

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
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Oakleigh, Vic, 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 33

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 42

INTRODUCTION

God works slowly but surely. About twenty two years ago, God revealed to Joseph through dreams that he would be exalted above his brothers. Joseph was then about seventeen years old. For the next thirteen years, he went through three terrible and trying experiences. He was stripped and thrown into a pit by his envious brothers and then they sold him to some Midianite merchants who were journeying to Egypt. In Egypt, he was sold as a slave to Potiphar, the chief of Pharaoh's army. Faithfully serving Potiphar, he was falsely accused of trying to seduce Potiphar's wife and was thrown into prison. In prison, Pharaoh's butler whom Joseph helped to interpret his dream, forgot him when his position was restored. He stayed in the prison for two more years.

In this chapter, God's appointed time had arrived to fulfil His plan and purpose. Joseph was suddenly ushered into the presence of Pharaoh who had

dreamed two dreams and no one could interpret them. Joseph interpreted and counselled Pharaoh, who was so pleased with him that Pharaoh promoted him and made him the most powerful man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. God may be slow in fulfilling His will, but His plan and purpose will surely come to pass. It may be slow according to us, but His appointed time is always the best.

When God permits bad things to happen to His children, it is for their own good. This is evident in Joseph's life. God was preparing and moulding him for the top job in Egypt. Being a young lad when he first set foot on Egyptian soil, there was much to learn and become. Great and powerful people display strong and fine character. The qualities of humility, patience, honesty, industry and empathy were but some of the character traits which Joseph learned in the various schools of life. It is also written that what we sow is what we reap, and that our sins will find us out.¹ This truth is aptly illustrated in the lives of Joseph's brothers.

Chapter 42 strikes a happy and joyous note in the life of Joseph, who unwaveringly and against all odds trusted God. He was so richly rewarded and that is the way of God whose loving kindness and tender mercies are from everlasting to everlasting! In addition, there are many precious and practical lessons, which we can learn.

¹Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Numbers 32:23 But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.

OUTLINE

A. Jacob Called His Sons to Go to Egypt to Buy Corn that They May Live and Not Die (42:1-5).

1. Jacob rebuked his sons and sent them to Egypt to buy corn (vv. 1, 2).
2. Joseph's ten brothers went to Egypt except Benjamin because the famine was in the land of Canaan too (vv.3-5).

B. Joseph's Brothers Appeared Before Joseph (42:6-20).

1. Joseph's brothers appeared before Joseph and bowed themselves to him (v.6).
2. Joseph recognised his brothers but his brothers did not (vv.7-8).
3. Joseph remembered his dreams and he purposely charged them for being spies (v.9).
4. Joseph's brothers denied the charge and tried to explain to him, but Joseph repeatedly charged them the same (vv.10-14).
5. Joseph put them in prison and suggested that one of them goes back and brings Benjamin (vv.15-17).
6. On the third day, Joseph allowed them to return to Canaan with the corn and provisions instead, but one of them would be detained in order to ensure that they return to Egypt and bring Benjamin with them (vv.18-20).

C. Joseph's Brothers Confessed Their Guilt Over the Way They Treated Him (42: 21-24).

1. They confessed their guilt concerning their treatment of Joseph (vv.21-22).
2. Joseph heard and understood their conversation and turned away and wept (vv.23-24a).
3. Simeon was detained (v.24b).

D. Joseph's Brothers were Frightened that the Purchase Money was Found in Their Sacks (42:25-34).

1. Joseph commanded his servants to return their money and put it in their sacks (v.25).
2. They departed to return to Canaan and when they discovered that their money was found in their sacks, they were afraid (vv.26-28).
3. They told their father Jacob every thing that happened in Egypt (vv. 9-34).

E. Jacob Refused to Let His Sons Take Benjamin to Egypt to Secure The Release of Simeon (42:35-38).

1. They were afraid because of the money, which was found in the sacks (v.35).
2. Jacob bemoaned his grief and refused to allow them to take Benjamin to Egypt (v.36-38).

COMMENTARY

Act, Don't Wait

Famine struck in all the land. In Egypt, there was grain for the people and many came from other regions to Egypt to buy food. The land of Canaan was not spared. Jacob and his family had almost exhausted their food supplies. Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, but his eleven sons did nothing. Instead of suggesting that they go to Egypt to buy provisions for their families, they “look one upon another” (v.1). The reason why they were staring at one another is not reported. Could they be saying in their heart: “Not me; anywhere but Egypt.” Egypt reminded them of their brother Joseph, whom they had somewhat forgotten, but now their memory of what they did to him was stirred up. Jacob being a man of action chided them and instructed them to go to Egypt to buy food so that they would live and not die. That tells us that the famine was very severe, and it was a matter of life and death. They were in a desperate situation.

