again explained that though they meant evil against him, God meant it for good to bring about the present result (Genesis 50:12-21).

The family (the people of Israel) continued to live and prosper in Egypt while Joseph lived. Joseph died at the age of 110. Just prior to his death he told his brothers that God would take care of Israel while in Egypt and that He would bring them out of Egypt and into their own land as he had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He then made his (surviving) brothers promise that his bones would be taken out of Egypt (Genesis 50:22-26). This promise was kept at a much later date when Moses took Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 13:17-19).

Takeaways

Wisdom: By the grace of God, Joseph understood that what his brothers had done to him by selling him was all in accordance with God's purpose and plan. The family of Israel would have suffered greatly, perhaps even died, had not Joseph been in Egypt saving up food and grain for the seven-year drought. We don't know if he realized that his relocation to Egypt was in fulfillment of God's plan revealed to Abraham (Genesis 15:13). I believe that we rarely know or realize how God is working through us because of our tendency to be prideful. Perhaps God will reveal to us what He accomplished through us when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

So then, my [Paul's] beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Forgiveness: When Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, they expected retribution for what they had done to him. It was natural for them to think that way. Instead, Joseph forgave them. He had

realized that, although his brothers had treated him with evil intentions, God was working everything out according to His purpose. Additionally, he recognized that it is God who judges us (Genesis 50:19). We are exhorted to never pay back evil for evil to anyone or to take our own revenge (Romans 12:17-19). Instead, we are to forgive those who sin against us.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Faithfulness: From being a slave to becoming the ruler over the all the land of Egypt as Pharaoh's second in command, Joseph remained faithful to God and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He did not let the riches of his job detract him from realizing that all that had happened had been according to the will of God and was not of his own doing. We should always be humbled to realize that all we have is based on what God has done for us through Christ—we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavens (Ephesians 1:1-6).

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones. (Hebrews 11:22)

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3)

Joseph was successful in wisdom, wealth, and power because the Lord was with him. There are those who teach that if we are obedient to God, including paying our pastors or spiritual leaders well, that we will be blessed by God through success, wealth, and other things (e.g., happiness, good health, etc.). Does the example of Joseph support this? Does anything in Scripture support this? Yes, we are to live for the Lord and walk worthy of our calling, but Paul had to live by humble means, was imprisoned, and was eventually put to death despite, or rather because of, his faithfulness (I Corinthians 4:11-13; Philippians 4:10-13; II Timothy 4:6-8). He warned wealthy believers to be careful because the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil (I Timothy 6:8-10, 17-19). The prophets of old were often put to death by their own people (Acts 7:52). Joseph and others in Scripture were blessed because God was working through them and not because of their works or righteousness.