

Genesis

Chapter Forty-One

- Pharaoh's Dream
- Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams
- Joseph Is Made a Ruler of Egypt
 - The Sons of Joseph

Pharaoh's Dream Verses 1-13

Verses 1-4

“Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. ² And behold, from the Nile seven cows came up, fine-looking and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. ³ Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and thin, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ Then the ugly and thin cows ate the seven fine-looking and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke.”

Almost half of Joseph's life had now been spent in Egypt. We are told Joseph was in prison for two years, then like the butler and baker, Pharaoh had a dream which needed to be interpreted. Cows submerging themselves in the cooling water of the Nile and eating the reeds that grew on the shore was a common sight. But Pharaoh's dream of cows eating cows was not ordinary. It seems Pharaoh's dream of seven fat cows coming out of the Nile and being consumed by seven ugly and gaunt cows, disturbed him enough to wake him. This wasn't a dream it was a nightmare about cannibalism.

Verses 5-7

“⁵ But he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. ⁶ Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. ⁷ And the thin ears swallowed the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream.”

Like Joseph years earlier, Pharaoh had two dreams. Egyptian Pharaohs self-assumed the position of gods. So their dreams were given special acknowledgment, as if the gods were speaking directly to them. Since these dreams came as a pair and since they paralleled one another, Pharaoh knew there was something to this message, but no one could interpret their meaning. Both ended violently and both revolved around the number seven.

Hosea 13:15, Job 1:19, Jeremiah 4:11 and Ezekiel 17:10 all speak about the damaging effects the “*scorching wind from the east*” can have, especially on vegetation. In Pharaoh's second dream, seven thin and scorched heads of grain devoured seven plump and full heads of grain. Again, this second dream disturbed him so much that it too caused him to wake up. Were these bad dreams or were they a message?

Verse 8

“⁸ Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent messengers and called for all the soothsayer priests of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.”

In the morning, these dreams stayed with Pharaoh. Two of his greatest assets were threatened, his cattle and his grain. He felt there was something important to finding the meaning of these dreams. He reached out to his magicians, (pagan priests who claimed to have mystical powers), the ones he felt would be able to tell him what the interpretation of these dreams were (Daniel 2:10-11). However, these soothsayers lacked the understanding that man does not

interpret dreams, only God does. The pagan priest's dream books were useless, and all these magicians did was leave Pharaoh in more of a panic.

While he was in prison Joseph told the butler and baker, interpretation belonged only to God, and He didn't give that knowledge to the magicians of Egypt. Both the cow and the Nile were common 'spiritual' symbols in Egypt. The cow or bull was the symbol of the goddess Isis and the Nile was the source of fertility.

Verses 9-13

“⁹ Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, “I would make mention today of my own offenses. ¹⁰ Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, both me and the chief baker. ¹¹ Then we had a dream one night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. ¹² Now a Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we told him the dreams, and he interpreted our dreams for us. For each man he interpreted according to his own dream. ¹³ And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; Pharaoh restored me in my office, but he hanged the chief baker.”

Finally, the butler, after he humbly spoke of his own offense, remembered Joseph and confessed how he had purposely failed to tell Pharaoh of Joseph's skill. Now those skills were needed, and the butler recommended Joseph to Pharaoh as a man who correctly interprets dreams. The butler left out the part about Joseph revealing that it was not him, but the God of the Hebrews, who brings the interpretation. This was the third set of dreams God had revealed to Joseph.

When he was summoned, Joseph was Egyptianized to be presented to Pharaoh and shaved his beard. As an unmarried Hebrew, he would have started to grow a beard. However, he wasn't in the Hebrew culture; he was in the Egyptian culture and it was not common for the Egyptian men to have beards. Also, in the Hebrew culture the shaving of one's beard would have been seen as an insult (Leviticus 19:27, Deuteronomy 14:1).

2 Samuel 10:5

“When messengers informed David, he sent servants to meet them, because the men were extremely humiliated. And the king said, “Stay in Jericho until your beards grow back, and then you shall return.”

