

JOSEPH'S BRETHREN VISIT EGYPT

BIBLE TEXT: Genesis 42:1-38.

LESSON 37 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "He hath not dealt with us after our sins" (Psalm 103:10).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Genesis 42:1-38.

¹ Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another?

² And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die.

³ ¶ And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.

⁴ But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, Lest peradventure mischief befall him.

⁵ And the sons of Israel came to buy corn among those that came: for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

⁶ And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.

⁷ And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.

⁸ And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.

⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

¹⁰ And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come.

NOTES:

Corn in Egypt

The effects of the famine began to be felt in Hebron where Jacob and his eleven sons were living. They heard that there was corn for sale in Egypt, but Joseph's brothers made no effort to go there for food. Jacob finally asked why they just looked at one another; why they did not make an attempt to keep their families alive?

It had been twenty years since Joseph had been sold into Egypt, but we know that his brothers had never forgotten their great sin. God would not let them forget. Perhaps that was the reason they hesitated to go for food: Egypt reminded them of their cruel treatment of poor Joseph.

God has given every person a conscience to check him when he sins. Sometimes one becomes so hardened through his evil-doings that his conscience is seared and he does not feel God's reproof. It is a terrible thing to get to the place where God's Spirit stops dealing with a person and even tells his loved ones not to pray for him any more; but we know some men do go that far in rejecting God's mercy (**I Samuel 16:1**; ¹ And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.).

Jacob had mourned all these twenty years over the loss of his favourite son Joseph, and in his grief had lavished his affection on Benjamin, his youngest son. Benjamin was now grown and had his own family, but still Jacob was fearful that if Benjamin went along to Egypt, something might happen to him.

Dreams Fulfilled

When the ten brothers came to Joseph to buy corn, they bowed low before him, hoping by their humility to gain favour with the governor of Egypt. How perfectly they were fulfilling the dreams that God had given Joseph many years before, although they did not realise it! They had said they would never bow before their younger brother, but here they were on their faces before him, begging his favour. God's Word will come to pass regardless of how hard man tries to fight against it. Man cannot change divine decrees.

Joseph must have been very happy to see his brothers again, but he pretended not to know them. They thought Joseph was a slave, or perhaps no longer was alive; so it is no wonder that they did not recognise the handsome ruler before them as their once-despised brother. Joseph bore no ill will to them for their harshness and cruelty to him, but he did want to make them think about their sins before he revealed himself to them. As he saw them on their knees before him he remembered the dreams he had dreamed as a boy, and could begin to see that the hand of God had guided his way.

Joseph was eager to know about his father and Benjamin, but he did not want to reveal himself; so he accused his brothers of being spies, in order to learn all about his family. His heart must have beaten fast when they said of their brother, "One is not." They were talking of him, and no doubt he longed to say, "Here I am," but first they needed to be tried a little to see if they were really sorry for their sin.

We see the wonderful compassion of Joseph who wept because of their grief. That is the true spirit of a Christian; "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Jesus

¹¹ We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.

¹² And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

¹³ And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.

¹⁴ And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies:

¹⁵ Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither.

¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies.

¹⁷ And he put them all together into ward three days.

¹⁸ And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God:

¹⁹ If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses:

²⁰ But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so.

²¹ ¶ And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.

²² And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear?

suffered humiliations at the hands of the Jews, yet He wept over Jerusalem and said, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37).

The Brothers Suffer

All the brothers were put into prison for three days, perhaps to let them know a little of how it felt to be in captivity. We can see now that their consciences really hurt them, because they thought this suffering was coming upon them for the evil they had done to Joseph. God's Word is sure, even to those who do not want to believe it; and we read in Numbers 32:23, "Be sure your sin will find you out." In Ecclesiastes 12:14 we read, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil". Nobody was accusing Joseph's brothers, but God was troubling them, reminding them of their sin.

