

Corn in Egypt

Read: Genesis 42:1-24

Key Verse:

“Look, He is coming with the clouds; and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him.”

Revelation 1:7

Extra: If you had been Joseph, how would you have acted on your brothers' visit?

Level 5 lesson 29

CONCERN

The famine, that Joseph had predicted, affected not only Egypt but the surrounding lands as well, including Canaan. However, without Joseph's warning, no preparations had been made for it in the other lands. So it is not entirely surprising that in our Scripture reading today, we find Jacob's sons sitting around in their tents looking very glumly at one another, as though each of the others were somehow to blame!

As they surveyed their parched lands and dying crops and herds, despair seemed to have paralyzed them. Finally, Jacob rebuked them, saying, "Why do you just keep looking at each other? I have heard that there is corn in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us so that we may live and not die!" Stirred into action, ten of the brothers went down to buy corn in Egypt.

Jacob wouldn't let Benjamin the youngest go, fearful that something might happen to him. After losing Joseph, Jacob was not prepared to trust the other sons to look after him. After a long journey, the brothers finally arrived in Egypt. Along with all the crowds clamouring for grain, they of course had to apply to Joseph for assistance, as Pharaoh had instructed. So "Joseph's brothers arrived, and they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground." Imagine that! Here is the upright sheaf (Joseph), surrounded by the other sheaves (his brothers) bowing down to him - the exact fulfilment of Joseph's dream of 22 years ago! (see Genesis 37:7)

CONFUSION

The ten brothers didn't recognize Joseph, but he recognized them! Of course, Joseph must have changed greatly since he was seventeen, and he was now dressed in the fine robes of Egyptian royalty. What emotions must have filled Joseph's heart as he looked over his brothers, now starving and desperate for food! Joseph though, did not reveal himself to his brothers at this point. Instead, giving no indication he had recognized them, he spoke roughly to them, accusing them of being spies!

Joseph's later behaviour tells us that this was just a ploy on Joseph's part. It would have been a mistake to embrace them straight away; the sinful events of the past needed to be correctly addressed in order for true reconciliation to take place. These sinful, proud brothers needed to be convicted afresh of their sin of 20 years ago (at the pit in Dothan, where Joseph had last seen them) and be compelled to confess it.

The ten brothers loudly rejected the charge of spying, and protesting their innocence, they humbly explained who they were and where they were from. In so doing, they mentioned the news that Joseph was desperate to hear; "the youngest son (Benjamin) is with their father, while one (referring to Joseph) is not." Immediately, Joseph seized hold of this statement. "I'll see if you are telling the truth" he said, "By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here!"

CONFESSION

He ordered that one of them be sent to fetch Benjamin, while the other nine were kept in prison. In the meantime, however, they were all placed under guard for three days. There in prison, in a strange land, the hidden guilt of twenty years finally surfaced in a united, fearful confession of their sin. Unaware that Joseph could understand them (because he had used an interpreter up till that point) all the brothers admitted; "We are truly guilty concerning our brother (Joseph). We saw the distress of his soul, when he pleaded with us and we would not listen. That's why this distress has come upon us" (v21). Reuben added, "Didn't I tell you not to harm the boy? Now we must give an account for his blood!" Upon hearing this, and seeing their obvious remorse, Joseph later relented and ordered that only one of the brothers be bound in the prison while the rest could go and bring Benjamin with them on their next trip.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was Benjamin not permitted to travel down to Egypt?	.....
2. How did Joseph's boyhood dream come true?	.....
3. Why did Joseph speak roughly and treat his brothers as spies?	.....
4. What information was Joseph desperate to hear?	.....
5. What effect did the brother's imprisonment have on them?	.....

My Name is Age

The Journey Home

Key Verse:
**“And we know
 that in all things
 God works for
 the good of those
 who love Him...”**

Romans 8:28a

Extra: From this study, how can you see all things working together for good?

Level 5 lesson 30

Read Genesis 42:25-38; 43:1-5

GLAD HEARTS

Joseph’s brothers had reason to be glad; they had gone to Egypt in the hope of buying corn and Joseph had seen to it that all their sacks were well filled (v25). In addition, he had provided them with provisions for their homeward journey and instructed his men to secretly put each man’s money back in his sack! These actions make it clear that Joseph’s strange conduct towards his brothers was not due to any feelings of resentment or vengeance.

Certainly, it would have been easy for Joseph to reveal his identity at the beginning and to punish them for their cruel behaviour. He had both the authority as Prime Minister of Egypt, and the justification - after their terrible treatment of him. But instead, his heart’s godly desire was to bring his guilt-hardened brothers to repentance, that he might forgive them! We read in verse 24 that when Joseph heard their private confession of sin, he turned away from them and wept.

SAD HEARTS

However, in spite of their filled sacks, the brothers were puzzled by the ‘Egyptian’s’ demand to fetch Benjamin, and concerned for their brother Simeon, now behind bars in prison. What was going on - and how would it all end? Then as they made camp that first night, one of them opened his sack, and there on top of the corn was his purchase money. Now they were really scared! Was the ‘Egyptian’ going to accuse him of theft next time? Convicted of their sin and fearful of further consequences, they cried out, “What is this that God has done to us?” Oh what a terrible burden of guilt they carried! How desperately these brothers needed to know the peace of sins forgiven; the restoration of right relationships between themselves and God, and with Joseph and their father Jacob.

