

# Pentwater Bible Church

*Joseph's Brothers Return to Israel*  
*Genesis Message Seventy-Nine*  
*Genesis 42: 26-43: 15*



Joseph Distributing Corn in Egypt by Bartholomeus Breenbergh 1598-1657

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## Genesis Message Seventy-Nine Joseph's Brothers Return to Israel

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### Review:

#### JACOB SENDS HIS SONS TO EGYPT

##### Genesis 42: 1-5

The time frame here back in Canaan is twenty years since the brothers sold Joseph into slavery. Benjamin was now about twenty-three years old. The text does not say exactly how Jacob knew that there was food in Egypt. But because of the extent of the famine the word was out so to speak. Interestingly he looks at his eleven sons and essentially asks them to get moving and do something to secure food for the family by going down to Egypt for it. They are obviously reticent about this and simply look at one another as though stunned. They knew what they had done to Joseph twenty years ago and where he most likely ended up. They did not want to go there where they might see him or learn of his fate as a slave. Even after twenty years they still had guilt over this. However, the need for food and their father's command to go caused them to overcome their unresponsiveness. They went to Egypt to secure food. In a famine people will do anything to secure food. Jeremiah even tells us about the famine caused by the war with Babylon in 586 B.C., which caused mothers to eat their children (Lamentations 2: 20). If humans have little experience with this it is hard to identify. But it was the motive that caused the eleven sons of Israel to overcome their guilt and inhibitions about going to Egypt. Jacob was surely a very wealthy man by this time and it is important to observe that money will not give us all we need. It is helpful to be sure but it can't buy food when there is none! So the ten sons of Israel assembled a caravan and proceeded to leave. Benjamin was left behind. Jacob did not want to take a chance on losing his only remaining son from his beloved wife Rachel. It was difficult enough to lose Joseph. He wanted to protect Benjamin from harm on the long and uncertain trip. He had no idea what was going to unfold from this famine and trip to Egypt.

#### JOSEPH MEETS HIS BROTHERS AFTER TWENTY YEARS

##### Genesis 42: 6-9

The text again states the Joseph was ruler over Egypt. The Hebrew text says his title/name, which is translated, as governor is *hashaleet* השליט. It is the only time it is in Scripture and it really means the one who is in charge or the one having mastery. He had control over the land and it was his job to oversee the dispensing of food to the citizens of Egypt during the famine and authorizing it to be given to foreign purchasers as well. In perfect conformity to his first two dreams of the sheaves and the stars his brothers approach his throne and bow down to him. This must have shocked him to see this as he surely and clearly remembered the details of the dreams, his brother's envy and

resulting attempts by them to dispose of him. He realizes who they are but they do not know him. His reaction is one we would expect from one hurt badly; he attempts to conceal his identity and speaks harshly to them. He is still suffering from the pain they caused him and lashed out at them asking where they came from. In a natural progression from the pain they caused him he accused them of being spies and were looking for the unfortified parts of the kingdom so as to gain illegal access to the food themselves.

#### JOSEPH BEGINS TO TEST HIS BROTHERS

Genesis 42: 10-17

They fearfully respond to the charge by restating that they are just here to purchase food not steal it. In order to affirm their honesty they say they are all belonging to one man as if to say not a foreign power intent on thievery. A foreign power in their reasoning would not send ten brothers of one family. They assert they are subservient to him and are not spies' intent upon mischief. So Joseph responds again by asserting that they are spies. Perhaps he thought it necessary to test them or he was just expressing his anger and hurt over the amount of pain they caused him. They sensing the necessity to further describe their family situation said that they are of a family of twelve brothers and the youngest is with their father and one of them is not. This means that he does not exist.

The Hebrew word is *aanachnoo* אֲנַחְנוּ; and is also found in Genesis 5: 24 speaking of the rapture of Enoch. He was no more. They were careful to not say he was dead because they did not know for sure. Undaunted by their pleas Joseph again says that they are spies and shall undergo a test to validate their claims. He is not saying that there is no chance they are innocent of his charges, just that he will give them an opportunity to prove their claims. Joseph is now going to give them some time to fret over this as they earn his forgiveness. He tells them that they will be held captive except for one of them who will go back to Canaan and fetch the youngest brother. This puts them into a major dilemma. On the one hand if they send one of them back home they are putting their families at risk. Jacob might not agree with this scheme and refuse to send Benjamin. On the other hand if they refuse they could be tried as spies and killed while there families die of starvation. In order to allow them make the choice of which will go, he puts them in custody for three days to mull the choice over.

#### THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 42: 18-23

After the three days were up Joseph said to them as if taking some pressure off them that he is a God fearing man. He uses the generic name *eloheem* without naming the specific name of the supreme God of all and of the Bible as well as the Israelites *Jehovah Eloheem*. He was not yet revealing that he knew their God and that he was a Hebrew. Therefore Joseph is in essence saying that he will not imprison them on a matter for which there is no clear evidence. He will not punish these strangers upon mere suspicion. Then he changes his mind to them and says, "I'll keep one of you here and send the rest back with the caravan of food." If they are honest then they should bring their youngest brother back and they shall not die.

The brothers then begin to speak amongst themselves not realizing that Joseph understands their native language. He had been using an interpreter up to this point and they start to quarrel about the cause of all these problems. They attribute all this to the incident with Joseph when they had him in the well twenty years ago and he cried out to them to be released. Ruben then interjects and says I told you so but you would not listen to me. So Ruben is agreeing with them that the blood of Joseph is essentially crying out in divine retribution over their sins.

#### JOSEPH'S RESPONSE

Genesis 42: 24-26

Joseph was overcome with emotion and turned away from them some distance and openly wept. He probably sensed some comfort in knowing that they realized the origin of their fate and guilt over what they had done to him. Once he was relieved of his stress he returned to them with instructions for them to follow. Next he had Simeon the second oldest bound in front of them. Some speculate that Simeon was chosen due to his role in the sale of Joseph and his advocacy of killing him as well as his cruel nature. He was after all the chief perpetrator of the incident with Shechem and Hamor in retribution for Dina's rape. Finally, their request to purchase grain was honored and the other brothers were released to return home. Joseph wanted to provide additional motive for them to convince Jacob they should return. He also wanted to begin the restoration process with them. Without their knowledge he placed the money they used to buy the grain back in the sacks hidden until they opened them.

