

Joseph and Esther

Lesson 6 (Joseph)

Genesis 42-44

Joseph Gives His Brothers Their First Test (Genesis 42)

Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy corn because there was famine in the land. What would have happened to Israel and his sons had they failed to go down to Egypt (42:2)? _____.

Jacob once sent his beloved son on a mission all alone (Genesis 37:13-14), but later he refused to send Benjamin with his ten brothers (Genesis 42:4). Why was he so protective? He had already lost one of Rachel's sons (so he thought). Did he want to lose another?

According to Genesis 42:6,9 Joseph's first dream was fulfilled (compare Genesis 37:7-8 where the phrase "made obeisance" is the same as the phrase "bowed down" in Genesis 42:6.) Also in Genesis 37:7-8 only the ten brothers were involved, not Benjamin. Compare Genesis 37:9-10. Joseph knew that God's purpose had been fulfilled (Genesis 42:9).

Joseph immediately recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. Over twenty years earlier they fooled their father as he recognized Joseph's coat (Genesis 37:32-33), but before Joseph they themselves were fooled as they failed to recognize their own brother. Why didn't they recognize him? Many years had gone by. He was not seventeen anymore. His position and dress and language were also different (Genesis 42:23). Little did they know that the one they had said "is not" (Genesis 42:13) was the very one they were talking to!

When Joseph recognized his brothers, he gave them a hard time and spoke unto them **"roughly"** (in a hard and severe way--Genesis 42:7). Did Joseph treat his brothers as badly as they once treated him (Genesis 37:20-27)? _____ These brothers dealt harshly with Joseph out of jealousy and hatred. Joseph dealt harshly with them out of love and concern. Indeed, it was not Joseph, but God through

Joseph who was dealing harshly and severely with them. They needed this harsh treatment as the following questions show:

Had these brothers ever confessed their great sin and acknowledged their wicked deed?

Had they ever repented of their evil act?

Did they ever stop hiding and covering up their sin?

Did they ever admit to their father what they had done?

Because they had never really dealt with their sin, God was going to deal with them! How does this same principle apply to believers today (1 Corinthians 11:31-32)?

Joseph's brothers could only see the harsh side of this man who was governor over the land. There was another side, a tender side, which they could not see (Genesis 42:24; 43:30–31).

Likewise, imprisoned, bereaved, rebuked, we count God harsh and hard. We little realize how much pain He is suffering as He causes us pain; or how tender the heart of our God is filled with grief, welling up within Him as He makes Himself strange, and deals so roughly with us (F.B. Meyers).

Joseph knew his brothers! These were the very same men who years earlier had tried to kill him and who finally sold him into slavery! Joseph had the position and power to do with these men whatever he wished! What would the natural human response be? To get even? To retaliate? To return evil for evil? To do unto them as they did to him? Did Joseph respond in such a way? _____

What should be the believer's response to those who mistreat and persecute him? See Romans 12:14,17–21; 1 Peter 3:9.

When Joseph accused his brothers of being spies, they quickly answered, "No, my lord,...we are true (honest) men (Genesis 42:9–11). They claimed that they were honest men and not liars. Yet, they were not too honest when they withheld the truth and lied to their father about Joseph years earlier (Genesis 37:31-33)! Joseph gives them a test--an opportunity to prove their honesty (Genesis 42:14-20). Will they pass the test?

When the ten brothers arrived in Egypt, everything started going wrong! They were accused (Genesis 42:9,12,14), tested (Genesis 42:15-16), and put in prison (Genesis 42:17,19). Why did all this happen to them? Were they innocent and honest men? Were they deserving of such trouble? Deep down in their hearts they knew that they deserved exactly what they were getting. Finally about twenty or twenty-one years after their horrible crime (Joseph was now at least 37 years old), they admitted their guilt, "We are verily _____ concerning our brother!" (Genesis 42:21). Perhaps during those twenty years they thought that they had gotten away with their crime! But alas, the cries of Joseph came back to haunt them as they remembered the day when young Joseph was in the pit: "We saw the **anguish** (distress) of his soul, when he **besought us** (begged for our mercy and favor), and we would not hear; therefore is this _____ (same word as above) come upon us!" (Genesis 42:21). "We caused him distress, now we are in distress! We are getting just what we gave to Joseph!"

There is a spiritual principle that the sins of the wicked will often be turned upon their own heads—a boomerang effect! Study Proverbs 26:27; 28:10; Psalm 7:15-16; Ecclesiastes 10:8; Obadiah 15; Joel 3:4; Galatians 6:7; compare Matthew 7:2. Their great sin of selling Joseph into slavery eventually led to the nation Israel (their children) being in slavery four hundred years. But even this was in God's gracious plan for His people (Genesis 15:12-14).

