

## LOVE VERSUS GUILT

Bible Background – GENESIS 42

Printed Text – GENESIS 42:6-25

<sup>6</sup> Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of selling grain to all the people, it was to him that his brothers came. When they arrived, they bowed before him with their faces to the ground.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph recognized his brothers instantly, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. “Where are you from?” he demanded. “From the land of Canaan,” they replied. “We have come to buy food.”

<sup>8</sup> Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn’t recognize him.

<sup>9</sup> And he remembered the dreams he’d had about them many years before. He said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become.”

<sup>10</sup> “No, my lord!” they exclaimed. “Your servants have simply come to buy food.”

<sup>11</sup> We are all brothers—members of the same family. We are honest men, sir! We are not spies!”

<sup>12</sup> “Yes, you are!” Joseph insisted. “You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become.”

<sup>13</sup> “Sir,” they said, “there are actually twelve of us. We, your servants, are all brothers, sons of a man living in the land of Canaan. Our youngest brother is back there with our father right now, and one of our brothers is no longer with us.”

<sup>14</sup> But Joseph insisted, “As I said, you are spies!

<sup>15</sup> 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!

<sup>16</sup> 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.”

<sup>17</sup> So Joseph put them all in prison for three days.

<sup>18</sup> On the third day Joseph said to them, “I am a God-fearing man. If you do as I say, you will live.

<sup>19</sup> If you really are honest men, choose one of your brothers to remain in prison. The rest of you may go home with grain for your starving families.

<sup>20</sup> But you must bring your youngest brother back to me. This will prove that you are telling the truth, and you will not die.” To this they agreed.

<sup>21</sup> Speaking among themselves, they said, “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.”

<sup>22</sup> “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy?” Reuben asked. “But you wouldn’t listen. And now we have to answer for his blood!”

<sup>23</sup> Of course, they didn’t know that Joseph understood them, for he had been speaking to them through an interpreter.

<sup>24</sup> Now he turned away from them and began to weep. When he regained his composure, he spoke to them again. Then he chose Simeon from among them and had him tied up right before their eyes.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph then ordered his servants to fill the men’s sacks with grain, but he also gave secret instructions to return each brother’s payment at the top of his sack. He also gave them supplies for their journey home.

-----New Living Translation

## Lesson Introduction

We were first introduced to Joseph, favorite son of Jacob (Israel), as a seventeen year old who was the object of bitter envy by his ten older brothers. The jealousy was so strong that the brothers plotted to kill him. The plan changed, however, to one of opportunistic greed when they had the chance to sell Joseph to a band of traveling Ishmaelite merchants. From a slave in Potiphar's house to an Egyptian prison, Joseph never lost faith or diminished his loyalty to the mighty God he served. Now, twenty-plus years later and through God's divine plan for the family of Israel, we now see Joseph as a powerful ruler of Egypt and preparing to live the fulfillment of the dreams that God gave him when he was just a lad (Genesis 37:7).

**Background:** Egypt's seven years of agricultural abundance was revealed to Pharaoh in a dream interpreted by Joseph (Genesis 41). Although Pharaoh did not worship the God of Israel, he quickly recognized Joseph's divine connection. God's favor upon Joseph positioned him to receive a life of prominence. As displayed throughout Joseph's life, God also gifted him as a strategic thinker and administrator. Joseph's plan to store grain during the years of plenty prepared Egypt for the coming years of famine. At thirty years old, Joseph became the second most powerful man in the world. He married into one of the leading families of Egypt and was the father of two sons. The famine hit Canaan where Israel, his sons, and their families lived. Israel heard there was grain in Egypt, and ordered all his sons—except for Benjamin—to travel there to purchase food for their families (Genesis 42:1-4). Benjamin was Israel's remaining son from his beloved wife Rachel who died giving birth to him (Genesis 35:16-19). Israel was especially afraid to send Benjamin out, after the presumed death of his favorite Joseph. He deeply mourned Joseph (Genesis 37:35) and did not want anything to happen to Benjamin while traveling.

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2020-2021, p. 37

## Confronting Shame

**Genesis 42:6-8:** Joseph is now governor (Heb. *shallit*-person in a position of honor) over all of Egypt. He is the one in charge of commerce and agriculture while the Pharaoh was mostly the ceremonial head. The day-to-day administration was under Joseph's authority. As was customary in North Africa and the Middle East, when the brothers came before Joseph, they bowed before him in respect of his high office of authority—just as his dream many years ago said that they would.

