

# Going down to Egypt

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[0:00] Okay, so a matter of life and death. There's a lot of words to go over. There's a lot of things said and I'd love a couple of hours to sit here and pull it all to pieces because there's so much in there.

It was a blessing to do this but frustrating in a way because every line has something golden that I'd love to really reach into but we don't have time for that so I'm going to fly over the top of it and just pull out some main points and see where we go from there.

So what I would like to do is really establish the timeline of things that are going on in these two chapters because the thing that I struggle with, I don't know if you're the same, is unless I have kind of pictures in front of me I find it really hard to picture where people are going and what they're doing and how many of them there are.

So I'm going to try and establish that through these little slides that we've got going on here. That mouse should disappear. Okay, so we'll go over a bit of background of how we got to this point. So when Joseph was 17, he lived in Canaan with his family and had 11 brothers. He had a dream that he would someday reign over his brothers. He was a favorite of his father and often his father often sent him to report on his brothers.

[1:32] His brothers didn't like him very much. That was one reason for that and they decided to kill him. They didn't kill him though and they decided to sell him into slavery.

Okay, so they sold him to some Ishmaelites who took him off to Egypt. Egypt was around 700 miles away. It's a long way to go. So we learned that the Lord was with Joseph.

This was a very prominent point. The Ishmaelites sold Joseph to a man named Potiphar who happened to be an official to the Pharaoh, a very important man.

He served in Potiphar's house for probably about 11 years before he was thrown into prison for a crime that he didn't commit. Every time I say those words, I think of the A-team thing.

But the Lord was still with him and he was put in charge of all those in prison. So during that time, Potiphar's cupbearer and the baker who were previously thrown in prison were troubled by dreams.

[2:42] And Joseph interpreted those dreams and asked him to remember him when all goes well with them because he didn't deserve to be in prison.

The dreams turned out to be true and the cupbearer forgot about him. So Joseph did porridge for two years, which is an English way of saying went to prison.

And then Pharaoh himself had troubling dreams. He sent for all the wise men and the magicians in the land, but no one could interpret the dreams.

The cupbearer is reminded of Joseph and has a pain in his conscience and suggests to Pharaoh, Joseph, as an aide, the person that could interpret the dreams.

So Joseph does just that and tells Pharaoh that God will bring seven years of abundance. And then he will bring seven years of famine afterwards.

[3:48] And he gives him advice on how to handle this situation. Pharaoh is really, really impressed with Joseph in this interpretation and makes him, under Pharaoh, the most important person in Egypt, with the exception of himself.

So he's like a king, but not quite. And he's only 30 years old. At 30 years old, I was just about in charge of my shirts.

So then came the seven years of abundance. Joseph stored up, as part of his leadership, he stored up huge amounts of food to prepare for the seven years of famine.

Just as he suggested to the Pharaoh. And then came the seven years of famine, which is where we are now in the reading. Okay, why aren't you working?

I'll do it the old-fashioned way. That was the recap, and I forgot the slide. Okay. Okay. So, we look at verse 1 and 2.

[5:24] We get the impression right away, and we know from the context, that it's a very desperate situation. I think they've probably already been sitting around discussing it many, many times.

And now they got to the point where they had no solution. There were no words to say. And you can almost hear the frustration in Jacob the father's voice as he comes in.

And he says, Why are you all looking at each other? There's grain down in Egypt. We could die here. So, the brothers set out on their way to Egypt.

And verse 5 gives us a reminder of how big the famine was. Excuse me. The scale of the famine. So, it says, Israel's sons were among those who went from that land to buy grain.

I think there was more going on here. I think there was a big group of people that were going. This famine was a serious business.

[6:42] So, the brothers head to Egypt. Which sounds like a simple process to us, because if we want to go to the other side of the world, we can just jump on a plane.

It takes a day. We're there. Jobs are good. For these guys, it would have taken maybe a month. Maybe more. And this was a decision that wasn't taken lightly.

And I say that for two reasons. The first reason is for the time scale. This is a journey that had to be planned. It had to be provided for. Or they couldn't just go out the door and walk there.

And the second reason would be that their father, Jacob, kept Benjamin back. Kept him at home because he was scared to lose him. He was scared the harm would come to him.

