

Joseph sees his father again

Before we begin our Bible study, here is some background information:

Joseph was born in Haran and emigrated to Canaan, his father's homeland, when he was about six years old. When they arrived in Canaan, his mother died during the birth of his younger brother Benjamin. Joseph also has ten older half-brothers and one half-sister. They were born from the marriage of his father Jacob and his aunt Leah.

But his brothers hate him because they see that their father Jacob loves Joseph very much. The brothers are jealous and also find it annoying that Joseph tells them that he dreams that everyone bows down to him. They mockingly call him "the master dreamer." One day, while 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 pull off his coat and throw him into a pit. Then they see a caravan approaching; it is Ishmaelites bringing merchandise to Egypt. They pull Joseph out of the pit and sell him to the merchants. They take Joseph with them and sell him to Potiphar in Egypt. Joseph is promoted by Potiphar because God blesses everything he does. Soon he is in charge of Potiphar's entire household. But Potiphar's wife wants to seduce him. When Joseph refuses, she turns the story around and says that Joseph wanted to seduce her. Potiphar becomes furious and throws him into prison.

In prison, Joseph realizes that God is still with him. The prison guard gives Joseph more and more chores to do. This brings him into contact with other prisoners. One day, two prisoners, Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, tell him that they have both had dreams. Joseph listens to them, and God shows Joseph what the dreams mean. Joseph tells them and asks the cupbearer to remember him when he is released. After three days, Joseph's interpretation comes true; they are both taken out of prison; the cupbearer gets his job back and the baker is hanged. But unfortunately, the cupbearer forgets to ask Pharaoh to pardon Joseph.

After two years, the Pharaoh of Egypt has two dreams that greatly concern him. But there is no one in all of Egypt who knows what these dreams mean. Then the cupbearer remembers Joseph. Joseph is released from prison and God reveals to Joseph what these dreams mean. He says: "There will be seven years of abundance, followed by seven years of famine. You must appoint a wise man, Pharaoh, who will store grain during the years of abundance for the bad years that will follow." "You must be that man, Joseph!" says Pharaoh, and so Joseph becomes the viceroy of Egypt. During the seven years of abundance, so much grows that it is impossible to count. Joseph has it stored in barns. Then the years of famine begin, not only in Egypt but also in the surrounding countries.

There is also famine in Canaan. Father Jacob hears that food is for sale in Egypt and sends his sons there. Except Benjamin, he is not allowed to go. The brothers appear before the viceroy in Egypt and bow deeply to him. They do not recognize him; it is Joseph who sits on the throne. But Joseph recognizes them. He says angrily, "What are you doing here? Are you spies, trying to find out how to attack our country?" The brothers are startled and say, "No, sir, we are honest men. We have come to buy food for our families."

Joseph listens to them and finds out that his father is still alive and that Benjamin was not allowed to come. But he wants to see him again so badly. That is why Simeon has to stay behind; he is not allowed to return home with his brothers. The next time they want to buy food, they must also bring Benjamin with them.

When the food at home is almost gone, their father Jacob tells the brothers that they must go back to Egypt. But the brothers know that they cannot go without Benjamin. Judah convinces his father by saying that he will vouch for Benjamin. When they stand before Joseph again, they are welcomed warmly. They are given a delicious feast. Then they set off for home again with their donkeys fully loaded. But they do not know that Joseph has had his cup hidden in Benjamin's bag. When they have been on the road for a while, they are overtaken by Joseph's servant. He says angrily, "My master has been so good to you, why did you steal his cup?" They say, "We would never do that, we are honest men! But the cup is found in Benjamin's bag. Defeated, they all return to the palace. Now the viceroy is no longer so friendly: "The one who has my cup must become my slave; the others may go home."

The brothers are distraught: how can they appear before their father without Benjamin?! Judah makes a long speech and says that he wants to take Benjamin's place. Joseph now knows that his brothers have changed.

Then Joseph can no longer restrain himself: "It is I, Joseph!" The brothers are greatly alarmed. But Joseph says, "It was not you, but God who brought me to this place. This way you can survive the famine. But go, bring your father and your families and come to Egypt."

When the brothers return home, they exclaim: "Father, Joseph is still alive!" Jacob cannot believe it. Until he sees the wagons Joseph has sent to fetch them. It must be true! His soul revives and he cries out: "My son Joseph is alive! Come, let's go, I want to see him before I die!"

We read from the Bible (AMP): Genesis 46:1-7 en 28-34 en Genesis 47:1-12

GENESIS 46

Jacob Moves to Egypt

1So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba [where both his father and grandfather had worshiped God], and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. [Gen 21:33; 26:23-25] 2And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob!" And he said, "Here I am." 3And He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you (your descendants) a great nation there. 4I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you (your people) up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes [to close them at the time of your death]."

5So Jacob set out from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. 6And they took

their livestock and the possessions which they had acquired in the land of Canaan and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him. 7His sons and his grandsons, his daughters and his granddaughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.

28Now Jacob (Israel) sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to direct him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. 29Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen; as soon as he presented himself before him (authenticating his identity), he fell on his [father's] neck and wept on his neck a [very] long time. 30And Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die [in peace], since I have seen your face [and know] that you are still alive." 31Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me; 32and the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.' 33And it shall be that when Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' 34you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth until now, both we and our fathers [before us],' in order that you may live [separately and securely] in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is repulsive to the Egyptians."

Genesis 47:1=12

Jacob's Family Settles in Goshen

1Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and their herds and all that they own, have come from the land of Canaan, and they are in the land of Goshen." 2He took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. 3And Pharaoh said to his brothers [as Joseph expected], "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers [before us]." 4Moreover, they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to live temporarily (sojourn) in the land [of Egypt], for there is no pasture for the flocks of your servants [in our land], for the famine is very severe in Canaan. So now, please let your servants live in the land of Goshen." 5Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know of any men of ability among them, put them in charge of my livestock."

