

## **JOSEPH TESTS HIS BROTHERS' JEALOUSY** **(Genesis 43:1-34)**

In order to bring his brothers to a place of reconciliation and blessing, Joseph administered three tests. He tested his brothers' honesty, their jealousy, and their loyalty. He warned them that they could not return to Egypt unless they brought their youngest brother Benjamin, thereby proving their honesty. When the brothers returned with Benjamin, Joseph tested their jealousy. According to Acts 7:9-10, which records Stephen's sermon prior to his martyrdom, jealousy drove Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery. By honoring his full brother Benjamin at a banquet, Joseph had the opportunity to observe how his other brothers would react. Were they still motivated by jealousy, or had they changed their ways? When we celebrate God's blessings in the lives of others, we too experience His blessings. Genesis 43 begins with Jacob's resignation to trust God, moves to a description of the dire fear in the hearts of Joseph's brothers upon their return to Egypt, and ends with Joseph's test of jealousy over his preferential treatment of Benjamin.

### **Resignation—when we submit our lives to God we open ourselves to receiving His blessings (43:1-14).**

Because of his wavering faith, Jacob failed to trust God to take care of his son Benjamin. He had refused to let Benjamin go to Egypt. But the continuing famine forced the issue, and Jacob had to resign himself to depend entirely on God.

***Jacob ordered his sons to go back to Egypt to buy more grain, but they refused to go without taking Benjamin (43:1-5).***

Famine continued to plague Egypt and Canaan. Food supplies again ran out for Jacob and his family, so Jacob ordered his sons to return to Egypt and buy more grain. Again, his sons insisted that Benjamin go with them. Judah took the lead, reminding his father about the Egyptian governor's demand. Speaking on behalf of his brothers, Judah refused to return to Egypt without Benjamin.

***Jacob chided his sons for telling the governor of Egypt about Benjamin, but they explained that the governor had questioned them closely (43:6-7).***

Jacob, here called Israel (possibly hinting at his gradual return to an attitude of faith), accused his sons of bringing trouble on him. Why had they told the Egyptian governor about Benjamin? But Jacob's sons explained that the governor had pressed them with specific questions about their father and family. They had answered honestly, with no ability to foresee the governor's unusual demand.

***Judah guaranteed the safety of Benjamin and Jacob reluctantly permitted his sons to return to Egypt, committing them to the mercy of God (43:8-14).***

Judah then asked his father to entrust Benjamin to his care. They needed to go to Egypt at once in order to stave off death. Judah guaranteed Benjamin's safety and took full responsibility. He would bear the blame if anything happened to Benjamin. Judah had been the one to suggest selling Joseph as a slave, but now he was ready to protect Joseph's full brother from harm (Genesis 37:26-27). At this, Jacob surrendered. He instructed his sons to take some local produce as gifts for the governor. He also told them to take twice as much silver, enough to pay for the first and second installments of grain. After all, he mused, maybe the silver they'd discovered in their sacks of grain after their first trip to Egypt had been placed there by mistake. Jacob gave permission for his sons to take Benjamin and leave at once. At this point Jacob resigned himself to God, saying, "And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man." But Jacob also understood that he might lose Benjamin, and concluded, "As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved." To resign ourselves to God is to trust Him in spite of the outcome. God may choose to protect us or He may allow us to experience hardships, but we must put our lives in His hands. We must trust Him. Only then will we find ourselves in the place of His blessing.

**Fear—when we face uncertainties in life  
we can trust God to see us through (43:15-25).**

Having secured their father's permission, Joseph's brothers made their second trip to Egypt. They must have wondered all along the way how things would turn out. Fear and uncertainty would have dogged their every step.

***When Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt, Joseph instructed his steward to take them to his house for a noontime meal (43:15-17).***

Gathering up some gifts and double the amount of silver, Joseph's brothers—including Benjamin—hurried down to Egypt. They wanted to get this trip over with as quickly as possible. In Egypt they presented themselves again to Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin, he knew that his brothers were now acting like honest men. But would they still succumb to jealousy? Joseph instructed his steward to take these men to his house and prepare a meal for them.

