

The Time of Famine

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

Once there was a terrible famine in the land of Egypt. Nothing would grow. There was no rain. The gardens dried up, and the cattle could find no water. But even though no food would grow, the people of Egypt did not starve, for their storehouses were full of food. A very wise and good man named Joseph had seen to it that food was stored up for those days. God had sent dreams to the king of Egypt, and only Joseph had understood that the king's dreams had meant that a famine was coming.

Now Joseph was not an Egyptian. He had been born in the land of Canaan, but his brothers had sold him to be a slave in Egypt. They had not wanted him in their family, because they thought that their father, Jacob, loved Joseph more than he loved them. That is how it happened that Joseph was taken to Egypt.

But Joseph never forgot the teachings of his father who had told him always to be good and kind, and to believe in God. And because Joseph worked hard and followed God's commands, God gave him the wisdom to understand the king's dreams.

The king thought so much of Joseph that he said, "You have told me that my dreams say that there will be seven good years, when everything will grow especially well, and when there will be more than enough food in the land for everyone. Then, you say, the bad years will come. Do what you think best to save the people from starving. Take care of everything for me."

He made Joseph ruler over the whole land Egypt and no one had more power than Joseph, except the king himself.

Then the bad years came and the famine began. When the people had used up all their own food, they went to Joseph and he gave everyone food from the storehouses.

There was famine not only in Egypt, however. In all the other, lands roundabout there was famine too; and the land of Canaan, where Joseph's father and brothers lived, people were starving.

So one day Jacob, Joseph's father, called his sons to him and said, "I hear that there is food in Egypt. Here is some money. Go down to Egypt and buy food. Then bring it back so that all of us can eat and not starve."

So Joseph's brothers went to Egypt. They had to go to Joseph to buy the food. But even though he was their own brother, they did not recognize him. Joseph had been a young

boy when they had sold him to be a slave, so many years before. Now he was a grown-up man.

As soon as Joseph saw them, however, he knew them instantly. For during all the long years when he had been a slave, he had thought about his father and brothers. He had missed his father sorely, and he had often wondered whether his father was still alive. When he saw his brothers he didn't tell them who he was. His heart was full of joy at the sight of them, even though they had wronged him so cruelly so many years ago. But he wanted to watch them first, and hear them talk, and find out if they were truthful. He pretended to be very stern with them and said in a harsh voice, "Who are you? Where do you come from?"

"We have come from the land of Canaan to buy food here," they answered.

"No, that is not true," said Joseph. "You are not here just to buy food. You have come from another king who wants to make war on Egypt. You have come to see how strong Egypt is, so that you can tell your king how to fight us."

"Oh, no!" cried his brothers. "We are just plain farmers and shepherds. We are all the sons of one man, named Jacob. He sent us here to Egypt to buy food. He could not come himself for he is very old and cannot travel so far."

When Joseph heard that his father was still alive, he could not pretend any longer. He cried for joy and said, "Don't you know me, my brothers? I am Joseph! Is my dear father really alive?"

His brothers were astonished. Could this really be Joseph—this grown man who was dressed in such fine clothes, like a king. Then they hung their heads in shame for what they had done to Joseph when he was a boy. And they fell on their knees before him and begged him to forgive them.

But Joseph said, "I forgive you for what you did to me. It must have been what God wanted you to do, for how God has raised me up and made me the ruler of this whole land! If I had not been in Egypt to tell the king about the seven bad years, you and my dear father would all have died. But now hurry. Go back to Canaan and bring my father, Jacob, here to Egypt, for I can hardly wait to see him again."

Then Joseph kissed his brothers. He gave them plenty of food and many fine gifts. He gave them large, comfortable wagons so that his father and all the rest of the family could ride all the way.

So Joseph's brothers went back to Canaan and told their father everything that had happened. They showed him the wagons and the food and the fine gifts that Joseph had sent.

Then Jacob packed all his belongings and set forth for Egypt to see his long-lost son.

When Joseph saw his father in the distance, he jumped into his chariot and rushed out to meet him. He threw himself into his father's arms and wept for joy.

And Jacob held Joseph in his arms and kissed him and said, "Now that I see your face and see that you are still alive, let me bless you."



