

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

Genesis 42:1–45:28

Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams was correct, and the seven years of abundance in Egypt were followed by seven years of famine. Jacob's question in Genesis 42:1 demonstrates the desperation of his family's situation. Apparently all other options had been exhausted. Without food from Egypt, Jacob and his family would starve. So 10 sons went to Egypt. However, Benjamin, the youngest, stayed home. With Joseph gone, Benjamin was the only tie Jacob still had to his beloved Rachel, who had died at Benjamin's birth (Genesis 35:16-18). Jacob didn't want to risk losing Benjamin, too.

One might think that the brothers would have recognized Joseph when they first saw him. However, it had been over 20 years since they had seen him, and Joseph was a young man when he was sold into slavery. Besides the maturity he had gained, he was also no doubt dressed as Egyptian royalty. And even if the brothers had noticed a resemblance, they would quickly have rejected any notion that the slave they had sold to the Midianites could have become a ruler in Egypt.

Why did Joseph put his brothers through all the testing and struggle? To do it out of revenge would have been out of character for the Joseph described elsewhere in Scripture. Instead, he likely did it to help the brothers come to terms with their guilt for what they had done to him. He may also have wanted to see if they had changed their way of treating others. When Judah offered himself in Benjamin's place to protect Benjamin and save his father from further grief, Joseph apparently saw that he had accomplished his purpose. The brothers regretted what they had done and truly cared about Benjamin and Jacob.

When Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, their terror was justified. They remembered all too vividly what they had done to their brother. They knew what Joseph had put them through already. They saw the power Joseph wielded throughout Egypt. Certainly they feared for their very lives! However, Joseph's message was one of forgiveness, not revenge. In spite of the difficulties Joseph had undergone, he realized that God had sent him to Egypt for a purpose. Joseph knew that his dreams were coming true as his brothers bowed to him, but instead of lording his power over them, he saved their lives from the famine that would have killed them. Not only did Joseph send food, but Pharaoh also sent carts and provisions so that all of Joseph's family could come to Egypt. Joseph could better care for them there, in the fertile land of Goshen, than far away in the land of Canaan.

Devotion for Leaders

The One Thing: As Christians growing in relationship with Jesus, we enjoy the protection and promises of a loving God. Therefore, it's necessary and natural that we forgive those who hurt or offend us.

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: As servants in God's kingdom, it's important that we forgive those who wrong us. Are you suffering from an offense or struggling to forgive someone? Consider the trial that Joseph endured. Reread his story, and ask God to give you the same strength and wisdom he gave Joseph.