

# Joseph's brothers travel to Egypt

This is the sixth Bible study on Joseph. You can find the first five Bible studies at [www.febebijbelstudies.nl/archief](http://www.febebijbelstudies.nl/archief). But you can also use this Bible study on its own.

Before we begin the Bible study, 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 a lot.*

*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 abundance, 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.*

## **We read from the Bible (ERV): Genesis 42:1-38**

### The Dreams Come True

1During the famine in Canaan, Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt. So he said to his sons, "Why are you sitting here doing nothing? 2I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go there and buy grain for us so that we will live and not die!"

3So ten of Joseph's brothers went to Egypt to buy grain. 4Jacob did not send Benjamin. (Benjamin was Joseph's only full brother.) Jacob was afraid that something bad might happen to Benjamin.

5The famine was very bad in Canaan, so there were many people from Canaan who went to Egypt to buy grain. Among them were the sons of Israel.

6Joseph was the governor of Egypt at the time. He was the one who checked the sale of grain to people who came to Egypt to buy it. Joseph's brothers came to him and bowed before him. 7Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted like he didn't know them. He was rude when he spoke to them. He said, "Where do you come from?"

The brothers answered, "We have come from the land of Canaan to buy food."

8Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not know who he was. 9Then Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about his brothers.

Joseph said to his brothers, "You have not come to buy food! You are spies. You came to learn where we are weak."

10But the brothers said to him, "No, sir, we come as your servants. We have come only to buy food. 11We are all brothers—we all have the same father. We are honest men. We have come only to buy food."

12Then Joseph said to them, "No, you have come to spy on us!"

13And the brothers said, "No, sir, we come as servants from Canaan. We are all brothers, sons of the same father. There were twelve brothers in our family. Our youngest brother is still at home with our father, and the other brother died a long time ago."

14But Joseph said to them, "No! I can see that I am right. You are spies. 15But I will let you prove that you are telling the truth. In the name of Pharaoh, I swear that I will not let you go until your youngest brother comes here. 16One of you must go back to get your youngest brother while the rest of you stay here in prison. Then we can prove whether you are telling the truth or not. If you are not telling the truth, then by Pharaoh, I swear that you are spies!"

17Then Joseph put them all in prison for three days.

### The Troubles Begin

18After three days Joseph said to them, "I am a God-fearing man. Do this, and I will let you live. 19If you are honest men, one of your brothers can stay here in prison, and the others can go and carry grain back to your people. 20But then you must bring your youngest brother back here to me. Then I will know that you are telling the truth, and you will not have to die."

The brothers agreed to this. 21They said to each other, "We are being punished for the bad thing we did to our younger brother Joseph. We saw the trouble he was in. He begged us to save him, but we refused to listen. So now we are in trouble."

22Then Reuben said to them, "I told you not to do anything bad to that boy, but you refused to listen to me. Now we are being punished for his death."

23-24Joseph was using an interpreter to talk to his brothers, so the brothers did not know that he understood their language. He heard and understood everything they said, and that made him want to cry. So he turned away and left the room. When he came back, he took

one of the brothers, Simeon, and tied him up while the others watched. 25Joseph told the servants to fill the bags with grain. The brothers had given Joseph the money for the grain, but he didn't keep the money. He put the money in their bags of grain. Then he gave them what they would need for their trip back home.

26So the brothers put the grain on their donkeys and left. 27That night the brothers stopped at a place to spend the night. One of the brothers opened his sack to get some grain for his donkey. And there in the sack, he saw his money! 28He said to the other brothers, "Look! Here is the money I paid for the grain. Someone put the money back in my sack." The brothers were very afraid. They said to one another, "What is God doing to us?"

The Brothers Report to Jacob

29The brothers went back to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. They told him about everything that had happened. 30They said, "The governor of that country spoke rudely to us. He thought that we were spies! 31We told him, 'We are honest men, not spies. 32There are twelve of us brothers, all from the same father. But one of our brothers is no longer living, and the youngest is still at home with our father in Canaan.'

33"Then the governor of that country said to us, 'Here is a way to prove that you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me. Take your grain back to your families.

34Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I will know if you are honest men or if you were sent from an army to destroy us. If you are telling the truth, I will give your brother back to you. I will give him to you, and you will be free to buy grain in our country.'"

35Then the brothers started taking the grain out of their sacks, and every brother found his bag of money in his sack of grain. When the brothers and their father saw the money, they were afraid.

36Jacob said to them, "Do you want me to lose all of my children? Joseph is gone. Simeon is gone, and now you want to take Benjamin away too!"

37But Reuben said to his father, "Father, you may kill my two sons if I don't bring Benjamin back to you. Trust me. I will bring him back to you."

38But Jacob said, "I will not let Benjamin go with you. His brother is dead, and he is the only son left from my wife Rachel. It would kill me if anything happened to him during the trip to Egypt. You would send me to the grave a very sad, old man."