Joseph's ten brothers went down. Benjamin did not go with them because Jacob would not allow him to go for fear that something might happen and he loses Benjamin. Jacob still remembered Joseph. In his decision and action, Jacob showed a lack of faith and trust in God. So Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt.

Reap What You Sow

They came before Joseph, who held a dual position. He was the Prime Minister of Egypt, and he took a personal interest in overseeing the sale

of the grain. Perhaps, he knew that one day his brothers would come to buy grain. When they came, Joseph could recognise them quite easily. All of them were older than Joseph. There was not much change in their appearance, and the fact that they came as one entity, ten of them, made it even easier for Joseph to detect. They could not recognise Joseph because, we can rightly surmise that they did not expect that great and noble man superintending the sale of grain to be Joseph, their brother. Joseph looked Egyptian, with his head and face shaven; wearing Egyptian clothes, and spoke in Egyptian. How could they even suspect that this great man was Joseph! When they came before Joseph, they bowed down before him (v.6).

Now Joseph remembered God's revelation to him in his dreams. God was fulfilling His revealed plan to Joseph. Joseph's opening statement to them was surprisingly unexpected. He did not reveal his identity. He spoke to them through an interpreter. He treated them harshly and when he spoke to them, he charged them for being spies (v.7)! Why charge them for being spies and not some other crime? One wonders. Someone has suggested that when he was serving his father, his brothers must have poured scorn on what they saw as Joseph's acts of spying on them. So they were now getting a taste of their own medicine. When they denied, Joseph repeated his charge, and he did this four times, each time indicating to his brothers that he was not satisfied with their explanation. His brothers were desperate and they began to tell Joseph about their family, saying that there were twelve of them, one was not (that was Joseph), the youngest was with their father (this

revealed that his father, Jacob was still living, and his younger brother, Benjamin too). Joseph put them through another test to prove their integrity and honesty. Joseph proposed that he would take nine of them as hostage and let one of them go back to bring Benjamin in order to secure their release. However, he kept them in prison for three days. This was a good move on the part of Joseph. He gave his brothers and also himself time to think. After three days, he reversed his plan. He mentioned that he feared God and would let nine of them go back and return with Benjamin, holding one of them hostage.

This second plan was better than the first for many good reasons. Surely Joseph must have thought through in the three days. First it would be dangerous for one of them to make the journey back alone. The journey was about 250 miles. He could be waylaid, robbed and even killed. Moreover, if he made it home, his old father Jacob might be fatally shocked. Jacob could be persuaded to let Benjamin go to Egypt if nine of them told their father rather than one. They needed a lot of food and provision to feed their families. It would not be wise and not possible for one to cart so much food alone back to Canaan. The revised plan was better.

The brothers were convicted of their past sin. They admitted their guilt. They were genuine. And they recounted how Joseph pleaded with them for mercy, but they would not hear. They deserved to be punished. Reuben reminded them that he had spoken up and asked them not to harm Joseph but they would not listen to him. Reuben then remarked that "his blood is required" of us, intimates that they believed that Joseph

might have died (v.22). Joseph heard and understood what they said. The situation was so emotionally charged that he could not bear it. He turned himself away and wept. How he loved them! Joseph was not being cruel to them. What he did was necessary for he wanted to see whether his brothers had changed from their evil ways. He wanted to see whether they were honest, sensitive to their father, and treating Benjamin well.

When he returned, he picked Simeon as the hostage. Simeon was the second eldest. He did not pick Reuben because he found out that Reuben wanted to save him then. However, the choice of Simeon was appropriate, not only because he was the second eldest, but because he had a reputation for cruelty. He led his brother Levi to massacre the Hivites (34:25), and in all probability, he might be the one who led the others in dealing with Joseph. Simeon should reap what he had sown. His life now depended on his brothers. If they did not return, he would die. Joseph then ordered that Simeon be bound in front of them to see. This was to impress upon them that he was serious and meant what he said.

Fear and Trust God

Joseph mentioned that he feared God. Indeed he meant well and it was not time for him to reveal his true identity to his brothers. His intention was to ascertain whether his brothers had changed for the better. He himself had learned much by trusting and obeying God, and now God had rewarded and blessed him. He wanted the best for his brothers too. It was time for the brothers to return to Canaan. Joseph ordered his servants to fill their sacks with grain, and

to return every one his money, and to give them provision for the journey (v.25). This proves that Joseph loved his brothers. Although he had not forgotten the bad treatment they inflicted upon him, he had forgiven them. He was in a position to take revenge and strike them back with the full weight of his power. He did not. Instead he was magnanimous. He would not take money from his brothers for the food, for he had the authority to give them free. Moreover, he made sure that they had enough provision for their journey. They need not have to consume from the grain in the sacks, which were for their families in Canaan. Joseph's action illustrates our Lord Jesus Christ's commandment to love and bless our enemies. This is turning the other cheek!

When the brothers found out that their money was returned to them, their first reaction was that they were afraid and exclaimed, "What is this that God hath done unto us" (v.28)? They recognised the hand of God in what had happened to them. They were afraid because they could be charged for stealing and cheating. All this unexpected happenings that occurred to them had aroused their guilty conscience. They had to wrestle with it. There are signs that they were repenting. So far they had been honest in their encounter with Joseph.

When they reached home, they told their father what happened in Egypt. They told the truth this time and tried very hard to explain to Jacob that Simeon's detention in Egypt was beyond them. They could do nothing at all. They also told Jacob that in order to secure Simeon's release, they had to bring Benjamin to Egypt. Moreover, they also

related to their father that they found their money in their sacks.

Jacob showed himself to be the same person he was before. He thought of himself. He blamed his sons for his sorrow and grief - Joseph was no more, Simeon was held hostage, and now Benjamin was to be taken away. Jacob's action showed two weaknesses. His love for Benjamin was an obsession. Benjamin was all his life and hope. He showed a weakening of his faith in God. In the first place if he had allowed Benjamin to go with them, it would have been a different matter completely. Joseph would have revealed his true identity, and upon their return, they would have all made their journey to Egypt much earlier, minus the period of anxiety and uncertainty. Jacob should have trusted God.

Reuben stood up and guaranteed to protect Benjamin and to bring Simeon back if Jacob would allow him. He displayed much courage and care. But his counter suggestion that should he fail, Jacob could kill Reuben's two sons, was foolish. Jacob was trying to keep every one safe and together. If Reuben should fail, it would mean the end of Benjamin, the end of Simeon and possibly himself, and then the end of two grand children! Reuben tried to do things according to human wisdom and ways. Walking close to God will always bear good fruit in all things, as the Lord has promised.

SUMMARY

The Lord our God has said that those whom He loves He will chasten if they sin against Him. We see how God stirs up the guilty conscience of Joseph's brothers and led them to the point of acknowledging their guilt and sin. For without this realisation, there will not be a strong conviction of the need of seeking forgiveness and change. Sometimes God permits our business to collapse, our wealth to crash, our health to fail, and our hopes to be dashed in order to get our attention to return to Him for good! God speaks clearly in Hebrews 12:

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby (vv.9-11)..

Joseph's life thus far demonstrates that God keeps His promises. He might be slow from our stand point, but His timing is always perfect and he is never too late. Unlike Jacob we ought to trust Him completely. Moreover, we must be very careful that we do not put all our love, attention, and hope in our children, and leave God out or even make Him second to them. In our lives, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ must have the pre-eminence in our heart. God deserves nothing less than our all, because He is God! Like Joseph, who feared God, he changed his plan for the better. His first proposal could have invited criticism against him for being vindictive and revengeful. But he feared

God. God gave him godly wisdom. He came up with a much better plan. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom as the writer of Proverbs declares. Let us fear God. AMEN

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DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Genesis 42:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-16.

Tuesday: Genesis 42:6-20; Ecclesiastes 12:1-14.

Wednesday: Genesis 42:21-24; Numbers 32:20-33.

Thursday: Genesis 42:25-34; Hebrews 12:5-11.

Friday: Genesis 42:35-38; Proverbs 3:1-12.

Discussion Questions

1. Why were the brothers looking at one another?

2. What does it tell about Jacob for not letting Benjamin go to Egypt with his brothers?

3. What could Joseph have done when he saw his brothers?

4. What did Joseph do instead?

5. How would you defend Joseph's treatment of his brothers?

6. Why did Joseph reverse his plan to hold one of them hostage instead of nine?

7. Why did Joseph insist on their bringing Benjamin to Egypt?

8. What were the character traits of Reuben as described in this chapter?

9. Why do you think Joseph picked Simeon as hostage and not Reuben?

12. What does Joseph's generosity tell us about his character?

10. Why did Joseph cry?

13. Why were the brothers afraid when they found out that their money was returned to them?

11. How generous was Joseph towards his brothers?

14. How can we empathise with Jacob?

15. What can we learn not to be like Jacob?
