

## An Awkward Family Reunion

<sup>1</sup> When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” <sup>2</sup> And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.” <sup>3</sup> So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. <sup>4</sup> But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. <sup>5</sup> Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

<sup>6</sup> Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.” <sup>8</sup> And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. <sup>9</sup> And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land.” <sup>10</sup> They said to him, “No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. <sup>11</sup> We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.”

<sup>12</sup> He said to them, “No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.” <sup>13</sup> And they said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more.” <sup>14</sup> But Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you. You are spies. <sup>15</sup> By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. <sup>16</sup> Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” <sup>17</sup> And he put them all together in custody for three days. – Genesis 42:1-17 ESV



Moses now turns the reader’s attention back to Israel (Jacob) and his family, living in the land of Canaan. It has been years since Jacob received the devastating news of his son’s death. He had mourned the loss of Joseph but then had been forced to move on with his life. He was the patriarch of a large and rapidly expanding family. Many of his 11 remaining sons had married and started families of their own, but they

remained a close part of the Israelite clan. So, when the famine spread to Canaan, Israel found himself with a crisis on his hands. There was no grain for purchase in the land of Canaan, which made it difficult for Israel to feed his family and livestock.

Upon hearing that grain was for sale in Egypt, Israel assigned his sons the unenviable task of making the long trip to the land of the Pharaohs and returning with as much grain as they could purchase. But Israel and his sons had no idea what awaited them in Egypt. Their objective was to buy temporary relief from their troubles. But God had something far more significant in mind.

Years earlier, God had told Israel's grandfather, Abraham, that his offspring would end up living in a foreign land for four centuries. But God had also promised that He would deliver them from that land and return them to Canaan.

*Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." – Genesis 15:13-16 ESV*

So, as Israel's 10 sons made their way to Egypt, their only aspiration was to return with grain so that their clan could survive the famine back home. But they were about to play important roles in a divine drama that would preface the next chapter in the story of God's chosen people.

Upon arrival in Egypt, the sons of Israel were ushered into the presence of the royal governor, who was responsible for the sale of all grain in Egypt. It just so happened that this dignitary was their long-lost brother, Joseph, but they failed to recognize him. He was years older and, most likely, dressed in Egyptian garments. And the last thing they expected to find in Egypt was their long-forgotten brother.

But Joseph had not forgotten them. And upon recognizing the faces of the very men who had sold him into slavery, Joseph decided to keep his identity veiled so that he could ascertain the state of affairs back home. He had no reason to trust his brothers and it must have concerned him that they had shown up in Egypt without their father and younger sibling. Had his father died while he was away? Did his jealous brothers do to young Benjamin what they had done to him? Joseph had so many unanswered questions, so he continued to portray himself as Zaphenath-paneah, the governor of Egypt until he could determine the trustworthiness of his brothers.

Moses indicates that Joseph kept up a convincing charade, speaking to his brothers in stern tones and displaying a suspicious attitude toward them.

*...he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. – Genesis 42:7 ESV*

A wave of emotions must have swept over Joseph as he stood staring into the faces of the men who had treated him with such disdain. Driven by nothing more than jealousy, these so-called brothers had conspired to kill him. And if it had not been for his brother Judah's intervention,

they would have left Joseph to rot in an abandoned cistern. But Judah had come up with the idea of selling Joseph to Ishmaelite traders. That way, they could be rid of him without being guilty of spilling innocent blood. And each of his brothers had been complicit in their betrayal of Joseph. Even Reuben, who had hoped to extricate him from the pit and return him to their father, had eventually caved into his brothers' demands.

Now they stood before Joseph, like groveling slaves before their master. And the scene brought to Joseph's mind the vivid images he had seen in his long-forgotten dreams. It was his sharing of these dreams that had turned his brothers against him.

*One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. "Listen to this dream," he said. "We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!" – Genesis 37:5-7 NLT*

*Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. "Listen, I have had another dream," he said. "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!" – Genesis 37:9 NLT*

And, while these dreams infuriated his brothers, "his father wondered what the dreams meant" (Genesis 37:11 NLT). Now, years later, they were all about to find out. As Reuben, Judah, and their eight other brothers knelt before the powerful governor of Egypt, they feared for their lives because he was accusing them of being spies. They vehemently denied the accusation and swore that their sole intention was to purchase grain for their families back in Canaan.