Eventually they arrived home and what a tale they had to tell! How the ‘Egyptian’ Ruler had spoken harshly and accused them of being spies.

How in spite of their protests of innocence, he had demanded as proof of their story, that Benjamin be brought back to Egypt; and that in the meantime, Simeon would remain in prison until they returned! Then, having told their story, the brothers opened their sacks and made another puzzling discovery - there in each sack was their purchase money! This had to be a trap by the wily ‘Egyptian’ and now they were even more frightened. Perhaps even now he was coming after them with his soldiers; how would they explain this ‘theft?’ He already accused them of being liars and spies!

FEARFUL HEARTS

Jacob cried out in despair, “You have deprived me of my children! Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin!” On the surface, it did appear as though “everything is against me!” as Jacob sadly declared. Of course, God was still at work for his and the family’s good, even in these confusing and discouraging events.

At this point, Reuben spoke up and pledged his own two sons as payment, if he failed to bring Benjamin back from their next visit to Egypt. “Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back” he promised (v37). “No!” replied Jacob emphatically, “My son will not go with you, for his brother Joseph is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

One can’t help being struck with the way that again and again, Joseph and the brother’s sins are remembered. “Joseph is no more” says Jacob in v36, and “his brother Joseph is dead” in v38. He even uses the same phrase as when the brothers first reported that Joseph was dead; “you will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave” (37:35).

In Ch 43, we read that the famine continued to worsen, and the supplies of corn were finally exhausted. Once more Jacob was compelled to order, “Go back and buy us a little more food.” Judah replied, “It’s useless without taking Benjamin. If you send him with us we will go, but not otherwise!”

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What shows that Joseph was not resentful towards his brothers?
2. What was his heart’s desire, shown through his actions?
3. How did his brothers react, on finding the money in their sacks?
4. What was Jacob’s response to their story and the Egyptian’s demand?
5. What do you think of Reuben’s reaction and his pledge to Jacob?

Return to Egypt

Key Verse:
“For he [Pilate] knew it was out of envy that they [the Jews] had handed Jesus over to him.”

Matthew 27:18

Extra: Explain the connection between the Key Verse and our study today.

Level 5 lesson 31

Read Genesis 43:6-34

In the last lesson, Judah put the position very clearly to his father, Jacob, essentially saying, “Either Benjamin goes with us to Egypt or we don’t go at all!”

QUALMS

“Oh, why did you tell the ‘man’ about Benjamin?” complained Jacob ruefully. The brothers explained how the man had asked them directly, “do you have another brother?” They had simply told the truth - never expecting him to say “Bring your brother down here!” Judah then appealed to his father. “Send the boy along with me. I’ll look after him and return him safely; if I don’t, let me bear the blame for ever.” He went on to point out it was now a matter of life or death for them; they would all perish, Benjamin included, if they didn’t go down and buy more corn. In fact, if they hadn’t wasted so much time, they would’ve already been back with it!

Jacob could see the truth of Judah’s words and reluctantly agreed. “If it must be, then do it. Take some of our best fruits, a little balm, a little honey, some spices, myrrh, and nuts. Take double the amount of money to pay the man back for the first load of corn,” and finally, he added (and how hard it must have been to say it) - “Take your brother and go back to the man at once.” Jacob, compelled by the pressure of circumstances, could only commit them all to God. “God Almighty give you mercy before the man!” were his last words, as they left to face the supposed Egyptian Noble.

QUANDARIES

On their arrival in Egypt, Joseph directed one of his servants to take the brothers to his home and prepare a feast for them because, “they are to eat with me at noon.” Upon hearing that they were to be taken to the great man’s own house, the brothers feared the worst. They suspected a trap and that they would soon find themselves enslaved and their donkeys confiscated for the ‘theft’ of the silver. So before entering the house, they desperately tried to explain to the man’s steward what had happened with their money.

“It’s all right,” said the steward, “Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver.” Then he brought Simeon out to them, before providing water for them and feed for their donkeys. Then he advised them they were to dine with His Excellency at mid-day. How puzzled they must have felt at such a royal welcome! In due course Joseph arrived and they “bowed down to the ground.” Remember again Joseph’s boyhood dreams about this?

QUESTIONS

After exchanging the normal greetings, Joseph’s first question was, “Is your father alive and well - the old man of whom you spoke?” “Yes,” they replied, “Your servant, our father, is alive and well.” Again they bowed low to pay him honour. Joseph then turned to Benjamin and asked, “Is this your younger brother of whom you spoke?” Trembling somewhat, the brothers confirmed this was so. “God be gracious to you, my son!” was Joseph’s kind response. However, at the sight of his own dear brother, Joseph was overcome with emotion and had to leave the room. Hurrying away before his tears were noticed, he hid himself in his private closet and wept there alone.