Reuben was Jacob's eldest son. Why didn't Joseph put him in prison (Genesis 42:22-24; compare 37:21-22,29-30)? Instead Simeon, the second eldest son, was bound (Genesis 42:24). We know that Reuben tried to save Joseph (not out of concern for Joseph but out of a sense of responsibility towards his father) and therefore it is most likely that Simeon, the next oldest, was the ringleader in the crime against Joseph. Probably the other brothers were surprised at the apparent coincidence that the governor would place in prison the one among them who had been most responsible for their heinous act.

The brothers' distress was intensified when they discovered the money in their sacks. Once again their guilty consciences made them feel as if God were repaying them for their terrible crime: "What is this that _____ has done to us?" (Genesis 42:28). Now when they would return to Egypt, the governor would have further accusation to bring against them. These "honest men" would all be subject to the charge of theft! When Jacob heard all of this, it was almost more than he could take (Genesis 42:29-38). He, too, had failed to see God's purpose in the seemingly horrible turn of events which his sons had

reported.

Even when circumstances seem negative, God is working positively! The greatest proof of this was Calvary's cross. God was able to take the darkest day in history, when man's sin was greatest, and turn it into the richest blessing for all who believe!

Jacob cried out and said, "All these things are A _____ me!" (See the end of Genesis 42:36.) What does God tell us in Romans 8:38?

Joseph Gives His Brothers Their Second Test (Genesis 43–44)

Jacob and his sons had no way of knowing that the famine would last so long (compare Genesis 45:6), and so once again they were in need of grain for survival. Jacob's sons submitted to their aged father's desires, and finally he agreed to let them take Benjamin, who was at this time about 23 years old.

Reuben, the firstborn, had offered to take full responsibility for Benjamin even at the cost of the lives of his own two sons (Genesis 42:37-38). However, he had failed to return Joseph safely to his father years before. Finally Judah gave himself as surety for Benjamin, taking full responsibility for him. This was a pledge or guarantee that Benjamin would be returned safely. What part did Judah play in the crime against Joseph (37:26–37)?

What pledge or guarantee does God give to assure that the believer will arrive safely in heaven (See Ephesians 1:13–14; 4:30)?

As the brothers appeared before Joseph again, this time with Benjamin, they bowed down before Joseph, thus fulfilling Joseph's second dream (Genesis 37:9-10, with Benjamin possibly representing his mother and father). The brothers were amazed when they were seated according to their age, from the eldest to the youngest (Genesis 43:33). This was no mere coincidence that they were so ordered. One can easily show (by simply multiplying together all the numbers from one through eleven) that there are no less than

39,916,800 different orders in which eleven individuals could be seated! Thus, for the servants to select the **one** correct order by chance was almost impossible. The odds were 40 million to one against it! Evidently, this man knew a great deal more about their family than they had realized; or else he had some kind of supernatural power (Henry Morris).

Why do you suppose Joseph gave such preferential treatment to Benjamin (Genesis 43:34)? Remember, Joseph was testing them. His brothers sinned in the past because of their jealousy concerning Jacob's preferential treatment of his beloved son, Joseph. Now Joseph was doing a similar thing with respect to Benjamin. Their greatest test, however, was yet to come.

Consider Judah's passionate words in Genesis 44:16. When he said, "God hath found out the _____ of thy servants," do you think he meant the iniquity of stealing Joseph's cup? For years they foolishly had thought they could get away with their crime, but finally it had caught up with them and they had to face it squarely.

What can we be sure of according to Numbers 32:23?

Compare Genesis 4:7; Isaiah 59:12 and Joshua 7:1–26. Is there really such a thing as a perfect crime, where the criminal will never get caught or punished?

What was Joseph's purpose in having the cup planted in Benjamin's sack? Would the brothers leave Benjamin in Egypt (Genesis 44:17) and return home to grieve their father once again? How would they treat their father's favorite this time? Would they break his heart again? Would they again bring sorrow to their aging father? Had these brothers changed from what they were like twenty-two years before?

Study carefully Judah's pleas as recorded in Genesis 44:18–34. It is interesting that he assumed Joseph was dead. For so many years they had been telling the lie about Joseph being torn to pieces that they started to believe it themselves! Did Judah claim responsibility for Benjamin's life? Did Judah want to return to his father without Benjamin?

Finally Judah made his brave request, "let thy servant abide _____ the lad" (Genesis 44:33). Benjamin was the one who was (seemingly) guilty. He was the one who (seemingly) should have been punished. Judah offered to take his place and to be punished instead so that Benjamin could go free! Judah asked to be Benjamin's **substitute**!

How does this illustrate the substitutionary death of Christ (1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 15:3; etc.)? Out of the tribe of J_____ would come the true Substitute (Matthew 1:1-2; Revelation 5:5; Hebrews 7:14!).



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