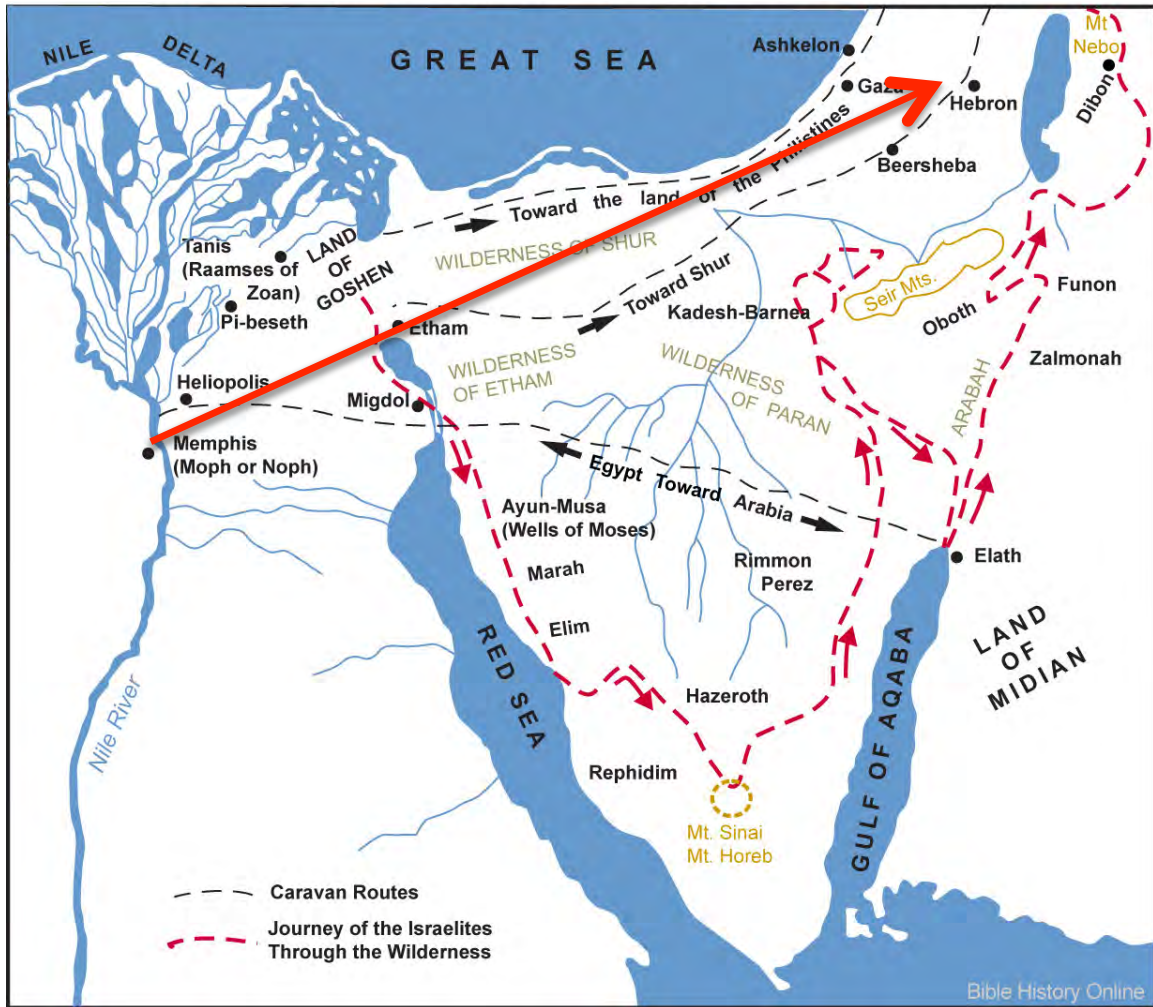
#### **Today's Message:**

#### THE BROTHERS TELL JACOB OF THEIR EXPERIENCE IN EGYPT

Genesis 42: 26-34

*<sup>26</sup>And they laded their asses with their grain, and departed thence. <sup>27</sup>And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the lodging-place, he espied his money; and, behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. <sup>28</sup>And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they turned trembling one to another, saying, What is this that God hath done unto us? <sup>29</sup>And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that had befallen them, saying, <sup>30</sup>The man, the lord of the land, spake roughly with us, and took us for spies of the country. <sup>31</sup>And we said unto him, We are true men; and we are no spies: <sup>32</sup>we are twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. <sup>33</sup>And the man, the lord of the land, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men: leave one of your brethren with me, and take grain for the famine of your houses, and go your way; <sup>34</sup>and bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true men: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffic in the land (ASV 1901).*

The brothers set out for Canaan without Simeon and without realizing that Joseph is the governor of Egypt with whom they have been dealing. This journey would be about two hundred fifty miles. The Israelite homeland was in Hebron and Joseph was in Memphis, which is about ten miles south of present day Cairo. It would be a three-week journey.



Probably Route from Memphis to Hebron

When they stopped a camping place, (not an inn the Hebrew word is *melone* which is a camping place מַלֹּן), to feed their animals one of the brothers opened the sack he had just purchased from the Egyptians and saw the money he used to purchase the grain resting at the opening of the sack on top of the grain. This caused them to panic. But they acknowledged the root source of all their issues when they said, “*What is this that God hath done unto us?*” They feared it was a ruse by the Egyptians to entrap them. The governor had accused them of being spies and now they could be accused of being thieves as well. They must have hurried to get far away from Egypt before the Egyptians could find them. God was using Joseph to break their hard hearts. Finally, when they got home they told Jacob the worst news. The Egyptian governor has Simeon and wants

Benjamin as well. If they will bring Benjamin back then he will know that they are not spies he will release Simeon, and they can have free travel in Egypt (traffic about).

#### JACOB REFUSES TO SEND BENJAMIN TO EGYPT

*Genesis 42: 35-38*

*<sup>35</sup>And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, 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 unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me. <sup>37</sup>And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again. <sup>38</sup>And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he only is left: if harm befall him by the way in which ye go, then will ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol (ASV 1901).*

Once home they related their experiences to Jacob including facts they revealed about the nature of their family. His reaction was predictably disturbed. In their haste to get away from their perceived pursuers' they failed to examine the other sacks of grain. When they opened them they and Jacob saw the bundles of money in each sack. Jacob now was resolved to not send Benjamin to Egypt. He did not trust these circumstances. If his sons were called spies and then possibly thieves he thought they would be apprehended if they went back to Egypt. He would not even consider the proposal since he was so very protective of Benjamin his youngest and son of Rachel his beloved wife. One son was lost, one in prison and now he was being asked to send another one on a journey that he was very uncomfortable about. He was responding to the request in an emotional manner not logistically evaluating what was before him. Ruben attempted to console him by offering up his two sons if he failed to bring Benjamin back. This was largely an emotional gesture since Jacob would never slay the two sons to compensate for the loss of his sons. His response was "*then will ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.*" This was not up to Sheol but down to Sheol. There were good and bad compartments to Sheol. His expectation was that because of this he was not destined to go to the good compartment.

