

Lesson 031

Joseph's Brothers return to Egypt

Genesis 42:1-38

MEMORY VERSE

LUKE 8:17 "For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light."

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- Chocolate chips, dry chow mein, a cookie sheet or waxed paper, a crock pot, and a spoon.
- A clear and possibly glass bottle, baby oil, water, and food coloring. Magazine pictures (or other pretty pictures), sheets of cardboard or poster board, rubber cement, scissors, and markers.

ATTENTION GRABBER! Mud Huts

You will need chocolate chips, chow mien, a cookie sheet or waxed paper, a crock pot, and a spoon. Before class put the chocolate chips in the crock-pot to melt. When melted, have the children gather around for this little story while you make the "Mud Huts."

There once was a man who had no house. He got wet when it rained and hot from the sun. He looked around and all he saw was mud (show the spoon with chocolate on it) and sticks (pour the chow mein noodles in the chocolate and stir gently). He asked the Lord to provide him a house and the Lord told him to mix the sticks with the mud and build (drop the cookies by spoonfuls onto the cookie sheet or waxed paper). And that is what he did. Soon other people around him learned to build Mud Huts, too. Instead of complaining that all they had was mud and sticks, they had houses to live in.

Explain that God is in control of our circumstances. Save the cookies and send home with the children. (Do not let the children eat them in class without parental permission.)

LESSON TIME!

How could a slave in a prison cell, know that everything would work out okay?--only by trusting in the Lord! Joseph had been sold by his own brothers into slavery and, later, falsely accused and thrown into prison; when it seemed that he had opportunity to become free (the Baker), Joseph

was “forgotten” for two years. Now, God’s purposes begin to unfold. We see indeed that God worked all things “together for good” for Joseph. God is in control of our circumstances.

Oftentimes, for a man to be used by God, he must first be broken. Joseph's dreams of his family bowing down to him must have seemed like a long-forgotten story at this point. But God, who holds our lives in His hand, had a purpose in every situation that came into Joseph's life, just as He has in our lives. God has a wonderful plan in the making, and all we must do is wait to “read the next chapter.” God is in control of our circumstances.

GENESIS 42: 1- 5

When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” 2 And he said, “Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.” 3 So Joseph’s ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, “Lest some calamity befall him.” 5 And the sons of Israel went to buy grain among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

The famine that was in Egypt had now spread to the land of Canaan and the other lands in the area. Jacob was aware that there was grain in Egypt, and he wanted to send his sons there to buy grain. When he told his sons of the abundance in Egypt, the Bible tells us that they looked upon one another. Why did they do that? Perhaps their reluctance to go was because of their guilty conscience concerning Joseph. For twenty years, they had been living with a secret: they had sold their brother Joseph to a caravan going to Egypt.

The brothers did go, but only ten of them; the youngest son, Benjamin, stayed home. Jacob did not want to take a chance on anything happening to him on the long and dangerous trip; the pain of losing Joseph was still strong in his life. We must remember that the abundance of food in Egypt was due to Joseph's wisdom, directed by God. If his brothers had not sold Joseph into Egypt, would there be grain for everyone? Again, what seemed to be such tragedy in Joseph's life, God had used for good for many people. God is in control of our circumstances.

GENESIS 42: 6-20

6 Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth. 7 Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, “Where do you come from?” And they said, “From the land of Canaan to buy food.” 8 So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 9 Then Joseph remembered the dreams

which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!"

10 And they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all one man's sons; we are honest men; your servants are not spies." 12 But he said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land." 13 And they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more."

14 But Joseph said to them, "It is as I spoke to you, saying, 'You are spies!' 15 In this manner you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16 Send one of you and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether there is any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies!" 17 So he put them all together in prison three days.

18 Then Joseph said to them the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God: 19 If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses. 20 And bring your youngest brother to me; so, your words will be verified, and you shall not die."

As the brothers came to buy grain, they stood before the governor of Egypt. It was their own brother Joseph, though they did not know it was him. The brothers bowed down before Joseph with their faces to the earth. A twenty-year old dream was fulfilled! Joseph recognized his brothers, for they had not changed as much in appearance as he had. The last time they saw him, he was seventeen years old. He was now about thirty-eight and dressed as Egyptian royalty.

Verse seven tells us that he spoke roughly with them. Joseph was testing his brothers. Perhaps he wanted to see if their hearts had changed. Were they still hardened? What was their heart toward Benjamin?

The brothers told Joseph that they had come from Canaan simply to buy food. Joseph replied by accusing them of being spies (insinuating that they were using an excuse as a cover for finding the places in Egypt which might be vulnerable to invasion). As he saw them bowing and fearfully protesting that he had misunderstood them, it is certain that he was recalling the dreams he had had so long ago.

To support the case that they were not spies, they began speaking of their family as evidence of good intentions. They explained that they were twelve brothers. They not only counted

Benjamin, but Joseph also. "One was not," they continued (indicating that they thought Joseph was dead yet still counted him as a member of the family).

Joseph decided to test them further and to prove to himself that their story was true. They were to send for their younger brother, Benjamin. In the meantime, he would continue to assume they were spies and keep them all in prison until their story could be proven true. As they once rejected Joseph's pleas, so does he reject their plea. As they had once sent him away into slavery and imprisonment, so now they would have a similar experience.

