

Introduction

Now that Joseph is established in a position of power in Egypt and the famine has gotten underway, we are ready to return to the account of Joseph's other family members—his father and brothers. They make several journeys down to Egypt to buy food in order to survive the famine and to move there. We will study the first two journeys.

Journey #1: Benjamin Left At Home, Simeon Held **Genesis 42:1-38**

The famine becomes so severe in the land of Canaan that Jacob (Israel) scolded his sons for just sitting around and doing nothing. Instead, he told them they should go to Egypt to buy food for themselves so they could live. So he sends 10 of his sons to Egypt, holding back his youngest Benjamin in case something bad were to happen along the way.

When the 10 brothers arrive in Egypt, they meet Joseph but do not know who he is. In 42:6 where the brothers bow down to Joseph we have a clear fulfillment of the first dream that Joseph told his brothers back in 37:5-8.

Joseph tested his brothers by accusing them as spies. They describe their family structure a little bit to try to demonstrate that they are not spies. They mention Benjamin, the youngest, who is still at home. Interestingly, they said, "and one is no more," referring to Joseph. They must have really come to the point that they now believed their second-to-youngest brother was dead. It had been over 20 years since they sold him into slavery (note 45:6). They did not realize they were talking to him!

Now Joseph tells them that they have to prove what they said to him by sending one brother back to Jacob and fetching Benjamin. Joseph changes his mind several days later and says all the brothers can return except one.

The 10 brothers now demonstrate a very guilty conscience about Joseph (42:21-22). They think that this trial has come upon them because they did not listen to Joseph when he pleaded with them not to be sold into slavery. Here's a principle: sin has a tendency to do that to us. So, don't sin! In the midst of their conversation, Joseph was listening (in Hebrew) and became overwhelmed with emotion that his brothers were showing some guilt about what they did to him.

The brother who is kept is Simeon. Joseph sent each man away with a load of grain, and secretly gave their money back to them. What grace! But when one of the brothers saw the money in his sack after they had journeyed on for a while, they all became very worried. Later on they found that they all had their money returned. Not only had their brother been left behind, but now they face the possible accusation of stealing the grain!

All of this puts Jacob into a sad situation. His Joseph was killed years back. Now Simeon is gone, as far as he is concerned. And the brothers are asking to take Benjamin to prove that they are truthful. Jacob cannot take it—if something would happen to Benjamin, he would go right to the grave in sorrow.

Journey #2: Benjamin With Them, Judah Surety **Genesis 43:1-34**

Jacob finally relents to let Benjamin go with the 9 remaining brothers (43:1-15). Judah promised that he would be responsible for his brother's safety. Jacob instructs them to bring a) Benjamin; b) a gift of the fruit of the land; c) the money that had been returned to them; d) more money to buy additional grain. Jacob resigns himself to the fact that he might also lose Benjamin now.

Joseph wants to do something nice for the brothers—invite them into his home for a noon meal. But the brothers begin to be afraid because they think they are going to be accused of stealing the grain/money on their first journey. So on the way to Joseph's house, they tell their fear to Joseph's house-manager. But the steward encourages them by saying that he was the one who had returned their money. He also brought Simeon out of jail to them. Simeon must have been in jail for a while—the time it took for his brothers to return to their father, exhaust the supply of grain (which was probably significant), and then come back to Egypt.

When Joseph then comes for the meal, they give him the gift that they had prepared. In 43:26-28 we see another fulfillment of Joseph's first dream (37:5-8) in that the brothers bowed down to him. When Joseph heard of his father and saw his younger brother, he was again overcome with emotion and went aside to cry for a while. When he came back, he had the men seated according to their age. They were amazed because they had not told him who was the oldest and who was the youngest, but Joseph remembered. Joseph gave Benjamin five times as much as the others. He must have been stuffed!

Further Testing During Journey #2 **Genesis 44:1-34**

Joseph told his steward to give the men as much grain as they could carry, and also return their money to them again. He also asked the steward to put his silver cup into Benjamin's sack. All of this was in preparation for testing the brothers again.

The steward caught up with the brothers on their way out of town and detained them because they had "stolen" the money and the silver cup. The brothers realize that their goose is cooked now, and they offer themselves as slaves to Joseph (v. 16). But Joseph only wants Benjamin as a slave. So Judah intervenes, for he had promised to keep Benjamin safe and return him to their father. He tells Joseph how their father's life is bound up in the life of their youngest brother, and that if they do not return with him, that their father would die from sorrow.

At this point, the chapter ends on a high note of climax. What will Joseph do now?

Joseph's Revelation During Journey #2 **Genesis 45:1-28**

Joseph could not bear to keep Benjamin back from them, and it was just too much to continue masking his identity from his brothers. So, he breaks down and tells them who he is. He encourages them not to be afraid (they were) because he realizes that God sent him there to preserve the lives of many people. Joseph said several times that all these events were God's doing:

1. 45:5 – "God sent me before you to preserve life."
2. 45:7 – "God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance."
3. 45:8 – "So now it was not you who sent me here, but God."
4. 50:20 – "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

This was now the second year of the famine and there were five more to go. So Joseph tells his brothers to go fetch the rest of the family to live in Goshen, a very choice part of the land of Egypt. There he could provide for them, and they would be close enough to each other to see each other.

Pharaoh was glad to hear about Joseph's family and all that had happened, so he also concurred with Joseph and invited Jacob down to Egypt to live through the famine.

When the brothers returned to Jacob to tell him what happened, he was beside himself. The news was too good to be true. After it sank in for a while, he came back to himself and agreed that he would go down to see Joseph before he died.

Conclusions

It seems to this author that an important lesson here is the guilt incurred by sin, even many years later. The brothers exhibited this plainly throughout this account.

It is also precious to see the love that Jacob has for his youngest son and how the brothers respect that love and want to protect their youngest brother, in contrast to how they treated Joseph years earlier in spite of their father's love for him.

But the most important thing we learn from this section occurs in chapter 45, where Joseph teaches us that God had superintended the events, as bad as they seemed in the midst of them, in order to ultimately preserve many people's lives. And this is true today—God can make all things work together for good to those who are His chosen ones. He can limit sin, permit sin, prevent sin, and use sin for His purposes. Can you think of other Bible passages in which God does similarly to accomplish his purposes? MAP