He feared for his son's life. And I know this tends to be an attribute for parents, doesn't it? To be scared of losing their kids. So I remember when I was a boy, my mum was scared to let me go down to the corner shop to get sweets.

[7:48] She feared for my life every day. Still does. But for Jacob, this is a massive deal. Because he's already lost his favorite son.

He already lost Joseph. He thought Joseph was dead. So the brothers, they get to Egypt and they go to the governor.

Have we gone too far? There we go. They go to the governor. And they bow with their faces to the ground to show their respect. It just so happens to be their brother.

If this happened to us, we'd be saying, what are the chances? What a coincidence. Isn't that amazing? I remember when I was in Australia with my mum earlier this year.

I was down in Fremantle. And I met a guy named Bob. And I bought an antique globe from Bob. And two weeks ago, I'm walking along London Road.

[8:57] I see him. So I stopped and I said, Hey, Bob. And he took a moment and he looked at me. And he went, hey. And I said, do you remember me? He said, yeah. He said, I sold you the antique globe.

I said, yeah. We agreed it was a small world. Sorry. I couldn't resist that. But actually, there's nothing random about these people bumping into each other.

You could say they were driven to Egypt as a product of circumstance, but I don't think that's the case. In chapter 41, 32, on the subject of the famine, Joseph said, this matter has been firmly decided by God and God will do it soon.

This was their only option, was to go to Joseph. They couldn't stay there and starve. They'd die. We live in a world that believes that we only get to where we are by our own hard work, by circumstance and chance, and that's it.

There's nothing outside of that. I say that's very wrong. We look at how quickly Joseph got to be the second in charge of all of Egypt.

[10:21] Okay, so we look quickly at the authority of Joseph. 39, 2-4, the Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered and lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

When the master, when his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in the eyes and became his attendant.

39, 5, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field.

39, 21, but while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him. He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison. As we can see pretty clearly and as we heard from Jerome last week, it's the Lord that is moving Joseph.

[11:28] It's the Lord that is giving him this authority. It's the Lord that is allowing this to happen. Joseph has an intimate relationship with God.

When his master's wife was trying to go to bed with him, his response to the temptation was, how then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? I wonder if temptation comes our way, we'd say the same thing, if that's our first thought.

Even the Pharaoh said later on, can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God? When the inmates were in prison and they were being troubled by the dreams, we were talking about this earlier, Joseph's response was, do not interpretations belong to God?

Tell me your dreams. So we put this together and we see that there's a strong connection between Joseph and God. We see that it was God the whole time that was guiding him.

So now Joseph's dreams have come true and he's ruling over his family as God said that he would in that dream as a 17 year old. actually he's ruling over the whole of Egypt.

[13:01] So Joseph's brothers are on the floor before Joseph and I want you to imagine the emotions that are going on, the things that are going through their mind.

The brothers didn't recognize who Joseph was but you can guarantee that they were hungry and they were tired and suddenly they were faced with being accused of spies in a foreign land and probably in front of hundreds of people as well.

I imagine they were thinking they would be killed. Thinking probably of their father and of their brother at home who are close to starving I should imagine.

They'd eaten all the food and on Joseph's side he's face to face with the very family that were trying to kill him.

The family that sold him off into slavery and yet they were still his family. Can you imagine the emotion that's going on and suddenly they appear in front of him.

[14:08] It's just a probably a regular day at work for Joseph. And let's notice the language in verse 9. Then he remembered his dreams about them and he said to them you are spies you have come to see where our land is unprotected.

It would be very easy to write this off I think as a moment of revenge just a cold reaction to what he's seeing and what he's experiencing. I think there's an element of that.

I think there is an emotional element there as Eleanor pointed out to me actually that he's using the word spies which was a very very similar thing to what was going on when his brothers were attacking him when he came over the hill if you remember back.

Now he's remembering his dreams and he remembered how he would rule over them and I don't think that he's really jumping on this idea of saying now's my chance for revenge.

I don't think that that's it because we just looked at how close he was to the Lord. He's remembering his dreams but I don't think he was thinking of revenge. I think at that moment he's realizing that God is fulfilling this moment as he promised and there's probably a conflict there of all those emotions and knowing the right things to do in the same way that we struggle with things.