*"Your servants have simply come to buy food. We are all brothers—members of the same family. We are honest men, sir! We are not spies!" – Genesis 42:10-11 NLT*

Their claim to be honest men must have struck a nerve with Joseph. How could these deceivers and betrayers dare to consider themselves to be honest and trustworthy? Nothing from Joseph's memory could support such a claim. So, he continued to question the veracity of their story.

Desperate to convince the governor of their innocence, they reveal that they have a young brother who has remained at home with their father. But because Joseph knew his brothers to be liars, he was reticent to trust them. How was he to know if Israel or Benjamin were alive or dead? He knew his brothers were capable of just about anything, so he came up with a test to determine whether they deserved his favor or anger.

*"This is how I will test your story. I swear by the life of Pharaoh that you will never leave Egypt unless your youngest brother comes here! One of you must go and get your brother. I'll keep the rest of you here in prison. Then we'll find out whether or not your story is true. By the life of Pharaoh, if it turns out that you don't have a younger brother, then I'll know you are spies." – Genesis 42:15-16 NLT*

Joseph was anxious to know that Benjamin was alive and well. After all, he and Benjamin shared the same birth mother, Rachel. And since Rachel's death, Benjamin had become near and dear to Joseph's heart. Yet, because of his brothers' actions, Joseph had been denied the joy of watching his younger sibling grow up. So much time had passed, and he longed to be reunited with his father and brother. And God was using Joseph's desires to instigate a plan that would eventually fulfill the very words that God had spoken to Abraham.

*"Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years."* – Genesis 15:13  
ESV



It would be centuries later that the descendants of Abram, the nation of Israel, made their way back to the land of Canaan after their 400-year hiatus in Egypt. And when they returned to the land, they would divide it among the 12 tribes. But they were forbidden by God from occupying the lands of Moab and Edom. He warned them, "Do not bother the Moabites, the descendants of Lot, or start a war with them. I have given them Ar as their property, and I will not give you any of their land" (Deuteronomy 2:9 NLT). And as far as the Edomites were concerned, God told the Israelites, "Do not detest the Edomites...because the Edomites are your relatives" (Deuteronomy 23:7 NLT).

To understand this divine get-out-of-jail-free card that God extended to the Moabites and Edomites, it is essential to understand their relationship with Israel. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the firstborn son of Isaac. Esau was the grandson of Abram.

And the Moabites descendants of Moab, the son of Lot, the byproduct of Lot's incestuous relationship with his oldest daughter. These two people groups ended up settling in the land

near where Lot had pitched his tent. And despite some poor choices on Lot's part, that land would end up being occupied by relatives of Abram.

This one little corner of the world where Lot chose to sink down roots was nothing compared to the vast tract of land that God would give to Abram. And God instructed Abram to “walk through the land in every direction” (Genesis 13:17 ESV) and take in all the beauty and abundance reserved for him. God flatly and confidently asserted, “I am giving it to you” (Genesis 13:17 NLT).

So, Moses did as he was told, and after scoping out the land, he pitched his tent at the Oaks of Mamre, near Hebron, and there he built another altar to the Lord. He offered sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God for His gracious gift. Lot pitched his tent near Sodom. But Abram pitched his tent in the middle of the land of Canaan, as an expression of faith in God's promise.



It's fascinating to consider that Lot was quickly associated with a city, the infamous city of Sodom. But Abram was a man who never owned a house or occupied a city. In fact, the author of Hebrews states that when Abram “reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God” (Hebrews 11:9-10 NLT).

As the story unfolds, we will discover that Lot eventually moved into the city of Sodom, and with less-than-stellar consequences. But Abram continued to live the life of a nomad, patiently waiting for the city that God had in store for him. According to the author of Hebrews, Abram and all the other Old Testament saints mentioned in chapter 11, “were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:16 NLT).

While Lot struggled with “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life” (1 John 2:16 ESV), Abram kept his eye on the true prize. Rather than settle down and settle for less than God had promised, he kept moving, waiting, and hoping. And he would be recognized and greatly rewarded for his faith.

