

Genesis 44:1 – 45:15

^{44:1} Then he commanded his house steward, saying, 'Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. ² Put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain.' And he did as Joseph had told him. ³ As soon as it was light, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys. ⁴ They had just gone out of the city, and were not far off, when Joseph said to his house steward, 'Up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? ⁵ Is not this the one from which my lord drinks and which he indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.' ⁶ So he overtook them and spoke these words to them. ⁷ They said to him, 'Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. ⁸ Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks we have brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? ⁹ With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves.' ¹⁰ So he said, 'Now let it also be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be innocent.' ¹¹ Then they hurried, each man lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. ¹² He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city. ¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there, and they fell to the ground before him. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, 'What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?' ¹⁶ So Judah said, 'What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found.' ¹⁷ But he said, 'Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father.' ¹⁸ Then Judah approached him, and said, 'Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' ²⁰ We said to my lord, 'We have an old father and a little child of his old age. Now his brother is dead, so he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.' ²¹ Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me that I may set my eyes on him.' ²² But we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' ²³ You said to your servants, however, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' ²⁴ Thus it came about when we went up to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. ²⁵ Our father said, 'Go back, buy us a little food.' ²⁶ But we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' ²⁷ Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; ²⁸ and the one went out from me, and I said, 'Surely he is torn in pieces,' and I have not seen him since. ²⁹ If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.' ³⁰ Now, therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, ³¹ when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will die. Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant our father down to Sheol in sorrow. ³² For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.' ³³ Now, therefore, please let

your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. ³⁴ For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me – for fear that I see the evil that would overtake my father?’ ^{45:1} Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, ‘Have everyone go out from me.’ So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. ³ Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. ⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Please come closer to me.’ And they came closer. And he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. ⁸ Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, ‘God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. ¹¹ There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished.’ ¹² Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. ¹³ Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here.’ ¹⁴ Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. ¹⁵ He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.

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.
- Joseph was in Egypt for 13 years and then was appointed by Pharaoh at 30 years of age to govern all Egypt. He has 7 years more of agricultural plenty, then some short period of time during the famine (1 – 2 years) during which his brothers come to Egypt. So Joseph is in Egypt for 21 – 22 years without his family.
- Joseph incognito held Simeon in prison and then sent his brothers home, requesting that they bring their youngest brother, Benjamin.
- Is Joseph acting with God, or without Him? 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. Is Joseph avenging himself on his brothers? Or doing something else?
2. What were his motivations, and what were his alternatives? What else could he have done?
 - a. Why doesn't Joseph just reveal himself right away, and send Egyptian troops to retrieve the rest of his family in Canaan?
 - b. What might have been tempting for Joseph?
 - c. What does Joseph know about his brothers, according to the last recorded things in Scripture about the brothers? So did Joseph know what his brothers would do with the grain? Why might he have been concerned? (Perhaps they would not share proportionately with Benjamin?)
 - d. In what sense is Joseph generous with his brothers? In what sense is he harsh with them?
 - e. What do his later tears suggest?
 - f. STATE: Let's leave Joseph for now and think about his brothers and father.
3. Why was this challenging to the brothers? They need to care about their brotherhood and whole family, even Benjamin, who they might not have liked for the same reason they didn't like Joseph.
 - a. Notice how Judah steps up to the plate. How has Judah grown since he and his brothers betrayed Joseph?
 - b. How is Judah being put into the same position he was 22 years ago? His father's favorite son is in danger. He had wanted to sell Joseph for money to the Ishmaelites as a slave (37:27). Now, he is confronted by the situation when Benjamin could be taken as a slave. He offers himself instead.
 - c. Judah cares about his father Jacob and the loss he would feel. He didn't think of that 22 years ago, with Joseph.
 - d. Application: Is there a part of your story that Jesus wants to retell, together with him?
 - e. Illus: Me talking to Barbara as a single mother, and being insensitive. Then, talking to Carla as a single mother, and asking her more questions and getting to know her more.
4. What did Joseph want? Is this about reconciliation? Or something more?
 - a. 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.
 - b. Joseph's concern actually seems to be bigger – for the whole world and for his whole family – just like God was concerned for the whole world and the whole family. He just isn't sure where his brothers are at and whether they can be trusted. Joseph, as God's agent, was determining whether his brothers could join God in God's concern for the whole world. Joseph and God are acting to shape the early ethos of the nation of Israel.
 - c. STATE: Joseph can now act in a way that his primary concern is not the validation of his dream, not the validation of his gifts, not even to get his brothers to say that what they did was wrong. In fact, after all his suffering and faithfulness, Joseph does not even become the first-born! Judah does. Joseph's concern is God's concern for all humanity, and desiring his family to share that. He can spiritually lead his brothers and even his father into God's concern. He gets interpersonal reconciliation as a by-product.
 - d. In fact, whereas Jacob-Israel fragmented the family of Israel, God uses Joseph to unite it.
 - e. Application: What has happened in Joseph that he can now be a spiritual leader, and not just an arrogant and gifted young person? It is not explicit in the passage itself, perhaps intentionally, because it causes us to ask those questions of ourselves more than just of the text. What do you all think?
5. How does Joseph understand God's activity in his life?
 - a. What has God done? He promised to provide for the family of Abraham and Sarah, but also that they would be slaves in a land not their own. But it didn't have to happen this way. God was not responsible for the motivations or actions of the brothers. But God was responsible for turning that event around for the benefit of the family. Joseph says twice, 'God sent me before you' to preserve life (45:5), and to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance (45:7).
 - b. But what do we do about the phrase, 'Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me...' in 45:8? Well it is actually true that it was not the brothers who sent Joseph to Egypt. They merely threw him into the pit. Some Midianite traders hoisted him out and sold him to the Ishmaelites who brought him to Egypt. So, after the brothers betrayed him and threw him into the pit, God was at work to preserve Joseph and bring him to Egypt so that