***Joseph's brothers feared that Joseph intended to make them slaves and explained to the steward that they were returning the misplaced silver (43:18-22).***

Joseph's steward obeyed his orders and took his brothers to Joseph's house. Of course, Joseph's brothers were perplexed. They assumed that Joseph was going to retaliate over the silver that they'd discovered in their sacks of grain. Gripped with fear, these brothers thought that Joseph would overpower them and make them his slaves. They who had sold Joseph into slavery now feared themselves becoming slaves. In a

desperate attempt to extract themselves from this situation before entering Joseph's house, Joseph's brothers explained to the steward that they were innocent. They'd only discovered the silver in their sacks of grain during their journey home. In fact, they'd brought the silver back to make restitution. They were basically pleading for their lives.

***The steward assured Joseph's brothers that God had given them their treasure and then treated them hospitably (43:23-25).***

Joseph's steward assured these brothers that everything would be alright. "Peace to you," he said, "Do not be afraid." The steward then said that God, the God of their fathers, had given them their treasure. The steward had received their original payment, so they need not worry. It's interesting that Joseph's steward spoke so easily about God, indicating that Joseph had been faithful in crediting God with his successes. The steward then sent for Simeon, and these brothers must have taken great comfort in being reunited. The steward treated Joseph's brothers with great hospitality. He took them into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet, and fed their donkeys. Joseph's brothers took the opportunity to prepare their gifts for Egypt's vizier. The stage was set. The situation was uncertain. Would God protect these brothers from harm? Even in the midst of life's uncertainties, we can be certain that God will provide.

**Favor—when God generously blesses  
others we can respond with joy instead of jealousy.**

The time had come for Joseph to test his brothers' jealousy. Would they display a sense of indignation over his favorable treatment of his full brother Benjamin? We know that we should rejoice with those who experience God's blessing, but too often we compare and complain about the way that God seems to be working in our own lives.

***When Joseph arrived, his brothers bowed to him and he asked them about their father (43:26-28).***

Joseph arrived at his house for the noontime meal. He must have arrived in all the regal splendor of his high office. His brothers presented him with the local produce they had prepared as gifts. In addition, they again bowed before Joseph, a fulfillment of God's prediction through Joseph's dreams. Joseph inquired about the health of their father. His brothers assured Joseph that Jacob was still alive and well. They then bowed before Joseph again.

***When Joseph saw his brother Benjamin he pronounced a blessing from God on him and then went out and wept (43:29-30).***

Joseph then fixed his attention on his full brother, Benjamin. He pronounced a blessing on Benjamin, inviting God to show favor to Benjamin, and referred to Benjamin with the intimate phrase "my son." This blessing and address must have sounded strange to Joseph's brothers. Why would the governor of Egypt single out Benjamin for divine

blessing? The whole scene was too much for Joseph. He hurried out of the room and wept privately over having seen his brother Benjamin after all these years. His mind may have flooded with memories of happier days followed by betrayal, slavery, and now God's blessing.

***When Joseph returned, he seated his brothers according to their birth order and then gave Benjamin five times more food than his brothers (43:31-33).***

Joseph returned from the privacy of his emotional reaction and took his place for the meal. He was seated alone, due to his high position and due to the fact that Egyptians didn't regularly associate with foreigners. In fact, Egyptians viewed Hebrews with disdain. So Joseph was seated alone, the Egyptians sat at their own table, and Joseph's brothers were seated at a table of their own. Apparently Joseph instructed his household staff to seat his brothers according to their birth order—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin—which astonished them. When the meal was served it was apparent that Benjamin received five times as much as his brothers. Would this obvious show of favoritism incite jealousy among these brothers? The text simply states, "So they feasted and drank freely with him." They each enjoyed their own share of the meal without any indication of jealousy. Benjamin, it turned out, could receive special favors without incurring the anger of his brothers. Joseph's brothers, who in jealousy had sold him into slavery, seem to have outgrown this vice. They were now ready to protect their youngest, favored brother instead of competing for his blessings. They learned that they could respond with joy instead of jealousy over God's generous blessings. We, too, can rejoice over the blessings of God in the lives of others. In fact, when we celebrate God's blessings in the lives of others, we too experience His blessings.