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. – Hebrews 11:1-2 ESV*



## I Fear God

<sup>18</sup> On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: <sup>19</sup> if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, <sup>20</sup> and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so. <sup>21</sup> Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” <sup>22</sup> And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” <sup>23</sup> They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. <sup>24</sup> Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. <sup>25</sup> And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man’s money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

<sup>26</sup> Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. <sup>27</sup> And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. <sup>28</sup> He said to his brothers, “My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!” At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, “What is this that God has done to us?”

<sup>29</sup> When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, <sup>30</sup> “The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. <sup>31</sup> But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we have never been spies. <sup>32</sup> We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.’ <sup>33</sup> Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, ‘By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. <sup>34</sup> Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.’”

<sup>35</sup> As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man’s bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. <sup>36</sup> And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me.” <sup>37</sup> Then Reuben said to his father, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.” <sup>38</sup> But he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.” – Genesis 42:18-38 ESV



Zaphenath-paneah (Joseph), the governor of Egypt, ordered the sons of Jacob to return to the land of Canaan, with instructions to bring back their younger brother, Benjamin. This would provide proof that they truly were innocent foreigners in search of food to survive the famine. But Joseph was seeking to ensure that they had not treated his younger brother with the same hatred and disdain as they had shown to him. He wanted to see Benjamin with his own eyes. And to ensure that the men returned, Joseph helped Simeon as

collateral. This was likely a test of his brothers' character as well. Would they return as ordered and spare their brother's life or would they abandon him to his fate in Egypt?

When Reuben and his brothers heard the governor's instructions, they were filled with guilt and regret. They couldn't help but conclude that this was all God's divine judgment for what they had done to their brother years earlier.

*"Clearly we are being punished because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his anguish when he pleaded for his life, but we wouldn't listen. That's why we're in this trouble."* – Genesis 42:21 NLT

And Reuben made matters worse by reminding them that he had been the one who had tried to talk them out of their ill-fated plan to get rid of Joseph.

*"Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy?...But you wouldn't listen. And now we have to answer for his blood!"* – Genesis 42:22 NLT

This only added to their sense of guilt and shame. They freely aired their dirty laundry right in front of the royal governor, thinking him incapable of understanding their language. But as they bickered among themselves, Joseph listened in, taking note of every word they spoke. And upon witnessing the bitter acrimony among his siblings, Joseph was moved to tears. All the memories of his past came rushing in and overwhelmed his emotions. When he regained his composure, Joseph took Simeon as a hostage and ordered the nine other brothers to take their allotment of grain and return home. Their brother would be released as soon as they returned with Benjamin.

Joseph ordered Simeon be bound with ropes as his brothers looked on helplessly. This was meant to be a vivid and painful reminder of their callous treatment of Joseph so many years before. Simeon's fate was in their hands. And, for the second time, the brothers found

themselves returning home with devastating news for their father. But this time, rather than fabricating a lie, they would be telling the truth.

Before they left for Canaan, Joseph had the grain they had purchased loaded onto their pack animals, and then provided them with provisions for their journey. He also played a rather cruel trick on them, ordering that the money they had paid for the grain be returned in full, and secretly dispersed among the bags of grain. When the brothers stopped for the night, they each discovered the money had been returned to the sacks in which the grain was contained. This made them look like thieves. And they immediately concluded that this was a punishment from the hand of God.

*“What is this that God has done to us?” – Genesis 42:28 ESV*

Could things get any worse? Their brother was a prisoner in Egypt. They were returning to Canaan with grain they had not paid for, making them guilty of theft. And, on top of that, they were going to have to somehow convince their father to send his youngest son back with them to Egypt. It was all a never-ending nightmare.

When they finally returned home and told their father all that had happened, Jacob was beside himself with grief and fear.

*“You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me.” – Genesis 42:36 ESV*

It was more than he could bear. His sons had returned with much-needed food, but they had left their brother behind. To make matters worse, the Egyptian governor was demanding that Jacob send his youngest son back to Egypt if he ever wanted to see Simeon again. This put Jacob in the unenviable position of risking the life of one son or possibly both. If he refused to send Benjamin, he would never see Simeon again. If he agreed to the governor’s demands and sent Benjamin, he had no guarantee that either would ever return. In fact, he had to face the very real possibility that none of his sons would return if the governor accused them of stealing the grain they brought back from Egypt.