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's dreams

Verses 14-37

Verse 14

“Then Pharaoh sent word and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh.”

Like someone trying to read God's Word with the help of the Holy Spirit, Pharaoh received a revelation from God, but was unable to understand it. No one was able to understand the message God was sending.

Verses 15-21

“¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” ¹⁶ Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, “It has nothing to do with me; God will give Pharaoh an answer for his own good.” ¹⁷ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream, there I was, standing on the bank of the Nile; ¹⁸ and behold, seven cows, fat and fine-looking came up out of the Nile, and they grazed in the marsh grass. ¹⁹ Then behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I had never seen for ugliness in all the land of Egypt; ²⁰ and the thin and ugly cows ate the first seven fat cows. ²¹ Yet when they had devoured them, it could not be detected that they had devoured them, for they were just as ugly as before. Then I awoke.”

When Pharaoh retells the dream for a second time, he adds additional details to his description. He also added when the skinny cows ate the fat cows, they themselves did not become fat. The temptation Joseph would have faced was to tell Pharaoh what he wanted to hear. This man of God did not yield to the king; he chose to be faithful to his God.

Verses 22-24

“²² I saw also in my dream, and behold, seven ears of grain, full and good, came up on a single stalk; ²³ and behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and scorched by the east wind sprouted up after them; ²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed the seven good ears. Then I told it to the soothsayer priests, but there was no one who could explain it to me.”

Dream number two was the same revelation God was sharing. Joseph saw God’s confirmation in the repetition of the dream. The double dream confirmation fit the pattern of Deuteronomy 19:15, requiring two or more witnesses before a matter could be established. This was a warning that the time to prepare is now.

Verses 25-32

“²⁵ And Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one and the same. ²⁷ The seven thin and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind will be seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁹ Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; ³⁰ and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will ravage the land. ³¹ So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it will be very severe. ³² Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is confirmed by God, and God will quickly bring it about.”

Up front Joseph takes the power of interpretation off himself and gives God the credit. Understand as he is facing Pharaoh face-to-face he is saying that my God, the God of the Hebrews, is greater than you and your gods and only He can do what you are asking. It’s a bold stance!

He then explains that Pharaoh did not have two separate dreams, he had one, for both dreams meant the same thing. He interpreted both dreams and repeated the interpretation twice. Joseph was explicit, saying that God was revealing the nation of Egypt was about to experience seven years of plenty and abundance, followed by another seven years of want and famine. The years of famine will be so drastic that the good years would be completely forgotten. Kings do not make history, they serve history. God was about to do a mighty work, starting in Egypt.

Verses 33-37

“³³ So now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and appoint him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him take a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt as a tax in the seven years of abundance. ³⁵ Then have them collect all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh’s authority, and have them guard it. ³⁶ Let the food be used as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine.”
³⁷ Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants.”

What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Knowledge is the information one stores in their head; wisdom is acting on that knowledge. Joseph provides Pharaoh with knowledge, then boldly, he gave the king some unsolicited advice, suggesting the king use wisdom and acts on that knowledge. Joseph saw this great coming crisis needing administration and proper logistics. The right person or people had to be put in place and they or he had to have the proper vision. The solution required the building of storehouses (Exodus 1:11, 1 Kings 9:19), and a twenty percent tax, versus the customary ten percent tax. By doubling the resources, the nation would be able to survive the coming crisis. Also placing the storage of grain in populated areas would provide adequate protection during the strain of a famine. Joseph was calling on the Pharaoh to find a man to lead the fulfillment of these dreams; he was not promoting himself.

Joseph Is Made a Ruler of Egypt

Verses 38-49

Verses 38-41

“Then Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom there is a divine spirit?” ³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰ You shall be in charge of my house, and all my people shall be obedient to you; only regarding the throne will I be greater than you.” ⁴¹ Pharaoh also said to Joseph, “See, I have placed you over all the land of Egypt.”

