

Lesson 17

Joseph Test and Reveals Himself to His Brothers

Genesis 42:1-45:16



Teacher, please remember that the commentary below is intended to help you in your study, not to be read to your students. Make your own list of applications, using the help from the commentary, but don't necessarily try to cover everything! Think of the students in your class, then be prayerfully selective.

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1. Preparation

- 1) Choose memory verse
- 2) Select attention grabber to start off lesson / break the ice - optional, recommended for younger classes. (see point 7)
- 3) Suggested activities- optional, recommended for younger children (see point 8)

2. Memory verse

Luke 6:36, "Therefore be merciful just as your Father is merciful">

3. Theme

Because God is in control of our circumstances and shows us mercy, we must be merciful to others.

4. Lesson introduction

To the teacher: This is a combined lesson on Joseph's tests of his brothers and his revealing of his identity to his brothers. The material covers all of Genesis 42 – 50 . . . a long section. Please encourage the parents to read this exciting story to their children in its entirety before they arrive at the class. You will not have the time to cover everything, but should at least mention at the end of the session that after Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, his father Jacob (Israel) comes to Egypt from the land of Canaan to live there. That sets things up for the next lesson, which teaches about the growth of the people of Israel in Egypt and their enslavement a generation after Joseph dies. **So . . .** due to the length of this passage consider telling this lesson in story form. You will need to familiarize yourself with the highlights of the story and make application throughout. You probably will not have sufficient time to read all of the verses and make application within the class session.

How could a slave in a prison cell, know that everything would work out okay?--only by trusting in the Lord! Joseph had been sold by his own brothers into slavery and, later, falsely accused and thrown into prison; when it seemed that he had opportunity to become free (the Baker), Joseph was "forgotten" for two years. Now God's purposes begin to unfold. We see indeed that God worked all things "together for good" for Joseph. God is in control of our circumstances, too!

Oftentimes, for a man to be used by God, he must first be broken. Joseph's dreams of his family bowing down to him must have seemed like a long forgotten story at this point. But God, who holds our lives in His hand, had a purpose in every situation that came into Joseph's life, just as He has in our lives. God has a wonderful plan in the making, and all we must do is wait to "read the next chapter." God is in control of our circumstances!

In Luke 6:36, Jesus says, "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." We live in a wicked world where people use us, cheat us, hate us, and treat us spitefully; yet we are called to love people who mistreat us because our Heavenly Father first loved us. Joseph forgave and showed mercy to his brothers after they had mocked him, hated him, sold him into slavery, and had even conceived a plan to kill him. Let us show mercy to others, for God is not only in control of our circumstances, but is also merciful to us!

5. Verse by Verse Commentary

GENESIS 42:1-5

The famine that was in Egypt had now spread to the land of Canaan and the other lands in the area. Jacob was aware that there was grain in Egypt, and he wanted to send his sons there to buy grain. When he told his sons of the abundance in Egypt, the Bible tells us that they looked upon one another. Why did they do that? Perhaps their reluctance to go was because of their guilty conscience concerning Joseph. For twenty years, they had been living with a secret: they had sold their brother Joseph to a caravan going to Egypt.

The brothers did go, but only ten of them; the youngest son, Benjamin, stayed home. Jacob did not want to take a chance on anything happening to him on the long and dangerous trip; the pain of losing Joseph was still strong in his life. We must remember that the abundance of food in Egypt was due to Joseph's wisdom, directed by God. If his brothers had not sold Joseph into Egypt, would there be grain for everyone? Again, what seemed to be such tragedy in Joseph's life, God had used for good for many people. God is in control of our circumstances!

GENESIS 42:6-20

As the brothers came to buy grain, they stood before the governor of Egypt. It was their own brother Joseph, though they did not know it was he. The brothers bowed down before Joseph with their faces to the earth. A twenty-year old dream was fulfilled! Joseph recognized his brothers, for they had not changed as much in appearance as he had. The last time they saw him, he was seventeen years old. He was now about thirty-eight and dressed as Egyptian royalty. Verse seven tells us that he spoke roughly with them. Joseph was testing his brothers. Perhaps he wanted to see if their hearts had changed. Were they still hardened? What was their heart toward Benjamin?