[15:43] So he directs all this emotion into almost a logical course of action and he tests his brothers. So there's a proposal.

He's still full of emotion and we look at verse 15 Joseph starts to outline his proposal but I don't think he's completely thought it through. So here's what he says.

And this is how you will be tested. As surely as Pharaoh lives you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of your number to get your brother.

The rest of you will be kept in prison so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not then as surely as Pharaoh lives you are spies.

You get the impression that this was a bit of an outburst. Because his next action is to throw them all in prison for three days. I think this gave Joseph a bit of breathing space.

[16:52] Time to think things through properly. Because after the three days there's a change in the plan. On the third day Joseph said to them do the this and you will live for I fear God.

If you are honest men let one of your brothers stay here in prison while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But you must bring your youngest brother to me so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.

can't find where we are in the slides. The brothers tested. So in both versions of the plan we can see Joseph's objective.

He wants them to get their youngest brother. Notice how after the three days in prison he says to his brothers that they can take grain back to Canaan to feed their starving families.

That wasn't present in the first plan. I think in that time that Joseph had to think it through he spent a lot of time thinking about his family. Suddenly he's been confronted with his brothers and it's probably triggered memories and emotions and all kinds of things and he's thinking of his father, he's thinking of his little brother, he's thinking of home for three days and there's this element of mercy that comes in.

[18:19] And one brother would not be enough to take all that grain back. So he amended his plan.

So the testing is set to start and Joseph will determine if the brothers are honest men. The conditions are in place. One brother Simeon is set to stay in the prison. The rest of the brothers will go back to Canaan and they must return with their youngest brother Benjamin.

So what's at stake? Already we've got a hint of it at the beginning of the chapter when Jacob said, go down there and buy some grain for us so that we may live and not die.

Joseph pushes the point home in verse 20. You must bring your youngest brother to me so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.

Notice the AK-47 on the screen. See if they failed a test they won't have access to food. Their families would probably starve.

[19:37] If they're considered spies in those days I'd imagine they were probably going to be executed so the price of this couldn't be much higher could it? Joseph holds the key to life for all of his family and the reality of the situation is setting in on both sides of the camp because in verses 21 and 22 we see the brothers facing regret for their actions all that time ago and they begin to remember what they did to their youngest brother still with no idea who the governor actually is.

Joseph was using an interpreter and this verse confused me but I think what it's saying is he's using an interpreter in order that his brothers would not recognize him.

He didn't need the interpreter because he spoke Hebrew and he understood them perfectly but they didn't realize that so they're talking these things and reality sets in for him and in verse 24 we start to see what real compassion looks like because Joseph starts to weep.

The cracks start appearing and he regains his composure and he has his brother Simeon bound.

It's Joseph's brothers return home with the food that they bought and on their way home they find that the money that they used to buy the food was still in their sacks and this was done by the order of Joseph and they get very very scared because that money was meant for Joseph for the food the person that holds their lives in his hands.

now they have the food and they have the money and Joseph has their brother Simeon looking like a very precarious situation isn't it?

[21:40] so they get home and they tell their father Jacob everything that happened and they say that Simeon is still in prison in Egypt and they need to take their brother Benjamin now to Egypt also brother Reuben tries to bargain to let the father Jacob release Benjamin and he offers his own sons as compensation if Benjamin died but Jacob refuses to let Benjamin go saying if harm comes to him on the journey that you are taken you will bring my grey head down to the grave in sorrow I think it was a pretty weak bargain wasn't it?

he didn't Reuben didn't offer himself he offered his sons it didn't make the grade and it wasn't enough to sway him and that's the way it stays for a couple of months until they had eaten all the food that Joseph had given them and it 43 we start to see some changes in character the conversation begins in a similar way to the last chapter as Jacob tells his sons to go and buy food and the brother Judah reminds him of the severity of the situation echoing Jacob's own words at the beginning of the last chapter he says the word says then Judah said to Israel his father that is Jacob Israel is Jacob send the boy along with me and we will go at once so that we and you and our children may live and not die here's that emphasis on living and not dying again this time Judah steps forward and himself offers to bear the responsibility of Benjamin with the offer that if anything went wrong then he himself would bear the blame all of his life and that's a complete reversal isn't it that's a complete 180 from wanting to kill his brother those years ago or even just to sell him in slavery it's a whole different thing he's putting away that old person and he's saying okay I'll take the blame for that and after a little quarreling Jacob concedes he gives up his youngest son and allows them to go he lets them leave by praying that God would have mercy on them and the brothers go down to Egypt so the stubborn father's heart is softened finally gives the situation over to