Pharaoh recognized Joseph had the right interpretation of the two dreams, but he also acknowledged that Joseph knew how to properly respond to the message or warning. Because Joseph was a man of God, (verse 38 says he had the Holy Spirit), he stood out from the magicians/priests. Because he stood out, Pharaoh wisely gave authority to Joseph. The king could have taken the words Joseph spoke and tried to do everything himself, but he wisely yielded to Joseph’s giftedness and set him over all. We are not told what title was given to him, but his promotion included Pharaoh’s house, the people of Egypt and the land of Egypt. Joseph’s promotion would save Egypt, but unbeknownst to him, it would also save his people.

Verses 42-44

“⁴² Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put the gold necklace around his neck. ⁴³ And he had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed ahead of him, “Bow the knee!”

And he placed him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴ Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.”

Pharaoh did not have a ring made for Joseph. He took the ring off his own finger and placed it on this Hebrew servant. The king’s signet ring represented authority; it bore the name of the king. That authority/status was now placed on Joseph’s hand. He went from wearing the shackles of a prisoner (Psalm 105:18) to wearing the signet ring of Pharaoh. He also traded the garment of betrayal (what he left behind with Potiphar’s wife) to the garment of royalty. He went from the chains of a slave to the gold chains of a king. He went from being tossed in the wagon of the Ishmaelites being taken to Egypt as a slave, to riding in a position of authority in a king’s chariot. He went from a pit to a palace.

Joseph was literally paraded around as people were commanded to bow to him. In verse 44, Pharaoh confirmed that no action in Egypt would take place without Joseph’s approval.

Verse 45

“⁴⁵ Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.”

To be completely accepted by the Egyptian people, Pharaoh gave Joseph a new Egyptian name which translates to “*God Speaks and He Lives.*” Years later, King Nebuchadnezzar did the same thing with Daniel when he gave him a position of authority in Babylon changing his name from the Hebrew Daniel to the Babylonian name Belteshazzar (Daniel 1:7). To complete the transformation with his new life, Joseph was also given a wife. She was not from the Hebrew people. In fact, she was the ultra-aristocratic daughter of Potiphara priest of On, but Joseph had little choice. He had to trust that this marriage would not offend His God. This marriage connected Joseph to a powerful priestly family in Egypt, a priest who would often officiate festivals worshipping the sun god Re. The city of On is also known as Heliopolis (Greek name) which means sun city. In our modern day this city is located ten miles northeast of Cairo. Despite the fact that Joseph’s clothes were now Egyptian, his name was Egyptian, his language was Egyptian, his wife was Egyptian and his father-in-law was the leading Egyptian sun-worshipper, Joseph remained faithful to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Verses 46-49

“⁴⁶ Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷ During the seven years of plenty the land produced abundantly. ⁴⁸ So he collected all the food of these seven years which occurred in the land of Egypt and put the food in the cities; he put in every city the food from its own surrounding fields. ⁴⁹ Joseph stored up

grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea, until he stopped measuring it, for it was beyond measure.”

To all this instant change, Joseph responded righteously. After being in Egypt for thirteen years, Joseph’s life dramatically changed in just one day. He did what was right, and God’s blessing continued to be upon him. Joseph, believing these dreams were God’s word, knew he had seven years to prepare for the real mission God has set before him. The agriculture of Egypt did not prosper from rain; it rained very little in the desert. In fact the northern area of the country is almost rainless. The crops grew from the spring floods that came from rain in the Upper Nile basin.

The Sons of Joseph Verses 50-57

Verses 50-52

“Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphra, priest of On, bore to him. ⁵¹ Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh; “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all of my father’s household.” ⁵² And he named the second Ephraim; “For,” he said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

From his Egyptian wife, Joseph fathered Manasseh, whose name means “*forgetfulness*” of “*he who causes to forget*”. God allowed Joseph to forget all the previous pain and trials in his life. His second son is Ephraim, which means “*fruitfulness*” or “*fertile*” because God made Joseph extremely fruitful in Egypt. Joseph’s story is a foreshadow of eternity. In heaven, believers will have the pain wiped away and life will be fruitful for eternity.

