

My father is devastated. He just found out that wild animals have devoured Joseph, his favorite son. He has eleven sons left, but he can only mourn for Joseph. For weeks and months, he mourns. He will not be consoled by any of children. He says he will never quit mourning until the day he dies.

All I want from my father is for him love me for who I am. Instead, he only loves me as a substitute.

Why is Joseph such a favorite? It's a short story. My father is known as Israel, formerly Jacob. He had children by four women, but the only one he truly loved was his second wife, Rachel. He loved her from the moment he saw her. She was the last of the four women to give him a son... Joseph. He loved Joseph so much because he was Rachel's first son, and he was the first son in my father's old age.

Rachel died at the birth of her second son. Benjamin. That's me. So, my father has mixed feelings about me. Perhaps it is my fault she died.

With Joseph now gone, my father is inconsolable. He has lost his two true loves. But in the way that people who grieve sometimes do, my father begins searching for a substitute love. And he doesn't have far to look. I am Rachel's only remaining son, and Joseph's only full brother. And in the way that people who grieve sometimes do, he becomes obsessed over my well-being. He cannot emotionally afford for anything to happen to me.

My brothers shepherd the sheep over vast areas. I stay home with my father. My brothers shear the sheep and meet with foreign traders. I stay home with my father. My brothers tame wild camels. I stay home with my father. I stay safe within the cocoon of my father's wealth and power.

Nearly two decades pass since the death of Joseph. Some years are plentiful, and we get richer. Some years are lean, and we live off of our wealth. Then, one year is savagely lean. Our huge community is on the verge of starving. We have plenty of gold and silver, but we cannot eat that.

We notice a growing stream of traders from the north and east headed to Egypt. It seems that famine has struck the entire world. It is rumored that Egypt has surplus grain and is willing to sell it. At a hefty price, but that no longer matters.

My father can no longer afford to wait. He orders my ten brothers to go to Egypt and purchase grain. Me? I have to stay home.

Months go by, and we are on the brink of starvation. In the distance we see another caravan, and hope beyond hope that it is my brothers. As they come closer, we start to cheer. It is my brothers and their donkeys are loaded with grain. Our family will survive. Why aren't my ten brothers smiling? Wait, there are only nine?

That night at dinner we find out why my nine brothers are so sober. They tell a story that places my father in a terrible predicament.

The arrive in Egypt and are escorted to the all-powerful man in charge of selling grain to the Egyptians and to foreigners. In his headdress and makeup, he was hardly recognizable as a human being instead of a god they worship. He treated us harshly. Where are you from and why are you here? We are from Canaan to buy food. Are you not spies, come to see where we are weak? No, we are honest sons of one man, come only to buy food. NO! You are spies! We are your servants come only to buy food. We ten are of twelve brothers of one father. One is at home with him, and one is no more.

YOU ARE SPIES! But this is how I will test you. One will go back and bring your other brother, while the rest stay in prison. If he does not return with the other brother you are surely spies! And he put us in prison for three days.

On the third day, we are brought before him again. He tells us that the test has changed. We are to leave one brother behind, while the other nine return with grain for our family. We must bring back the younger brother to prove we are honest.

Reuben does not tell this next part to my father. In front of the powerful Egyptian, my brothers lament that this awful thing has happened to them because of what they did to their brother, Joseph. Reuben reminded them how he had tried to keep them from sinning against Joseph.

Reuben resumes his story for my father. The powerful man leaves the room with an angry, angry look. He returns and has Simeon taken and bound in front of them. They can say nothing.

The next morning, we awake to find our donkeys fully loaded with grain that we have paid for with all of our silver. We have no silver left. We leave the city without Simeon.

That night, Ephraim opens his sack to get feed for his donkey, and sees his silver laying on top. We all check our sacks and find the same thing. Our hearts sink. The Egyptian will know we stole his silver and we are not honest men. What has God done to us?

My father breaks down. He laments the loss of Joseph and Simeon. He is willing to sacrifice Simeon in order to keep me safe. Reuben offers his own sons as surety, his own sons! But my father will not relent. They are not returning and neither am I.

Months go by and the grain dwindles. Finally, we are nearing the point of no return. The brothers insist that they take me and go back to Egypt. What good is it for me to starve to death along with the others? My father finally gives in. He sends me, double the silver, and many precious gifts.

We arrive in Egypt and go straight to the man in charge. He doesn't come to see us, but sends his servant to us. The servant takes us to a home. We are shocked. We believe he is going to take our things and place us into slavery. As we approach the entrance to the house, we tell the servant our side of the story. How we paid with silver, but it was in our sacks when we returned. He shrugs and says he received our silver, so our God must have put it in our bags. From out of nowhere, Simeon appears

We prepare ourselves and our gifts. At lunch, the all-powerful man appears and asks about our father. He looks at me, and tests us to find out if I am the youngest son. Again, he gets angry and leaves the room.

We are in shock. But the surprises continue. The man eats by himself. The Egyptians eat by themselves. And we are seated at our own table. Somehow, we are seated in birth order, and my share is five times everyone else's. We eat more food at that meal than we have been eating in a week.

The next morning, our donkeys are loaded with all the grain they can carry. We know better than to insult the Egyptians by looking in them, but we are so scared. We decide to get out of eyesight before looking in the sacks. We nod at each other, thrilled to have all eleven brothers together.

We are almost ready to stop and look when we hear a thunderous sound behind us. Chariots and horses headed our way. Surely, they are not coming for us. But they are. The riders surround us and have us stand together. A man accuses us of stealing his master's cup used for drinking and divinations. We protest, we claim we have done nothing of the sort. They start searching our bags from the oldest to the youngest. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. And then they reach my bag, and pull out the cup.

They haul us back to the city. My brothers all offer to be slaves, but we are told that only Benjamin will be kept because he is the guilty one. The rest are free to leave with their donkeys and grain. Me. For the sake of my father, why me.

Judah begs for grace, and gets it. He tells the whole story of what has happened, and explains why they cannot go home without Benjamin. He begs to take my place. He talks, and talks and talks. He begs. When he finishes, the Egyptian god-man explodes. He commands all of his

servants and attendants to leave the room. Death. We are all expecting death. A death that we deserve.

The man-god starts crying. Crying so loud that everyone in the building can hear him. He takes off his headdress, and starts wiping off his makeup. He transforms himself into someone who looks like us. Using our own language and dialect, he announces himself. He says, "I am Joseph!"

We are so terrified that we cannot answer any of his questions. Now we know we deserve death at the hands of the man in front of us. Instead, we get unfathomable grace.

Instead, he pulls us close and explains things in an entirely different way.

He says that God allowed him to be sold into Egypt so he could save lives. He tells us there would be five more years of famine, and he was put in this place to save our lives by a great deliverance. What we meant for evil, God meant for good.

He tells us to hurry back to our father and explain everything to him. He tells us to bring back our father, Joseph's father, and all of our community. He will have us live in the land of Goshen where he will take care of us.

There is a rush of emotion. He hugs me, and we both weep. All of us hug and kiss and weep. He can't wait to see our father.

The Pharaoh hears the story, and loads us down with gifts and carts for our return. We don't bother to bring all of our possessions because Joseph will fill our every need. On the way out of the city, Joseph looks serious and says, with a wink, "No fighting on the way home."

As you can imagine, our father... ecstatic beyond expression. He gets to see Joseph, the one he loves so much, he gets to see him before he dies. And none of us are jealous about it.

On the way to Egypt, God speaks to my father. He tells him not to be afraid, because he will be made into a great nation there, and will someday be brought back out.

When we arrive, we realize we have 70 direct descendants of Israel, our father. Through four generations and we are only 70 people. It seems as if God is moving very slowly in making our family a great nation. We do not know that the stability of living in Egypt will cause our birth rates to soar.

We arrive in Goshen, the land the Egyptians despise because it was only good for shepherds. Joseph arrives in his chariot, and he and his father have an indescribable reunion.

Later, Joseph presents our father to Pharaoh, and he blesses Pharaoh. We are granted the land of Goshen to live in.

Over the next five years, Joseph purchases almost the entirety of the land of Egypt with the grain he had stored. He does not buy the land of the priests. He rents the land back to the people in return for 20 percent of the harvest.

Before our father dies, he blesses Joseph's sons, and takes them as his own. That is why the Tribe of Joseph is known as the two half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. He blesses all of his other sons, too. With those blessings, we begin to have an inkling that our family's future lays in the family of Judah.

Our father lives seventeen more years. He makes Joseph promise that when his people leave Egypt that they will take his bones with them and bury them with his forefathers and Rebekah. Years later, on his deathbed, Joseph makes the same request. It will be four centuries later before those requests are fulfilled.