



Famines of Life

June 11, 2017

Scripture Reading Genesis 42:1-10

Last week we saw how Joseph handled his trials and tribulations. He overcame through Prayer, perseverance, planning through the Spirit of God, and promotion or execution of that plan. But this week we will see his family struggling to cope with their sufferings. They approached everything in a worldly way rather than through faith.

There is something interesting about Joseph's life. He became an Administrator when he was 30. He was about 38 years when Egypt was going through a famine. Joseph could have gone with his entourage and glamor to Jacob's house, and surprised his family, confronted his brothers, rebuked them, shaken them up, and made them repent. Why didn't he do that? It was more than 20 years since he had seen them! Should he not have taken that initiative? The following passage gives some answer.

Gen 41:50-52 Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." He named the second Ephraim, "For," he said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." (Genesis 41:50-52 NASB)

Joseph married a foreigner just like Boaz.

Did Joseph take his family more like a nightmare? Did he really want to cut off?

Life is sometimes like a roller coaster. It moves rapidly up and down, with lots of twists and turns! As I spoke in my previous sermon, life is full of hills and valleys. Egypt had a bountiful harvest for first seven years, and Joseph had done a great job saving the extra grain by building huge warehouses in every town. As Joseph interpreted, severe famine followed. All nearby countries suffered except Egypt.

Gen. 42: 1-3 1Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you staring at one another?" 2He said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die." 3Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt.

Famine in any country brings chaos, hunger, and death. God's Word came true not only for Egypt but for neighboring countries like Israel also. You can feel the anguish of People in Jacob's conversation here! The children of Jacob were staring at each other not knowing what to do. Jacob wanted action. He wanted them to go to Egypt and buy some food! Sometimes we do not move to meet our needs!

There is a story of the rich executive who announced to his church one morning that he was going to give up all he owned so that he had to depend on his faith in God for everything he needed. He sold everything, gave it to the poor, and moved into a rented home down on the bad side of town. That first night, he prayed that God would furnish him with some food. The next morning, he went outside on the porch and there was no food.

That night, he again prayed for food. The next morning...nothing.



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The 3rd night, he prayed again, saying, "Lord, if you do not feed me, I will surely die of starvation." The next morning...nothing. Then, in a near panic brought on by hunger, he fell to his knees and cried out, "Lord, I have put my faith in you on the line. Why are you ignoring me like this?"

In the quietness of that rented house, he heard the Lord tell him that his prayers had been answered, but he was not looking at the answer. The Lord told him to go back out on the porch, which he did. Then, the Lord told him to look up! A large sign on the building across the road, in bold letters, said, "WORKERS WANTED -- LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED"

Food is such a basic necessity! Qatar crisis is a recent one and it is going on for only a few days. We can see the impact of food shortage already in Qatar. Let us continue the story here.

Gen. 42:4,5. 4But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "I am afraid that harm may befall him." 5So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.

Jacob protected Rachel's child Benjamin. He did not want to lose him also like Joseph. He just sent other ten!

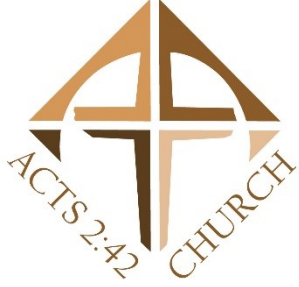
Gen. 42: 6,7. 6Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. 7When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."

Joseph had complete control of the grain. Everyone had to go through him. Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces down! Joseph's first dream was fulfilled concerning his brothers coming to him and bowing down before him. Joseph recognized them but they could not. Their sight must have brought a lot of painful memories for Joseph. He showed his anger in his speech. He accused them as spies! We could see, even after 20 years, Joseph was bitter.

Gen. 42:8-13. 8But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. 9Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, "You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land." 10Then they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. 11"We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies." 12Yet he said to them, "No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!" 13But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive."

They trembled and answered truthfully. They are a family of twelve, one is no longer alive, and the youngest is with the father.

Gen. 42:14-17. 14Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies; 15by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! 16"Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested,



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whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” 17So he put them all together in prison for three days.