Verses 53-57

“⁵³ When the seven years of plenty which had taken place in the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said, then there was famine in all the lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ So when all the land of Egypt suffered famine, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, you shall do.” ⁵⁶ When the famine was spread over the entire face of the earth, then Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians; and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ Then the people of all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth.”

The word “*famine*” is used six times in this section. This illustrated just how severe the famine was. God’s original promise to Abraham was that his offspring would be a blessing to the entire world. That promise is still yet to be fully realized, however what Joseph accomplished in Egypt, having the entire world come there for life preserving grain, we get a taste of what will ultimately be fulfilled through God’s promise (Genesis 12).

Because the world had to come to Egypt for food, money also came to the land. Because of Joseph’s obedience and leadership, the people of Egypt actually prospered during this famine period. Joseph became the hero of the Nile.

Genesis

Chapter Forty-Two

- Joseph's Brothers Sent to Egypt
 - Simeon Is Held Hostage

Joseph's Brothers Sent to Egypt Verses 1-28

Verses 1-5

“Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, “Why are you staring at one another?”² Then he said, “Look, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die.”³ So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt.⁴ But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, “I am afraid that harm may happen to him.”⁵ So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, because the famine was also in the land of Canaan.”

When Jacob told his sons to go down to Egypt, we are told a strange expression came across the brothers faces. For over two decades they had been keeping a secret. They had to be confronted with their guilt, they needed an awakening of conscience. They need to repent. They knew that it was likely Joseph was sold as a slave there. If he was still alive he would probably be an obscure slave in some household or business. What this family did not know was that God was in the beginning of moving the entire nation of Israel down to Egypt.

Jacob, again showing favoritism, kept Benjamin behind. Though he had 11 sons, only one was a son of his beloved and deceased wife Rachel. He lost Joseph twenty years ago; he was not going to take a risk of losing Benjamin. This was also a sign that he did not completely trust his sons.

Verses 6-13

“⁶ Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold grain to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.⁷ When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. He said to them, “Where have you come from?” And they said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.”⁸ But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him.⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and he said to them, “You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land.”¹⁰ And they said to him, “No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food.¹¹ We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies.”¹² Yet he said to them, “No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!”¹³ But they said, “Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive.”

The brothers knew that in this time of famine, their lives literally depended on receiving the favor of this Egyptian official; they paid him great respect by bowing. Joseph would have immediately flashed back to the dream he shared with his brothers about them doing the exact thing they are now doing, bowing down to their younger brother (37:5-10). Joseph's brothers plotted murder against him and sold him into slavery, they did it with the specific intention of defeating his dreams (37:19-20), Instead, by sending Joseph to Egypt, they paved the way for his dream to be fulfilled.

Joseph, pretending to be a stranger, recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. He was clean shaven, wearing white linen with gold around his neck. He spoke Egyptian and would have spoken to them through an interpreter, not letting them know he spoke Hebrew. They did what every foreigner did, they bowed before him, with their face towards the ground, knowing he held their life or death in his hands.

By not revealing his identity to his brothers, he was able to interrogate them and accuse them of spying. As he continued to accuse them of evil, they revealed more and more about themselves. They responded to this Egyptian official by lying, saying they had one brother back home in Canaan and one brother who was dead, knowing they were lying about Joseph's death but not knowing who it was they were lying to!

Verses 14-20

“¹⁴ Yet Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you, you are spies; ¹⁵ by this you will 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 have him get your brother, while you remain confined, so that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, you are certainly spies!” ¹⁷ So he put them all together in prison for three days. ¹⁸ Now Joseph said to them on the third day, “Do this and live, for I fear God: ¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified, and you will not die.” And they did so.”

Joseph knew how much Jacob would rebuke the brothers attempt to bring Benjamin to Egypt, out of the safety of his father's house. If they were telling the truth, if they were not spies and were honest men, then they would prove it. After three days in an Egyptian prison, the brothers were ready to agree to whatever Joseph wanted them to do. They had been humbled. Joseph's 'test' was to see if they would turn on one another.

