Joseph

Famine in Canaan

The famine, as the years without food were called, reached all the way into the land of Canaan. That was where Joseph’s father and brothers still lived. They had grown rich during the seven good years. Once the seven bad years started, though, Jacob and his eleven sons ran out of food. Most of the sons were grown up and had families of their own to feed. Everyone was hungry. Jacob knew there was food in Egypt. He had heard from some merchants traveling through the area. He told his sons, “If you don’t want to starve to death, go to Egypt. Take money with you and buy us some food.”

The Brothers Learn Their Lesson

The brothers loaded up their camels and donkeys. They rode off toward Egypt. Not all of Jacob’s sons left, however. Benjamin stayed at home. After losing Joseph, Jacob never let this last child of Rachel’s out of his sight. Jacob still missed Joseph terribly. But Benjamin made his father laugh and smile. “No,” Jacob thought, “Benjamin must stay here with me. What would I do if I lost Rachel’s second child as well as her first?”

Together Benjamin and Jacob waved at the ten brothers. Soon all they could see was a cloud of dust. Jacob took Benjamin’s hand. The father and son began to pray. They prayed for ten brothers. They prayed they would be kept safe and would come home soon.

When the brothers arrived in Egypt, they went straight to the man in charge of selling grain. That was Joseph. They did not see who he was. Joseph looked and acted too much like an Egyptian. Joseph knew who they were but he did not tell them. Instead he called them spies.

“We’re not spies, we’re brothers!” they told him. “There were twelve of us, but one is gone and the youngest is with our father.”

Joseph said, “I don’t believe you. If you are not spies, then prove it by going home. Bring the youngest to me. In the meantime, I will keep one of you as prisoner.” Joseph pointed at his brother Simeon. The brothers stood with their mouths open. Then Joseph said, “But first you must all spend three days in prison.”

When the three days were over, nine of the ten brothers rode home. Simeon stayed in jail. On the way they discovered that the money they had used to pay for the grain had been given back to them. “Oh no,” they moaned. “The Egyptian will think we stole the grain.”

When the brothers arrived home, they told Jacob what had happened. They asked if they could take Benjamin back to Egypt. Jacob said, “Absolutely not! No one is taking my Benjamin from me. No. Benjamin stays here.” Jacob would not even listen to the brothers. He thought, “It is bad enough that Joseph is dead. Now they have left Simeon behind. No, they will never take Benjamin away.”

Benjamin May Go Along

Slowly but surely, the grain from Egypt ran out. Soon there was hardly anything left. Again and again the brothers had asked Jacob to let them go back to Egypt. After all, Simeon was still there. But Jacob always said no. He knew it would mean saying good-bye to Benjamin. Finally he had no choice but to think of his large family. So he said yes. And Judah, the brother who had sold Joseph as a slave, said he would take special care of Benjamin. “Nothing will happen to him,” he promised.

“Just to make sure,” Jacob said, “Take enough money with you to pay the Egyptian back for the last load of grain. Take him gifts of honey, perfume, pistachio nuts and almonds.”

As soon as the brothers arrived in Egypt, they went to Joseph. All he could do was stare at his brother Benjamin. He had grown into a handsome young man. “Come, stay in my house and we will have a big meal together,” Joseph said. Then he had Simeon brought out of prison. When the brothers arrived at the house, they told the steward about the money they had found on their trip home. He reassured them, and they went inside.

“How is your father?” Joseph asked. He held his breath. The brothers said that Jacob was alive and well. Joseph looked at Benjamin again. “May God be good to you,” he said. Suddenly he turned away. His brothers were bowing down to him, just like in his dream so long ago.

The memories were suddenly too much for Joseph. He ran from the room. Once alone, he cried and cried. “Lord,” he prayed, “You have brought us together again. I love them all so much.” Joseph wiped away his tears. He went back to his brothers. It was a grand party and lasted most of the night. But Joseph did not tell the brothers who he really was.

The Stolen Cup

The next morning the brothers rode off for home. They had rescued Simeon, bought food for their families and eaten with an important man. Best of all, Benjamin was safe.

Little did they know that Joseph had a plan. He had ordered a servant to hide his silver cup in Benjamin’s bag. The palace guards were chasing them because of it. They galloped alongside the brothers. “Get off your camels and donkeys,” the guards ordered. “One of you has stolen our master’s silver cup!”

The guards went from camel to camel, donkey to donkey. They ended up at Benjamin’s donkey. When they reached into his sack, one of the guards raised the silver cup into the air. Benjamin was so shocked, he just shook his head. “But, I didn’t take it,” he said.

The guards ordered them back to Joseph’s palace. The brothers begged Joseph, “We don’t understand what happened. Please forgive us.”

Joseph said, “You may go,” But the thief must stay behind.”

Judah said, “But our father will die if we don’t bring Benjamin back. He has already lost one son. He could not bear to lose this one, too.” Judah begged, “Please, let me stay here in his place. If Benjamin stays here, none of us can face our father again.” Judah fell to his knees.

Joseph looked at Judah on his knees. Then he told the servants, “Leave us. I want to be alone with these men.” The servants left the room. Joseph said, “I am your brother, Joseph.” They did not believe him. They were so terrified, they could not look or listen. “Open your eyes,” Joseph said. He came closer to them. “I am Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!”

The brothers took a good look, and then they became even more afraid. If he really was Joseph, then he should kill them for what they had done to him. “No, no, don’t be afraid brothers. Don’t be angry with yourselves,” Joseph said. “God sent me here to make sure there would be enough food for our family.”

Joseph’s brothers stared in amazement. “Don’t you see?” he said. “You did not send me here, God did. God made me ruler of all Egypt, over everyone but Pharaoh. This was all part of God’s plan for taking care of our family. Now hurry back to our father. Tell him to bring our whole family to Egypt. I will make sure you have enough to eat.”

When Pharaoh heard the news, he gave the brothers many carts so they could bring their wives, children, and belongings back to Egypt. Before they left, Joseph gave the brothers many animals and other beautiful gifts. “Give them to my father,” he said.