Being in such a high position, Joseph most likely did not participate in every transaction for the sale of grain. There were grain silos throughout the land and many officers and supervisors were appointed for sale and distribution of food (Genesis 41:34-36). But because the ten men before him were foreigners in the land of Egypt, they were subject to more scrutiny and Joseph's approval was probably required.

The brothers thought that Joseph was dead, but even if he had survived, they certainly did not expect to see him in this way, under these circumstances, so they failed to recognize him. Joseph,

however, knew exactly who they were, but he did not reveal himself to them as their long lost brother. They saw him as he appeared—a clean-shaven Egyptian of high rank in the land and the one on whom they had to depend for food to sustain their very lives and the lives of their families. Joseph treated them as strangers and spoke to them harshly, with the authority they probably expected from a pagan ruler.

It's not clear whether he treated them harshly to perpetuate the ruse of his hidden identity or because he remembered what they had done to him. Probably some of both. Whatever the reason, it is perfectly understandable to be brusque or rude to someone who has caused you deep hurt and pain. In such situations, we must remember God's grace to us so that we can move from painful emotions to respond in a godly manner in these circumstances.

◆ *As Christians, how can we manage our emotions and maintain godly character?*

### **Confronting Opportunity**

**Genesis 42:9-17:** Once placed in the situation of seeing his brothers bowing before him, Joseph recalled his dreams and the prophecy that resides within them. He recognizes that God is about to fulfill the promises made in those dreams. He continues the performance of stern ruler and repeatedly accuses the brothers of being foreign spies. In their attempt to defend themselves they begin to tell him the history of their father and family, including their youngest brother Benjamin and the brother (Joseph) they believe to be dead.

The brothers assume that they are suspected of espionage simply by their appearance as ten men from a foreign land traveling together. They don't appear to be a caravan of merchants or even an open delegation from a specific nation. So, they continue to emphasize that they are brothers, the ten sons of one man who lives in the land of Canaan and they merely came to buy food. Joseph is surely grateful to learn that his father Jacob and brother Benjamin are well, but still tests his ten brothers to see if they have changed at all. Are they honest men, or are they still vengeful and treacherous as they were over twenty years ago when they sold him, their own brother, into bondage?

◆ *What would you do if given the opportunity to pay back someone who hurt you deeply?*

### **Confronting Pain**

**Genesis 42:18-22:** Although Joseph had initially told the brothers that he would send one brother back to Canaan for Benjamin and keep the rest as prisoners, he told them there was a change in plans for "I fear God". The word used for "God" (Heb. *Elohim*) could have meant the Hebrew God or also "gods," so as spoken through a translator, they may have understood Joseph to mean a general faith in non-specific gods. Another reason for the changed plan was that Joseph had compassion for his family at home. He allowed only one brother to be held prisoner while the other nine would return home with food for the starving family in Canaan. He also longed to see his brother Benjamin and kept one as motivation for the other nine to return to Egypt with the youngest brother.

Speaking among themselves, the brothers acknowledge their guilt in the cruel way they treated Joseph many years ago. They recall how they ruthlessly ignored Joseph's cries and pleadings for

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his life. They are unaware that Joseph can understand them as they remember all that they did and accept their current situation as payback for their transgressions against their brother. Reuben takes the opportunity to offer an “I told you so” and inadvertently reveals to Joseph how he tried to rescue him, but to no avail. (Genesis 37:21-11).

◆ *When have you accidentally or purposely inflicted pain on a family member? Were you able to gain forgiveness? Have you forgiven yourself?*

### **Confronting With Mercy**

**Genesis 42:23-25:** As the brothers discussed their predicament, they were unaware that Joseph could understand every word although he had been speaking to them through an interpreter. On hearing them express their guilt, he could no longer hold his emotions, so he turned from them and wept. Composing himself, he bound Simeon in front of them.

Joseph’s compassion and love for his family was certainly not reflected by the harsh way he spoke to them, or by the demands to imprison Simeon until they returned with Benjamin. But his actions toward the nine who were to return, showed his generosity and concern. Joseph gave them the food they had come for but ordered their money returned to them with the grain. He also gave them additional provisions to last each brother for the ten plus days that it would take to travel the approximate 200 miles back to Canaan. Joseph was motivated by the knowledge that all was working according to God’s plan and he was positioned to forgive and care for his estranged family. All Joseph wanted from his brothers was repentance and reconciliation.