- Joseph's visions would be honored once more and, more importantly, God could preserve life through him.
- c. Joseph seems to see God in the 'what happened next.' The Midianites and Ishmaelites could have kept him or killed him. But God seemed to nudge them not to kill him. Potiphar could have just abused and worked Joseph for all he was worth. But God helped Joseph and seemed to help Potiphar appreciate the blessing Joseph brought. The jailor could have just milked Joseph and taken advantage of him. But God helped Joseph again and seemed to help the jailor appreciate Joseph.
 - d. Joseph actually had a chance to retell his own story several times. He was a good shepherd, working for his father. He was a good administrator, working for Potiphar. He was a good administrator, working for the jailor. He was a good leader, working for Pharaoh.
 - e. Illus: God developing a mercy gifting in me; in high school going through my parents' arguing about divorce; then my three friends in high school caring about me; then

Some additional notes to fill in the leader regarding the Joseph story:

1. Look at God and Joseph thus far:
 - a. ^{39:2} The LORD was with Joseph
 - b. ^{39:3} Now his master saw that the LORD was with him.
 - c. ^{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.
 - d. ^{39:23} The LORD was with him [in the jail]; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.
 - e. ^{40:8} Then Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please.'
 - f. ^{41:38} 'Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?'
 - g. ^{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.'
2. Why do we get this information about Joseph (God is with him, he has God's Spirit, he has reached some inward 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?
3. Furthermore, how is Joseph like God?

God	Joseph
God desires blessing for all nations	Joseph cares for all nations
In God's sovereignty, God waits for and encourages willing responses from chosen individuals to implement the blessing	Joseph, though powerful, waits for and encourages willing responses from chosen individuals to be a part of the blessing
This willingness requires reorientation from the path of 'making a name for oneself' toward understanding and upholding the interests of others	This willingness requires reorientation from the path of 'making a name for oneself' toward understanding and upholding the interests of others
God is the Creator of Life	Joseph's Egyptian title, Zaphenath-paneah, can be translated 'Creator of life'
God provides for all	'All the earth came to Egypt, to Joseph, to get provisions' (42:1 – 6).
People 'stand in God's presence'	The brothers went down to Egypt and stood in Joseph's presence (43:15).
God causes things to happen by his word.	Joseph commands his Egyptian servant, and then he says to the brothers about what Joseph did, 'All is well with you, do not fear. Your God and the God of your father has placed treasure for you in your bags' (43:23)
God asks Abraham to give up a beloved son, Ishmael (Gen.21), and another beloved son, Isaac (Gen.22); God asks Isaac to give up a beloved son, Esau (Gen.26)	Joseph (incognito) asks Jacob to give up a favored son, Benjamin

God 'appeared' to Abraham (12:7; 17:1) and to Isaac (26:2); the phrase 'appeared before him' is the common construction in Hebrew for God's appearing to someone	Joseph 'appeared' before Jacob (46:29)
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Joseph is acting on God's behalf to develop his family into God's mission.