Joseph pretended as though he did not believe and he had to investigate. He put them in prison for 3 days, and gave them a taste of real suffering, a suffering sometimes we go through because of false accusations!

Joseph made one of them stay back and made others go back to bring his own brother Benjamin.

Gen. 42: 18-22. 18Now Joseph said to them on the third day, “Do this and live, for I fear God: 19if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, 20and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die.” And they did so. 21Then they said to one another, “Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.” 22Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood.”

The brothers were remorseful. They felt guilty because of their ruthless behavior against Joseph. Reuben said, I told you not to do it but you all would not listen. They started confessing their sins! If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive all our trespasses! Conscience is an amazing part of God's creation. It sets the alarm when we do something contrary to the Lord! It spurs us to repent and come to God for forgiveness!

Gen. 42. 23-25. 23 They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. 24He turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. 25Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man’s money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And thus it was done for them.

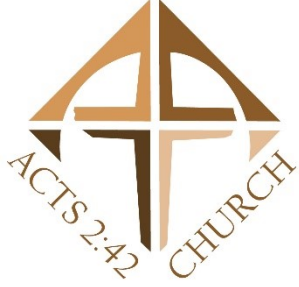
The brothers were speaking among themselves in Hebrew which Egyptians did not understand. Even though Joseph used an interpreter, he understood. He turned away from them and cried. He provided them not only grain but he returned their cash also. Joseph had still compassion on them! But he kept Simeon and tied him up in front of his brothers!

Why Simeon?

Why not Reuben who defiled his father's bed?

Why not Judah who had incest relation with his daughter in law, Tamar?

Levi and Simeon slaughtered the whole village of Shechem. They must have been put to death. As a matter of fact, all ten stood before Joseph as a guilty party because of what they did to Joseph! At present, we all stand before our Lord as a guilty party. Only by His grace through His shed blood, we are pardoned, forgiven, and redeemed!



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Gen. 42: 26-28. So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there. 27As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. 28Then he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack." And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

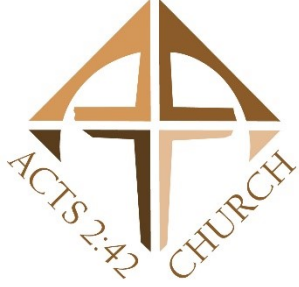
On their way back, they discovered their money again and they were very much troubled! They were wondering what was going on? Was it a set up for their punishment?

Genesis 42: 29-34. 29When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, 30"The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with 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 longer alive, and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.' 33"The man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me and take grain for the famine of your households, and go. 34'But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'"

The sons returned back to Jacob and explained everything that happened to them in Egypt. They also explained about the hostage crisis of one of their brothers, Simeon. Now they were demanded to bring Benjamin to prove that they are indeed honest. The father's lament is indeed gripping!

Gen 42: 35-38. 35Now it came about as they were emptying 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 dismayed. 36Their father Jacob said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me." 37Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you." 38But Jacob said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow."

Jacob was vexed in his spirit when he heard that Simeon was held captive and the Egyptian ruler wants to see Benjamin verify the truth, Jacob loved Rachel's children, Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph was gone, Simeon was gone, and now there was the real danger of losing Benjamin also. Jacob went through serious depression when Joseph disappeared mysteriously. Now if something happens to Benjamin that would be his last day! Reuben promised him that he will take charge of Benjamin personally as his own life. He promised something that he had no control of! What if indeed something happened to Benjamin? Sometimes we are too rash in promising people.



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Tension was very high in Jacob's family, and everyone was at a collapsing point. It is a very long story, and I'll stop here, and continue this story next week also. So what can we learn from this part of story?

Conclusion:

- I. What we sow so we reap!
- II. Reconciliation through confrontation!
- III. We will at times face famines of life! Be prepared!
 1. Famine of lack of love
 2. Famine of lack of money
 3. Famine of lack of job/career
 4. Famine of lack of friendship and support.
 5. Famine of lack of supportive family.
 6. Famine of lack of good Christian fellowship.

Only by the grace of God, we can overcome the famines of life. Let us pray!