Sensing his father’s dilemma, Reuben promised to bring back Simeon and Benjamin, offering his own two sons as sacrificial substitutes should he fail to do so. He was putting his own family line in jeopardy by doing so, but he was willing to take that risk to guarantee Simeon’s release. Jacob reluctantly agreed to send Benjamin back to Egypt, along with his 10 older brothers. This decision must have been gut-wrenching as he considered the very real possibility that he might never see any of them again.

In reading this emotionally charged story, it’s easy to overlook a statement made by Joseph that establishes the tone for all that takes place. After placing his brothers in confinement for three days, Joseph had them brought before him. Then he said something that must have caught them by surprise. After all, they believed they were standing before a powerful Egyptian

dignitary who was speaking to them through an interpreter. But as the translator relayed Joseph's message, they must have been surprised and encouraged.

*"Do this and you will live, for I fear God."* – Genesis 42:18 ESV

They must have looked at one another in astonishment as, out of the mouth of this Egyptian lord, came the name of *'ēlōhîm*, the God of Israel. While hiding his true identity from his brothers, Joseph was not disguising his faith in God. He wanted his brothers to know that their fate was in God's hands, not his own. If they would only obey his orders and return with their younger brother, all would go well. Their brother Simeon would be cared for while they were gone and be released upon their return. And it must have surprised these men to have someone whom they thought to be a pagan to encourage them to trust their own God. This Egyptian was showing more faith than they were. It seems apparent that Joseph could see God's sovereign handiwork behind all of the events of the last three days. And, somehow, he knew that good was going to come from it all.

## Like Grandfather, Like Son

<sup>1</sup> Now the famine was severe in the land. <sup>2</sup> And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food." <sup>3</sup> But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' <sup>4</sup> If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. <sup>5</sup> But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'" <sup>6</sup> Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?" <sup>7</sup> They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'" <sup>8</sup> And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. <sup>9</sup> I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. <sup>10</sup> If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice."

<sup>11</sup> Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. <sup>12</sup> Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. <sup>13</sup> Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. <sup>14</sup> May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

<sup>15</sup> So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

<sup>16</sup> When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon." <sup>17</sup> The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph's house. <sup>18</sup> And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, "It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys." – Genesis 43:1-18  
ESV

Reuben and his brothers were unable to convince their father to allow them to take Benjamin back to Egypt with them. Fearing that he might lose yet another son, Jacob refused to give in to the Egyptian governor's demands. But eventually, their supply of grain ran out and he was left with no other option but to send his sons back to Egypt to purchase additional grain. But Judah reminded him that the trip would be a waste of time if they failed to take Benjamin with them. The Egyptian governor had made it very clear that their brother Simeon would not be released

unless they returned with their younger sibling. Reuben reminded his father of Zaphenath-paneah's conditions.

*"You won't see my face again unless your brother is with you." – Genesis 43:3 NLT*



No Benjamin, no grain. It was as simple as that. And Judah informed his father that he and his brothers were unwilling to make the long and arduous trip unless Benjamin accompanied them.

Jacob expressed his frustration that they had ever mentioned Benjamin in the first place. But Judah defended their actions by explaining that they had simply answered the governor's questions. How were they to have known that Zaphenath-paneah would require physical proof of Benjamin's existence? From their viewpoint, they had no other choice but to obey the governor's demands. If they refused, they would all end up starving to death. So, after a bit of persistent cajoling from Judah, and an assurance that he would guarantee Benjamin's safety, Jacob finally acquiesced to the plan.

But it's important to note that two of Jacob's sons had made solemn pledges to protect and preserve Benjamin's life. These men had been changed by their disconcerting encounter with Zaphenath-paneah. Reuben vowed to watch over Benjamin, even putting up the lives of his two sons as collateral.

*"You may kill my two sons if I don't bring Benjamin back to you. I'll be responsible for him, and I promise to bring him back." – Genesis 42:37 NLT*

Even Judah, the one who had suggested that they sell Joseph to the Ephraimite traders, was now willing to put his reputation and his life on the line to guarantee Benjamin's physical well-being.

