

Genesis 42:1 – 38

¹ Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why are you staring at one another?’ ² He said, ‘Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die.’ ³ Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, ‘I am afraid that harm may befall him.’ ⁵ So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. ⁶ Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, ‘Where have you come from?’ And they said, ‘From the land of Canaan, to buy food.’ ⁸ But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. ⁹ Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, ‘You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land.’ ¹⁰ Then they said to him, ‘No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies.’ ¹² Yet he said to them, ‘No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!’ ¹³ But they said, ‘Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive.’ ¹⁴ Joseph said to them, ‘It is as I said to you, you are spies; ¹⁵ by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! ¹⁶ Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.’ ¹⁷ So he put them all together in prison for three days. ¹⁸ Now Joseph said to them on the third day, ‘Do this and live, for I fear God: ¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die.’ And they did so. ²¹ Then they said to one another, ‘Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.’ ²² Reuben answered them, saying, ‘Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood.’ ²³ They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. ²⁴ He turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. ²⁵ Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man’s money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And thus it was done for them. ²⁶ So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there. ²⁷ As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸ Then he said to his brothers, ‘My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack.’ And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, ‘What is this that God has done to us?’ ²⁹ When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, ³⁰ ‘The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us, and took us for spies of the country. ³¹ But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we are not spies. ³² We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no longer alive, and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.’ ³³ The man, the lord of the land, said to us, ‘By this I will know that you are honest

men: leave one of your brothers with me and take grain for the famine of your households, and go. ³⁴ But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.’’ ³⁵ Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man’s bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. ³⁶ Their father Jacob said to them, ‘You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me.’ ³⁷ Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, ‘You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you.’ ³⁸ But Jacob said, ‘My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.’

Historical and Cultural Background

- While Joseph was with his family, Joseph would have had these last memories of his brothers: Simeon and Levi deceived and slew all the men in Shechem (Gen.34:25), Reuben lay with Rachel’s handmaiden (35:22), they threw him in the pit to kill him (37:19 – 20), they hated Jacob’s favoritism towards Rachel’s sons. Joseph knows that his full younger brother Benjamin was born (35:18), and guesses that Jacob now favors Benjamin.
- Look at God and Joseph thus far:
 - ^{39:2} The LORD was with Joseph
 - ^{39:3} Now his master saw that the LORD was with him.
 - ^{39:5} The LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD’s blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.
 - ^{39:23} The LORD was with him [in the jail]; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.
 - ^{40:8} Then Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please.’
 - ^{41:38} ‘Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?’
 - ^{41:51} Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, ‘For,’ he said, ‘God has released me from all the debt of my hardship, and of all my father’s house.’ ⁵² He named the second Ephraim, ‘For,’ he said, ‘God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.’

