

Joseph's Brothers Go Down to Egypt Again

Genesis 43:1-14

Genesis 43:1-14 - *"Now the famine was severe in the land. ² And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food."*

³ But Judah spoke to him, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, '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 will not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.'"

⁶ And Israel said, "Why did you deal so wrongfully with me as to tell the man whether you had still another brother?"

⁷ But they said, "The man asked us pointedly about ourselves and our family, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' And we told him according to these words. Could we possibly have known that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?"

⁸ Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. ⁹ I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. ¹⁰ For if we had not lingered, surely by now we would have returned this second time."

¹¹ And their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: Take some of the best fruits of the land in your vessels and carry down a present for the man—a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. ¹² Take double money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. ¹³ Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man. ¹⁴ And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"

Background Notes

When Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt the first time, they probably thought that the famine would soon be over, and that the grain they took home would tide them over until the rains returned. But little did they know that the famine would last for seven years! Genesis 45:6 indicates that the famine was only in the second year at that point. So when the family's food supplies began to dwindle, Jacob told the brothers they would have to return to Egypt to buy a little more food, still thinking and hoping that the famine would soon be over.

But Judah, who was now the spokesman for the brothers, said "No way!" He reminded his father that *"the man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you'"* (v3-4). Notice that Judah referred to

Joseph as “the man.” I think this may be another parallel between Joseph and the Lord Jesus. Do you remember Pilate’s statement in reference to Christ in John 19:5? *“Behold the Man!”* Just as the brothers didn’t recognize who Joseph was, so the Jewish people didn’t recognize who the Lord Jesus was. To them, He was only “the man.” The man Joseph controlled the destiny of the brothers, whether they knew it or not, and whether they liked it or not. Like Joseph, “the Man” - Jesus of Nazareth - controlled the destiny of those who didn’t recognize Him as their Messiah.

The brothers had to come to the man Joseph **on his terms** to get bread and live. In the same way, people today must come to the Man Jesus Christ **on God’s terms** to receive the Bread of Life and live. We cannot come on **our** terms. We must come to Jesus on **God’s** terms! There is only one way to everlasting life, whether we like it or not. John 14:6 Jesus said, *“No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* And 1 Timothy 2:5 says, *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”*

Verse 11 says that the brothers took the best “products of the land” down to Egypt. Wait a minute! I thought there was a famine in all the land? Where would they get these gifts? Balm, myrrh, date honey, and nuts were items that could have been preserved for a couple of years. Bringing a gift when approaching one’s superior was an important custom in those days, and most of these items were not native to Egypt.

The brothers were to take double money to Egypt - to buy more grain, and also to pay back the money that had been returned in their sacks on the first trip. Genesis 42:35: *“Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man’s bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.”* Joseph had returned their money, not only to test their honesty, but as an act of kindness - and perhaps to ensure that they would come back to Egypt!

Ten brothers had their money returned, and now they were taking double money back. That means they were prepared to pay **twenty bundles of silver** to “the Egyptian ruler.” Isn’t that interesting? Years before they had sold Joseph into slavery for **twenty pieces of silver** (Genesis 37:28). Now they planned to pay out twenty **pouches** of silver. Hosea 8:7 says, *“They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind.”*

Doctrinal Points

1. God can use famine to bring about divine decrees.

From the human perspective, the seven-year famine was just an unfortunate natural disaster. Egypt and the Middle East had had famines before, and they would continue to have famines. This one “just happened” to be a little longer than average. From the divine perspective, however, this natural event was no coincidence. It had been ordained in the eternal counsels of God! And through this famine divine decrees were being carried out.

What divine decrees? First, an aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant was partially fulfilled at this time. God had promised Abraham, *"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (12:3) Think of the blessing that Joseph was providing for a large portion of the earth's families at that time! That prophecy, of course, is ultimately fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, think of the divine decree to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-16, that the nation of Israel was to be formed in Egypt, and then come out of Egypt in a great Exodus. God used the famine to move Jacob and his family to Egypt.

