

Study: The Joseph Story

Text: Genesis 43: The Brothers' Journeys to Egypt, Part II: Second Journey with Benjamin (43:1–34)¹

I. Jacob Instructs His Sons (43:1–14)

A. Introduction: Famine (43:1)

1. Here the context of this episode is set. To what does “the land” refer in v.1? (Hint: What was the location of the narrative when chapter 42 ended?)

2. What does the text say about the nature of the famine at this point?

B. Jacob's Instruction to Return to Egypt (43:2)

1. What happens to the grain they have acquired in Egypt?

2. Who thinks of another trip to Egypt? What does he say?

3. Why is Jacob's request going to be problematic?

C. Request to Take Benjamin (43:3–7)

1. Who takes the lead in responding to Jacob on behalf of the brothers (v. 3)?

a. Which other brother might have been expected to take the lead here? Why?

¹ 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.

b. How did Jacob respond to that brother the last time he had tried to intervene with Jacob? (Hint: see 42:37-38.)

2. What does Judah remind Jacob about “the man” and his instructions to them while they were in Egypt (v. 3)? What condition for returning is placed upon them by that man?

a. What condition does Judah place upon Jacob for being willing to go buy grain (vv. 4-5)?

b. What, in response, does Jacob accuse the brothers of having done (v. 6)?

c. Note, there is some irony in Jacob’s charge. On the one hand, unbeknownst to Jacob, the boys have already “treated him badly” in Gen 37 by *failing to reveal* that his most treasured son still is. Now he accuses them of treating him badly by revealing that his second most treasured son exists (Gen 43:6)!

3. The brothers defend themselves against the charge of Jacob by saying that their disclosure of this vital family information was simply what (v. 7)?

a. Did you notice that what the brothers say in 43:7 does not exactly match 42:10-14? In which account do they appear to offer this information voluntarily? In which do they seem to be forced to give it?

b. It is tempting to suspect that the brothers (being known deceivers) are defending themselves by embellishing the account from Gen 42 so as to make the Egyptian's interrogation seem more forceful. Now, read Gen 44:18-20 and consider how Judah summarizes the initial interrogation back to Joseph. What does 44:19 make you think about the truthfulness of 43:7?²

D. Judah's Pledge for Benjamin (43:8-10)

1. Who steps up to take personal responsibility for the boy?
2. In connection with this assumption of responsibility, what three sorts of legal expressions does Judah use to describe what he's willing to take upon himself (v. 9)?
 - a. I will be . . .
 - b. From my hand you shall . . .
 - c. Let me bear the . . .

E. Jacob's Further Instructions (43:11-14)

1. Is Jacob persuaded by Judah's forceful speech?
2. In each of vv. 11-13, Jacob advises them to "take" something. List the three things they are to take with them to Egypt:
 - a. (v. 11)
 - b. (v. 12)
 - c. (v. 13)
3. In v. 14 Jacob expresses a two-fold prayer/wish.

² This is a good reminder that, when you read Scripture and see accounts that appear to be in conflict, you shouldn't immediately assume that the Bible contradicts itself. The tension between the two accounts may simply be an issue of one account being abbreviated (Gen 42:10-14), and the other providing fuller, complementary information (Gen 43:7).

- a. What two things does he desire?
- b. Of whom does he make this request/prayer?
- c. The Hebrew term for this divine title is *El Shaddai*. It occurs 3x prior to this verse in the book of Genesis. Look up these passages where it occurs and discuss how what the texts say might have a bearing on what Jacob is facing here.

Gen 17:1-4 (esp. v. 2)

Gen 28:1-5 (esp. v. 3)

Gen 35:9-12 (esp. v. 11)

- d. It's clear to Jacob that he has no choice—either certain death by starvation, or the possibility of greater loss. How does he express his resignation to accept the possible outcome of this risky venture at the end of v. 14?

II. Joseph Receives His Brothers (43:15–34)

A. Joseph Instructs His Steward (43:15–17)

1. We see in v. 15 the brothers following Jacob's instructions and bringing the 3 things he had recommended (43:11-13). When they arrive, what does the text say they do (end of v. 15)?
2. In the OT, the expression “to stand before” someone is to take a position and posture of humble respect and sometimes even connotes service to that person. The ESV and other English translations sometimes render it literally ('stand before') and

sometimes interpret it for us ('minister', 'serve', 'entered service', 'remain in service', etc.). Look up these passages (a mere sampling); who *stands before* whom?

Gen 41:46

1 Kgs 10:8

Deut 1:38

1 Sam 16:21-22

3. What did Joseph do when he saw them and Benjamin (vv. 16-17)?

B. Steward Receives the Brothers' Gift (43:18-25)

1. Acc. to v. 18 the men were afraid. What happened to make them afraid? How did they interpret this action?

2. What did they do in order to forestall the tragedy they feared awaited them (vv. 19-22)?

3. What shocking response did Joseph's steward provide?

a. What titles for Yahweh did the steward use in v. 23? Which absent person is invoked in the story at this point by the use of one of the titles?

b. That absent person had expressed a two-fold prayer in 43:14. Review that prayer now. How are those two elements apparently being addressed in 43:23?

c. Instead of seizing their donkeys, what happens to them (v. 24b)? Instead of enslaving the men, what happens to them (v. 24a)?

C. Joseph Receives Benjamin (43:26–30)

1. Several times in this section (vv. 26–30) the brothers engage in a physical gesture toward Joseph (still unaware of who he is). What do they do (vv. 26, 28)? What does this remind us of from earlier in the story?

2. In v. 27, Joseph “inquired about their welfare.” In Hebrew it says that “he asked them concerning *shalom* (*peace*).” We have seen this Hebrew term used before in the Joseph story:

37:4 (who could not speak peaceably to whom?)

37:14 (who was tasked to checking on the peace/welfare of whom?)

3. Acc. to v. 29, Joseph exclaims, “God be gracious to you, my son!”

a. Who is this directed toward?

b. Again, this seems to be the beginning of a tangible answer to Jacob’s prayer in 43:14. Which of the two parts of his prayer does this address?

4. What does Joseph have to do in v. 30? Why? Why do you think he feels this way?

D. Joseph Favors Benjamin (43:31–34)

1. Upon returning to the dining room Joseph commences the meal.
 - a. What is the seating arrangement in terms of nationality?
 - b. What is the seat arrangement among the brothers? How do the brothers respond to this remarkable “coincidence”?
2. In the final verse (34), we see two indications of great blessing for the family.
 - a. How is Benjamin favored?
 - b. In a time of famine, how are the brothers favored?

E. Discussion questions:

1. What do you learn about humanity from this passage?
2. What do you learn about God from this passage?