

Joseph 17 when he gets his coat  
18/19 when imprisoned  
2 years + in prison 21/22  
7 years of abundance 28/29  
Brothers visit 29/30 12 years after he got his coat.  
Jacob lived 17 years in Egypt and died aged 147

## Genesis 42

### Situation

Jacob had twelve sons from 4 wives:

The sons of Leah:

Reuben the firstborn of Jacob,  
Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and

Zebulun.

The sons of Rachel:

Joseph and Benjamin.

The sons of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah:

Dan and Naphtali.

The sons of Leah's maidservant Zilpah:

Gad and Asher.

We know Rachel had died.

We also know that Reuben had slept with Bilhah, Simeon and Levi had slaughtered a whole village in vengeance for the rape of their half-sister Dinah.

Judah had slept with his daughter in law.

About 10-12 years ago, Joseph, Jacob's favourite son, was presumed dead, his coat covered in blood brought in by the other brothers.

The half-brothers had a dark secret. They had sold Joseph to slave traffickers.

Hardly a happy family. In fact it makes you wonder why God ever bothered with them. Yet this is the family God had chosen to be his special nation through which he was to show his glory, revealing himself in a special way so that the world would know his character and be guided on how to live.

But before we criticise God's purposes, that is no different from us. God chooses to bring his salvation to those who do not deserve it. In fact he reveals his glory by transforming sinners like you and me into his likeness, inviting us to be his sons and daughters.

Their situation turns sour. There is famine in the land. Remember they have no revelation that

the years of plenty would be followed by 7 years of famine. They were facing famine and starvation, a downturn in the economy, the future is bleak if not terminal.

Then they hear rumours of food supplies in Egypt and they still have money. So the 10 older brothers are packed off to Egypt to buy food. Such is the nature of the family that Benjamin remains at home for his own safety from his brothers! Notice that. This was a high risk venture going to a foreign country and there was no embassy or conventions or agreements to protect them. But Jacob fears his sons as much as what the Egyptians might do.

You heard the story but I want to identify some matters that Moses simply did not think significant.

First, the unexpected. Neither Joseph or the brothers could have anticipated the meeting. Joseph would have been unrecognisable. He was speaking a different language through an

interpreter. He was dressed in Egyptian garb, probably shaven headed and with grand finery. The brothers could not have imagined anything but a miserable end to Joseph. So when they arrive at an Egyptian Palace, belonging to the Prime Minister of Egypt, they do the bowing and pleasantries they are probably told to do.

Joseph, on the other hand, suddenly has 10 of his brothers bowing down in front of him.

There is an instant flashback to the dreams that created so much animosity in 37. His brothers were actually bowing down to him. The emotion of the moment would have been incredible. Joseph had to react. How he reacts tells us about his inner man. This begins as a knee-jerk reaction to discovering he has his brothers in his power.

How you react to a sudden event is determined by your inner person. That reaction will be a combination of trained response and the person you are. Emergency services, Police, military and the like constantly train to make the right

response to any crisis they may find themselves in. In a crisis they do the right thing because they are trained to respond that way. But given a situation you cannot of anticipated, you inner person makes the choices.

The Bible does not say that Joseph responded in a godly way. It does not mention the Nehemiah emergency prayer “ So I prayed to the God of heaven” in Nehemiah 2:4.

There is nothing in his apparent mind-set to suggest that he was initially anything but bent on revenge. But this is a man who has learned about God’s ways through a determined discipline of hope. He has remained faithful and he is known for his integrity through slavery, false accusation, imprisonment, being forgotten and then upgraded to Prime Minister of Egypt.

. So I think that the initial reaction rapidly gives way to a different way of thinking. By the time we get to Genesis 45:4-8 he understands what the last 12 years were about.

Here is the gist of that:

*v5 it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.*

*v7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.*

*8 “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.*

But Joseph is still on a journey. Maybe the three days he locks up his brothers allowed him time to reflect on the journey so far. God had been good to him. His brother's actions, while appalling, had led to him being wealthy, happily married with children with luxury this family could not have dreamed of.

His brothers are miles behind, they have no idea what is going on. But Joseph's actions open up old sores. In particular their treatment of Joseph.

And it comes out when brought up before the Prime Minister. Like all of us, we only hear the bad news not the good news. After all Joseph

has just said he will release all but one instead of sending one back alone. They also miss the remark , *"Do this and you will live, for I fear God:"* They are wrapped up in their guilt.

Guilt is a thick cloud. Our consciences are meant to bring us to God in repentance for forgiveness and healing. But to often, we borrow into what we did wrong and what would happen if we behaved differently and who else was to blame and how we were caught by time and circumstance.

As you listen to Joseph's brothers, remind yourself of Romans 8:1

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you<sup>[a]</sup> free from the law of sin and death.*

Guilt is a very destructive force in our lives. The cure is Jesus. He takes the blame, he bears the punishment, he transforms your thinking. That does not mean the consequences of your sin

are reversed but it does set you upright again, more able to deal with the consequences, whether that is apologising for your behaviour or repaying a debt or seeking forgiveness or accepting the consequences on your life as well as others.

Joseph, of course understands Hebrew and is deeply moved by their arguments. He was the victim and they are telling him his story, how they came to sell him rather than kill him. He is reliving the shock and horror of that trip out to see how his brothers were getting on.

Joseph decides to act in grace. Whether I am wrong about his initial reaction or no, here is clear evidence of a life where God's mind-set rules. Joseph invents cash-back. Except he give them their own cashback. Now that would be an offer that would make people sit up and notice. In fact there would be long queues outside any shop that offered that sort of cashback.



It was meant to indicate that he had serious intent to help them.

But look at the reaction! Guilt does not allow one thought of this is great! But they are fearful of what it means.

Have you noticed how the world at large rejects God's grace? We put up posters telling them that salvation is free and they want to know the catch. They want to find out what they have to do, they are suspicious of God's motives. So by and large Jesus is rejected because grace is outside our way of thinking. We want to trade with God. If I do this and that, If I am an all round good person, will you let me into heaven? We want God to be like us, easy going on sin and prepared to negotiate. But God offers a far, far better salvation. Based on the death of his Son, he offers forgiveness freely for the asking.

I'm not sure Joseph could foresee the grief he brought his Father. He was desperate to see his brother and to know for certain he was alive.

He wanted to see his Father and he wanted to know his brothers were truly repentant for what they had done. But we end today with Jacob, Joseph's father mourning the loss of Joseph and Simeon, news that the famine was going to continue and the only way to get food would probably lead to the death of Benjamin. Reuben's comments in verse 37 tell you this family have a long way to go. The only persuasion he can think of is you can kill two of your grandchildren if I don't bring Benjamin back! Ouch! However, to be positive, he is talking of protecting Benjamin, so their some shift in thinking!

Verse 38 tells you that for Joseph to see his brother and his Father there has to be a change of heart in Jacob's household. The continuing famine will do that.

So what do we learn from this passage?

1. **God's choices are not based on respectability.** Many of the characters of the Bible would not be permitted to take up

responsibilities in our society. Israel was not chosen because it was acceptable. It was chosen because God wanted to demonstrate his love for crazy mixed- up sinners like you and me. And that is a key point. This is a messy story because it is a real story about real people who sinned and yet were loved by God. So if you are wondering why God chose Israel, be encouraged, God loves you just as he did the sons of Israel! It does not matter who you are or what you have done, you are loved by God.

2. **What matters is the real you!** In a crisis the real you comes out and it is not always so great but quite often the second thought makes all the difference. Joseph's initial reaction may have been ungodly; you can debate that over coffee! But what he chooses to do is intended to search out whether his brother was safe in this family. This is important to understand. God wants to transform you into his image but it is a life-long process and along the way there are testing times when you discover the Christ-life has been formed in you.

Jesus was very clear on this. What matters is not the religious rules you obey but what comes out of the heart.

**Matthew 6:19; Luke 12:34** <sup>19</sup> *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:* <sup>20</sup> *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:* <sup>21</sup> *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

**Matthew 12:33; Luke 6:45;** *“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. 35 A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day*

*of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

**Matthew 15:16** *“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. 17 “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? 18 But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”*

**Matthew 18:21** *21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” 22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*

23 “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold[h] was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. 29 “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ 30 “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened,

*they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.*

*32 “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.*

*33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*

*35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”*

**3. Grace is difficult to receive.** When Joseph releases most of them from prison and when he returns their silver the brothers cannot cope with grace in action. It does not make sense outside of Jesus. And yet the alternatives are deeply troubling. At the end of the American Civil war a general was asked what he was going to do with the confederate soldiers who surrendered. He said he had three choices. Kill

them all or punish them for their part in the war which would lead to resentment which would eventually lead to another war or feed them, clothe them , send them home with resources to rebuild their lives. Grace won the day and with some significant exceptions USA has been at peace with itself.

**The treaty of Versaille** punished the German people for WW1 leading to the rise of Naziism and curiously to the Japanese invasion of China. The vindictiveness borne out of the suffering of the war bred WW2.

**The Marshal Plan** at the end of WW2 learnt from the two previous examples and the Allies invested in Germany, rebuilding its industry and establishing it an independent state. That has led to 70 years of peace in Europe.

Grace works on the international stage because it reflects the character of God. Faced with your sin and my sin, God does not punish us but resolves the problem of sin by Jesus coming as to die in our place for our sins. Instead of justice



we received grace. There is nothing you can do to persuade God you are good enough for him, but you can accept his free offer of salvation.

And that concept is vital in the church and outside of it. Grace is the only way we have a peaceful future. Jesus said in Matthew 6:14 *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. He adds a sober rider: But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

#### **4. The results are not immediate.**

Just think of Joseph at the end of the story. In the business of the day to day workload, his thoughts would turn to his brothers. He had set up a return meeting but would they come? Would they just leave Simeon to rot to save their own hides? Would they actually bring Benjamin with them? We are not told but they may be as much as a year between the visits. God has plans for your life not just tomorrow.

His purpose is to reproduce his characteristics in you. Patience and sustained faith are part of that. Many things in life can't be fixed with a makeover or a three day mass effort. Healing takes time and we leave Joseph wondering whether he has done the right thing or it will all fade away. He has to trust God as he did when sold into slavery, when accused of sexual assault, when in prison and forgotten, when raised to prime minister of Egypt. Like him, you have to lift your burdens in prayer and trust him to sustain you, whatever the issue that is on your heart.