

## Study: The Joseph Story

**Text:** Genesis 42: The Brothers' Journeys to Egypt, Part I: First Journey Without Benjamin (42:1–38)<sup>1</sup>

### I. Jacob Sends the “Ten” Brothers to Egypt (42:1–5)

#### A. What does Jacob learn about Egypt (v. 1)?

1. What does he ask the brothers? What sort of attitude does this question seem to indicate is present in Jacob?

2. What does he then ask the brothers *to do* (v. 2)?

3. What motivation is supplied for asking for this?

a. What do you think Jacob intends by this?

b. In light of Joseph’s later statements in Gen 45:7 and 50:20, what did God intend through this?

c. How does Eph 3:20–21 relate to this?

#### B. How many of Joseph’s brothers come down to Egypt to buy grain (v.3)?

1. Which one stays behind, and why (v. 4)?

2. The narrative in Gen 42 picks up the story about the family of Jacob from the end of Gen 37 (the prior three chapters, Gen 39–41, provide the backdrop for Joseph’s

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<sup>1</sup> The outline of the passage we are following basically follows the outline provided in K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 82.

rise that enables the conditions for the family to reunite). One of the central questions/concerns of the story is, Will this family change? At the beginning of Gen 42, we do not see that anything has changed yet. How does Jacob's treatment of Benjamin (compared to the brothers) show that he is at this point unchanged?

## II. Joseph Receives the Brothers (42:6–28)

### A. Joseph Charges His Brothers with Spying (42:6–17)

1. What does v. 6 make a point of telling us about Joseph's roles in Egypt? Why do you think that information is important to point out here?

2. What do the brothers do when they come into contact with Joseph in v. 6?

a. Are they aware of the significance of what they are doing? How do you know? (See v. 8.)

b. Is Joseph aware of the significance of what they are doing? Why do you think so? (See v. 9.)

3. How does Joseph treat the brothers acc. to v. 7?

a. By asking about their origins, Joseph confirms their identity as his brothers, but he sees that Benjamin is missing. It has been suggested that perhaps Joseph thought that Benjamin's life was in question. Why would it be reasonable for Joseph to think that Benjamin may either no longer be alive, or that the brothers might be willing to kill him to protect their secret?

b. What does Joseph accuse the brothers of *being* and of *doing* in vv. 9, 12, 14?

4. In v. 11 the brothers defend themselves by making three assertions. Which of the assertions is true? Which is false?

5. As the brothers continue to protest and explain in v. 13, Joseph learns two more important bits of information about the family—what?

6. Finally, Joseph decides to submit the brothers to a test:

a. What must they produce in order to prove their story that they are not spies?

b. What must the rest of the brothers do in the meantime?

c. By the end of this scene in v. 17, a great reversal of roles has occurred:

(1) Who initially engaged in deception with a call to “recognize” the bloody tunic (Gen 37)? Who is now engaging in deception because he “recognizes” what others do not?

(2) Who were responsible for Joseph’s numerous confinements, beginning with the pit? Who is now responsible for the brothers’ confinement?

## B. Joseph Deceives His Brothers by a Test (42:18–28)

1. In v. 18 Joseph imposes a more lenient requirement upon the brothers.

a. How many must remain in confinement? How many may return?

- b. How would this benefit the whole family?
- c. What rationale is given in v. 18 for why Joseph would alter the plan this way?

Mathews (779-80) provides an interesting and reasonable comment on the effect of Joseph's assertion that he "fears God":

Yet the author of chaps. 42-44 constructs much of what is said and done between Joseph and the brothers to convey a double meaning. The implication one might draw from Joseph's protestation is that he was a person of integrity and the brothers were not. That the brothers immediately acknowledged their sin suggests strongly that they recognized the deeper meaning of his challenge to their integrity. From their perspective, the Egyptian lord presumably did not know their family secret, but in the ears of their conscience his words were the judgment of God against them. Moreover, by his assertion "I fear God," another implication was that even this foreign lord acted with more fidelity than they had toward their own family.

- 2. In vv. 21-22 Joseph is treated to a gut-wrenching discussion among the brothers.
  - a. To what do the brothers attribute their present trouble?
  - b. What moral terms/language is used by the brothers themselves to describe their own deeds?
  - c. What do the brothers not know as they have this discussion? Why did they think this way? (v. 23)
  - d. What is Joseph's response to these things? Why do you think he responds this way? How do you think Joseph feels about hearing for the first time that one of the brothers has tried to prevent this from happening?

3. In v. 24 Joseph prepares to send them away to Canaan.

a. Whom does he bind as a hostage before the rest of them? What is the risk that Simeon runs as he watches his brothers depart?<sup>2</sup>

b. What three things does Joseph order to be done for the brothers prior to their departure (v. 25)?

c. In v. 28 we are given a window into the brothers' responses to discovering that one of them still has his money in his sack. What are the two internal, emotional responses they give? And what do they then say in response?

d. The expression in v. 28 “What has God done *to us*?” could also be translated “What has God done *for us*?” One rendering construes God’s acts as negative; the other as positive. How do the brothers take it? Now compare Gen 43:23—how does God intend it, according to Joseph’s steward?

### III. The Brothers Report to Jacob (42:29–34)

A. From vv. 29–34 we are treated to an almost verbatim retelling of the story of the brothers’ encounter with the “lord of the land.”

B. There is one detail provided in v. 34 that is not mentioned elsewhere. What?

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<sup>2</sup> If the brothers were willing to leave Joseph in a pit, what would prevent them from leaving another brother there to save their own necks?

#### IV. Jacob Refuses to Send Benjamin to Egypt (42:35–38)

- A. What surprising thing do all the brothers discover upon unloading (v. 35)? How do they respond?
- B. What is Jacob's response to the news that they are to bring Benjamin to Egypt (v. 36)?
- C. How does Reuben try to persuade Jacob (v. 37)? Why do you think Reuben is so insistent?
- D. What is Jacob's response even to this? Once again, how are Jacob's feelings for Benjamin different from his feelings for the other brothers?

Mathews (784) once again remarks with insight:

Jacob's refusal is stated stridently. The construction "my son will not go down there" (v. 38) is a strongly worded prohibition. His explanation for his refusal was forcefully stated and reasoned, though no doubt stinging to Reuben. "My son" and "his brother" sound the closed circle of Rachel's two sons and their father. That Benjamin is "the only one left" states what the brothers had known all along: Benjamin was the only son who counted in their father's eyes.