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DHW

LESSON 33

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 42

INTRODUCTION

God works slowly but surely. About twenty two years ago, God revealed to Joseph through dreams that he would be exalted above his brothers. Joseph was then about seventeen years old. For the next thirteen years, he went through three terrible and trying experiences. He was stripped and thrown into a pit by his envious brothers and then they sold him to some Midianite merchants, who were journeying to Egypt. In Egypt, he was sold as a slave to Potiphar, the chief of Pharaoh's army. Faithfully serving Potiphar, he was falsely accused of trying to seduce Potiphar's wife and was thrown into prison. In prison, Pharaoh's butler, whom Joseph helped to interpret his dream, forgot him when his position was restored. He stayed in the prison for two more years.

God's appointed time had arrived to fulfil His plan and purpose.

Joseph was suddenly ushered into the presence of Pharaoh, who had dreamed two dreams and no one could interpret them. Joseph interpreted and counselled Pharaoh, who was so pleased with him that Pharaoh promoted him and made him the most powerful man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. God may seem to be slow in fulfilling His will, but His plan and purpose will surely come to pass. It may be slow according to our expectation, but His appointed time is always the best, never too late or too early.

When God permits bad things to happen to His children, it is for their own good. This is evident in Joseph's life. God was preparing and moulding him for the top job in Egypt. Being a young lad when he first set foot on Egyptian soil, there was much to learn and to become a better person, whom God could use. The qualities of humility, patience, honesty, industry and empathy were but some of the character traits which Joseph learned in the various schools of life. However, we also learn that what we sow is what we reap, and that our sins will find us out.¹ This truth is aptly illustrated in

¹Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

this chapter when Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy grain from him. Chapter 42 strikes a happy and joyous note in the life of Joseph, who unwaveringly trusted God against all odds. God had rewarded him tremendously all for the purpose of saving His people, who were not yet harmonious and united. Lessons of sin, repentance, and forgiveness need to be learned before greater things can be achieved. A child of God must learn to change from his bad character and conduct to become the kind of child that pleases God, who can then use him to achieve greater things. Jacob and his sons are now in focus and through the years they had changed. Some of these changes are revealed in this chapter. In addition, God's guiding hand in dealing with His children brings comfort and encouragement.

The following is a suggested outline:

- 1) Jacob called his sons to go to Egypt to buy corn that they might live and not die (42:1-5);

- 2) Joseph's brothers appeared before him (42:6-20);
- 3) Joseph's brothers confessed their guilt over the way they had treated him (42:21-24);
- 4) Joseph's brothers were frightened when the money paid for the corn was found in their sacks (42:25-34);
- 5) Jacob refused his sons to take Benjamin to Egypt in order to secure the release of Simeon (42:35-38).

STUDY THE WORD

Jacob Sends His Sons to Egypt

Famine struck *in all lands* (41:57). In Egypt, there was grain for the people and many came from other regions to Egypt to buy it. The land of Canaan was not spared. Jacob and his family had almost exhausted their food supplies during the early period of the famine. Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, but his eleven sons did nothing. Instead of discussing and deliberating among themselves regarding what actions they should take, they did nothing, causing Jacob to say to them, *why do ye look one upon another* (v.1). This shows a

Numbers 32:23 But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.

family that was not functioning in harmony and unity. They ought to be suggesting that they should go to Egypt to buy provisions for their families. Were they staring at one another because they did not want to go to Egypt fearing that they might meet Joseph there? Had they forgotten about Joseph but this prospective trip to Egypt could have re-ignited the burden of their guilt against their brother?

Jacob was a man of action. He knew what to do in difficult situations. Accordingly, he called his sons to go to Egypt to buy food so that they would live and not die. That tells us that the famine was very severe, and it was a matter of life and death. They were in a desperate situation. Joseph's ten brothers went to Egypt. Benjamin did not go with them because Jacob would not allow him to go. Since the loss of Joseph, Benjamin had become his favourite son. Jacob feared that something might happen and lose another son. Jacob still remembered and mourned for the loss of Joseph. So, *the sons of Israel* (using their national identity instead of their personal identity) arrived in Egypt to buy corn. They were

among many who came from Canaan to buy corn (v.5)