## Explanation:

There is not only famine in Egypt, food is also running out in Canaan.

Jacob says to his sons, "Do something! Go to Egypt, I have heard that there is grain there."

10 brothers saddle their donkeys, Benjamin is not allowed by father. Benjamin is the only son Jacob has left from his deceased wife Rachel.

The brothers make the same journey Joseph made 20 years before.

In Egypt, Joseph is viceroy; he is in charge of issuing the grain. There is an awful lot stored in barns during the 7 years when the wheat grew abundantly. Many people come to buy grain.

Then Joseph sees a group of Hebrew men enter, he recognizes them immediately: they are his brothers. They bow down before Joseph. Exactly as Joseph had dreamed when he was young.

The brothers do not recognize Joseph. Where 9 years ago the cupbearer described Joseph as a "Hebrew boy" he now looks like an Egyptian.

What is Joseph going to do now? Is he going to take revenge and punish his brothers? Does he cry out, "I am your brother Joseph?"

No, Joseph is cautious. He wants to know if they are still the same: heartless, mean....

He is also curious about his little brother Benjamin; and how will his brothers treat him?

And his father, would he still be alive?

Through an interpreter, he says sternly, "What are you doing here? Are you spies to watch the places in Egypt where we are most vulnerable so you can attack us?"

The brothers are startled! "No sir, we are honest men. We want to buy food. We are all sons of 1 man. There were 12 of us, 1 son is no longer alive and the youngest son stayed home with father."

Joseph hears what his brothers say. Oh how wonderful: his father is still alive! And Benjamin is with father. But he also hears what they made father and other people wise. They have sold him but say he is no longer alive. But Joseph is not dead, he is alive and kicking! He is sitting here before them on the throne!

Joseph says, "1 of you must return to fetch the youngest son. Only then will I believe that you are honest and trustworthy."

He has them locked in prison for 3 days.

After 3 days, Joseph rejoins his brothers. He has thought about it and says, "1 brother stays here, the others pick up the youngest brother." He realizes that otherwise they cannot bring enough grain for the families who are in Canaan.

The whole event brings out the past in the brothers. What hasn't been talked about for years comes up now. "This happens to us because we have been so bad to Joseph. We saw his anguish of soul when he begged for mercy."

Ruben says, "I still said don't do anything to the boy, but you didn't listen! This is our punishment."

Joseph understands everything they say. It moves him, so he runs away.

When he returns, he has Simeon tied up; Simeonj has to go back to prison.

Why Simeon has to stay behind is not entirely clear. Perhaps Simeon stood by when Joseph was tied up by the Ishmaelites when he was sold.

Or was Simeon the brother Joseph had the best contact with when he was young? Suppose the brothers did not return, he still had Simeon....

We don't know.

In the sacks of grain, Joseph has the money put back. He also gives food for the road. Then the brothers leave for Canaan.

Joseph must have wondered if he would see them again. Will he have done the right thing?

Will they return with Benjamin? And will he see his father again?

Not only for the brothers, but also for Joseph it is a time of processing. So much has happened, so much trouble. Everything comes up again.

Above all, Joseph wants to know if his brothers have changed.

At night, when a brother opens his sack of grain to feed his donkey, he sees the money lying on top of the grain. He is greatly frightened.

Later they discover that with the other brothers the money is also on top of the grain. What does that mean? They say, "What has God done to us?"

Back with Father, they tell him everything that happened. Jacob says, "You are robbing me of my children: Joseph is no longer there, Simeon is left in Egypt...Not a hair on my head that Benjamin will go with you!"

However, after a while the grain runs out. What should they do now?

***Prayer: Lord, after years Joseph meets the bullies of old. They stand before him. They not only treated him unfairly, they banished him from their lives by selling him to traders. They took away his life with his beloved father and little brother. What pain and sorrow they caused.***

***Lord, we see how carefully Joseph proceeds. Can we learn from Joseph?***

***Even today, people can damage and hurt each other. Lord, I want to pray for all those people who have also been treated unfairly and are scarred for life as a result. Help them Lord, just as You helped Joseph. Will You be near them and will You heal wounds? Amen.***

## questions

1. Joseph comes face to face with men who have done something horrible to him, in fact, they are his own brothers! Now the roles are reversed: Joseph can do what he wants with them.

What would you have done in his position?

2. The past has been pushed away from everyone: no one talks about what happened. Now everything comes out and they speak out that they did terrible things.

Why is it so important to talk about past events, no matter how painful?

3. Can people change?

b. What can you tell that the brothers have changed?

c. How might they have changed?

4. Why would Joseph have had the money put back in the sacks?

5. Where do you see God's hand in this history?

6. Is it hard to forgive when someone has done something to you? What can we learn from Joseph?

This Biblestudy was written by Carla Heuvelman and can be found at [www.febelijbelstudies.nl](http://www.febelijbelstudies.nl)