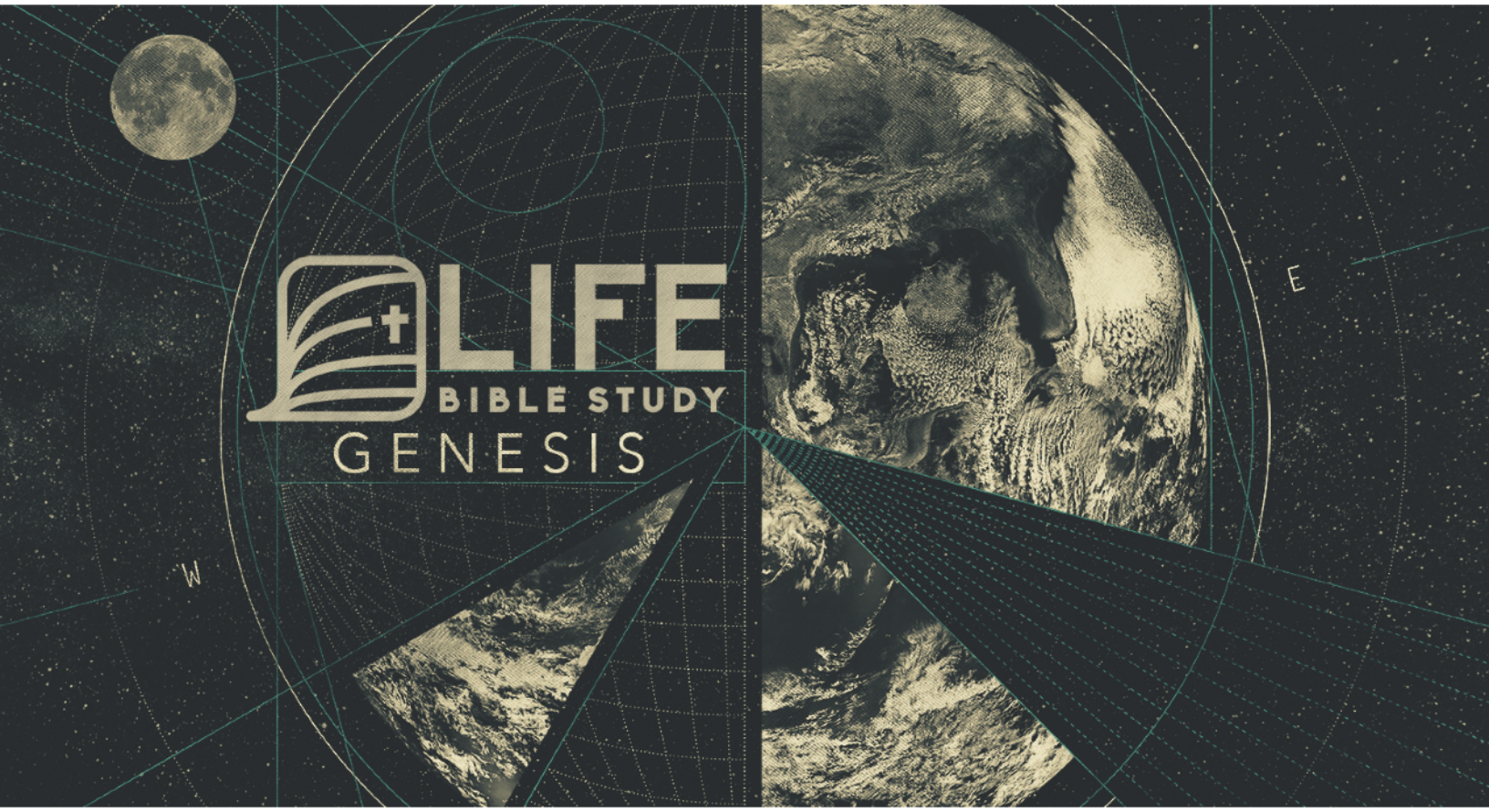

SESSION OBJECTIVE: GENESIS 42:1-43:15
To learn about the beginning of the reunion between Joseph and his brothers.

Family Reunion

I remember, as a kid, every year during Thanksgiving we would have this big family reunion in Riesel, TX. Riesel is a small town right near Waco known for its antique store and proclivity to get hit by tornadoes (I'm sure it's known for more than that, but that's all I remember hearing about as a kid). I had family that lived there, my mom grew up there, and every year during Thanksgiving we would gather in a little event center, eat food, watch the Cowboys get beat by the Redskins (I'm a salty fan, it's fine), and "catch up." Of course, as a kid, it meant we would run around outside in the old, abandoned football field completely unsupervised (the 90's were wild, man). All in all, I loved it. I had no idea who half of those people were, I could remember very few of their names each time I went, but I always loved it. It seemed like a good idea to have reunions each year. It was certainly something worth celebrating.

