

JOSEPH FORGIVES HIS BROTHERS

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

These chapters show how God works all things together to accomplish His own ends. First, Jacob had to renew his faith in God by allowing Benjamin to travel to Egypt with his other sons (43:14). Second, Jacob's sons had to be convicted of their sin against Joseph and show a change in their lives (Gen 43, 44). Third, Abraham's descendants had to be brought down to Egypt according to God's prophecy to him (15:13).

In addition, these chapters illustrate the true nature of Bible forgiveness through Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers. None of his actions should be considered as vengeful or retaliatory, but rather they were designed to bring about a genuine repentance and confession on the part of his brothers. He was kind to them and met their physical needs (Gen 43), and yet he caused them enough serious trouble to accomplish some spiritual good in their lives (Gen 44). In the lesson we will discover at least three things were accomplished by his "tough love" approach. When Joseph reached these objectives, he revealed himself to his brothers. He recognized God's leading in all of these circumstances. All believers should carefully study and emulate Joseph's attitude and actions toward those who sin against them.

I. Joseph Analyzed His Brothers — 43:1-44:34

A. For Honesty — 43:1-15

1. Judah's persuasion — 43:1-10

Note: Joseph had a plan whereby he intended to accomplish at least three purposes. Although all the details of each conversation are not recorded, it is clearly evident that Joseph's plan concerned the spiritual condition of their lives from the very first visit (cp. 42:9ff; with 44:21-23). His plan then was designed to test his brothers' attitude toward their father and his favorite son. Second, it was to discover their feelings about their sin against him years earlier. Third, it was to bring them to repentance so he could reveal himself to them and help them during the remaining years of the famine.

Joseph knew five important facts. First, the famine would last five more years (45:6). Second, his brothers would need more grain to survive those years. Third, because of God's special revelation to him, he alone had made provision to supply the famished peoples with grain. Fourth, his brothers had demonstrated their dishonesty many times in the past. Fifth, Benjamin was especially dear to his father and Jacob would not allow Benjamin to go with his brothers (cp. 42:9-16, 36-38; 44:21-23 with 42:4). These facts became the basis of his plan to test his brothers. His brothers could have brought another young man in the place of Benjamin, but Joseph would soon discover the scheme. It is a real credit to the brothers that such a plan was not attempted, even in the face of famine. They proved themselves to be honest men.

43:1-2 — Reuben had tried to persuade Jacob to accept his own two sons as surety for Benjamin, but Jacob sharply rejected such a proposal (42:37-38). When the food from the first visit was nearly gone, Jacob commanded his sons to return to Egypt for more food. At this point, Jacob was not ready to send Benjamin with them. He was unable to trust in God to take care of Benjamin.

43:3-10 — Judah used a fourfold approach to convince Jacob to let Benjamin travel with them. First, he reminded his father that the governor said, "You will not see my face unless your brother is with you." Second, "We will go and buy food if our brother is with us, but we will not go if he is not with us." Third, he urged Jacob to send Benjamin with them or his whole family would die, even his grandchildren. Fourth, Judah pledged his own life as a guarantee of Benjamin's safe return (cf 44:32-34).

2. Jacob's Faith — 43: 11-15

43:11ff — Jacob, though obstinately refusing to allow Benjamin's departure, finally yielded to reason and faith. He sent some exquisite gifts of produce from the land to gain favor with the governor of Egypt as he had done with Esau (cp. 33:1ff). He also instructed them to return the money that had been placed in their bags on the first journey (42:27, 28, 35). This money had been placed in the bags for two reasons. First,

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Joseph did not want to charge his needy brethren. Second, it set the stage to aid in his plan of bringing Benjamin to Egypt (see notes on Genesis 44). In addition to his human effort, Jacob exercised his faith in that he sought God's protection upon them (v. 14). He had actively sought human means to solve his problem but now he was resigned to accept God's will in the matter (v. 14b). A submissive spirit to God's will open His hand of blessing.

B. For Jealousy — 43:16-34

1. The setting — 43:16-31

43:16ff — Joseph's brothers returned to Egypt with Benjamin and this showed that they passed the first of Joseph's tests. Now Joseph set the stage for his second test: he needed to see if they had any jealousy toward Benjamin as they once had toward him when he held the favored position with their father. So Joseph planned to have them come to his house for a noon meal. When the brothers heard this they were greatly alarmed. They told the steward about the money they had found in their bags and offered to pay for it again but the steward refused their money. It may be a tribute to Joseph's testimony that this Egyptian gave God the credit for giving them their money (43:23). The steward then released Simeon from prison and brought him to his brothers.