#### THE ISRAELITES RUN OUT OF FOOD

*Genesis 43: 1-7*

*<sup>1</sup>And the famine was sore in the land. <sup>2</sup>And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food. <sup>3</sup>And Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. <sup>4</sup>If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food: <sup>5</sup>but if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down; for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be*

*with you. <sup>6</sup>And Israel said, Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother? <sup>7</sup>And they said, The man asked straitly concerning ourselves, and concerning our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we in any wise know that he would say, Bring your brother down (ASV 1901)?*

As the effects of the famine worsened and the grain they had secured in Egypt was eaten up Jacob said to his sons that they should go buy a *little* more. Perhaps Jacob thought that if they just tried to purchase a small quantity then they would not have to meet the Egyptian governor again and comply with his requirements. Judah tried to restate the firmness of the Egyptian governor's resolve to not see them at all if they failed to bring back their young brother. There was no way they could get food without Benjamin. The text then using Jacob's new name Israel says he exploded and said, "*Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?*" He was accusing them of offering too much information when he did not see the reason for it. Judah responded by saying it was not their doing. The man they were dealing with asked about their family and when we responded we had no idea that he would require Benjamin in order to release Simeon and sell us more food. Jacob was still responding to this situation in an emotional manner. He must have remembered that Abraham was promised by God almighty (Genesis 15: 13-14) that someday his people would be a land that was not theirs and undergo an affliction. He might have had this in his mind as well when he resisted sending Benjamin.

*<sup>13</sup>And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; <sup>14</sup>and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance (ASV 1901).*

#### JUDAH PLEADS WITH JACOB

#### Genesis 43: 8-15

*<sup>8</sup>And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. <sup>9</sup>I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever: <sup>10</sup>for except we had lingered, surely we had now returned a second time. <sup>11</sup>And their father Israel said unto them, If it be so now, do this: take of the choice fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spicery and myrrh, nuts, and almonds; <sup>12</sup>and take double money in your hand; and the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks carry again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight: <sup>13</sup>take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: <sup>14</sup>and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release unto you your other brother and Benjamin. And if I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. <sup>15</sup>And the men took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin; and rose up, and went down to*

*Egypt, and stood before Joseph (ASV 1910).*

Judah then began to plead with Jacob and offered himself as a personal guarantee for the safety of Benjamin. He affirmed that the necessity of bringing Benjamin was genuine. If he was not with them when they went back there would be no food and Simeon would not be released. Perhaps they would be imprisoned as well. For now the famine was worsening and they would all die including their children if food was not secured soon. In fact they should have already gone back a second time by now except for Jacob who was being obdurate over this issue. If it didn't work out Judah said he would take all the responsibility forever. Judah was not offering much of a personal guarantee, just that he would be held responsible. Jacob did not listen to Reuben making the same plea. Now that the famine was worsening and they were facing starvation he had to consider the only way to obtain the Egyptian resources. Judah was experienced in the loss of sons and he was being empathetically persuasive to Jacob. Jacob now began to realize that he had no other way out of this situation.

Jacob then instructed his sons to gather the finest fruits available in Canaan and present them to the Egyptian governor along with balm, honey, spices as well as myrrh, nuts and almonds. There must have been a limited amount of these commodities available to them since Jacob used the term "little" when referring to the amount to give the Egyptians. Even though they had some other goods they still needed grain to sustain life and that is what they would get in Egypt. This practical offering would assist in two ways. *One*, it would appease the governor and let him know that the Israelites were serious and *two*, the balm, spicery and ladanum were not available in Egypt. The Ishmaelites were on the way to Egypt to trade these same items when the brothers sold Joseph to them. Joseph would appreciate Jacob's choice of these seemingly insignificant gifts to the second most powerful man in the world. These delicacies were highly desirable more so than gold and silver. He probably had all he wanted of gold and silver. He also told them to take double the money necessary to secure the food and gain Simeon's release. Perhaps the Egyptians did not realize that they had placed the money in the sacks and would not hold them accountable due to the honesty they would display by returning the money to them.

Finally Jacob tells them to take Benjamin with them. In doing so he invokes the powerful of God "El Shaddai" the powerful one. He was asking God to provide safe return of Benjamin, Simeon and the rest of the sons with the food. Jacob was put into a situation where he had to trust God. It was out of his hands and he was very disturbed about it. The brothers left Canaan with double the money the gifts and Benjamin to meet with Joseph.

NEXT WEEK: JOSEPH ENTERTAINS HIS BROTHERS

**Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments**

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