

Joseph tests his brothers

This is the seventh Bible study on Joseph. You can find the first six Bible studies at www.febelijbelstudies.nl/archief. But you can also use this Bible study on its own because of the background information.

Before we begin the Bible study, first some background information:

Joseph was born in Haran and, when he was about 6 years old, emigrated to Canaan, the land his father came from. To do this, he and the family he was born into had to walk some 800 kilometers. When they arrived in Canaan, his mother died giving birth to his little brother Benjamin. Joseph also has 10 older half-brothers and a half-sister. But his brothers dislike him because they see that father Jacob loves Joseph very much.

The brothers are jealous and also find it irritating that Joseph tells them that he dreams that everyone bows before him. So they mockingly call him "the master dreamer." One day, as the brothers are grazing the flock, they see Joseph approaching in the distance. He stands out because of his colorful coat.

When Joseph reaches his brothers, they grab him. They take off his coat and they throw him into a well. Then they see a caravan arriving; they are Ishmaelites bringing merchandise to Egypt. They pull Joseph out of the well and sell him to the traders. They take Joseph and sell him in Egypt to Potiphar. With Potiphar, Joseph is promoted because God blesses everything he does. Soon he controls all of Potiphar's household. But Potiphar's wife wants to seduce him. When Joseph does not respond to this, she turns the story around; she says Joseph wanted to seduce her. Potiphar becomes furious and throws him into prison.

In prison, Joseph notices that God is still with him. The jailer makes Joseph do more and more chores. This is how he gets to other prisoners. One day, two prisoners, Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, tell him they both had a dream. Joseph listens to them and God shows Joseph what those dreams mean. Joseph tells them and asks the cupbearer to think of him when he is free again. After three days, Joseph's explanation comes true; they are both released from prison; the cupbearer gets his job back and the baker is hanged. But unfortunately, the cupbearer forgets that he was going to ask Pharaoh for a pardon for Joseph.

After two years, the Pharaoh of Egypt receives 2 dreams that concern him greatly. But there is no one in all of Egypt who knows what these dreams mean. Then the cupbearer remembers Joseph. Joseph is taken out of prison and God reveals to Joseph what these dreams mean. He tells, "there will be 7 years of plenty, then there will be 7 years of famine. You must appoint a wise man Pharaoh, who will store up grain in the years of plenty for the bad years to come after that." "You must be that man, Joseph!" says Pharaoh, and so Joseph becomes the viceroy of Egypt. In the 7 years of abundance, so much grows that it cannot be counted. Joseph has it stored in barns. Then the years of famine break out, not only in Egypt but also in the surrounding countries.

There is also famine in Canaan. Father Jacob hears that there is food for sale in Egypt and sends his sons there. Except Benjamin, he is not allowed to go with them. The brothers come to stand before the viceroy in Egypt; they bow deeply before him. They do not recognize him, because it is Joseph who sits on the throne. But Joseph does recognize them. He says angrily, "What are you doing here, are you spies to see how you can attack

us?" The brothers are startled and say "No sir, we are honest men, we have come to buy food for our families."

Joseph hears them out and finds out that his father is still alive and that Benjamin was not allowed to come with him. But he wants so much to see him again. That is why Simeon has to stay behind; he is not allowed to return with them when the brothers go back home. Will they come back? And will Benjamin be there?

We read from the Bible (ERV):

Genesis 43:1-2

Jacob Lets Benjamin Go to Egypt

1The famine was very bad in that country. 2The people ate all the grain they had brought from Egypt. When that grain was gone, Jacob said to his sons, "Go to Egypt and buy some more grain for us to eat."

Genesis 43:15-16

15So the brothers took the gifts to give to the governor. And the brothers took twice as much money with them as they took the first time. This time Benjamin went with the brothers to Egypt.

The Brothers at Joseph's House

16When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his servant, "Bring these men into my house. Kill an animal and cook it. They will eat with me at noon today."

Genesis 43:26-34

26When Joseph came home, the brothers gave him the gifts they had brought with them. Then they bowed down to the ground in front of him.

27Joseph asked them how they were doing. Then he said, "How is your elderly father you told me about? Is he still alive?"

28The brothers answered, "Yes, sir, our father is still alive." And they again bowed before Joseph.

29Then Joseph saw his brother Benjamin. (Benjamin and Joseph had the same mother.) Joseph said, "Is this your youngest brother that you told me about?" Then Joseph said to Benjamin, "God bless you, my son!"

30Joseph felt a strong desire to show his brother Benjamin that he loved him. He was about to cry and didn't want his brothers to see him, so he ran into his private room and cried there. 31Then Joseph washed his face and came out. He regained control of himself and said, "Now it is time to eat."