The brothers told Joseph that they had come from Canaan simply to buy food. Joseph replied by accusing them of being spies (insinuating that they were using an excuse as a cover for finding the places in Egypt which might be vulnerable to invasion). As he saw them bowing and fearfully protesting that he had misunderstood them, it is certain that he was recalling the dreams he had had so long ago.

To support the case that they were not spies, they began speaking of their family as evidence of good intentions. They explained that they were twelve brothers. They not only counted Benjamin, but Joseph

also. "One was not," they continued (indicating that they thought Joseph was dead yet still counted him as a member of the family).

Joseph decided to test them further and to prove to himself that their story was true. They were to send for their younger brother, Benjamin. In the meantime, he would continue to assume they were spies and keep them all in prison until their story could be proven true. As they once rejected Joseph's pleas, so does he reject their plea. As they had once sent him away into slavery and imprisonment, so now they would have a similar experience.

Joseph put them into prison for three days. After the three days, Joseph summoned them again and told them that they would not all need to remain there; perhaps, he thought of the grief of his father. He told them that his change of mind was because he feared God. (Joseph did not worship the Egyptian idols; he continued to look to the true and living God.)

GENESIS 42:21-24

As the brothers received this ultimatum from Joseph, they all acknowledged to one another that this had all come on them because they had sinned against their brother Joseph. Their consciences had been stirred up. Not only had they conspired to kill, later deciding to sell their brother, but they had ignored his cries of anguish to save him. In all reconciliation, offenders must first come to the place where they acknowledge their wrong and are sorry for their sins.

Reuben reminded them that he had tried to persuade them not to carry out their crime. But, Reuben had also failed in not being willing to tell his father the truth or attempt to rescue Joseph. He may not have been as guilty as the others, but he was not innocent either. They did not know that Joseph could understand what they were saying. Joseph had been careful to carry out his conversations with them through an interpreter.

The true character of Joseph breaks through his stern exterior when he turns away and weeps as his brothers confess their sins before him. After again gaining control of himself, he continued with his instructions. One of them must stay bound in prison while the others went home. The brothers agreed to the new condition Joseph set to prove they were innocent. Joseph had his guard take Simeon and put him in bonds before their eyes. To the brothers, it seemed God's justice was being served. Yet, as we see, it was all a part of God's plan to ultimately bless the family. God is in control of our circumstances!

GENESIS 42:25-28

Here Joseph gives orders to supply the brother with corn, deposit their money in their sacks, and furnish them with provision for their trip home--all without their knowledge. We see Joseph's heart as he not only provides for them the grain, but he also provides extra provisions for their trip. Their response to this kindness was fear. They knew that they had paid for the grain; but now, it was obvious that somehow not all of the price of the grain had been paid, and it scared them. They feared that upon their return to Egypt, the governor would have more accusations against them. Again, the guilt of their sin against Joseph was plaguing their hearts.

GENESIS 42:29-35

Now the sons related to Jacob all that happened in Egypt (no lies or deceit this time). They told him of Simeon's captivity, and the need to bring Benjamin down with them if they wished to buy grain again and bring Simeon home. They explained their shock to find the money they were to pay for the grain in

each one of their sacks. The brothers realized the seriousness of the situation, would they be accused of being thieves?

GENESIS 42:36

There is much in this one verse that we can learn from. Jacob was looking at the things that are seen, rather than at the things unseen. He was walking by sight rather than by faith. It does not appear that he thought that the Lord had a purpose for all this. We must remember that even when the circumstances look like disaster, our God is working His wondrous purposes on our behalf. We never have to fear that God has let things get out of control. They may be out of our control, but never His. God has a higher purpose, related to our eternal future, for which He is preparing us through all our difficulties. "All things" were not against Jacob. All things were actually working together for good! All Jacob had to do was to "read the next chapter." God is in control of our circumstances.

GENESIS 42:37-38

Reuben promises that he would be responsible for Benjamin if Jacob would let him go with them. If anything happened to Benjamin, Jacob could then kill Reuben's own two sons. Yet, Jacob completely refused to consider letting Benjamin go down to Egypt. He had grieved so bitterly over Joseph that he was not willing even to think about allowing Benjamin to risk his life. And, there the matter was left for the time being.

