

When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?"² And he said, "Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die."³ So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.⁴ But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "Lest some calamity befall him."⁵ And the sons of Israel went to buy *grain* among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.⁶ Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with *their* faces to the earth.⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food."⁸ So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.⁹ Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, "You *are* spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!"¹⁰ And they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food."¹¹ We *are* all one man's sons; we *are* honest *men*; your servants are not spies."¹² But he said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land."¹³ And they said, "Your servants *are* twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest *is* with our father today, and one *is* no more."¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, "It *is* as I spoke to you, saying, 'You *are* spies!' "¹⁵ In this *manner* you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here.¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether *there is* any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you *are* spies!"¹⁷ So he put them all together in prison three days.¹⁸ Then Joseph said to them the third day, "Do this and live, *for* I fear God:¹⁹ If you *are* honest *men*, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses.²⁰ And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so.²¹ Then they said to one another, "We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us."²² And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us."²³ But they did not know that Joseph understood *them*, for he spoke to them through an interpreter.²⁴ And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.²⁵ Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them.²⁶ So they loaded their donkeys with the grain and departed from there.²⁷ But as one *of them* opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment, he saw his money; and there it was, in the mouth of his sack.²⁸ So he said to his brothers, "My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!" Then their hearts failed *them* and they were afraid, saying to one another, "What *is* this *that* God has done to us?"²⁹ Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying:³⁰ "The man *who is* lord of the land spoke roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.³¹ But we said to him, 'We *are* honest *men*; we are not spies.³² We *are* twelve brothers, sons of our father; one *is* no *more*, and the youngest *is* with our father this day in the land of Canaan.'³³ Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, 'By this I will know that you *are* honest *men*: Leave one of your brothers *here* with me, take *food for* the famine of your households, and be gone.³⁴ And bring your youngest brother to me; so I shall know that you *are* not spies, but *that* you *are* honest *men*. I will grant your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'" ³⁵ Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man's bundle of money *was* in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.³⁶ And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me: Joseph is no *more*, Simeon is no *more*, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me."³⁷ Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "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."³⁸ But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave."

Introduction

For the benefit of those people who are visitors today, I will briefly bring you up to date with our studies in the life of Joseph.

The story so far is as follows.

- a) Joseph was the favoured son of his father Jacob. His brothers were jealous of his position.
- b) One day, Joseph's brothers threw him down a pit and sold him as a slave to merchants who were traveling to Egypt. The brothers faked Joseph's death, by dipping his coat into the blood of an animal. They were all guilty of this crime.
- c) Joseph was sold as a slave in Egypt to the home of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He prospered in this position and became the director of all the affairs of his master. He had the best slave job in Egypt. God blessed Joseph in all that he did for Potiphar.
- d) The enemy, Satan, used Potiphar's wife as a way to tempt Joseph. She offered sexual allurements to Joseph. Joseph did not give in to these temptations and this offended Potiphar's wife. She accused him of rape, and Joseph was placed into the king's prison. God blessed Joseph in prison and he was given the responsibility of caring for all the prisoners.
- e) During Joseph's period in prison, the chief butler and the chief baker of the royal palace upset king Pharaoh and were put in the same prison as Joseph. They both had dreams and Joseph was able to interpret those dreams. The butler was restored to his old position in the palace and the baker was killed. Joseph had asked the butler to speak to Pharaoh and to get him out of prison. This didn't happen and Joseph had to spend another 2 years in the prison.
- f) Pharaoh had dreams and there was nobody to interpret his dreams. It was then that the chief butler remembered his experience with Joseph in prison. Joseph was removed from prison and was able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. The interpretation of the dream was that Egypt would soon face 7 years of very good harvests and then 7 years of famine. Joseph made a good suggestion to appoint someone to take charge of storing the excess food in the 7 good years, and then being in charge of the distribution of the food in the 7 years of famine. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph that he appointed him the top position of ruler of Egypt, under his command.
It was at the beginning of these 7 years of famine that we enter into the text of chapter 42.

We can divide Chapter 42 into 3 sections.

1. The guilty conscience of Joseph's brothers begins to awaken. - v. 1-5.

It was the famous British playwright William Shakespeare who said:

"Conscience does make cowards of us all"

What he probably meant by that statement is that we all have a "Conscience" and when we have done something seriously wrong, that thought stays in our mind and can be awakened at any time.

When our conscience is awakened, we do fear the outcome, and we become cowards.

There is no doubt that in these first five verses, Joseph's brothers were in the early stages of having their **consciences awakened**.

There are two pieces of evidence in the text.

The first is the way that Jacob had to force them to go down to Egypt to buy grain.

If Jacob knew that there was food in Egypt, then all his sons knew this information also.

But why did they not take the initiative to go down to Egypt?

The answer was that Joseph's brothers had a guilty secret.

They knew that about 20 years ago, they had sold Joseph to travelers on their way to Egypt.

They also knew that they had faked his death to cover up their crime.

They also knew that Jacob was still grieving the death of Joseph.

The mere mention of the word "Egypt" would have stirred their consciences.

Jacob had to **order** his sons to go to Egypt to buy grain.