*"I personally guarantee his safety. You may hold me responsible if I don't bring him back to you. Then let me bear the blame forever." – Genesis 43:9 NLT*

It should not be overlooked that Jacob, a man who had betrayed and defrauded his own brother, had fathered 10 sons who ended up doing the same thing to one of their own. But now, years later, Jacob watched as two of these same men pledged to protect the life of their younger sibling. While he knew nothing of what they had done to sell Joseph into slavery, he must have been encouraged by the selfless and sacrificial display of love from his two older sons.

Before sending his sons on a potentially dangerous journey into a foreign land where they would face unknown obstacles, Jacob attempted to do what he could to produce a positive outcome.

*“Pack your bags with the best products of this land. Take them down to the man as gifts—balm, honey, gum, aromatic resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Also take double the money that was put back in your sacks, as it was probably someone’s mistake. Then take your brother, and go back to the man.” – Genesis 43:11-13 NLT*

He reached into his old bag of tricks and came up with the same ploy he had used on his brother Esau (Genesis 32:13-16). If the Egyptian governor was angry that Jacob’s sons had left without paying for the grain, he hoped to assuage that anger with gifts. He doubled the amount of money they should have paid and then threw in some additional agricultural products for good measure.

But Jacob also revealed that he was ready and willing to trust God with the outcome. He was willing to purchase favor with the Egyptian governor but if that didn’t work, he would trust in the sovereignty of God.

*“May God Almighty give you mercy as you go before the man, so that he will release Simeon and let Benjamin return. But if I must lose my children, so be it.” – Genesis 43:14 NLT*

Jacob had come a long way. In his statement, he reflects the same sentiments that Job expressed when he learned that he had lost all his children in a freak accident.

*Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” – Genesis 43:20-21 ESV*

While Jacob feared losing his sons, he also displays a firm belief that God was going to fulfill His covenant promises. By sending his 11 remaining sons to Egypt, he was following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Abraham. No doubt, Jacob’s father Isaac had told him the story of when Abraham had taken him to Mount Moriah with the intention of following God’s command to offer his only son as a sacrifice. And now, here was Jacob willingly sending his son to Egypt, not knowing if they would ever return. But his decision was an act of faith. If God was

going to fulfill His covenant promise, Jacob would need to have sons. And so, he let them go, trusting that God would find a way to allow them to return. But little did Jacob know that God had greater plans than he could ever imagine. All of his sons would eventually return, but only so they could bring their father and families back to the land of Egypt. All in keeping with God's sovereign and unshakeable plan.

## Son, Servant, Savior

<sup>19</sup> So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the door of the house, <sup>20</sup> and said, "Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food. <sup>21</sup> And when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us, <sup>22</sup> and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks." <sup>23</sup> He replied, "Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them. <sup>24</sup> And when the man had brought the men into Joseph's house and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, <sup>25</sup> they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there.

<sup>26</sup> When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground. <sup>27</sup> And he inquired about their welfare and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" <sup>28</sup> They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. <sup>29</sup> And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!" <sup>30</sup> Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. <sup>31</sup> Then he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself he said, "Serve the food." <sup>32</sup> They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. <sup>33</sup> And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. <sup>34</sup> Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him. – Genesis 43:19-34 ESV

The sons of Jacob returned to Egypt, accompanied by their younger brother, Benjamin. Eleven men made the arduous journey from Canaan to the land of the Pharaohs, not knowing what fate awaited them upon their arrival. They were bringing with them gifts to offer Zaphenath-paneah, the governor of Egypt, who was holding their brother, Simeon, as a hostage. They had also brought the money that had somehow made its way into the sacks of grain they had brought back to Canaan on their first trip. For some inexplicable reason, their payment for the first shipment of grain had never made it to the hands of the royal governor, so they feared they would be viewed as thieves and treated accordingly.

Upon their arrival in Egypt, the brothers headed straight to the governor's palace, and anxiously explained their predicament to his household steward. They declared their innocence and professed ignorance as to how the money had ended up back in their possession. They wanted the steward to know that they were anxious to settle their debt and to purchase additional grain for their families back in Canaan.