GENESIS 43:1-10

The famine continued to be severe and, now, the grain the brothers had brought back from Egypt was gone. Jacob instructed his sons to go back to Egypt to buy more food. Judah urged Jacob to let them take Benjamin with them. The governor he feared, would not even talk to them without Benjamin; he would just believe that they had lied to him earlier about having another brother, presume that they were spies, and put them in prison or kill them.

Now Jacob would have to trust his beloved Benjamin to the Lord. How often do we, as Jacob, complain and become fearful in time of heavy trial? Interestingly enough, it is at this point that the name Israel begins to be used instead of Jacob. The name had not been used since Genesis 37:13. It seems that losing Joseph caused a struggle once more with the nature of the "old Jacob." Perhaps the faith he stirred in willingness to release of Benjamin meant that God was once more assuming control. Judah argued that if they did not go back to get more grain, they would all die, including Benjamin, and offered himself as a guarantee for his youngest brother. He also reminded Jacob that, if they had not waited so long, they could already have made the trip to Egypt and back twice.

GENESIS 43:11-14

Jacob saw the situation and knew that it was out of his hands. So, he prepared a gift for the man. He also reminded them to take back the bundles of money that had been restored in their sacks on the first trip, and "double money" for the purchase of grain. He then told them to take their brother Benjamin with them to the man down in Egypt with the prayerful hope and confidence that God Almighty would overrule in the heart of the man and have him return both Benjamin and Simeon to them again. If not, Jacob was content to leave the matter with God. Jacob committed Benjamin into the hands of God. God

often touches that which we cling to the most. He wants us to surrender everything to His control and trust in Him.

GENESIS 43:15-25

Now the brothers were on their way to Egypt. When their arrival was announced to Joseph, he immediately had them brought into his presence. Imagine the emotions Joseph must have felt when he laid his eyes upon his little brother Benjamin for the first time in twenty years. He then gave instructions to prepare a dinner at noon for the men at which time he would join them. Since the brothers will still be concerned about the money that had been replaced in their bags, this lavish display of kindness made them suspicious. They feared a trap. Before they entered Joseph's house, they told the steward about the discovery of the money in their bags and explained that it had been returned to them entirely without their knowledge. The steward assured them that they needed not fear, because he himself had received the money from them in payment for the grain. They should thank God and the God of their father who must have mysteriously put the money in their bags. Simeon was then released to them.

GENESIS 43:26-34

Finally, Joseph arrived. When they brought him the present, they bowed themselves before him calling him, "Thy servant our father." Again, we are reminded of the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams.

Joseph then inquired about the welfare of his father and was moved to tears when he saw his youngest brother, Benjamin. We see that Joseph's heart had remained tender as he embraced the Lord through his years of difficulty.

Even natural affection is often destroyed by adversity and prosperity. Joseph could have become bitter and hardened. May we as Joseph remain tender-hearted through times of difficulty. When we walk in fellowship with God, we understand His great love and realize even our most adverse circumstances are working together for good for us. God keeps our hearts tender and protects us from bitterness. God is in control of our circumstances.

Upon seeing Benjamin, Joseph could no longer hold back his emotion; he quickly left the room before they could see him crying. Finally, he was able to keep his feelings under control and gave instruction to begin the meal. Joseph sat apart from his brothers according to the custom of the land (Egyptians were not permitted to eat bread with the Hebrews). There were three tables: one for the Hebrews, one for the Egyptian guests, and one for Joseph himself. The brothers noticed something incredible. They had been seated in order of age, from the oldest to the youngest.

Just a fun little fact: If one were to do the math, there are no less than 39,917,000 different orders in which eleven individuals could have been seated. They were seated perfectly in order. Evidently, this man knew more about their family than they realized. They also saw that Benjamin was given five times as much as the others. Thus, Joseph was deliberately honoring Benjamin five times as much as the others. Perhaps he wanted to see if there was any resentment towards Benjamin. There was not, and Joseph was happy with their attitudes.

GENESIS 44:1-3

Joseph commanded the steward to fill his brothers' sacks with food, as much as they could carry. He instructed him to return their money once again, in the mouth of each sack. Then the steward was told to place Joseph's own personal drinking cup, made of silver and beautifully ornamented, in Benjamin's sack. In the morning, at dawn, the brothers found their donkeys loaded and ready to go. And thus they left.