43:26-28 — Little did Joseph's brothers realize that their bowing before Joseph was the fulfillment of his dreams which they had despised (cp. 37:5-11).

43:29-31 — The sight of Benjamin so emotionally affected Joseph that he had to leave the room to weep and then refresh himself. Joseph had not seen his brother for 22 years.

2. The test — 43:32-34

43:32 — At Joseph's house, three separate tables were set. One table was set for Joseph; his high rank in the government may have dictated this as proper protocol. Another table was set for his brothers apart from the Egyptians, because the Egyptians would not eat with Hebrews. They considered shepherds as an inferior class of people (46:34). Also, it was wise to separate the Hebrews from the Egyptians because the Egyptians, like many heathen nations, may have honored their gods at their meals, which would have offended the Hebrews. A third table was set for the Egyptians.

43:33 — The brothers marveled that they were seated exactly according to their age. They wondered how the governor could have known this.

43:34 — Joseph arranged to have five times as much food served to Benjamin. This was designed to see if his brothers had any jealousy or resentment toward him as they had toward Joseph when he was the favored son of Jacob. Joseph could tell by their actions that their characters had truly changed -- they were not envious (cp. 37:11, 18, 20ff), but actually enjoyed themselves with Benjamin.

C. For Sincerity — 44:1-34

1. Joseph's plan — 44:1-6

44:1-5 — Joseph had one further test which was designed to test his brothers' sincerity. He remembered his own favored position and how his brothers had treated him. Now he planned to test their character to see if they truly loved Benjamin. If they would show no concern for Benjamin in his affliction, they would demonstrate that they still had their old selfish and envious natures. Hence, Joseph planned to test his brothers in a two-fold manner. First, he made it appear that Benjamin had stolen his personal silver cup and had hidden it in his bag. Second, he placed the money for the grain in the bags of all the brothers to let them know that Benjamin really was not guilty. He could then discern how they treated Benjamin. If they were willing to fight for his innocence, then they would pass the test, but if they did not come to his defense, when they knew he was innocent, then they would fail the test.

2. Brothers' plea — 44:7-14

44:7-9 — Joseph's steward confronted the brothers with their "dastardly deed." They were so sure of their integrity in this situation that they reminded the steward of their conversation the previous day (v. 8). Then

they unanimously agreed that the death sentence be given to the culprit, knowing there wasn't one, and offered to surrender their own liberty to the governor.

44:10-14 — The steward then searched each sack beginning with the eldest down to the youngest (Benjamin). In the sacks of the first ten brothers there was no sign of the silver cup, but there was money in their sacks once again. This must have puzzled them, though nothing is said about it. However, when Benjamin's sack was opened, the silver cup was found. Now the test of the brothers was going to show if they really cared for their father's most precious son.

3. Judah's petition — 44:15-34

44:15 — Joseph then questioned these "foreigners" as to their crime. His cup is called a diviner's cup, but this does not mean he participated in the Egyptian magical cult. The language may not distinguish between the cult and true gift of prophecy just as the word prophet in the Old Testament was used of both true and false prophets.

44:16 — Judah now petitioned a special favor from Joseph. He was in a predicament for he knew that Benjamin was not guilty, yet he certainly could not accuse the governor or his steward of misconduct. His only response was that God had used this occasion to punish them for their former crimes -- chiefly the one concerning Joseph.

44:17 — Joseph refused to punish all eleven men for the crime of one and wanted to let the others go. One can readily see how Joseph was testing their concern and sincerity for Benjamin and Jacob.

44:18ff — Judah then humbly expressed his concern for Jacob, who so specially loved his youngest son. Benjamin was not all that youthful since he already had ten children (cp. 46:21) but he was Jacob's prized son. Judah told about Jacob's loss of one son (Joseph) but he did not give many details. Finally, Judah indicated how he had sworn to Jacob concerning Benjamin's safety and begged that he be able to take Benjamin's place as a slave so that Benjamin could return home to his father. This was a great change in Judah's character, because 22 years earlier he had brazenly sold Joseph into slavery without any concern for Jacob. Judah must be commended for keeping his oath to his father (Ps 15:4) and for being willing to accept the favored position of Benjamin without jealousy, and at great personal loss -- the loss of his freedom.

