

LESSON 15 JOSEPH TESTS HIS BROTHERS**READING: Genesis 42 to 45**

AIM: To show how God fulfilled Joseph's dream and preserved Jacob and his family through him.

1. BACKGROUND

The famine, as predicted by Pharaoh's dreams, overtook Egypt and other countries also. However, Joseph had controlled the storing of food during the years of prosperity. Egypt's granaries provided for the Egyptians and foreigners as well.

Jacob sent his ten sons to get the much needed grain from Egypt for Canaan also was affected by the widespread famine. In the events that followed the particularly strong personal interest and **family bond** that existed between Joseph and his brothers shines through.

2. THE FIRST VISIT TO EGYPT - Gen. 42:1-28

Events surrounding the first visit to Egypt were:

- (1) Jacob still mourned the loss of Joseph. He refused to allow Benjamin to go "lest mischief befall him".
- (2) Joseph recognised his brothers when they approached but they did not know him. From a lad of seventeen he had grown beyond recognition in the twenty years. His foreign dress and robes of office, his speech and manners disguised him.
- (3) The brothers bowed to Joseph. His boyhood dream was fulfilled (Gen. 37:5-9)
- (4) Joseph submitted his brothers to a number of tests.
 - a. He accused them of being spies
 - b. He held Simeon and demanded Benjamin should be brought
 - c. He returned their money in the sacks. It filled them with fear.

The time had not yet come for Joseph to make himself known to his brothers, so he chose the above methods to find what he most desired to know. He wanted news of his ageing father and also to see **Benjamin**. He tested his brothers to learn if they were changed, repentant men.

3. IN CANAAN - Gen 42:29-43:14

Upon their return they told Jacob what "the Lord of the country" had said, but Jacob firmly refused to part with his youngest son (Gen. 42:38). God's purpose was working slowly but nevertheless surely. Jacob and his sons had yet to realise fully that their survival depended upon the salvation God had provided through Joseph in Egypt.

More food was needed, Judah promised to guarantee the welfare of his younger brother. Adversity had changed Judah. Earlier he had been foremost in selling Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37:26). Jacob consented (Gen. 43:11-14) because they were desperate for grain:

"Take a present ... take double money ... Take also your brother ... and God Almighty give you mercy before this man".

4. EGYPT – THE SECOND VISIT – Gen. 43:15-34

Underlying the events of the second visit to Egypt were the affection and warmheartedness of Joseph:

- (1) The brothers were fearful when summoned to Joseph's house, on account of the money found in their sacks.
- (2) At the sight of Benjamin, Joseph wept with joy.
- (3) Joseph placed them in order of age at the meal he gave them and this amazed them. He could not sit at the same table with them (as Egyptians did not eat with Hebrews).

- (4) **Benjamin, the most honoured guest, had five times the portion of his brothers. They were not jealous of him, showing that they had changed since the time they were jealous of Joseph.**

The Brothers Tested – Gen. 44

Joseph knew that Benjamin had now taken his (Joseph's) place in Jacob's affections. Would the brothers show the same envy of Benjamin as they had of Joseph twenty years before? He imposed a further test on them. How would they react if Benjamin was in peril?

The discovery of Joseph's silver cup in Benjamin's sack caused them to beg forgiveness at Joseph's feet. Joseph was satisfied that his brothers were changed, humbled men. Judah's touching appeal was an evidence of this – he volunteered to remain instead of Benjamin (Gen. 44: 18-34)

5. JOSEPH MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN – Gen 45

The time had come for Joseph to reveal himself to his brothers. He commanded all Egyptians to leave the room, and then to the astonishment and continued fear of his brothers, he revealed his identity. He told them not to worry about their ill-treatment of him, as God meant it for good and designed it as a means of preserving their lives. He called upon them to return home and bring back his aged father, promising them food for themselves and pasture for their cattle through the remaining years of famine. They were to live in Goshen, a relatively unused part of Egypt (because it was pasture land) near the fertile Delta of the Nile.

The disclosure of Joseph caused fear in the hearts of the brothers. They looked at him with wonder and were troubled at his presence (Gen. 45:3). Their ill-treatment of Joseph had rested heavily on their consciences (Gen. 42:21).

Joseph calmed their fears, he explained God's purpose in the matter. He had been sent to “**preserve a posterity of Israel in the earth**”, to “**save them by a great deliverance**”(Gen. 45:7). He told them it was God's action that he should be sent to Egypt and then, as he perceived that they realised that this lordly young prince was indeed their brother, he told them to hasten home and bring his father back to Egypt that he might care for him.

The wealth of Egypt was used to bring Jacob to Egypt. The brothers hastened home to tell their father the joyous news. He refused at first to believe it, but when he saw the presents sent by Joseph he was compelled to recognise the truth. With thankfulness to God and joy in his heart, he prepared to go down and meet his son. In this way, Jacob learnt that God **is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think**”. (Eph. 3:20; Jude 24-25)

6. PROVIDENCE IN JOSEPH'S LIFE

The Hand of God shaped the life of Joseph. Remember the dreams given to him? The first (Gen. 37:5-8) is significant in that the brothers saw its meaning – “Shalt thou, indeed, reign over us?” This was fulfilled (Gen. 42:6).

With the second dream (Gen. 37:9-11) Jacob pondered its meaning: “Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come and bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” The mother of Joseph, represented in the dream by the “moon”, was then dead! Little wonder that Jacob should “observe the saying”. For this to be fulfilled requires **resurrection** from the dead.

The close resemblance between the life of Joseph and that of Christ is obvious and striking. The principal features (excluding points of detail) are:

- (1) Joseph was raised up (as Christ was) to save his people.
- (2) In that he experienced evil treatment, rejection and what amounted to “death” Joseph's life patterned the deeper sufferings of our Lord: as his restoration and elevation to power foreshadowed the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- (3) As a typical history, the lesson reveals how the Jews, will be brought very low and that, before restoration to God's favour, they will humble themselves in the presence of the one whose injury they sought.
- (4) After Jewry has been humbled, however, they will be cared for and given the choicest of the land in which to live – the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- (5) Finally, all of the redeemed will offer praise and honour to Christ, whom God has provided for their redemption.

7. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Joseph's reaction to the circumstances that took him into Egypt and his high position in the land are seen in Gen. 45:5-7; 50:20. He recognised the hand of God guiding and controlling his life for the purpose of accomplishing His own will and plan for His people.

We, too, can learn that the circumstances of our own life can be controlled by God for the purpose of His ultimate honour if we, like Joseph, willingly allow Him to control us through the guiding influence of His Word.

REFERENCE LIBRARY

"The Ways of Providence", chapter 8.

"Scriptural Coincidences", part 1, chapters 11 and 12.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe separately the first and second visits of Joseph's brothers to Egypt.
2. How did Joseph test his brothers?
3. Show how Joseph's experiences with his brothers foreshadowed that of Jesus Christ with the Jews.
4. Explain the fulfilment of Joseph's two boyhood dreams.
5. Show, overall, the hand of God in Joseph's life and his example for us.