7Then Joseph brought Jacob (Israel) his father and presented him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8And Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How old are you?" 9Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. Few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, and they have not reached the years that my fathers lived during the days of their pilgrimage." 10And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and departed from his presence. 11So Joseph settled his father and brothers and gave them a possession in Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses (Goshen), as Pharaoh commanded. 12Joseph provided and supplied his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to [the needs of] their children.

Explanation

What wonderful news Jacob has received: his son Joseph, whom he thought had died, is still alive!

And he is even viceroy of Egypt. Joseph has sent wagons to fetch his father and his family. All the tents are taken down, all their belongings are packed up, and everything is loaded onto the wagons.

But before he goes to Egypt, Jacob first travels to Beersheba, a place where his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham lived. Here he offers sacrifices to God. Jacob wants to know if God approves of him taking his family to another country. After all, Canaan is the place God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Is he allowed to leave this place?

There had been a famine before, and at that time the Lord did not allow Jacob to go to Egypt (Genesis 26:1-6).

At night, God speaks to Jacob in a vision. That is like having a dream while you are awake.

God says that Jacob may go to Egypt, and there He will make Jacob into a great nation. Jacob will die in Egypt with Joseph at his side, and his descendants will return to Canaan.

With God's blessing, Jacob travels to Egypt with everything he has, with peace of mind. God will go with him!

After they have been traveling for a while, Judah is sent ahead to Joseph. Joseph must designate the place where they may live. Judah is the family's representative here. Judah has not lived with his family for a long time. He has started a family in another place. Due to the famine and the journeys with his brothers to Egypt, he is reunited with his family.

He is given the leading role here, partly because he made a passionate plea for Benjamin to the viceroy (Joseph).

All secrets have been revealed, the lying and deceit are over. Family ties are restored: Judah belongs to the family again and Joseph will also belong to his family again. A new era is dawning: this is the time of healing.

When Joseph hears from Judah that his family is almost in the province of Goshen, he jumps into his carriage. After all these years, he will finally meet his father again.

When they see each other, they fall into each other's arms, and Joseph cries for a long time at his father's neck.

These are tears of sadness, about exile, injustice, loss, loneliness, and how everything has turned out. Twenty years of sadness come pouring out.

Tears heal. For Jacob, too, this reunion is a moment when a whole chapter of his life can be closed. "Now that I see you, I know you are still alive. Now I can die, now my soul can rest," he says to his son.

How tragic the past twenty years must have been for Jacob: thinking that his son had died when no body was ever found. How can you close something like that?

We hear it again when he later says to Pharaoh, "My short life has been full of difficulties and sorrow."

For Joseph brings his father and five of his brothers to Pharaoh. "My father and brothers have arrived from Canaan with all their animals and possessions," he says.

When Jacob comes before Pharaoh, he blesses Pharaoh. This may seem strange to us, because Jacob is less than Pharaoh, isn't he? Dependent on Pharaoh's goodness?

Jacob is a chosen man. God chose him, his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham to enter into a special covenant with them. Jacob knows God. God speaks to him. And Jacob asks that God to bless Pharaoh. Twice: when he arrives and when he leaves.

What Jacob does here is actually very beautiful.

Perhaps we too can ask God to bless those around us who do not know Him. And in that way, we can be an instrument in God's hand for others.

Pharaoh does not react negatively. He engages in conversation with them.

Pharaoh asks what Joseph's brothers do for a living.

And although Egyptians despise and hate shepherds, Joseph advises them to simply tell him that they are shepherds.

No more lying or embellishing things, but just being honest.

Pharaoh says to Joseph, "Choose a place for them to settle, give them the best land in Egypt." They are the family of the second most important ruler in Egypt, so they are allowed to live in the best part of the country. Pharaoh even offers them a job: "Skilled men may be appointed as overseers of my livestock."

Jacob's family goes to live in the province of Goshen. The famine worsens in the land and everyone suffers, but Joseph provides his family with food, enough for everyone.

Prayer: Lord, how wonderful that Jacob and Joseph are reunited! The time of sorrow is over; they are together again. Thank You for keeping Jacob's family alive during the severe famine through Joseph. One day, the promised savior will be born from that family. You continue Your work. You are with us, even when we cannot see You. We can trust in You. Hallelujah, thank You, Lord.

Questions:

1 Before Jacob goes to Egypt, he first asks God if it is okay for him to leave the Promised Land.

a. Do you ask God what He thinks of your choices before you make them?

b. May God guide your life?

c. Is there a tension between making your own choices and waiting to see what God will do in your life?

2. Jacob had to miss his beloved son Joseph for more than 20 years. Yet Joseph was the only son who could do this task (as viceroy, ensuring the preservation of many people, including Jacob and his family).

Jacob had to give Joseph up to the Lord because He could use him in a greater plan.

Jacob receives "sweetness after bitterness" (Psalm 77:6). In the last years of his life, he is able to live in abundance with a family that has been reunited. He also does not have to emigrate again, as God said that he could die in Egypt and that He would bring his descendants back to the Promised Land.

a. Can you give an example of someone who experienced a lot of "bitterness" in life and after many years received "sweetness"?

b. Does sweetness always follow bitterness?

c. Can Jacob's story be an encouragement if you yourself are experiencing bitterness in your life?

3. Jacob blesses Pharaoh. Why does he do this?

b. Are there people in your life whom you can bless? How do you do that?

c. Would you dare to say it out loud to that person?

4. Even when we don't see it, God's work continues. Can you give an example of this?