Joseph's demand was clear. They had to prove they were not spies by proving they were honest and that they told the truth about the brother back home. The brothers agreed to this, but with hesitation because they also knew their father would never want to let Benjamin leave home.

Verses 21-23

“²¹ Then they said to one another, “Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; for that reason this distress has happened to us.” ²² Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Now justice for his blood is required.” ²³ They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them.”

Their guilty conscience got the best of them telling them this situation was because of the way they treated their younger brother Joseph. They felt they were reaping what they sowed. This was the first hint of the brothers acknowledging their sin from twenty years earlier. Joseph was overcome with emotion for he knew God had to do a deep work in the hearts of these

brothers for the relationship to be reconciled. These brothers would need to see their sin clearly and willingly repent before Joseph was revealed and the relationship restored. Remember these were hard men, men who deceived and murdered an entire village.

Verses 24-26

“²⁴ Then he turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. ²⁵ Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, but also to return every man’s money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And that is what was done for them. ²⁶ So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there.”

Joseph did not allow himself to be bound up by bitterness and hatred. These men were still his brothers. As they did twenty years ago, bounding Joseph (37:28), he now turns the tables and bound Simeon, keeping him as a prisoner to guarantee the return of the brothers with Benjamin. Why Simeon? We are not told, but he was not mentioned as having a prominent role in the selling of Joseph. Keep in mind God had told Joseph that the famine would last seven years. He *knew* his brothers would need to come back.

As he sent his brothers back to Canaan, what followed was not an accident, but was commanded by Joseph. The grain, in a famine, was expensive, but Joseph ordered each brother to have his money put back in his sack. It was to be hidden so it would be found at a later time. On top of the return of their funds, he made sure they had the provision they would need for the journey back home. Joseph was already taking care of his family.

Verses 27-28

“²⁷ But when one of them opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the overnight campsite, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the opening of his sack! ²⁸ So he said to his brothers, ‘My money has been returned, and look, it is right in my sack!’ Then their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, ‘What is this that God has done to us?’”

“But when one of them opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment, he saw his money.” This would have been a shock but more importantly it became an awareness of God’s grace. Receiving what we do not deserve. The question now was, how are the brothers going to respond to this surprised blessing? Instead of rejoicing, they became afraid. A guilty conscience doesn’t know how to handle gifts from God.

Simeon Is Held Hostage

Verses 29-38

Verses 29-34

“²⁹ When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him everything that had happened to them, saying, ³⁰ ‘The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with 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 longer alive, and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.’ ³³ But the man, the lord of the land, said to us, ‘By this I will know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me and

take grain for the famine of your households, and go. ³⁴ But bring your youngest brother to me so that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.”

For several days as they journeyed back home, one can only wonder what was weighing on their mind? They probably processed thoughts such as;

- How do we explain Simeon is not with us?
- How do we explain that we have both grain and silver (money)?
- How do we explain that we have to go back to Egypt and we have to bring Benjamin?

Verses 35-38

“³⁵ Now it came about, as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man’s bag of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bags of money, they were afraid. ³⁶ And their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my sons: Joseph is gone, and Simeon is gone, and now you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me.” ³⁷ Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, “You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you.” ³⁸ But Jacob said, “My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should happen to him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.”

When the brothers finally made it home, this time they told their father Jacob the truth. The last time they came back missing one of the brothers, they told a lie, making up a story about Joseph being attacked by a wild animal. To reinforce their lie, they even had his bloody coat of many colors to give false evidence to their lie.

Jacob’s outlook on life was that everything was against him. He spoke as if he had no happiness in the present and no hope for the future. In response, Reuben makes a dramatic offer. Reuben, the firstborn, the one who disgraced the family with incest (35:22) and the one who did too little too late to rescue Joseph, makes a dramatic proposal. “*You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring (Benjamin) back to you.*” Reuben was willing to lay down the life of his own sons to give peace to Jacob in his time of despair. Jacob lived protecting himself against future pain, but God was about to bring Jacob good news — greater than he had ever hoped.