God can use famine - and any other natural event - to fulfill divine decrees. The Scriptures clearly indicate that God has decreed that there will be return of the nation of Israel in the future. This return will not only be a physical return to the land of Israel (that is happening right now), but a spiritual return to the Lord. Read Romans 11 in this connection. It is a divine decree!

Do you know how God will bring about that divine decree in the future? It will largely come about through a seven-year period of tribulation, a time known as "Jacob's trouble," and that may be pictured here. That seven-year period of tribulation will include literal famine, and it will bring Israel and the entire world to their knees. But the good news is that out of this great time of trouble will come a believing remnant of godly Jews - according to God's divine decree.

The psalmist tells us, *"This day, as ever, Thy decrees stand fast, for all things serve Thee"* (Psalm 119:91) God can use famine to bring about His divine decrees.

2. God can use famine to turn around human character.

God can use any number of things to discipline His children. In Genesis 43 God used a famine to change the hearts of two of His children, Judah and Jacob.

What a change in Judah's character! Judah was the brother who came up with the idea to sell Joseph as a slave to Egypt (Genesis 37). Judah married a Canaanite woman, and committed the sins of incest and fornication with his daughter-in-law (Genesis 38). Not a pleasant history. But look at Judah in Genesis 43. He had become the responsible brother in the family, caring for his father and his brothers. And he was even willing to put his own life on the line for Benjamin! How did God bring about this change in Judah's character? It came about largely through the famine. God used the famine as discipline in Judah's life - and it worked! If there had been no famine, Judah might have continued to live his own selfish way.

Now look at Jacob's character. Back in Genesis 42:36 Jacob said to his ten sons, *"You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me!"* That doesn't sound like a man of faith who was trusting the Lord, does it? And in Genesis 42:38 Jacob said, *"My son [Benjamin] shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave."*

But look at his character in Genesis 43:14: *“And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin.”* There had been a change of character for sure. Jacob was now trusting in “El Shaddai” – in “God Almighty.” No longer was he trusting in his own plans and schemes for running his life. Jacob had come to the place where he realized that even if he lost Benjamin, it was God’s will. No wonder Jacob is called by his new name, Israel, throughout this chapter.

How did God bring about this change in Jacob? It came about largely through the famine. The famine brought Jacob to the “end of his rope.” Jacob had to stop trying to control everything himself. He had to be willing give up Benjamin and rely on God as his only hope. The only other option was for his entire family to perish.

God can use a “famine” to bring people to the end of themselves, and to bring about a change in their character. He can use a time of extraordinary trouble in your life to change your character, too. Maybe you’re a very self-sufficient person - and maybe you’re even proud of your self-sufficiency. You think you can run your own life just fine, and you don’t need God. God may allow some kind of “famine” to come into your life to bring you down a notch. He may allow the famine to continue until you realize you can’t make it on your own, so that in your need for help you turn to the Lord as your only source of hope. God can use famine to change human character.

Practical Application

Never say “Never!”

At the end of chapter 42, Jacob said he would never let Benjamin go down to Egypt - **never!** But God changed Jacob’s mind. Did you ever say “Never!” about something? Well, God may have other ideas for your life.

When I was attending seminary in beautiful New England, I thought I would **never** move our family to the urban sprawl of Chicago! Who would want to live in Chicago?! Well, God had other ideas - and here I am, living and serving Him very happily in the Chicago area.

One of my friends is very thrifty. He guards his finances carefully. Before he committed his life to the Lord, he learned that the Christian lifestyle involved giving of your money to the Lord. He said to me, “Maybe I’ll become a Christian, but no way am I going to give 10% of my money away to the Lord! No way!” Well God had other ideas, and today he is **more** than tithing! He has become a “cheerful giver”!

Never say “Never!” God can change your character so that you’ll be doing things that you **never** thought possible! God can do miracles - so - **never say “Never!”**