II. Joseph Announced His Identity — 45:1-15

A. Emotionally — 45:1-4

45:1 — Joseph was satisfied that his brothers had changed and he could no longer conceal his identity. He commanded the Egyptians to leave his presence (the heart expresses strong emotions privately) and then wept so loudly that the Egyptians could hear him. His brothers were troubled in his presence because he was powerful and they had hated him without a cause.

B. Forgivingly — 45:5-7

45:5ff — Joseph made it clear that he held no grudges against them. He recognized the providence of God in the whole matter. Now let it be clear that only a righteous person as Joseph could make this statement. It would have been pious and hypocritical for the brothers to have stated this. This ought to motivate believers to greater obedience, because God uses both the saint and the sinner to accomplish his purposes. This should humble the sinner to obedience. God's overruling providence does not in any way justify our sin. Joseph then explained that five years of famine still remained. Joseph looked beyond his human master, Pharaoh, to the God of the universe as the One Who accomplished this.

C. Practically — 45:8-15

45:8ff — Joseph then asked his brethren to quickly bring their father to Egypt where he could provide for him and his posterity. They still were so dazed that Joseph asked them to notice carefully his eyes and speech -- yes, it was indeed Joseph (v. 12). Joseph's forgiveness was genuine; he forgave and forgot their sin against him (cf Eph. 4:32).

III. Joseph Accommodated His Family — 45:16-46:34**A. For Their Journey — 45:16-28****1. Necessary provisions — 45:16-23**

45:16-23 — The news of Joseph's brothers quickly spread in Egypt and Pharaoh was willing to provide for them. This was only proper seeing all that Joseph had done for him. He personally invited them to partake of the provisions of the land and provided transportation and goods for the journey.

2. Necessary precautions — 45:24-28

45:24 — Joseph warned his brothers not to fall into contentions en-route to Jacob. He had already heard some of this from Reuben (42:21, 22). As far as Joseph was concerned, the sin and those responsible for it was a forgotten issue.

45:25-28 — When Jacob heard the good news about Joseph, he said that his last wish before death was to visit Joseph.

B. For Their Settlement — 46:1-34**1. Jacob's spiritual preparation — 46:1-4**

46:1-4 — Jacob was probably living at Hebron and travelled to Beersheba where he sought God's leading. He desperately wanted to go to Egypt, but he was most interested in God's will. He needed God's direction for several reasons. First, his father had been warned not to go to Egypt during a previous famine. Second, he was concerned lest his descendants become corrupted by pagan Egyptians. Third, he probably knew that his posterity would be afflicted in Egypt (15:13-14). God responded to Jacob in a fourfold manner. First, he renewed the promise that Jacob's descendants would become a great nation (28:12-14). Second, God guaranteed His protection for Jacob. Third, He assuredly promised to bring his people back from Egypt. Fourth, Joseph would be the one to perform the last rites upon his father at his death (50:1).

2. Jacob's seventy descendants — 46:5-27

46:5ff — Jacob's sons by his two wives and two concubines are listed with their appropriate children that came to a total of seventy. In the New Testament, Stephen lists the total group as 75 (Acts 7:14). There is no contradiction, however, because he quotes the Septuagint version of Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5. The five additional descendants apparently come from the posterity of Joseph, children that were born of Manasseh and Ephraim in Egypt. One reason why this posterity is listed is to show the small number that entered Egypt in contrast to the great number who would exit in 430 years. It is estimated that the nation of Israel had grown to at least two million people -- a sign of God's blessing.

3. Jacob's sweet reunion — 46:28-30

46:28-30 — As Jacob neared Egypt, he sent Judah ahead to inform Joseph. This was probably so that Joseph might come to meet him and also that preparations for their arrival might be made. After a joyful reunion, Jacob indicated he was ready to die, though he lived another 17 years (see 47:9; 47:28). Now, Joseph could put his past 22 years together and truly recognize God's leading (Rom 8:28; Gen 50:20).

4. Joseph's separation plan — 46:31-34

46:31-34 — Joseph still was faithful to God in finding a place for his family. He did not practice nepotism but wanted them to have a separate piece of fertile land for themselves. Goshen was lightly populated with Egyptians and yet it was fertile and was located in the delta region. This separation of Jacob's family from the Egyptians was necessary to keep the Egyptian paganism from destroying their unique faith in the one true God. The natural basis of this separation was caused by the Egyptians' distaste for shepherds, the occupation of Jacob and his family.