Joseph’s Brothers Go to Egypt

In chapter 42 of Genesis, God again uses a famine to test those whom He loves. Abraham and Isaac had experienced famine and their actions marked significant milestones in their relationships with God. God left Abraham to decide for himself and he went to Egypt instead of relying on God to provide food for him and his family (12:10-20). God had spoken directly to Abram on numerous occasions but he was silent while Abraham was in Egypt. Abraham returned from Egypt with a servant named Hagar with whom he would have a son named Ishmael who would become the patriarch of tribes that would be in opposition to Israel in the future. God told Isaac to stay in Canaan during the famine and he obeyed and his obedience was rewarded as his crops flourished (26:12). Now we see Jacob facing a drought but instead of moving to Egypt, he ordered his sons to go to Egypt to bring back food. These were grown men but they still lived under the rule of their father. Jacob could see a reaction in his sons that he did not comprehend, asking them why they were looking at one another. Their guilt had stayed with them for 20 years. Now when Jacob mentions Egypt, they thought of their brother whom they had sold into slavery. The caravan of nomadic traders was headed toward Egypt and they knew it was likely that Joseph had been resold upon the caravan’s arrival in Egypt. Jacob once again shows his favoritism toward 1 son as he kept Benjamin with him while sending the other 10 sons. Like Joseph, Benjamin was the son of Rachel whom Jacob loved while his other sons were born to Leah, Bilhah or Zilpah.

Upon their arrival in Egypt, the brothers bowed down to Joseph whom they did not recognize thus fulfilling Joseph’s prophecy that they would bow to him (37:7). Joseph, however did recognize his brothers although he concealed that from them. He spoke to them through an interpreter so they would not know that he spoke Hebrew. He treated them harshly but it was not done out of spiteful revenge rather he did it to bring them to repentance. Joseph longed to see his younger brother and used his meeting with the brothers as an opportunity to bring Benjamin to Egypt. The brothers saw their predicament as punishment for their sin of 20 years earlier. David Guzik wrote “We are truly guilty concerning our brother: Their guilty conscience told them this complicated mess was because of the way they treated Joseph before. This was a good sign. The *quickness* with which they associated these events with their sin against Joseph meant they often remembered that sin.

i. There was not a completely logical connection between their current situation and their previous treatment of Joseph, but a guilty conscience sees every trouble as sin’s penalty.

ii. The United States government has something called the Federal Conscience Fund, which collects money people send in because they know they cheated the government in some way. People have sent in money because they took army blankets for souvenirs, for cheating on postage, or on income tax. But our consciences are notoriously weak or corrupt. One man wrote the IRS and said, “I cheated on my taxes and can’t sleep at night. Here is a check for $100. If I still can’t sleep, I’ll send the rest I owe.”

After putting them in jail for 3 days, Joseph allowed them to return to Canaan to bring back Benjamin with Simeon being held as surety. While there is no explanation of why Simeon was chosen, it may be that Joseph felt that he was the one most responsible for his being sold into slavery. Joseph was sold to the caravan of Ishmaelites while the oldest son Ruben was not present. Simeon as the next oldest had a responsibility to prevent his brothers’ actions but he did nothing to stop them.

Joseph sent his bothers on their way with the grain they had bought but he had their money used to purchase the grain secretly put back in their sacks. The brothers were even more alarmed when they discovered their money had been returned fearing they would be suspected as stealing it. Guzik had the following interesting observation :To restore every man’s money to his sack: This was an unexpected and wonderful blessing. The grain had to be expensive, and Joseph put their money back in the sacks of grain appointed for each brother.

And to give them provisions for the journey: Joseph gave them more than their money back; he also gave them what they needed for the journey. He took care of them from beginning to end.

i. The money was hidden and would only be discovered later. We can assume that the provisions were given immediately and openly (otherwise they would not have been of much good). Joseph gave them what they needed to get by, but also much treasure beyond.

ii. Joseph did this for his brothers *before they were reconciled to him*. They had yet to repent or ask forgiveness – yet He loved them and cared for them. He gave to them and they didn’t even know it!

iii. In the same way, Jesus gives us unexpected, undeserved blessings. Some are obvious and up front, and some are hidden to be discovered later – but He gives to us *even before we were reconciled to Him.*

· *There is extra in the sack*.

· Jesus gave to us and we didn’t even know it.

· Jesus has gifts for us now and we don’t even know it.

At the end of the chapter, they reached Canaan and told Jacob what had occurred. He forbade them to return to Egypt with Benjamin apparently having little regard for Simeon who was being held as a prisoner.

Bob Deffinbaugh observed that while on the surface it would appear that the brothers were being tested, it was actually Joseph who was being tested by God. Joseph had immense power in his position in Egypt and had the fate of his brothers in his hand. See link below for this very insightful article.

[42. The Proper Use of Power (Genesis 42:1-38) | Bible.org](https://bible.org/seriespage/42-proper-use-power-genesis-421-38)