In Genesis chapter 42, Joseph is finally reunited with his family, although it isn't as celebratory as the Thanksgivings of my youth. The last time Joseph saw his brothers, he was looking up at them from the pit they had pushed him in (Gen. 37:23-24), right before they sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:28). While it isn't the most ideal reunion, it paves the way for some important events for the history of Israel.

A Dream Come True

Much of the Joseph narrative involves dreams of some kind. The conflict between Joseph and his brothers begins when he has a dream (Gen. 37:5-11), Joseph interpreted the dreams of the chief cupbearer and the

chief baker (Gen. 40:5-8), as well as Pharaoh's dreams (Gen. 41:25-32). The only dreams of these that have not been realized at this point in the narrative are the first dreams regarding Joseph's family, and it is at this reunion where they are fulfilled.

Joseph serves two roles in Egypt at this point. The Hebrew calls him both a šallîṭ, which is an administrator of the land in Egypt (a more political role), and also a hammašbîr, or one who dispenses provisions (a more economical role). These roles are important in understanding how the dreams in Genesis 37 are fulfilled. The obvious tip to the fulfillment of the dreams is that the 12 brothers are bowing down to him when they come to him (Gen. 42:6). However, recall that Joseph had two dreams regarding his family. In the first one, Joseph's sheaf stood up while the brother's bowed down. The sheaf, if you remember, is a bundle of grain. What is it that the brothers are coming to Egypt to purchase? Grain (Gen. 42:1-2). Who are they purchasing it from? The chief dispenser of grain! The second dream involved the sun and moon (Joseph's parents) and the stars (Joseph's brothers) bowing down to him, a sign of authority or power. Again, Joseph is the chief administrator of the land of Egypt, and his brothers are bowing to him. The dreams in the beginning of Joseph's story have come to fruition. He is an authoritative figure in the world, and responsible for dulling out sheaves of grain to those who come to purchase them. As a result, "Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them" (Gen. 42:9).

The Price of Favoritism

One might take note of the detail in verse 4: "But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him." It's a quick detail, but an important one in understanding the psyche of Jacob. Recall that Joseph was the favored son prior to his (not real but perceived) death (Gen. 37:3). It should not surprise the reader that Joseph is a favorite for Jacob, because he is the first son of the favorite wife. If you will also recall, Jacob intended to marry Rachel, but was duped by her father Laban into marrying her sister Leah (Gen. 29:23-25). While Jacob remained married to Leah and fathered many children with her, he also worked to eventually win Rachel's hand in marriage as well (Gen. 29:28), and she was loved more than Leah (Gen. 29:30).

Being that Rachel was the favored wife, it makes sense that her children would be the favored children as well. By now in Genesis 42, it has been many years since Rachel died, and yet we still see Jacob's favor for Rachel and her offspring. With Joseph thought to be dead, Benjamin is the only remaining son of Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 35:16-18), and Jacob's insistence to withhold Benjamin from traveling with his brothers highlights his ongoing favor. This is an important detail for many reasons, but for one, because it demonstrates how imperfect Jacob is. There is clearly an unhealthy thread throughout the sons of Israel (in that one of them was sold into slavery by the others because of jealousy), and that emanates from Jacob. It's a generational kind of curse that speaks to the emotional problems that blossom out of polygamy. God never intends the family to suffer this kind of favoritism, and the results speak for themselves.

Joseph's Test

Joseph's plan here is both interesting and multi-faceted. He first calls his brothers, "spies," and then demands that one of them go back home and bring back their youngest brother who is not with them (Benjamin). The one who is, "no longer," is of course a reference to himself, Joseph. There is irony in the brothers' words: "We are honest men" (Gen. 42:11). They were, at least when Joseph last knew them, not honest men. They lied to Jacob regarding the fate of Joseph after selling him to the Midianites (Gen. 37:27-28). There is perhaps even a

little wordplay here too in, “the nakedness of the land” in verse 12. The last they saw Joseph, he had been stripped naked and left in a pit.

IT’S ALL ABOUT BENJAMIN

Of course, it seems, the underlying reason for this plot is to see his brother Benjamin again, but for what purpose? One can speculate, but it isn’t clear in the text. Perhaps it is simply that Joseph and Benjamin were close. This would make sense being that Rachel was their mother. It is also a possibility that Joseph wanted to verify that the same fate had not befallen Benjamin. Knowing that the brothers were likely jealous of Rachel’s sons from his own experience, perhaps Joseph wanted to know if they had acted harshly against Benjamin as well? Again, the text is not clear. Joseph demands that one of the brothers stay while the others go to retrieve Benjamin, and it is Simeon that Joseph picks.