God says okay so we get to the last verses of chapter 43 and we start to see a wonderful picture of reconciliation because the results of the testing of the brothers are starting to come in they start to fall into place the brothers present themselves before Joseph Joseph sees that they got it right they met the conditions of the test they return with the brother Benjamin so he instructs his steward to prepare a feast so the steward takes the brothers to the house and they're scared they're scared because they still had the money that they should have paid Joseph before but their response is honesty they go straight to the steward and they tell him about the silver about the money that they found in the sacks when they were on their way home to

Canaan and the response from the steward is reassurance don't be afraid their fear is relieved the money that was returned to their sacks was revealed by the steward as a gift from God they reunited with their brother Simeon and what follows is a wonderful picture of being reunited being in Joseph's home and there for a great feast we all know the anticipation of a great feast it's a wonderful feeling especially when you're hungry and you know this is the picture of forgiveness isn't it I like

[27:04] KFC this is the picture of forgiveness despite everything that Joseph experienced at the hands of these men he rescues them from death he brings them to his home and he weeps for joy at their presence now we're going to just have a quick recap of what's happened we see a whole nation starving we see a picture of all people coming to Joseph to be fed we see it's a life or death situation there's no mucking around if the brothers didn't go to Joseph they would die we see actually that Joseph knew what he was doing because at the very moment his brothers came to him he was already planning to get his family back together again and Joseph had all the authority a man could have and despite knowing everything about them he still gave the option for his family to come to him in honesty he dealt directly with the people that abused him and tried to kill him and had gut wrenching compassion on them is this sounding familiar to anybody

Jesus does all of those things we can look at these characteristics and we can say how wonderful is our God and it's right that we aspire to have those characteristics in basic ways I think we achieve these not to their full measure but as God makes us more like Christ we start showing these things and we should focus on that in reality we're probably more like the brothers we sit around thinking about our problems when we should be taking them to the Lord I speak about myself more than anybody the road might be rocky at times and we might be scared Joseph's brothers had no idea what was going on what Joseph was doing for them but they trusted him when he gave them the instructions and they were honest and they followed them they had no idea how much he loved them or what he planned to do and for us as

Christians it's much the same we don't always know what the Lord is doing in our lives we don't know his plans and we can't grasp the depths of his love but we do know it is for our good because Romans 828 promises that so I say to you remember particularly if you're struggling remember

remember the first time you fell at the feet of Jesus remember the first time that he fed you remember how he forgives you remember that he keeps doing just that and we should keep going back to him because we still fall short don't we we still get things wrong Jesus still forgives remember that he loves you and he wants you with him remember that one day we will all be reunited in his home for a great feast and in that place all the guilt all the shame all the wickedness all the pain all the anxiety and the sorrow be washed away nothing and if you're not a Christian if you don't know Jesus maybe you don't realize it but you're starving I can guarantee that you know that even in the flesh you can be starving and not feel hungry but you can see it outwardly and it's the same spiritually Jesus said I am the living bread that came down from heaven if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever the most important thing you can do today if you're not a Christian is pay a visit to the man and fall down in front of him it doesn't matter what your background is it doesn't matter what language you speak it doesn't matter what you've done doesn't matter who others I say no look at what the enemies of Jesus did to him and he prayed for them his own execution and he said father forgive them they do not know what they're doing Jesus will absolutely forgive you and he'll take away all the fear and trembling he'll bring you to his home he'll clean you up and he'll feed you and it doesn't cost a penny Jesus doesn't want the silver he won't let you go hungry and die if you don't pay but you have to go to him in honesty this is a free gift of eternal life make sure you take it amen