When Joseph insisted that one of the brothers stay as a hostage to make sure that Benjamin would be brought before him, he chose Simeon to remain. Reuben was the eldest and was the one who was responsible for his brothers; but at the time Joseph was sold into Egypt, he was not present. Simeon, being the next eldest, was the one upon whom the blame fell. Now Simeon was the one who had to stay in prison while his brothers went back to the land of Canaan. God notices every detail; and He never forgets.

Nine of the brothers started for home with food for their hungry families. Joseph had given them ample provisions, and had also had their money put back into their sacks. The brothers were greatly worried when they found the money, and thought immediately that someone was trying to get them into trouble. A person with a guilty conscience is ever suspicious of another. He judges the other person by what he himself might have done under a similar circumstance. Likewise, a child of God whose heart is pure is not looking for the faults in his brother, but covers them with his love. "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins" (Proverbs 10:12).

The brothers did have a certain amount of the fear of God in their hearts because when they found the returned money they said, "What is this that God hath done unto us?" They felt that the Lord was permitting them to get into trouble as a judgment against their evil deeds. However, no one from Egypt had followed to arrest them for having the money; and they went on home in peace.

Joseph's brothers all had children of their own now, and were more compassionate than they were when they sold Joseph into slavery. It was a distressing story they had to tell Jacob: The ruler in Egypt had spoken harshly to them and called them spies, their brother Simeon was being held as hostage in prison, and they could have no more food until Benjamin was brought before the governor.

Jacob's Grief

Jacob was very sad. It seemed that all his life had been full of disappointment and trouble -- ever since the day he had tricked his brother out of his birthright. God had forgiven his sin, and had prospered him, but new sorrows came to him to remind him of the time he had transgressed against God. The Lord is faithful to every repentant soul and will forgive all his sins, but how much better it would be if he had never sinned!

The story is told of a father who drove a nail over the door every time his son disobeyed him. If the son asked forgiveness, the nail would be pulled out but the hole was still there. The father forgave his son for his disobedience; but the holes remained as a constant reminder of his sins. How much better it is for a young person to give his heart to God before the "nails" have been driven in than to wait until he is older to ask for forgiveness and have the "holes" to remind him of his folly.

therefore, behold, also his blood is required.

²³ And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.

²⁴ And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.

²⁵ ¶ Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them.

²⁶ And they laded their asses with the corn, and departed thence.

²⁷ And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money; for, behold, it was in his sack's mouth.

²⁸ And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?

²⁹ ¶ And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them; saying,

³⁰ The man, who is the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.

³¹ And we said unto him, We are true men; we are no spies:

³² We be twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.

³³ And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone:

³⁴ And bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true

Jacob still refused to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt; but the famine continued, and when all the corn was eaten something had to be done. If they did not get more food, not only Benjamin would die, but all the family. Reuben had offered his two sons as security, but Jacob did not accept them. When they could wait no longer, Judah offered to bear the blame forever if anything should happen to Benjamin in Egypt. Again we can see God's notice of details. It was Judah who had suggested the transaction which made Joseph a slave of the Midianites, and his house was now assuming the blame if judgment should fall upon anyone.

It must have been a great consecration for Jacob to send all that he held dear into a heathen land, not knowing what would happen to them. He had nothing left: Rachel, his wife, was dead; all his children had gone into Egypt; and there was no food to eat in Canaan.

God was planning to save the lives of His chosen people, and He wanted Jacob to trust Him wholly. Jacob had done all he could do, and now he committed everything into the hands of God, and prayed that his sons would find mercy in the sight of the ruler of Egypt. When the things about us seem to be swept away, and we have nothing to lean upon, we can still trust to the Lord for deliverance. We can pray as David prayed, "When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 61:2).

QUESTIONS

1. Were Joseph's dreams beginning to come to pass?
2. After twenty years, did the brothers still feel condemnation for their cruelty to Joseph?
3. Do you think anything but repentance and forgiveness can remove condemnation from the heart?
4. How did Joseph hide his identity from his brothers?
5. Were the brothers beginning to reap what they had sown?

men: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffick in the land.

³⁵ ¶ And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack: and when both they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.

³⁶ And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.

³⁷ And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again.

³⁸ And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.