Then the brothers received the first of what would be many surprises. The steward attempted to calm their fears by informing them that they owed nothing. He had received full payment for their initial order. And then, this pagan Egyptian informed them that the money found in their grain sacks must have been a gift from *‘ēlōhîm*, the God of their father Jacob. This statement must have left the brothers speechless and staring at one another in astonishment. Was the steward suggesting that the money had been a gift from God? But before they had time to ascertain just what the steward meant, they found themselves reunited with Simeon. At this point, they had to be wondering why things were going so unexpectedly well.



But the brothers had little time to discuss their good fortune because the steward ushered them into the palace and told them to clean up for lunch. Much to their ongoing surprise, they discovered that they would be dining with the governor himself. These 11 sons of Jacob would be treated to a sumptuous feast in the royal palace as the honored guests of Zaphenath-paneah, the second-most powerful man in all of Egypt. As they

prepared for this high honor, they must have debated and discussed the surrealistic nature of their unexpected welcome. All of this would have been a shock to their systems. It was far beyond anything they could have ever imagined.

And then, just as they were beginning to wrap their minds around these unprecedented events, the governor showed up. Upon seeing this powerful dignitary enter the room, the 11 brothers bowed down before him as sign of honor and deference. And as Joseph stood looking down on his prostrate brothers, the images he had seen in his long-forgotten dreams must have flooded into his mind.

As a young boy, Joseph had been given a vision in his sleep that portrayed he and his 11 brothers as bundles of grain. But what made the dream so offensive to his brothers when he shared it with them was that their sheaves of grain all bowed down to his. And Joseph had a second dream that conveyed the same basic message. In it, he saw the sun, moon, and 11 stars all bowing down before him. And when he shared this dream with his father and brothers, it was met with the same degree of anger and animosity.

Yet, years later, Joseph stood in his royal palace with his brothers lying on their faces before him. The irony of this moment would not have escaped Joseph. His dreams had become vividly and indisputably true. But Joseph didn't gloat. Instead, he recalled his aging father back in Canaan and inquired as to the status of his health.

*“How is your father, the old man you spoke about? Is he still alive?”* Genesis 43:27 NLT

The brothers affirmed that their father was alive and well, and humbly referred to him as a servant of the governor. They followed this statement by bowing before Joseph yet a second

time. This action would have been done on behalf of Jacob, illustrating his humble subservience to the Egyptian governor.

News of his father's good health pleased Joseph greatly. He probably harbored hopes that he might live to see his father once again. But it was the presence of his younger brother, Benjamin, that drew Joseph's attention. For the first time in years, he stood face to face with his blood brother, and the experience moved him deeply.

*Joseph hurried from the room because he was overcome with emotion for his brother. He went into his private room, where he broke down and wept. – Genesis 43:30 NLT*

But Joseph regained his composure and returned to the dining room where he ordered the food to be served. Then he treated his brothers to a royal feast fit for a king. To the brothers' amazement, the governor ushered each of them to their seat, arranging them in the proper chronological order based on their birth. How would this pagan Egyptian have known who was the oldest and who was the youngest? And, once again, the brothers received an additional shock when the governor took it upon himself to serve their plates with food from his own table. Little did they know that the brother whom they had treated with disdain and contempt was showing them honor and reverence. The innocent young man whom they had sold into slavery was now performing the task of a lowly household servant. In a sense, he was taking the food from his own table and feeding it to the "dogs" who had treated him as less than animal, throwing him into a pit and selling him for a few pieces of silver.

Without realizing it, Joseph was modeling the life of Christ, long before He left His throne in glory and took on human flesh. Jesus said of Himself, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28 NLT). In a real sense, Joseph had "given his life" when his brothers sold him into slavery. When the Ishmaelite slave traders dragged him away in chains, he had left behind his place of honor in his father's house. And he soon found himself living as a common slave. He ended up being falsely accused and eventually arrested for a crime he didn't commit. But, like Jesus, Joseph had been sent to bring rescue to God's people. But he had ended up humiliated and humbled. But the day came when he was glorified, lifted up, and invested with the power to offer help and hope to those in need. His brothers, undeserving of his grace and mercy, would receive redemption instead of retribution. They would be forgiven, and their crime would be forgotten. And, in time, they would discover the true identity of their benefactor. Zaphenath-paneah would end up being their long-lost brother and their unlikely savior.