The second piece of evidence is the way that Jacob held back his youngest son Benjamin and did not allow him to go with his other brothers to Egypt.

It had been at least 20 years since Joseph left the family.

At that time Benjamin was a young boy. He must have been at least about 5 years old.

This would make Benjamin about 25 years old when Jacob didn't allow him to go to Egypt with his brothers.

Joseph was 17 yrs. old when he disappeared, so it wasn't a question of age that prevented him going.

In v. 4 we are told that Jacob was **worried that some harm might come to Benjamin.**

This tells us that the disappearance of Joseph was still in the mind of Jacob, and probably not fully resolved.

This decision would have probably added fuel to the consciences of Joseph's brothers.

The brothers might have been able to hide their crime against Joseph, but they could not hide their unruly and bad characters.

Jacob knew about their characters and past sins.

Jacob was a wise man who in Genesis 37: v. 11 kept the dreams of Joseph fixed in his mind.

2. The guilt of sin convicts the brothers of Joseph - v. 6- 22.

Joseph's brothers made their way to Egypt in order to buy grain.

When they arrived they discovered that there was a person in charge of the distribution of all the grain.

The brothers did not recognise that it was Joseph in charge of world food distribution.

The brothers hadn't seen Joseph for at least 20 years.

They certainly didn't expect him to be in a position of great power.

Joseph would have looked like an Egyptian, dressed like an Egyptian and would have spoken in the language of an Egyptian.

However, Joseph did recognise his brothers.

In v. 6 we are told that the first thing that Joseph's brothers did was to **bow down with their faces to the ground in order to honour Joseph.**

This was a partial fulfillment of a prophetic dream that Joseph had at the age of 17.

Remember that the dream involved all of his brothers bowing down before Joseph and also His Mother and Father.

There was one brother missing and his Father and Mother weren't there yet.

(Gen. 37: v. 1-11)

However, in v. 9 we are told that Joseph remembered the dream.

After Joseph recognised his brothers and remembered his dream from 20 years ago, he started to treat his brothers harshly.

Why did Joseph behave like this towards his brothers?

Why didn't Joseph reveal himself to his brothers at this point?

The simple answer is that God was still working His purposes out in this situation.

The Bible teaches us that it is the goodness of God that brings "repentance"

(Romans 2: v.4)

God was being good to the brothers of Joseph in order to bring them to repentance.

The way God did this was to use Joseph to make them think about their past sin of 20 years ago.

The Holy Spirit was working in the situation to bring the brothers to repentance.

Joseph accused his brothers of being spies and they had to prove to Joseph that they were genuine and not spies.

Initially Joseph said he was going to test the genuineness of their testimony by sending one of the brothers back to Canaan to collect their youngest brother and then return to Egypt.

Joseph then put all his brothers together in prison for 3 days.

After the brothers were taken out of prison, Joseph changed his mind about sending back one of the brothers.

Joseph said in v.18 "Do this and live, for I fear God.."

Suddenly Joseph is confronting them with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Joseph declares that he fears God.

In doing this Joseph confronts his brothers with the challenge that **they should also fear God.**

Joseph's new deal for his brothers was for one of them to remain behind in prison and for the rest of the brothers to return home with plenty of grain.

Simeon was chosen to remain behind in prison as security for the brothers to return with their youngest brother Benjamin.

Joseph was showing compassion for all of his family back in Canaan.

The brothers would be able to take back much more grain now, being a larger group.

The brothers agreed to this new and better deal.

The important issue in this section is v. 21 -22

²¹ Then they said to one another, "We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us." ²² And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us."

Firstly, we need to note that Joseph was speaking in the Egyptian language and that everything was being communicated to the brothers through an interpreter. (v.23)

Joseph heard a confession of their guilt.

In v. 24 we are told that Joseph went away somewhere and wept.

He cried with an emotion of joy, because at last his brothers were facing up to their sin of 20 years ago.

Joseph must have sensed that God was working in and through him to reach the heart of his brothers.

We will come to some important application about this later.

3. The Grace of God provides for Joseph's brothers and their families – v. 38.

In v. 25 we see the "grace" of God, working through Joseph.

Joseph ordered that the brothers be given all the grain that they could carry and also he ordered that the money that they used to buy the grain was returned to them.

This means that the "grain" was FREE.

On top of all this Joseph ordered that they be given provisions for their journey home. This would involve food, water.

On the first night of their journey home, one of the brothers noticed that his money had been returned to him. It was placed at the top of his sack of grain.

All the brothers were confused and afraid of this wonderful gift of the return of their money.

There exact words were "**What is this that God has done to us?**"

It is interesting to note that the brothers are aware that God is doing something in their situation, but they are not sure what it is.

They are certainly not yet aware of God's amazing "GRACE".

That comes later.

The brothers then returned to their Father, Jacob, and told him everything that had happened to them in Egypt.

Jacob couldn't see what God was doing in the situation.

All Jacob could see was that he had lost Joseph, Simeon was in prison in Egypt and now he was being asked to release his youngest son Benjamin to go to Egypt.

An amazing thing happened in v. 37,

³⁷ Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "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."

The eldest son gave full assurance to his Father that he would bring Benjamin back to him after their return journey to Egypt.