After Joseph had washed his face, he returned to the room, and composing himself once more, commanded the food to be served. So each group was seated and served: Joseph at his own table, the brothers at another, and the Egyptians at yet another (v32). The first thing the brothers noticed was that they were seated in order of their ages. No wonder they looked at each other in astonishment! “How does he know our ages?” they must have whispered to each other.

Joseph paid special attention to Benjamin, giving him choice and extra portions. We don’t know for sure why Joseph did this; it may have been simply out of love for his full brother. However, it certainly also served as something of a test for the brothers; to their credit, and no doubt Joseph’s delight, Scripture records none of the brother’s showed any envy which they’d earlier displayed toward Joseph. On the contrary, they “feasted and drank freely with him.” (v34)

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What ultimatum did Judah give his father?	.....
2. What did Judah also promise his father?	.....
3. What was Jacob’s final response?	.....
4. What did the brothers suspect on being invited to the man’s house?	.....
5. Why do you think Joseph gave extra food to Benjamin?	.....

The Silver Cup

Read Genesis 44:1-34

Key Verse:
“Good understanding wins favour, but the way of the unfaithful is hard.”

Proverbs 13:15

Extra: Comment on Joseph’s plan to find out if the brothers had changed.

Level 5 lesson 32

Magicians in Joseph’s day often claimed the ability to predict the future by ‘cup-readings’ in much the same way as some people today claim to be able to predict the future by ‘reading’ tea-leaves in a cup. Precious stones or small pieces of gold and silver were dropped into a cup, and coming events were supposedly indicated by the way in which the contents of the cup arranged themselves. This was called “divination” and it was later forbidden by God, since it involved a dependence on evil spirits.

Joseph himself possessed an expensive silver cup, and he had told his Egyptian servant to tell his brothers later on that it was his special drinking and divining cup. Joseph’s power to reveal the future though, came directly from God (see Genesis 40-41) and not through any evil practice such as ‘cup-reading.’ However, for the moment Joseph tolerated the impression that he performed ‘divinations,’ probably to keep his brothers thinking that he really was an Egyptian nobleman.

THE CUP CONCEALED

Joseph told his servant to “Fill the men’s sacks with food” and to “put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack and put my silver cup in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack,” which of course, was Benjamin’s. The servant obeyed, filling the sacks with as much food as they could contain, before pressing the brothers’ money pouches into the top of the sacks. Joseph’s silver cup was carefully placed in Benjamin’s sack along with his money, as Joseph had directed. Early next morning the brothers started out, glad to be heading home and blissfully unaware of the cup in Benjamin’s sack.

THE CUP SOUGHT

They were barely out of the city gate when they found themselves pursued and overtaken by Joseph’s steward. As instructed, he accused the brothers of ingratitude because they had stolen the cup his master used for drinking and ‘divination.’ Joseph’s brothers at once denied the charges and reminded the man that they had previously returned money that belonged to the Egyptian treasury. “Why then should we steal silver and gold from your master’s house?” they argued.

Confident Joseph’s steward was mistaken, they assured him, “If any of us is found to have it, (the cup) let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves!” So the steward began checking their sacks.

THE CUP FOUND

Sack after sack was searched; in all of them, only the money on top of the corn was found. But there in the last sack, Benjamin’s, was his money and the cup! What a catastrophe! In disbelieving despair, Joseph’s brothers ‘tore their clothes’ (a sign of deep sadness) before reloading the donkeys and returning to Joseph’s house. Joseph came to meet them and immediately the brothers “threw themselves on the ground” at his feet in humble submission. In response to Joseph’s question, Judah despairingly speaks for them all; “What shall we say? What shall we speak? How shall we clear ourselves?” he cried. He was in shock and at a total loss to explain what had happened.

Then finally, Judah made this frank admission, “God has uncovered your servant’s guilt. We are now my lord’s slaves; both we, and the one who was found to have the cup!” That was it! It was the confession that Joseph’s dealings with his brothers had been intended to produce. Judah had admitted the brothers’ guilt - this was the only possible response due to being caught with the money and the cup, even though the brothers knew they were innocent - but underlying here is a confession of their guilt from 22 years ago, when they pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him into slavery in Egypt. Now they themselves faced slavery in Egypt and Judah accepted this as being the rightful penalty for their sin.

However, Joseph quickly assured Judah that all were free to return to their father in peace - except Benjamin! Immediately Judah stepped forward again, remembering his vow to Jacob to bring Benjamin safely home. In verses 18 to 34 he made a humble and touching appeal on behalf of his aged father and Benjamin. Finally, he offered himself as a substitute for Benjamin. There appears to be no doubt that Judah and his brothers were changed men. Years ago, they had callously and wickedly sold their own brother into slavery, without a thought for his, or their dear father’s feelings. Things had certainly changed!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How did the brothers try to disprove the charge of stealing Joseph’s silver cup?	.....
2. What did they do when the cup was found?	.....
3. What was Joseph’s intention in dealing with his brothers like this?	.....
4. What do you think led Judah to make his frank admission?
5. How had the brothers changed from many years ago?

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