GENESIS 44:4-6

After the brothers left the city, Joseph ordered his steward to follow them. When he had overtaken them, he was to accuse them of stealing his lord's most cherished possession, the silver cup from which he drank and which he used for divining the future. (The Egyptians must have attributed Joseph's prophetic insight to this cup of divination.)

GENESIS 44:7-13

When the steward overtook the brothers and accused them of the theft, they denied the charge. They proposed death for the thief and slavery for the rest of them if the missing cup should be found in one of their bags. The steward, offering easier terms, said the thief alone should be enslaved. He then started searching the bags, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Would these same brothers who had sold Joseph into slavery leave Benjamin to bear the blame of the "theft" and continue on home? The Lord had been at work in the hearts of these men. They stood by Benjamin and returned to Joseph to plea for their brother. They who had once sold a brother were now willing to be sold into slavery rather than give up another brother.

GENESIS 44:14-17

As they came back to Joseph's house, he asked them why they had done such a thing. How did they expect to get away with such a crime? Judah could say nothing in defense of himself or his brothers except that God was evidently punishing them for some secret sin they had committed. Judah proposed that they all remain in Egypt as Joseph's slaves. Joseph refused the severe proposal. He suggested that only Benjamin stay in Egypt as his slave while the rest of them return to their aged father. By giving them this choice, Joseph was subjecting the brothers to a hard test. Would they abandon Benjamin, as they had abandoned Joseph before, or would they refuse to return to Canaan without their brother? Even though they were innocent in this particular situation, they were guilty sinners. Judah and his brothers were deeply burdened with the enormity of their misdeed in selling Joseph into bondage 20 years ago; now, it was only fitting that they themselves should also become slaves in Egypt for the rest of their days.

GENESIS 44:18-34

Judah came to Joseph and pleaded for Benjamin, his brother. With tenderness and beauty, Judah described the aged father's unwillingness to let Benjamin go with his brothers to Egypt for food. Particularly moving is the description of Jacob's feeling for his lost, beloved son, Joseph. Those who had cruelly torn their young brother from their father's side now plea for mercy and offer themselves as slaves rather than see Benjamin suffer the same fate as his brother.

Joseph had been severely tested by the wickedness of his brothers as well as Potiphar's wife. Yet, man's designs cannot thwart God's well laid plans; more often, they contribute to the accomplishment of His purposes. May we, as Joseph, remain faithful through adverse times. God is faithfully working out His good plan. God is in control of our circumstances.

GENESIS 45:1-3

Joseph had seen his brother's humble hearts and it probably encouraged him to reveal himself to them.

GENESIS 45:4-8

Joseph missed his family. He still loved his brothers even though they had shown hatred to him. This is a good picture of God's heart towards this world. God's love for us--when we were still enemies, when we

wanted nothing to do with Him--compelled Him to send His only Son to reconcile us to Himself. Colossians 1:21 says, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled." Joseph called his brothers near just as our Lord does us. Although Joseph's brothers initially feared him, we need not fear our God, for by Jesus' blood and forgiveness we may come boldly to His throne of grace (Hebrews 10:19-23; Colossians 1:19-20). We are free from our sin and our pasts through our belief in Jesus and His forgiveness; we may have free fellowship with our God (Romans 8:1).

We see Joseph's brothers were dismayed (really amazed or blown away) that this was Joseph. Not only was it Joseph, but he was not having them thrown into prison or killed for their past actions. He was not bitter or angry towards his brothers. Joseph knew that God had sent him to Egypt before his family to help them during the famine. God was using Joseph to protect the nation of Israel. Joseph was able to recognize that although his brothers meant evil toward him, God meant it all for good (Genesis 50:20). He acknowledged that God had been in control of his life; God's will, not man's, controlled the circumstances of his life. With this realization, he was able to forgive those who had wronged him. Let us show mercy to others, for God is merciful to us.