◆ *Recalling God’s mercy in your own life, how have you been able to show mercy to others?*

### **Conclusion**

In this world, we have many opportunities to hurt and to be hurt by others, even those who are expected to love us. With so many chances to ‘mess up’ our relationships, it is important to stay prayerful in our dealings with those who are close to us. One mark of a mature Christian is to be quick to forgive and to make amends. Through the work of Holy Spirit, the remembrance of the grace extended to each of us (as we have all offended God) should lead us to willingness to forgive others. We must be quick to forgive others as God quickly forgives us. It is vital to continually engage in processes that bring healing and restoration.

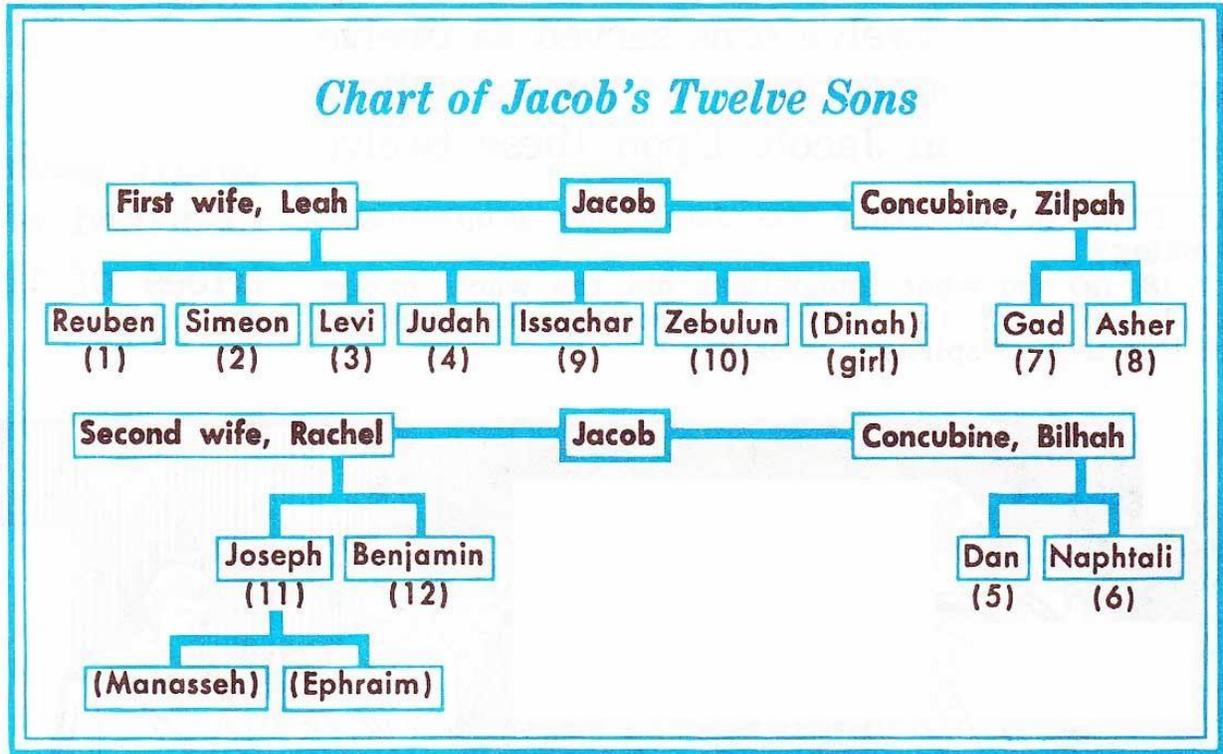


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**Sources:**

*Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation, Carol Stream, Illinois.

Ogbonnaya, A. O. (Ed.). (2020). *Wisdom. Precepts for Living*, 22(Summer Quarter), 32-44. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2020-2021.

**Lesson for Next Week – September 27, 2020 – Study Guide 4**

**GOD'S PLAN REVEALED**

Bible Background ♦ GENESIS 43, 45:1-15

Printed Text ♦ GENESIS 45:1-15

Devotional Reading ♦ JOHN 14:1-14