

Cindy Cottone

The Bible Corner



Judah's promise, Part II

Joseph watched his brothers bowing low before him. Not one of them recognized his true identity, but still he said nothing. Finally, seeing their anxious faces, he addressed his brothers. "There was no reason for you all to return," he said. "As I instructed my manager, only the guilty one from among you must remain here as my slave."

"Please, sir," said Judah as he came boldly forward. "I know that you are a powerful man, second only to Pharaoh himself. We have stolen nothing. If a mistake has been made, and the crime must be paid for, I offer myself as your slave."

"What?" Joseph asked, somewhat surprised. "I understood the thief to be the youngest brother."

"It is true that the cup was found in Benjamin's grain sack," Judah continued. "But I know that Benjamin could never have stolen it. Far away in Canaan, our old father waits for us to return. Many years ago, he lost another son, and he has never gotten over it. My youngest brother is very much like Joseph. If I don't return with him, as I promised, I fear our father will die of grief."

Every person in the room waited to hear Joseph's decision. He offered no answer to Judah, but instead, he ordered everyone to leave except for his brothers. Then he turned to them and said, "Doesn't anyone know me yet? I am Joseph, your brother."

All of his brothers were so stunned, they couldn't utter a word. So Joseph motioned, "Come closer." Then he placed Benjamin next to him and said, "Do you not see the

resemblance between us? Yes, it is a fact. I am Joseph."

When his brothers still didn't say anything, Joseph continued, "Don't be afraid for yourselves over something you did to me long ago. For God has used evil for a good purpose. I have been able to save many lives because of my position in Egypt. There are still to be five more years of famine in the land. I will protect our family so that we can grow to become a great nation, as God promised our father. Now please, stop staring, and go back to Canaan. Bring Father and all of your families back here to live in Egypt."

Joseph hugged each of his brothers and gave them new clothes and food for their journey. He also sent for his father 10 donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt and another 10 donkeys loaded with grain and other food.

Judah remained behind the others and said to Joseph, "How can you forgive so easily such a great sin against you? I am so sorry, Joseph."

"I have learned to trust my life to God," Joseph replied. "Don't worry, Judah. All will be well now."

Meanwhile, back in Canaan, Jacob was keeping a daily watch for his sons. "Something is terribly wrong!" Jacob said as he wrung his hands in dismay. "They have been gone far too long."

Late that day, Jacob caught a glimpse of something in the distance. He strained to see. "I am an old man and my eyesight fails me — or else the hot afternoon sun has played tricks with my mind. But, I do think I see a whole army of donkeys coming toward me!"

Jacob started walking toward them. "I

think I see Reuben, and next to him, Judah. And, thanks be to God, there is Benjamin. Yes, I see 11 sons in all. But, why so many donkeys?"

"Father, father," Benjamin called. "I saw Joseph. I saw my brother, Joseph."

"What? Could my hearing be wrong, too?" Jacob said. "I think I heard someone say 'Joseph.'"

At last, 11 sons and 31 donkeys in all were assembled before Jacob. "What is all this, my sons?" he cried. "What happened in Egypt?"

"Joseph is alive!" They all shouted together. "He is the prime minister of Egypt."

Jacob sat down, his face saddened. "This can't be true. Someone has played a cruel trick on our family."

"Father," Judah said, "there is cause for great rejoicing. Joseph does live. In spite of his brothers, he lives."

"What do you mean?" said Jacob.

"Father," Judah continued, "I've wanted to tell you for so long. Many years ago, we sinned against God and against Joseph. We were jealous of him, so we sold Joseph to some traders. But God was with Joseph all of this time, and he triumphed in a foreign country."

"Judah speaks the truth," said Reuben. "Joseph said there are still five more years of famine, and he wants all of us to go to Egypt and live!"

"Look, Father," Dan pointed to the donkeys. "Joseph has sent many gifts for you."

The old patriarch's face brightened. "My son, Joseph, alive? It must be true! I will see Joseph before I die!"

The very next day, Jacob set out for Egypt with his sons, their families and all of their possessions. When they reached Beer-sheba, they stopped and camped for the night.

During the night, when Jacob prayed, God spoke to him, "Jacob, do not be afraid to go to Egypt. Even there, I will cause you to become a great nation. You will die in Egypt, with your son, Joseph, at your side. One day, I will bring all of your descendants back to Canaan again."

As Jacob and his family neared Egypt, Judah went ahead to tell Joseph that they were on their way. Joseph jumped into his chariot and went to meet them. He hugged his father for a very long time, and they both wept. "Father, I can take care of you now and all of our family," Joseph said. "Pharaoh has promised to give us the best land in Egypt. There you can live out your days in peace."

Jacob lived for 17 more years after they had settled in Goshen. He watched his family grow to be very large in numbers. Before Jacob died, he blessed his sons, saying, "Never forget our God. All of us have been favored by Him. From you will come the 12 tribes of Israel. This great nation will be known as the children of Israel."

Because of Joseph's high position in Egypt, when Jacob died, the whole nation mourned his passing for 70 days.

For Discussion

- 1) How did Joseph know that Judah and his brothers had changed from their earlier days?
- 2) What did God promise to Jacob? Was this promise fulfilled?
- 3) What important lesson did Joseph learn from all of his troubles?

For Further Reading

- 1) Joseph and his family are reunited and settle in Egypt in Genesis, Chapters 45-46.
- 2) Joseph told his brothers that God had taken something evil and used it for good. In Paul's letter to the early Church, he gives them the same advice: Romans, Chapter 8:28.

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