

Bi121 Old Testament

Lesson Bi121-16 Joseph's Brothers in Egypt (Gen 42- 45)

When a person is really hungry, he may do some really desperate things. Canaan was suffering a time of severe famine. Jacob could see that food for his children and grandchildren was almost gone. People were saying that there was food to be found in Egypt, but Egypt was definitely not the land that God had promised to Israel.

So Jacob delayed and prayed. Finally, in great desperation, he sent ten of his sons 320 kilometers (200 mi.) southwest—across an increasingly hostile desert region—to try to buy some food in Egypt. He kept his youngest son Benjamin safely at home. Jacob's greatest fear was that he might lose him, just like he had lost Joseph, the first son of his beloved Rachel.

As the ten brothers arrived in Egypt, they had to appear before the governor of the land, who decided which foreigners would be permitted to buy grain. They did not recognize their grown-up brother Joseph, as they bowed before him. He, however, immediately knew who they were and recalled his childhood dreams. In his dream the bundles of wheat representing his brothers and even their parents had bowed down to his sheaf of wheat. Joseph decided not to reveal himself yet. First he would test them to see if their hearts had changed since he had last seen them more than 20 years earlier.

“Where are you from?” Joseph asked harshly, glaring at them.

“We are from the land of Canaan, coming to buy food.”

“You are liars; you are spies!” The governor barked back.

The brothers protested, “No, we are honest men – all sons of one man who lives in Canaan. Our youngest brother stayed at home, and the other one is no more.”

Through his interpreter—for Joseph was pretending he could not understand them—he continued, “To let you prove your story, I will keep one of you here in prison. The rest of you go home and feed your starving households. But you must bring back your youngest brother to me. Then I will know if you are telling me the truth.” He then took Simeon and had him bound before them.

Joseph sent the other nine brothers back home with sacks full of grain. When they stopped for the first night, each of them found the silver they had paid for the grain stuck in the top of their sacks. With fear and trembling they asked each other, “What has God done to us? He is punishing us for what we did to our little brother long ago!” Back in Canaan, they told their father Jacob all that had happened. He became very agitated and refused to hear any more about the matter of taking Benjamin to Egypt.

Too soon the grain was gone. The famine was terrible and the children were crying

from hunger. Jacob asked his sons to go back to Egypt and buy more food. But Judah reminded him that the governor had warned them not to come back without Benjamin.

“You are not taking Benjamin away from me! Joseph is no more, Simeon is gone, and now you want to take Benjamin? Everything is against me. If I lose him, I will die with grief!”

Judah stepped in and promised his father, “I will personally guarantee Benjamin’s safety. So let us go; we need the food now!”

Reluctantly Jacob agreed. He told them to take special spices, myrrh, and honey as gifts for the man, plus double the amount of money for the grain. “May God grant you mercy so Simeon and Benjamin can return with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.” The brothers then took Benjamin and quickly left for Egypt.

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them this time, he told his steward to take them all to his house for the noon meal. On entering the house, the frightened brothers tried to return to the steward the money they had found in their sacks. He replied, “Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver.”

When Joseph came home, his brothers presented their gifts and bowed down before him. He inquired about their father and then caught sight of Benjamin, his own mother’s son. He said, “May God be gracious to you, my son.” Deeply moved, he had to leave the room and find a place to weep. The steward then seated the brothers in the exact order of their birth, from the oldest to youngest, and Joseph pulled himself together enough to order the food to be served. When they were all served, Benjamin received five times more than the others!

The next morning the men were sent on their way to Canaan with their sacks full of grain. Joseph had instructed his servant to put his silver cup in the sack belonging to Benjamin. They had not gone far when Joseph sent the servant to catch up with them and ask, “Why have you repaid good with evil? Who stole my master’s silver cup?”

The brothers were shocked! In a rash decision they declared, “We would never do such a thing. If you find the cup, the person who has it will die and the rest of us will become your master’s slaves.”

Each brother opened his sack, and the steward found the cup in Benjamin’s sack. They were all horrified and tore their clothes. They returned to the city and threw themselves on the ground in front of Joseph. He demanded, “What is this you have done?”

Judah replied, “How can we prove our innocence? All of us will now become your slaves.”

“No! Only the guilty one will be my slave. The rest of you can go home to your father.”

But Judah pled, “I promised my father that I would guarantee Benjamin’s safety. Let me be your slave instead of him. I cannot bear to see my father’s grief when the boy

does not come home. He will surely die.”

Finally Joseph could control himself no longer. Sending all his attendants from the room, he broke down and began to cry. He said, “I am Joseph!” The brothers were terrified and unable to speak. He continued, “Come! Come closer and see! I am your brother, the one you sold into slavery! Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves. For two years now there has been famine, and for the next five years there will not be a harvest. God sent me here ahead of you in to save your lives! It was not you who sent me here, but God.”

“Now hurry back to my father and say, ‘Come down to me and live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds and all you have. I will provide for you there.’” When Pharaoh heard about this joyous occasion, he promised Joseph that the best of Egypt would be theirs.

This story is **important** because it demonstrates that the things God’s children encounter in life are all part of His great plan. Joseph was not only taken physically to Egypt to save his family. He was also molded by the things he suffered so that he would be ready for his great assignment in Egypt. Though we may not understand the circumstances God allows in our lives, as we are faithful to trust Him, all things will work together for our good and His glory.

The main **truth** of this story is God will fulfill His plan to bless His children and provide for their needs as a part of His eternal plan.

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions.

1. Why did Joseph first test his brothers when they came to Egypt?
 - A. [Pause for 6 seconds.] If you said, “He wanted to test them to see if their hearts were changed,” you are correct.
2. What was the purpose of God in bringing Joseph to Egypt?
 - A. [Pause for 6 seconds.] If you said, “God sent him there to save his family’s lives,” you are correct.
3. How did Judah’s promise concerning Benjamin show that his heart had changed?
 - A. [Pause for 6 seconds.] If you said, “Judah promised Jacob he would guarantee the safety of Benjamin,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened; see the events in your mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and retell it until you feel sure you are repeating the circumstances and actions correctly. You should spend at least 45 minutes in learning the story. You may need to have someone check that you are telling the story correctly.

If possible tell this third part of Joseph’s story to the same person you told parts one and two to. Ask the person, “Do you think God cares about his children, from providing them food and a place to live, to changing the way they look at life’s hard times?” Have them explain why they believe what they believe.