Joseph's Brothers Come Before Him

Joseph's ten brothers came before Joseph to buy corn. Joseph held two positions. He was *the governor over all the land*, and he took a personal interest in overseeing the sale of the grain. In the purchasing of the grain in Egypt, the buyers had to come before Joseph. Perhaps, he expected that his brothers would come to buy grain. They came and Joseph could straightaway recognise them. They had beards and their clothes showed that they were Jews. They were much older than Joseph. There was not much change in their appearance, and the fact that they came as one entity, ten of them, made it even easier for Joseph to detect. They spoke in Hebrew to Joseph through an interpreter. But they could not recognise Joseph because, we can rightly surmise that they did not expect this great and noble man superintending the sale of grain was Joseph, their brother. Then Joseph looked Egyptian, with his head and face clean-shaven; wearing Egyptian clothes, and spoke in Egyptian. How could they even

suspect that this great man was Joseph! When they came before Joseph, they *bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth* (v.6). By the providence of God, Joseph and his brothers, except Benjamin, met. Joseph knew them but they did not know him.

Now Joseph remembered the dreams he dreamed of them (37:5, 9). God was fulfilling His revealed plan and purpose. Joseph's opening statement to them was surprisingly unexpected. He did not disclose his real identity. He spoke harshly to them through an interpreter asking where they came from (v.7). He then charged them for being spies (v.9)! Why charge them for being spies and not some other crime? One wonders. Someone has suggested that when he was serving his father, Jacob, his brothers could look upon him as spying on them. So, they were now getting a taste of their own medicine. When they denied, Joseph repeated his charge three more times, and each time indicating to his brothers that he was not satisfied with their explanation. Joseph was deliberately treating his brothers as liars and untrustworthy. His brothers were desperate. They

began to tell him more things about the family than necessary.

They began to tell Joseph about their family, saying that there were twelve of them, one was no more (that was Joseph), the youngest was with their father (this revealed that his father, Jacob, was still living, and his younger brother, Benjamin too). Joseph put them through another test to prove their integrity and honesty. Joseph proposed that he would take nine of them as hostage and let one of them go back to bring Benjamin in order to secure their release. And if they could not prove what they had declared, then they would be guilty as charged, that is, spies, and they would be put to death (v.16). However, Joseph detained them in prison for three days. This was a good move on the part of Joseph. He gave his brothers time to think about his proposition, and also gave them a taste of what was like to be in prison. The three days also allowed Joseph time to think about his proposition. After three days, he reversed his plan. He mentioned that he feared God and would let nine of them go back and return with Benjamin, holding one of them

hostage to prove their honesty (vv. 18, 19).

This second plan was better than the first for many good reasons. Surely Joseph must have thought through in the three days. First, it would be dangerous for one of them to make the journey back alone. The journey was about 400 kilometres (250 miles). He could be waylaid, robbed and even killed. Moreover, if he made it home, his old father Jacob might be shocked to death. But with the present plan, Jacob could be persuaded to let Benjamin go to Egypt if nine of them told their father rather than one. Jacob and their families needed a lot of food and provision to feed them. It would not be wise and more difficult for one to cart so much food alone back to Canaan. The revised plan was better. Joseph reiterated that they should bring their youngest brother when they return to Egypt to prove their honesty and integrity lest he would die. The ten brothers agreed.

Joseph's Brothers Confess Their Guilt

The brothers then spoke among themselves in Hebrew, their mother tongue. They were convicted of their past sin against Joseph, their brother. They were

truly repentant. Joseph had pleaded with them at that time for mercy but they would not hear. They attributed their present distress as a punishment for their crime against Joseph. In other words, they deserved to be punished. Addressing them, Reuben recounted that he had spoken up and asked them not to harm Joseph but they would not listen to him. Reuben then remarked that *his blood is required* of them, suggesting that they believed that Joseph might have died (v.22). This was new information unknown to Joseph. He heard and understood all that they talked among themselves. The situation was so emotionally charged that he could not bear it. He turned himself away and wept. How he loved them! Joseph was not being cruel to them. What he did was necessary for he wanted to see whether his brothers had changed from their evil ways. He wanted to see whether they were honest, sensitive to their father, and treating Benjamin well.

When he returned, he picked Simeon as the hostage. Simeon was the second eldest. He did not pick Reuben the firstborn because he had just found out that Reuben actually had wanted to save him at Dotham.

However, the choice of Simeon was appropriate, not only because he was the second eldest, but because he had a reputation for cruelty. He led his brother Levi to massacre the Hivites (34:25), and in all probability, he might be the one who led the others in dealing with Joseph. Simeon should reap what he had sown. His life now depended on his brothers. If they did not return, he would be put to death. Joseph then ordered that Simeon be bound in front of them to see. This was to impress upon them that he was serious and meant what he had told them.