32The servants seated Joseph at a table by himself. His brothers were at another table by themselves, and the Egyptians were at a table by themselves. The Egyptians believed that it was wrong for them to eat with Hebrews. 33Joseph's brothers were seated at a table facing him. The brothers were looking at each other because, to their surprise, they had been seated in order, from the oldest to the youngest. 34Servants were taking food from Joseph's table and bringing it to them. But the servants gave Benjamin five times more than the others. The brothers continued to eat and drink with Joseph until they were drunk.

Genesis 44

Joseph Sets a Trap

1Then Joseph gave a command to his servant. He said, "Fill the men's sacks with as much grain as they can carry. Then put each man's money into his sack with the grain. 2Put the youngest brother's money in his sack too. But also put my special silver cup in his sack." So the servant obeyed Joseph.

3Early the next morning the brothers and their donkeys were sent back to their country.

4After they had left the city, Joseph said to his servant, "Go and follow the men. Stop them and say to them, 'We were good to you! So why have you been bad to us? Why did you steal my master's silver cup? 5My master drinks from that cup, and he uses it to learn secret things. What you did was wrong!'"

6So the servant obeyed. He rode out to the brothers and stopped them. The servant said to them what Joseph had told him to say.

7But the brothers said to the servant, "Why does the governor say these things? We wouldn't do anything like that! 8We brought back the money that we found in our sacks before. So surely we wouldn't steal silver or gold from your master's house. 9If you find the silver cup in any of our sacks, let that man die. You can kill him, and we will be your slaves."

10The servant said, "I agree, except that only the man who is found to have the cup will be my slave. The others will be free."

The Trap Is Sprung; Benjamin Is Caught

11Then every brother quickly opened his sack on the ground. 12The servant started looking in the sacks. He started with the oldest brother and ended with the youngest. He found the cup in Benjamin's sack. 13The brothers were very sad. They tore their clothes to show their sadness. They put their sacks back on the donkeys and went back to the city.

14When Judah and his brothers went back to Joseph's house, Joseph was still there. The brothers fell to the ground and bowed down before him. 15Joseph said to them, "Why have you done this? Didn't you know that I have a special way of learning secrets? No one is better at this than I am!"

16Judah said, "Sir, there is nothing we can say. There is no way to explain. There is no way to show that we are not guilty. God has judged us guilty for something else we have done. So all of us, even Benjamin, will be your slaves."

17But Joseph said, "I will not make you all slaves! Only the man who stole the cup will be my slave. You others can go in peace to your father."

Judah Pleads for Benjamin

18Then Judah went to Joseph and said, "Sir, please let me speak plainly with you. Please don't be angry with me. I know that you are like Pharaoh himself. 19When we were here before, you asked us, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' 20And we answered you, 'We have a father—he is an old man. And we have a younger brother. Our father loves him because he was born while our father was old. This youngest son's brother is dead, so he is the only son who is left from that mother. Our father loves him very much.' 21Then you said to us, 'Bring that brother to me. I want to see him.' 22And we said to you, 'That young boy cannot come. He cannot leave his father. If his father loses him, his father will be so sad that he will die.' 23But you said to us, 'You must bring your youngest brother, or I will not sell you grain again.' 24So we went back to our father and told him what you said.

25"Later, our father said, 'Go back and buy us some more food.' 26We said to our father, 'We cannot go without our youngest brother. The governor said he will not sell us grain again until he sees our youngest brother.' 27Then my father said to us, 'You know that my wife

Rachel gave me two sons. 28I let one son go away, and he was killed by a wild animal. And I haven't seen him since. 29If you take my other son away from me, and something happens to him, I will be sad enough to die.' 30Now, imagine what will happen when we go home without our youngest brother—he is the most important thing in our father's life! 31Our father will die if he sees that the boy isn't with us—and it will be our fault. We will send our father to his grave a very sad man.

32"I took responsibility for the young boy. I told my father, 'If I don't bring him back to you, you can blame me for the rest of my life.' 33So now I beg you, please let the boy go back with his brothers, and I will stay and be your slave. 34I cannot go back to my father if the boy is not with me. I am very afraid of what would happen to my father."

Genesis 45:1-7

Joseph Tells Who He Is

1Joseph could not control himself any longer. He cried in front of all the people who were there. Joseph said, "Tell everyone to leave here." So all the people left. Only the brothers were left with Joseph. Then he told them who he was. 2Joseph continued to cry, and all the Egyptian people in Pharaoh's house heard it. 3He said to his brothers, "I am your brother Joseph. Is my father doing well?" But the brothers did not answer him because they were confused and afraid.

4So Joseph said to his brothers again, "Come here to me. I beg you, come here." When the brothers went to him, he said to them, "I am your brother Joseph. I am the one you sold as a slave to Egypt. 5Now don't be worried. Don't be angry with yourselves for what you did. It was God's plan for me to come here. I am here to save people's lives. 6This terrible famine has continued for two years now, and there will be five more years without planting or harvest. 7So God sent me here ahead of you so that I can save your people in this country.