Joseph put them into prison for three days. After the three days, Joseph summoned them again and told them that they would not all need to remain there; perhaps, he thought of the grief of his father. He told them that his change of mind was because he feared God. (Joseph did not worship the Egyptian idols; he continued to look to the true and living God.)

GENESIS 42: 21- 24

21 Then they said to one another, "We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore, this distress has come upon us."

22 And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us." 23 But they did not know that Joseph understood them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter. 24 And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

As the brothers received this ultimatum from Joseph, they all acknowledged to one another that this had all come on them because they had sinned against their brother Joseph. Their consciences had been stirred up. Not only had they conspired to kill, later deciding to sell their brother, but they had ignored his cries of anguish to save him. In all reconciliation, offenders must first come to the place where they acknowledge their wrong and are sorry for their sins.

Reuben reminded them that he had tried to persuade them not to carry out their crime. But, Reuben had also failed in not willing to tell his father the truth or attempt to rescue Joseph. He may not have been as guilty as the others, but he was not innocent either. They did not know that Joseph could understand what they were saying. Joseph had been careful to carry out his conversations with them through an interpreter.

The true character of Joseph breaks through his stern exterior when he turns away and weeps as his brothers confess their sins before him. After again gaining control of himself, he

continued with his instructions. One of them must stay bound in prison while the others went home. The brothers agreed to the new condition Joseph set to prove they were innocent.

Joseph had his guard take Simeon and put him in bonds before their eyes. To the brothers, it seemed God's justice was being served. Yet, as we see, it was all a part of God's plan to ultimately bless the family. God is in control of our circumstances.

Shake It Up

You will need a clear plastic or glass bottle, baby oil, water, and food coloring. Fill the clear glass bottle half-full of baby oil, and half full of water (leave a little air space). Add a few drops of food coloring and let the children shake it up (to represent the trials and trouble we experience).

Tell the children that sometimes God does not work on our timetable. "We usually want an immediate rescue when we call on God for help." Set the bottle aside and go on with other activities. Tell them that the fizzy mess in the bottle will get back to being beautifully clear in a little while. Ask them to keep checking.

GENESIS 42: 25- 28

25 Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus, he did for them. 26 So they loaded their donkeys with the grain and departed from there. 27 But as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment, he saw his money; and there it was, in the mouth of his sack. 28 So he said to his brothers, "My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!" Then their hearts failed them, and they were afraid, saying to one another, "What is this that God has done to us?"

Here Joseph gives orders to supply the brother with corn, deposit their money in their sacks, and furnish them with provision for their trip home--all without their knowledge. We see Joseph's heart as he not only provides for them the grain, but he also provides extra provisions for their trip.

Their response to this kindness was fear. They knew that they had paid for the grain; but now, it was obvious that somehow not all of the price of the grain had been paid, and it scared them. They feared that upon their return to Egypt, the governor would have more accusations against them. Again, the guilt of their sin against Joseph was plaguing their hearts.

GENESIS 42: 29- 35

29 Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying: 30 "The man who is lord of the land spoke roughly to 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 more, and the youngest is with our father this day in the land of Canaan.' 33 Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, take food for the famine of your households, and be gone. 34 And bring your youngest brother to me; so, I shall know that you are not spies, but that you are honest men. I will grant your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.' "

35 Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.

Now the sons related to Jacob all that happened in Egypt (no lies or deceit this time). They told him of Simeon's captivity, and the need to bring Benjamin down with them if they wished to buy grain again and bring Simeon home. They explained their shock to find the money they were to pay for the grain in each one of their sacks. The brothers realized the seriousness of the situation, would they be accused of being thieves?

GENESIS 42: 36

36 And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me."

There is much in this one verse that we can learn from. Jacob was looking at the things that are seen, rather than at the things unseen. He was walking by sight rather than by faith. It does not appear that he thought that the Lord had a purpose for all this.

We must remember that even when the circumstances look like disaster, our God is working His wondrous purposes on our behalf. We never have to fear that God has let things get out of control. They may be out of our control, but never His. God has a higher purpose, related to our eternal future, for which He is preparing us through all our difficulties. "All things" were not against Jacob. All things were actually working together for good! All Jacob had to do was to "read the next chapter." God is in control of our circumstances.

GENESIS 42: 37- 38

37 Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." 38 But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for

his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.”

Reuben promises that he would be responsible for Benjamin if Jacob would let him go with them. If anything happened to Benjamin, Jacob could then kill Reuben's own two sons. Yet, Jacob completely refused to consider letting Benjamin go down to Egypt. He had grieved so bitterly over Joseph that he was not willing even to think about allowing Benjamin to risk his life. And there the matter was left for the time being.

Joseph's brothers were in a very difficult situation, they felt guilty because of their previous mistakes and noticed how things have been getting complicated at that point, and they could not fix anything or convince their father. What they do not realize is that God is planning things from the background to guide them to repentance. God is in control of our circumstances.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of thanksgiving for God's grace in working our circumstances for good.