Joseph's Brothers Discover that Money Is Found in Their Sacks

Joseph mentioned that he feared God. Indeed he meant well and it was not time for him to reveal his true identity to his brothers. His intention was to ascertain whether his brothers had changed for the better. He himself had learned much by trusting and obeying God, and now God had rewarded and blessed him. He wanted the best for his brothers too. It was time for the brothers to return to Canaan. Joseph then ordered his servants not only to fill their sacks with grain, but also to return everyone his money, and even

enough provision for the journey back to Canaan (v.25). This proves that Joseph loved his brothers. Although he had not forgotten the bad treatment they inflicted upon him, he had forgiven them. He was in a position to take revenge and strike them back with the full weight of his power. He did not. Instead he was magnanimous. He would not take money from his brothers for the food, for he had the authority to give them for free. Moreover, he made sure that they had enough provision for their journey. They did not have to use the grain from the sacks, which were for their families in Canaan. Joseph's action illustrates our Lord Jesus Christ's command to love and bless our enemies. This is turning the other cheek!

When one of the brothers discovered that the money paid for the grain was found in his sack, their first reaction was fear and they exclaimed (v. 28): *What is this that God hath done unto us?* This is the first time Joseph's brothers mentioned God in their heart. They recognised the hand of God in what had happened to them. They were afraid because they could be charged for being thieves, stealing and cheating. All these unexpected

happenings that occurred to them had aroused their guilty conscience. They had to wrestle with it. So far they had been honest in their encounter with Joseph. They should be repenting.

When they reached home, they told their father what had happened in Egypt. They told the truth this time carefully omitting any part that might make their father more worried. They tried very hard to explain to Jacob that Simeon's detention in Egypt was beyond them. They omitted the part that he was bound before them. They could do nothing at all. They also told Jacob that in order to secure Simeon's release, they had to bring Benjamin to Egypt. Moreover, they also related to their father that they found their money paid for the corn in their sacks.

Jacob Refuses His Sons to Take Benjamin to Egypt for the Release of Simeon

Jacob showed himself to be the same person as he was before. He thought only of himself. He blamed his sons for his sorrow and grief - Joseph was no more, Simeon was being held hostage, and now Benjamin was to be taken away. Jacob's action showed two

weaknesses. His love for Benjamin was an obsession. Benjamin was all his life and hope. He showed a weakening of his faith in God. In the first place if he had allowed Benjamin to go with them, it would have been a different matter completely. Joseph would have revealed his true identity, and upon their return, they would all make their journey to Egypt much earlier. But now a period of anxiety and uncertainty was still hanging. Jacob should have trusted God.

Reuben stood up and guaranteed to protect Benjamin and to bring Simeon back if Jacob would allow him. He displayed much courage and care. But his counter suggestion that should he fail then Jacob could kill his (Reuben's) two sons was utter foolishness. Jacob was trying to keep everyone safe and together. If Reuben should fail, it would mean the end of Benjamin, the end of Simeon and possibly himself. In what way could the killing of Jacob's two grandchildren help? That would be catastrophic! Reuben tried to do things according to human wisdom and ways. Walking close to God will always bear good fruit in all things, as the Lord has promised.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The Lord our God has said that those whom He loves He will chasten if they sin against Him. We see how God stirred up the guilty conscience of Joseph's brothers and led them to the point of acknowledging their guilt and sin. For without this realisation, there will not be a strong conviction of the need of repenting and seeking forgiveness and change. Sometimes God permits our business to collapse, our wealth to crash, our health to fail, and our hopes to be dashed in order to get our attention to return to Him for good! God speaks clearly in Hebrews 12:9-11): *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

Joseph's life thus far demonstrates that God keeps His

promises. He might be slow from our stand point, but His timing is always perfect and he is never too late. Unlike Jacob we ought to trust Him completely. Moreover, we must be very careful that we do not put all our love, attention, and hope in our children, and leave God out or second to them. In our lives, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ must have the pre-eminence in our heart. God deserves nothing less than our all, because He is God! Like Joseph, who feared God, he changed his plan for the better. His first proposal could have invited criticism against him for being vindictive and revengeful. But he feared God. God gave him godly wisdom. He came up with a much better plan. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom as the writer of Proverbs declares. Let us fear God.

Joseph forgave his brothers. He remembered all that his brothers did against him. He was harsh to them for good reasons. But forgiveness does not necessarily mean that one must forget the past. Contrary to popular thinking, it is not necessary to forget in order to forgive. Joseph forgave his brothers for he did not act vindictively. In order to reconcile and restore trust his brothers must prove that they have changed for the better. AMEN