GENESIS 45:9-11

Not only will Joseph be joined with his family again, but he will provide abundantly for them. Again, Joseph's words remind us of the heart and love of God for His children. He desires to be near to us and draws us close to Him to dwell in His amazing goodness. Just as Joseph was to provide for his family, so God provides for His children. He has promised to "supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

GENESIS 45:12-13

Joseph tells his brothers to make "haste" to tell their father that Joseph was alive and to tell him of all his glory in Egypt. Joseph wanted to see his father as soon as possible. We see another picture. Our Heavenly Father commissions us to tell this spiritually dead world that Jesus lives and is wonderful. By His grace, we are to make haste and spread the news of the only One who can save man's starving soul.

GENESIS 45:14-16

Joseph then kissed all of his brothers expressing his love and care for them. Truly God had meant for good all that had happened to Joseph. He brought Joseph's family back together; He provided for them in time of severe famine. God was with Joseph through all of his difficulties and enabled him to stand strong and keep a tender heart. Ultimately, Joseph recognized that it was God, not man, who was in control of his life, allowing him to show mercy to those who offended him. Jacob will one day well summarize Joseph's character—a character made strong through "fiery" trials. In Genesis 49:22-24, we read: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well, His branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob."

As we look to our "Mighty" God, He will enable us to stand strong, even when others have treated us cruelly or unfairly, even in the face of betrayal by those we have loved. With His help, we can forgive those who have sinned against us. Let us show mercy to others, for God is merciful to us.

Genesis 45:17-50:26

Note: Joseph was called to suffer before He would see God's promises fulfilled. Joseph's life in many ways is a picture for us of Jesus' life: he was greatly loved by his father, hated by his brothers, plotted against, sold for 30 pieces of silver, arrested unjustly, made to suffer, and then went from suffering to becoming the savior of those who had rejected him.

Joseph's brothers returned to Canaan to tell their father about everything that has happened. They may have been a little frightened to tell their father about what had happened, especially since they had lied to him. At the same time, they may have been excited to let their father know that Joseph was still alive-- what a blessing that would be to their father!

Israel (Jacob) sets out to go to Egypt. This is the beginning of the time that Israel dwells in the land of Egypt. The sons and families of Jacob prospered in Egypt for many years; however, we read in Exodus, that they eventually became slaves to the Egyptians. God will hear the cries of his people and, again, deliver them gloriously. God takes care of His people. God works all things together for good to those who love Him.

Jacob, who is also called Israel, headed to Egypt with his family. He made a sacrifice to God, and God spoke to Jacob in a vision. God gave Jacob the promise that he would make a great nation of Jacob in Egypt. God also promised he would bring the nation back again. (This promise, the exodus, would be fulfilled 400 years later.) Sometimes, God asks us to do new and difficult things, but He promises to be with us, to guide us, and to provide for us. God works all things together for good to those who love Him. Joseph and his father's family were all shepherds. The Egyptians did not respect shepherds, but Joseph made sure that the Egyptians knew his family tended sheep. This allowed Joseph's family to live apart from the Egyptians and establish themselves as a separate nation, just as God had promised to make of them. They maintained a separate identity and did not become like the Egyptians.

Just like Joseph's family, we live around non-Christians. We are called to share God's love with them, but not to live and act as they do. Joseph's family lived in Egypt, but they were not Egyptians. We should be identified with Christ and not with those who live as non-Christians around us.

When all of the food was gone, the people came to Joseph to ask for food. He sold them food for their possessions until Joseph had gained all the material wealth for Pharaoh. But Jacob and his family prospered and multiplied in number. We continue to see God working in these circumstances to help His people. God works all things together for good to those who love Him.

Jacob took Joseph's sons to bless them and to make them his. He claimed them as his own sons and gave them his blessing. He blessed the younger first and said He would be great and a father of many nations. The older brother, Manasseh, was not to be as great as Ephraim, the younger, but he would be great and multiply also.

Jacob called his twelve sons together, and he told them what was to become of them and their descendants. Jacob spoke prophecy concerning each of his sons. Each of his twelve sons became a tribe of the nation Israel and that which Jacob prophesied happened to the tribes. Jacob requested that he be buried in Canaan with his fathers, and he died.

After the death of their father, Joseph's brothers feared that, perhaps now, Joseph would take revenge on them for selling him into slavery. But Joseph knew that all of the things that happened to him were part of God's plan to bless His people. Joseph reassured his brothers and promised to help provide for them and their children. God works all things together for good to those who love Him.