Explanation:

It has been some time since the brothers were in Egypt to buy food for their families. But their supplies are running low. Father says, "go back to Egypt, but Benjamin stays home." However, the brothers know that without Benjamin, they don't have to arrive at the viceroy's house. Simeon even had to stay behind until they return with Benjamin.

Then Father says, "Very well then, go..."

Judah says, "I will vouch for Benjamin, father!"

They bring gifts and also double money. For the money they had paid last time was miraculously back at the top of their sacks of food.

In Egypt, Joseph, as viceroy, was busy managing the famine.

It was nice to see his brothers again. But he wonders if they are still as mean as before. And how will they treat his little brother Benjamin?

He actually expected them back by now.

Joseph makes a plan. The plan begins with a feast.

And then, one day, the brothers stand before his throne again.

The brothers are taken to the palace by a servant. Simeon also rejoins them. When Joseph comes home that afternoon they give him the gifts, they bow deeply before him. Joseph no doubt thought back to the dreams he had as a child: the sheaves bowed before his sheaf and the sun, moon and 11 stars bowed before him.

Joseph asks through an interpreter how they and their father are doing. Then he looks at Benjamin. "Is that the youngest brother?" he asks. "Yes."

It's been over 20 years since you saw Benjamin, he was just a boy then.

It moves him, so he runs away to cry in another room.

When Joseph returns they go to the table, the brothers are seated at the table in order of their age. That's strange!

They are served a delicious feast. What a luxury in this time of famine!

And Benjamin gets as much as 5 times as much food as the rest.

They eat, drink, enjoy and ... at the end of the evening they are all drunk.

Joseph could have said, "It's me: Joseph! How nice, isn't it, that we are all together again!"

But he doesn't; he sticks to his plan.

The next day, the brothers leave for home again with Simeon and Benjamin. It had gone so differently than they had thought. What a great day it was yesterday. And they got a lot of food for their families.

When they have been on the road for a while, the servant of the viceroy comes up behind them. They stop. "Why did you treat my lord so badly when he was so good to you?" he asks angrily. "Why did you steal his cup?"

The brothers are startled. "We would never do such a thing! We are honest men. We even brought back the money that was in our pockets to pay double now."

"If you find the cup with anyone, that person will be killed and the others will become your slaves." That is how confident they are.

The servant says, "The one with whom I find the cup will become a slave and the others will be free." All the sacks are taken off the donkeys. He begins to search the sacks of food, starting at sack of oldest brother.

Then, in Benjamin's very last sack, the servant finds the cup. Benjamin did not steal it; Joseph had this done to see how the brothers would react.

How startled the brothers are! They tear their clothes, as a sign of fear and sadness.

Dismayed, they return to the viceroy who is furiously waiting for them.

They throw themselves on the ground before Joseph.

Judah says, "What shall we say lord? How can we prove that we are innocent? It is God who is accusing us because of the crimes we have done. We will all become slaves to you."

"No," Joseph says, "Only the man with whom the cup is found will be my slave."

Judah says, "We cannot leave Benjamin behind, father will die of grief. He didn't want to let Benjamin go with us, but I said I would vouch for him. Benjamin is still the only son of the woman he loved dearly. And he loves Benjamin dearly, if I come home without him father will die of grief. Ah, let me be a slave instead of Benjamin! I promised father that I would take care of him."

When Judah finishes his plea, Joseph can no longer hold back. How wonderful to see that his brothers have changed!

He sends all the servants out of the room and then he exclaims: "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

The brothers, they cannot utter a word! They are bewildered!
But Joseph says, "Do come closer! I am Joseph whom you sold to Egypt. But you need not be afraid. For God has sent me before you to save your lives from famine."

Prayer: Lord, Joseph went from the well to the palace. You made things right in Joseph's life. Yet there was always the pain of what the brothers had done to him. You gave Joseph the wisdom he needed to test them. Lord, people can change for the better, thank You for that. Thank You for bringing Joseph to a place where he could keep his brothers and his people from dying of famine.

Questions:

1. Joseph devises a plan to test his brothers. He orders them to hide his silver cup in Benjamin's sack. Then he accuses them of theft.

What do you think of his plan?

How can he tell that they have changed?

What will cause the brothers to be changed?

2. Why is it so important for Joseph to know that his brothers have changed?

b. Would he have had a plan B in case they left Benjamin to his fate?

3. When Joseph has made himself known to his brothers he names what they did wrong: "You sold me."

(Why) is it important to name what people have done to you?

4. God had raised Joseph from the depths (the pit) (the throne). But the pain that he had been sold by his brothers was still there. What advice would you give to someone still carrying pain from the past?