Questions

1. What's going on with Jacob and his youngest son Benjamin (v.1 – 5)?
 - a. Jacob's afraid that the ten brothers won't protect Benjamin? Because of Joseph...
2. Why does Joseph disguise himself and question his brothers (v.6 – 16)?
 - a. What might have been tempting for Joseph?
 - b. Is Joseph an ego-maniac? Is he thinking of the dream-prophecy of his family bowing down to him? If so, is the prophecy fulfilled or not?
 - c. What does Joseph know about his brothers, according to the last recorded things in Scripture about the brothers?
 - i. Simeon and Levi had slaughtered Shechem and the family of Shechem in cold blood, out of revenge for their sister Dinah being raped: ²⁵ Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male. ²⁶ They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went forth. ²⁷ Jacob's sons came upon the slain and looted the city, because they had defiled their sister. ²⁸ They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; ²⁹ and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that was in the houses.' (Gen.34:25 – 29)
 - ii. Reuben had rebelled against their father Jacob by sleeping with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid, who might have been promoted to 'wife' status after Rachel's death (Gen.35:22)
 - iii. Some of them had wanted to kill him (Gen.37:19). Judah had been a profiteer and suggested selling Joseph into slavery for a profit (Gen.37:26 – 27)
 - iv. Obviously they were willing to compromise their father in various ways.
 - v. So did Joseph know what his brothers would do with the grain? Why might he have been concerned?
 1. Perhaps they would not share proportionately with Benjamin?
 2. Perhaps they were not telling the truth about the family; are they even still a family? Are they torn apart?
 - vi. In what sense is Joseph generous with his brothers? In what sense is he harsh with them?
 - d. What do his later tears suggest?
3. Why does Joseph put them in prison all together for three days (v.17)?
 - a. It reminded them of Joseph being in the pit back in Dothan when he was seventeen (37:18 – 28), over twenty years ago. (Joseph spent thirteen years in Egypt in Potiphar's household and in prison, and then seven years during Egypt's years of plenty, with some years of famine).
 - b. Would they have thought the Egyptian viceroy was Joseph? Probably not. But they might have read it as bizarre coincidence or even divine appointment, a reminder of what they had done.
4. Why did Joseph take Simeon (v.24)?
 - a. Reuben was technically the firstborn, but from what he had just told his brothers in v.22, had tried to rescue Joseph. Joseph then takes the next one who bore legal responsibility: Simeon would have been the firstborn after Reuben.
 - b. This would have been significant for the brothers. It would seem like poetic justice.
5. Why do the brothers say that God has done this to them (v.28)?
6. What do you think about the interaction between papa Jacob and oldest son Reuben in v.35 – 38?
 - a. Jacob doesn't want to let go of his youngest son.
 - b. Who else had to let go of their beloved sons?
 - i. Cain should have let go of Enoch but didn't
 - ii. Abraham did let go of Ishmael and Isaac
 - iii. Isaac should have let go of Esau and treated Jacob as the firstborn
 - c. So Jacob should have known about this pattern in his family that God had started. Each father has to let go of his beloved son because God wants to do bigger and better things with that son. Each father wants to use the son for the family. God wants to use the son to bless the world.
7. In what sense is Joseph generous with his brothers? In what sense is he harsh with them?
 - a. Does Joseph know what his brothers are going to do with the grain? Why might he have cause to be concerned? What does Joseph know about his brothers, according to the last recorded things in

Scripture about the brothers? Simeon and Levi deceived and slew all the men in Shechem, Reuben lay with Rachel's handmaiden, they threw him in the pit, they hated Jacob's favoritism towards Rachel's sons. This is what Joseph knows about his brothers. Joseph knows that Benjamin has been born, and guesses correctly that Jacob now favors Benjamin.

- b. Look at who Joseph has cared for up until now: Potiphar's household, the prisoners in the dungeon, the cupbearer and chief baker, Pharaoh and all of Egypt. Would he care about his own family now? Why or why not?
8. What is Joseph's purpose here?
 - a. Why doesn't Joseph just reveal himself right away, and send Egyptian troops to retrieve the rest of his family in Canaan?
 - b. Why is this challenging to the brothers? They need to care about their brotherhood and whole family.
 - c. Why is this challenging to his father Jacob? He needs to let go of his now-favorite son Benjamin, just as Abraham had to let go of Isaac.
 - d. Is this about reconciliation? Or something more? It's really about God's mission through Abraham to all the nations (Gen.12:1 – 3). God is training His people for His mission.
 - e. Does Joseph know that God wants the whole family of Israel to share in a spiritual attitude?
 - f. Look at God and Joseph thus far:
 - i. ^{39:2} The LORD was with Joseph
 - ii. ^{39:3} Now his master saw that the LORD was with him.
 - iii. ^{39:5} The LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.
 - iv. ^{39:23} The LORD was with him [in the jail]; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.
 - v. ^{40:8} Then Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please.'
 - vi. ^{41:38} 'Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?'
 - vii. ^{41:51} Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, 'For,' he said, 'God has released me from all the debt of my hardship, and of all my father's house.' ⁵² He named the second Ephraim, 'For,' he said, 'God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.'
 - viii. Why do we get this information about Joseph (God is with him, he has God's Spirit, he has reached some resolution as reflected in his children's names) in ch.41 right before his brothers reappear in the story in ch.42? Does this affect our evaluation of what Joseph is doing?
 - g. Furthermore, how is Joseph like God to his father and brothers?
 - i. God called each father to give up his beloved son (Abraham; Isaac). Joseph is doing the same.
 - ii. God called brothers to be reconciled (Cain and Abel; Esau and Jacob). Joseph is doing the same.
9. Application: Pursuing God and challenging others in the process
 - a. Illus: me challenging my mom about living with Mexican immigrant families in East Palo Alto, CA.
 - b. Illus: Derek challenging others by sharing that he doesn't have sex anymore