It is amazing how that God can turn the things that were meant for evil into things that are good. If we go through a difficult time, we can be confident, God will turn things meant for evil to things that are good for us too! Romans 8:31 declares, "If God is for us, who can be against us? We can give Him all our cares and trust Him. If we have Joseph's attitude and realize that God is working for good in our lives, we will not be bitter about our circumstances. God works all things together for good to those who love Him.

6. Prayer:

Lead the children in a prayer of thanksgiving for God's grace in working our circumstances for good. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity.

Lead the children in a prayer of thanksgiving for God's grace and mercy and wonderful work in our lives. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.

7. Attention Grabbers

Mud Huts

You will need chocolate chips, chow mein, a cookie sheet or waxed paper, a crock pot, and a spoon. Before class put the chocolate chips in the crock-pot to melt. When melted, have the children gather around for this little story while you make the "Mud Huts."

There once was a man who had no house. He got wet when it rained and hot from the sun. He looked around and all he saw was mud (show the spoon with chocolate on it) and sticks (pour the chow mein noodles in the chocolate and stir gently). He asked the Lord to provide him a house and the Lord told him to mix the sticks with the mud and build (drop the cookies by spoonfuls onto the cookie sheet or waxed paper). And that is what he did. Soon other people around him learned to build Mud Huts, too. Instead of complaining that all they had was mud and sticks, they had houses to live in.

Explain that God is in control of our circumstances. Save the cookies and send home with the children. (Do not let the children eat them in class without parental permission.)

Blindfold Buffet

You will need blindfolds, paper, writing boards, and markers. Form pairs and have the children sit in chairs facing their partners. Have one child in each pair volunteer to be blindfolded. Give a few markers to the blindfolded child. Have the un-blindfolded child hold up to his or her partner a blank sheet of paper on a writing board. The object is to have the blindfolded child draw the best picture possible. Tell the children that the team with the best picture wins. After a few minutes of allowing the partners to

draw their pictures, have the children with the blindfolds remove them. Collect the pictures. Mix them up and display on the chalkboard. Conspicuously, pick the worst picture in the group as a demonstration of mercy and declare it the winner. Perhaps award a small prize to the team. Explain that this demonstrates our lesson today. We will see that mercy is shown in a situation where mercy was not deserved. That is how God deals with us. He gives us mercy even though we do not deserve it. And because God is merciful towards us we should be merciful towards others. Let us show mercy to others, for God is merciful to us.

8. Activities:

Shake It Up

You will need a clear plastic or glass bottle, baby oil, water, and food coloring. Fill the clear glass bottle half-full of baby oil, and half full of water (leave a little air space). Add a few drops of food coloring and let the children shake it up (to represent the trials and trouble we experience). Tell the children that sometimes God does not work on our timetable. "We usually want an immediate rescue when we call on God for help." Set the bottle aside and go on with other activities. Tell them the fizzy mess in the bottle will get back to being beautifully clear in a little while. Ask them to keep checking.

Puzzles

You will need magazine pictures (or other pretty pictures), sheets of cardboard or poster board, rubber cement, scissors, and markers. Glue several pretty pictures to the sheets of cardboard, trim the edges neatly, and cut the glued boards into pieces to create home made puzzles. In class, mix all the pieces of all the puzzles together and form as many groups as you have finished puzzles. Let the class work on them collectively. Explain that even when things are a great big mess God can still put things together. God is in control of our circumstances.

Help! I'm Hungry

You will need oyster crackers and a set of cut-outs (money, livestock, land, myself) for each child. Seat children in a circle and pass out a set of cut outs to each child. You may want to choose a child to play Joseph or you could do it yourself. Ask your class what they think the Egyptians said to Joseph when all their food was gone. They probably said, "We're hungry; please let us buy food with our money." Have Joseph take up all the money, and pass out one oyster cracker to each child. Then repeat with the livestock, the land, and finally the "myself" cutouts. This should reinforce the desperation of the famine.

9. Bible text (NIV):

42:1 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" ²He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."

³Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. ⁵So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also.

⁶Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. ⁷As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked.