IT’S ALL ABOUT THE BENJAMINS

The other part of this plan involves money that was to be removed in place of grain and provisions for their journey back to Canaan. Upon their return, however, they discover all of their money that was intended to purchase the grain *still in their sacks with* the grain. This makes them nervous because they do not want to be seen as people trying to cross Joseph. This is also a test of honesty and integrity. They have a choice to make: either keep the money and never return to Egypt, or bring the money back along with their brother Benjamin, as Joseph requested. Both of these tests will carry over into the next study.

Jacob’s Relent

Jacob becomes greatly dismayed that his sons have given the Egyptian man (Joseph) as many details as they did about their family. By doing so, they have now put two of Jacob’s sons at risk. Either Jacob is to send Benjamin back to Egypt with his brothers and risk losing him, or prevent Benjamin from traveling and lose Simeon (who was being held by Joseph until the brothers returned). Jacob decides to allow Benjamin to go, and verse 14 captures Jacob’s sentiment: “May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”

There is profound maturity in Jacob’s words here. He calls for blessing and mercy to fall upon his sons, and recognizes that such gifts only come from the hand of God. He does not refer to God by His name here (Yahweh), because God had not shared His name with His people yet (that doesn’t happen until Exodus 6:3). Instead, he refers to God with a title for God that is typical of the patriarchs: “God Almighty,” which in Hebrew is, “El Shaddai.” The exact translation of the name is up for debate among scholars. Some have connected shaddai with the Hebrew verb šāḏaḏ, which is taken to mean, “to deal mightily with.” However, that verb is better translated, “to deal violently with.” Others have associated shaddai with the Assyrian word šadu, which means, “mountains or high,” thus rendering His title, “High God.” The title, “God Almighty” actually comes from the Septuagint (LXX) and Vulgate, the Greek and Latin translations of the Old Testament.

Jacob’s call for mercy on his sons does not seem to include himself. He relents: “If am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” In other words, Jacob has accepted the real possibility that danger will come to them, and he is trusting God to do what He wills.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Genesis 42:1-5. Where was Jacob's family able to purchase grain from? Who did Jacob send to go and purchase the grain? Who did he not send, and why? What was happening in Canaan that precipitated this trip?

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2. Read Genesis 42:6-11. What was Joseph's role at this point in Egypt? How did his brother's approach him and what did they say? Did Joseph recognize them? Did they recognize Joseph?

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Day Two

1. Read Genesis 42:12-17. What do the brothers tell Joseph in this passage? How does Joseph respond? What kind of test does he put on them? For how long did he imprison them?

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2. Read Genesis 42:18-25. After the imprisonment, what does Joseph propose to his brothers? What do the brothers discuss among themselves in Hebrew? How does Joseph respond to this? What was the order Joseph gave before they journeyed back to Canaan?

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Day Three

1. Read Genesis 42:26-34. What did the brothers find in their sacks in addition to the grain? What details do the brothers recall to Jacob?

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2. Read Genesis 42:35-38. What is Jacob's response to the money they found? What does Reuben say to him in response?

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Day Four

1. Read Genesis 43:1-10. Was the famine getting better or worse? Once they ran out of the grain they had purchased, what does Jacob suggest? How does Judah respond? What is Judah's solution to the problem?

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2. Read Genesis 43:11-15. What additional items does Jacob suggest bringing to Egypt with them? How much money were they to bring? Were they allowed to bring Benjamin this time?

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Week 34 Discussion: Reaping the Harvest

There are several moments in Genesis 42 where one of God's people reckons with their past actions and begins to accept the consequences of their choices. Joseph's brothers, while imprisoned (unknowingly) by Joseph, begin to believe that this punishment is the result of their treatment of Joseph years ago (Gen. 42:21-22). Jacob, upon hearing of his sons' dealings in Egypt, begins to think that he is being punished (Gen. 42:36). The reality is, while we might forget our sins, our sins never forget us. Talk as a group about some of the consequences in your life from things that happened maybe even years ago, and how we as Christians should receive these consequences.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever experienced consequences from something you did a long time ago? Share with the group if you're comfortable.
2. How do you actively fight against sin in your life today? (e.g. accountability, community, etc.)
3. Do you keep, "short accounts," with people?
4. How good are you at taking responsibility for your actions?
5. Do you ever believe that God is punishing you when trials befall you?
6. Would you consider yourself correctable? Would others consider you correctable? Why or why not?

Takeaways:

1. Famine in Canaan causes Jacob to send his sons to Egypt to buy grain, but Benjamin is prohibited from going.
2. Joseph tests his brothers, and sets up a plan for him to see his brother Benjamin.

PRAYER REQUESTS: