

Genesis 43:1 – 34

¹ Now the famine was severe in the land. ² So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, 'Go back, buy us a little food.' ³ Judah spoke to him, however, saying, 'The man solemnly warned us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' ⁴ If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. ⁵ But if you do not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You will not see my face unless your brother is with you.' ⁶ Then Israel said, 'Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had another brother?' ⁷ But they said, 'The man questioned particularly about us and our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' So we answered his questions. Could we possibly know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'' ⁸ Judah said to his father Israel, 'Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. ⁹ I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever. ¹⁰ For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice.' ¹¹ Then their father Israel said to them, 'If it must be so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. ¹² Take double the money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake. ¹³ Take your brother also, and arise, return to the man; ¹⁴ and may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, so that he will release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.' ¹⁵ So the men took this present, and they took double the money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. ¹⁶ When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, 'Bring the men into the house, and slay an animal and make ready; for the men are to dine with me at noon.' ¹⁷ So the man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸ Now the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house; and they said, 'It is because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in, that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us, and take us for slaves with our donkeys.' ¹⁹ So they came near to Joseph's house steward, and spoke to him at the entrance of the house, ²⁰ and said, 'Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food, ²¹ and it came about when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back in our hand. ²² We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; we do not know who put our money in our sacks.' ²³ He said, 'Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money.' Then he brought Simeon out to them. ²⁴ Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys fodder. ²⁵ So they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon; for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there. ²⁶ When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him. ²⁷ Then he asked them about their welfare, and said, 'Is your old father well, of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?' ²⁸ They said, 'Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.' They bowed down in homage. ²⁹ As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, 'Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?' And he said, 'May God be gracious to you, my son.' ³⁰ Joseph

hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. ³¹ Then he washed his face and came out; and he controlled himself and said, ‘Serve the meal.’ ³² So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians. ³³ Now they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment. ³⁴ He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

Historical and Cultural Background

- Recall the motif of ‘the face of God’ in Jacob’s life. After Jacob wrestled with God, on his way back to see the ‘face’ of his brother Esau (Gen.32:20) and dwell in the land of promise, Jacob said, ‘I have seen God face to face’ (Gen.32:30). Going even further back, Cain killed his brother, and banished himself from the ‘face of the land’ and the ‘face of God’ (Gen.4:14).
- Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold as a slave to Egypt for 13 years. He was then appointed by Pharaoh at 30 years of age to govern all Egypt as viceroy. Then, 7 years passed of agricultural plenty, and 1 – 2 years of a 7 year famine, during which his brothers come to Egypt seeking grain. So Joseph was in Egypt for 21 – 22 years without his family.
- Joseph incognito as Egyptian viceroy held Simeon in prison and then sent his brothers home, requesting that they bring their youngest brother, 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. Jacob's spiritual state (v.1 – 14)
 - a. When we resume the story, how long has Jacob been stalling?
 - b. How long have they let Simeon rot in Egypt's jail? It's undetermined but it seems like a while if they've eaten all the food
 - c. What does that mean about Jacob's leadership of the family?
 - i. He's drifted into being governed by his appetite while holding onto his fear of losing his son Benjamin.
 - ii. Notice that he distances himself from Simeon! He refers to Simeon as 'your other brother' (v.14) and not as 'my son Simeon.' But in the same breath, he names Benjamin. He is clearly playing favorites again, on Rachel's side.
 - d. Why does the narrator use the name 'Israel'?
 - i. Where did Jacob get the name Israel before?
 - ii. So Jacob is wrestling with God
 - iii. What are the indications of that? He's letting go of his son Benjamin
 - e. How would Jacob have heard Judah's message, that he cannot see the 'face' of the Egyptian viceroy and gain food without bringing his brother Benjamin?
 - i. Jacob has had to connect the motifs of brother, face, land, and life before. After Jacob wrestled with God, on his way back to see the 'face' of his brother Esau (Gen.32:20) and dwell in the land of promise, Jacob said, 'I have seen God face to face' (Gen.32:30). Then he met Esau and said, 'I see your face as one sees the face of God' (Gen.33:10). He had to become his brother's keeper to see the face of God.
 - ii. Going even further back, Cain killed his brother, and banished himself from the 'face of the land' and the 'face of God' (Gen.4:14).
 - iii. Thus, Judah has to become 'his brother's keeper' to see the 'face' of Joseph, and to benefit from the 'face' (fruitfulness) of the land.
 - iv. Jacob should recognize this as a pattern from God!!! The fact that he lets go of his son Benjamin is a subtle indication that he does see it.
2. What do you think about Judah stepping up here to his father Jacob (v.1 – 14)?
 - a. At first, Judah just states the facts (v.1 – 7)
 - i. It makes sense that Judah and the brothers answered the questions honestly because as far as they knew, they were being asked about how much food they needed.
 - b. Does Judah's second appeal to his father Jacob reflect anything different (v.8 – 14)?
 - i. He says 'the lad' which is a term of affection
 - ii. He offers himself in terms of responsibility for Benjamin and potential blame if Benjamin gets hurt; he has learned to sacrifice his own interests and himself
 - iii. Judah's second appeal to his father Jacob reflects his maturity
 - c. How did Judah become this type of man?
 - i. Previously, he had tried to profit from Joseph's departure into slavery (Gen.37). He wandered from his family and married among the Canaanites (Gen.38). Judah had tried to exclude Tamar the Canaanite woman who had tried to live according to God's promise and her hope to be part of the chosen family. He traded his identity markers for a one night stand with a woman he thought was a prostitute, giving into the same carnal appetites his father Jacob demonstrated when he said of Rachel, 'Give her to me, that I may go into her,' his uncle Esau demonstrated when he traded his birthright for a bowl of stew, his grandfather Isaac demonstrated when he wanted to give God's blessing to Esau for catching wild game and cooking it well.
 - ii. But Judah had been taught a humbling and piercing lesson by Tamar about righteousness. She deceived him into having sex with her and impregnating her. Judah's own weakness became his own undoing. He can see that his father Jacob's weakness can become their undoing.
 - iii. Judah learned that he should have given up his son Shelah, in the sense of letting him be with Tamar. Judah now knows that Jacob has to give up his son Benjamin.
 - d. Application: Growing when you challenge an authority figure's sin
 - i. Illus: That happens in the church. When I was just over one year old as a Christian, during my senior year of high school, I noticed that my church, a Japanese-American

church, celebrated dads and grads in June. It was Father's Day for dads and graduation day for high school grads. What my church did was to bring the high school seniors to the front of the church during a service and announce where each person was going to college. I was heading to Stanford, and there were things people did and said to me that made me uncomfortable. Parents elbowed their kids in the pews. A mom asked me to tutor her daughter. Plus, I knew people who were struggling in school. What if there was someone who didn't graduate? Or who wasn't going onto college? I felt like that element of the service just reinforced the academic idolatry and comparison-orientation of Asian culture. I knew I had to ask the pastor and other leaders to reconsider doing this. It took half a year for me to pray about it and read Scripture and think about what words I was going to say. But when I came back for Christmas break, with fear and trembling I asked my pastor to meet with me, and I asked him why the church did that. To me, it seemed cultural but not Christian, cultural in a sinful way that could not be redeemed by Christ. I thought we should stop doing it. I said so, and asked for his perspective. He said that I wasn't the only person to ask about that. He said he could see my point. After that, my church did not pull graduating students to the front. We prayed for people broadly speaking, and celebrated everyone's learning, but we did not celebrate graduation per se, and we certainly did not name all the colleges that people were going to.

3. How does Joseph receive his brothers this time?
 - a. First the house steward gets them (v.19). He says in v.23, 'Your God and the God of your father...' How does he know this? The only way is that Joseph has told his steward about the God he worships, and his family's experiences of God. Joseph has led this man to a knowledge of God and his family.
 - b. Joseph releases Simeon and brings him out (v.23). The servant also washes their feet (v.24), a typical Middle Eastern act of hospitality because of the dusty roads and use of sandals.
 - c. Joseph sets a lunch for them. He comes in and has such a strong emotional response to seeing his full brother Benjamin (v.30). Why?
 - i. Perhaps because Benjamin is just the closest to him
 - ii. Perhaps because Benjamin looks like their mother Rachel
 - iii. The memories of himself as a young man and what he has lost – time with his family
 - iv. The sense of thanks to God that his father Jacob has released Benjamin and is letting go of his favoritism
 - d. Why does Joseph seat them in their birth order?
 - i. To give a clue that God is at work in this scene.
 - ii. Maybe to drop a clue about his own identity, but more so that God is involved.
 - e. Why does Joseph give Benjamin five times as much food?
 - i. This breaks the honoring of the brothers by birth order
 - ii. This makes them relive their father's favoritism, to see what their reaction will be. Can they be thankful and grateful despite this?
 - iii. In Jewish Law, the multiple of five will later become the amount due for restitution for a theft: 'If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.' (Ex.22:1) Perhaps not coincidentally, this comes after a law against kidnapping and selling a man into slavery (Ex.21:16), and a law about an ox or donkey falling into a pit to its death (Ex.21:33 – 34). There are echoes here of Joseph's story.
 - iv. Application: How would you have reacted if you were one of the brothers?