Jacob virtually said that if Benjamin was not to return then he would die.

Now we come to some practical spiritual applications from this chapter.

Applications.

1. **We must always maintain a healthy fear of God in our lives.**

The famous hymn – “through all the changing scenes of life” has a verse in it that says “fear Him ye saints, and you will then, have nothing else to fear.”

There is Biblical truth in this verse as we will discover in a moment.

Turn back with me to verse 18

¹⁸ Then Joseph said to them the third day, “Do this and live, *for* I fear God:

In this verse, Joseph was teaching his brothers about his own conscience.

Joseph’s conscience was governed by his fear of God.

He told his brothers that **they needed** to fear God also.

We note in v. 21 that the fear of God did come upon the brothers.

The subtle challenge by Joseph to his brothers worked.

Maintaining a healthy fear of God is very important for Christians.

The fear of God is quoted about 300 times in the Bible.

Therefore, it is important that we understand a little about this subject before we make an application.

I am going to quote some verses from the Old and New Testament that will give us an idea of what the fear of God actually means.

Exodus Chapter 1: v.17. – The Hebrew mid-wives feared God more than Pharaoh.

¹⁷ But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive.

Exodus Chapter 9: v. 29-30 – Pharaoh did not fear God.

²⁹ So Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth *is* the LORD’s.

³⁰ But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God.”

We now come to the New Testament.

Matthew 10: v.28. Jesus teaches us to fear God and not to fear man.

²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

2 Corinthians Chapter 7: v.1. Paul teaches us that personal holiness is important for Christians and should happen because of a fear of God.

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

In Paul’s passage outlining sin, he intimates that sin continues in people’s lives because “**there is no fear of God before their eyes.**”

From these verses we understand clearly that those people who do not fear God, don’t understand the consequences of their sinful behaviour, and therefore continue to sin and do what they like.

On the other hand, those people who fear God, understand that God is much bigger than any powerful person. Therefore, God must be given both respect and obedience.

Those people who fear God, understand that God is their creator owner and their behaviour has consequences.

In v. 22 of chapter 42 Reuben realised that the brother's sin against Joseph had consequences. The consequences would be their death.

We will discover later that it was the fear of God in the hearts of the brothers that eventually led them to repentance and forgiveness from Joseph.

Now we come to a personal application in our lives today.

First of all, I want us to understand what the fear of God looks like for a born again Christian.

1 John 4: v. 16-19.

¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love Him because He first loved us.

This passage teaches us that if we have confessed our sin to God and trusted in the work of Jesus, who died for our sin, then God's love by the Holy Spirit should be living in our hearts and minds.

We have the assurance that the consequences of our sin have been dealt with by Jesus. **There is no fear of God's judgement upon our sins.**

That judgement was placed upon Jesus.

However, our intimacy with God and the Holy Spirit is disturbed by any sinful behaviour in our lives. Therefore, if we have a healthy fear of God, we confess our sins immediately if we make a mistake or commit a sin known to us.

The closer we get to Jesus, the more aware we are of our sins.

What does the fear of God look like for people who have not confessed their sin to God and known His forgiveness through Jesus?

Someone once said "**Before we are ready to feel the medicine of God's love being poured into our hearts, we must face up to our sin.**"

Either the fear of God drives you away from Christians and God fearing people, or it drives you towards God, and confessing your sins to Jesus.

Just like Joseph's brothers, there is a step by step process of drawing you to God, through a fear of the consequences of your sin.

It is a very difficult thing to admit your sin to God.

It took Joseph's brothers 20 years.

Maybe in your life, the waiting will stop today and you will confess your sin to Jesus?

It is a very simple thing to do once you are willing in your heart to take a step of faith and really believe that God loves you and He sent His Son to die for your sins.

(John 3: v. 16)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

2. We must always exercise "grace" in our lives, even to those who don't know Jesus.

Notice how Joseph changed his mind about keeping the brothers in prison and sending one brother back to get Benjamin.

One person could not carry very much grain home.

Also we see how the return of their money, was all about grace.

Grace is an undeserved gift from God.

The brothers never paid a yen or a dollar for their grain. It was God's gift through Joseph.

Our Salvation is a gift from God, through Jesus.

Ephesians 2: v. 8-9.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

As Christians God continues to pour His grace into our lives and although it is not easy to do the same, we must try.

Here is a true story about God pouring His grace into my life about 33 years ago.

I had a business debt that I could not pay.

I went to a civil court expecting to get a court order to gradually pay back the money.

I waited in my car outside of the court and prayed for a miracle of God's Grace.

I prayed to God and asked Him to take away the debt, the burden was too great for me.

I promised that if God did that for me then I would surrender my life in service for Him.

I got into the court and the legal officials declared that all of the papers concerning this case had suddenly disappeared.

The judge said, "if you can't produce these papers in 7 days then this man goes free and there is no debt for him".

That was 33 years ago. God paid the debt that I owed.

God's grace was poured into my life, and I surrendered my life to God.

May God help us all to pour grace into other peoples' lives too.

We do this by presenting the message of God's grace to people and through behaving gracefully to other people.