“From the land of Canaan,” they replied, “to buy food.”

⁸ Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. ⁹ Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

¹⁰ “No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.”

¹² “No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

¹³ But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.”

¹⁴ Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies! ¹⁵ And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!”

¹⁷ And he put them all in custody for three days.

¹⁸ On the third day, Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: ¹⁹ If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. ²⁰ But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” This they proceeded to do.

²¹ They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us.”

²² Reuben replied, “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.” ²³ They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

²⁴ He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

²⁵ Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man’s silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, ²⁶ they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left.

²⁷ At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸ “My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers. “Here it is in my sack.”

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?”

²⁹ When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, ³⁰ “The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land. ³¹ But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we are not spies. ³² We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan.’

³³ “Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, ‘This is how I will know whether you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go. ³⁴ But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade^[a] in the land.’”

³⁵ As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man’s sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened. ³⁶ Their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!”

³⁷ Then Reuben said to his father, “You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back.”

³⁸ But Jacob said, “My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.”

The Second Journey to Egypt

43:1 Now the famine was still severe in the land. ² So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go back and buy us a little more food.”

³ But Judah said to him, “The man warned us solemnly, ‘You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.’ ⁴ If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. ⁵ But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, ‘You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.’”

⁶ Israel asked, “Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?”

⁷ They replied, “The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family. ‘Is your father still living?’ he asked us. ‘Do you have another brother?’ We simply answered his questions. How were we to know he would say, ‘Bring your brother down here?’”

⁸ Then Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. ⁹ I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. ¹⁰ As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice.”

¹¹ Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift—a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. ¹² Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake. ¹³ Take your

brother also and go back to the man at once. ¹⁴ And may God Almighty^[b] grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”

¹⁵ So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. ¹⁶ When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare a meal; they are to eat with me at noon.”

¹⁷ The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph’s house. ¹⁸ Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, “We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys.”

¹⁹ So they went up to Joseph’s steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. ²⁰ “We beg your pardon, our lord,” they said, “we came down here the first time to buy food. ²¹ But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. ²² We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don’t know who put our silver in our sacks.”

²³ “It’s all right,” he said. “Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver.” Then he brought Simeon out to them.

²⁴ The steward took the men into Joseph’s house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. ²⁵ They prepared their gifts for Joseph’s arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to eat there.

²⁶ When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. ²⁷ He asked them how they were, and then he said, “How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?”

²⁸ They replied, “Your servant our father is still alive and well.” And they bowed down, prostrating themselves before him.

²⁹ As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother’s son, he asked, “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?” And he said, “God be gracious to you, my son.” ³⁰ Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

³¹ After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, “Serve the food.”

³² They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. ³³ The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. ³⁴ When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

A Silver Cup in a Sack

44:1 Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. ² Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.” And he did as Joseph said.

³ As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. ⁴ They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, “Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid good with evil? ⁵ Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.’”

⁶ When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. ⁷ But they said to him, “Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! ⁸ We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master’s house? ⁹ If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord’s slaves.”

¹⁰ “Very well, then,” he said, “let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame.”

¹¹ Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. ¹² Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. ¹³ At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

¹⁴ Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, “What is this you have done? Don’t you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?”

¹⁶ “What can we say to my lord?” Judah replied. “What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt. We are now my lord’s slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.”

¹⁷ But Joseph said, “Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace.”

¹⁸ Then Judah went up to him and said: “Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, ‘Do you have a father or a brother?’ ²⁰ And we answered, ‘We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother’s sons left, and his father loves him.’

²¹ “Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.’ ²² And we said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.’ ²³ But you told your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.’ ²⁴ When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

²⁵ “Then our father said, ‘Go back and buy a little more food.’ ²⁶ But we said, ‘We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’

²⁷ “Your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. ²⁸ One of them went away from me, and I said, “He has surely been torn to pieces.” And I have not seen him since. ²⁹ If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.’

³⁰ “So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy’s life, ³¹ sees that the boy isn’t there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. ³² Your servant guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father. I said, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!’

³³ “Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. ³⁴ How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father.”

Joseph Makes Himself Known

45:1 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ 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. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. ⁹ Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. ¹⁰ You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’

¹² “You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you.

¹³ Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.”

¹⁴ Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping.

¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

¹⁶ When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased.