

Joseph Tests His Brothers

Genesis: 43:15-34

Genesis 43:15-34 - *"So the men took that present and Benjamin, and they took double money in their hand, and arose and went down to Egypt; and they stood before Joseph. ¹⁶ When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my home, and slaughter an animal and make ready; for these men will dine with me at noon." ¹⁷ Then the man did as Joseph ordered, and the man brought the men into Joseph's house.*

¹⁸ Now the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, "It is because of the money, which was returned in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and seize us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys."

¹⁹ When they drew near to the steward of Joseph's house, they talked with him at the door of the house, ²⁰ and said, "O sir, we indeed came down the first time to buy food; ²¹ but it happened, when we came to the encampment, that we opened our sacks, and there, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it back in our hand. ²² And we have brought down other money in our hands to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks."

²³ But he said, "Peace be with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

²⁴ So the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys feed. ²⁵ Then they made the present ready for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they would eat bread there.

²⁶ And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed down before him to the earth. ²⁷ Then he asked them about their well-being, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?"

²⁸ And they answered, "Your servant our father is in good health; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads down and prostrated themselves.

²⁹ Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." ³⁰ Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to weep. And he went into his chamber and wept there. ³¹ Then he washed his face and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, "Serve the bread."

³² So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. ³³ And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked in astonishment at one another. ³⁴ Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin's serving was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him."

Background Notes

When the brothers visited Egypt the first time, Joseph treated them roughly. He accused them of being spies and put them in prison for three days. Joseph was not being vindictive in his treatment of his brothers. He was testing them to see if they had changed in the past 20 years.

When the brothers came to Egypt the second time, Joseph treated them with kindness. Simeon, the brother who had been held as security for their return, was released unharmed from prison.

Then Joseph cared for the brothers in his home: *“So the man brought the men into Joseph’s house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys feed” (v24)*. They were treated as honored guests. During their meal together, the brothers were served from Joseph’s own table: *“Then he took servings to them from before him” (v34)*. *“Benjamin’s serving was five times as much as any of theirs” (v34)*. Why do you suppose Joseph gave Benjamin five times more food than the other brothers? This was a further test! Remember, Joseph and Benjamin were the sons of Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife. Joseph wanted to see if the brothers who had been so jealous of him were just as jealous of Benjamin. This was a part of Joseph’s test to expose their true hearts – and to see if they had changed.

Verse 32 mentions that Joseph, as prime minister, ate at his own table. The other Egyptians present ate at their own table, and the brothers had their own table. We learn here that the Egyptians would not eat with Hebrew people, for that was “an abomination to the Egyptians.”

This detail indicates that Joseph came to power before the “Hyksos period” in Egyptian history. You see, the Hyksos people were Semitic, and they would not have had a problem eating with Hebrew people. So we can deduce two interesting and important details here. First - Joseph went along with the Egyptian culture where it did not contravene his principles. And second - the Joseph lived before the Hyksos period. That fact is important, because it fits in with a conservative and “high” view of the biblical chronology.

By the way, when Joseph arranged his brothers according to their ages, how many different combinations do you think there are, for arranging eleven brothers? Believe it or not: 39,916,800! No wonder the brothers were astonished!

Doctrinal Points

1. The fear of God should lead a person to repentance.

Verse 18: *“Now the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph’s house; and they said, “It is because of the money, which was returned in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and seize us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys.”* Why were the brothers afraid? Why did they jump to the far-out conclusion that Joseph wanted to steal their donkeys and make them slaves? The bottom line is that their guilty consciences were awakened - and a guilty conscience and fear go together! God has designed us that way! A guilty conscience should lead a person to repentance.

If you did something wrong when you were a young child, do you remember how you lived in fear that your parents would find out? Everything that happened and everything that anyone said somehow seemed to relate to our wrongdoing! We lived in fear because our guilty conscience told us we had done wrong. Hopefully this fear led us to repentance and a change in our behavior, for that is what God intended.

Maybe you're living in fear right now because you have done wrong, and you fear exposure. Everything that happens around you, and everything that people say, and even this message form Genesis, triggers the fear that you'll be exposed. Hopefully this fear will lead you to repentance.

Genesis 43 was not the first time the brothers were afraid. Look back at Genesis 42:28, when they discovered the money in their sacks: *"He said to his brothers, 'My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!' Then their hearts failed them and they were afraid, saying to one another, 'What is this that God has done to us?'"*

Notice that God was finally brought into the picture? The fear of God should lead a person to repentance. God has designed us so that fear and a guilty conscience go together, and that fear should lead us to repentance. It did so in the brothers' case, and it should do so in our case, too.

This is true for unbelievers who need to recognize and repent of their sin, and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. It is also true of believers who need to repent of sin and be restored to fellowship. The fear of God should lead a person to repentance.

2. The grace of God should lead a person to repentance.

God's grace is His favor, goodness and kindness to us - even though we deserve absolutely nothing! God's grace is pictured in Joseph's kind treatment of his brothers. They had done nothing to deserve or merit any kindness from Joseph, but he treated them kindly.

Even when Joseph was treating his brothers roughly (chapter 42), there were glimpses and hints of Joseph's kindness. But in chapter 43 Joseph's grace towards his brothers was clearly shown. When the brothers tried to pay back the money, Joseph's steward told them that their debt had been paid. Joseph had taken care of that debt. This reminds us of God's grace toward us. Our debt to God has been paid. **God Himself** has paid it! What amazing grace!

Joseph's grace was extended to his brothers when he sat down and ate a meal with them. These were the brothers who had betrayed him – yet Joseph brought them into his home and ate a meal with them!

In verses 26 and 28, the brothers bowed down **twice** to Joseph - a fulfillment of his dreams! The brothers were completely under Joseph's control. He could have done anything he wanted to them. What would you have done at that point? I think that I might have smiled and said, "I've got you where I want you now!" But Joseph didn't rejoice or triumph over them. Instead he asked about their welfare and the welfare of their father Jacob. What grace! Then Joseph's heart was revealed. Once again he had to leave the room in order to weep, as he did in chapter 42.

Notice that Joseph said to Benjamin: *“God be gracious to you, my son”* (v29). And in Genesis 42:18 Joseph told his brothers, *“Do this and live, for I fear God.”* The mention of “God” should have been a clue to the brothers that the man they thought was an unknown Egyptian prime minister was speaking to them and caring for them in a most unusual way! And he wasn’t invoking a pagan Egyptian god. He was speaking of the one true God, the God of their fathers. All this grace and kindness was definitely bringing a change in the hearts of the brothers. They were led to repentance, and this paved the way for their reconciliation with Joseph.

The grace of God should lead people to repentance today. Some people don’t respond to the grace of God - but they should! Romans 2:4 says, *“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”* That’s the way God’s grace should work. The grace of God should lead a person to repentance.

Practical Application

Let’s explain the true God to people who believe in false gods.

In verse 23, Joseph’s Egyptian steward said to the brothers: *“Peace be with you; do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money.”* Notice what the Egyptian steward didn’t say? He didn’t say, “Peace be with you, do not be afraid. The Egyptian gods have taken care of your debt.” No! He said, *“Your God, and the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks.”*

Now where did this Egyptian man get the knowledge of Jacob’s God, the God of their father? One guess! He got it from Joseph! Joseph must have explained the true God to this man, and possibly he had become a believer. Notice that Joseph didn’t take the attitude of today’s anthropologists, and say to himself, “I’m not going to upset this Egyptian man’s religion. What right do I have to question his personal religious faith?” No! Joseph knew the one and only true God, and his servants would have seen the difference in the way he lived his life. Long before the Lord Jesus gave the Great Commission, Joseph obeyed it: *“Go into all the world, and preach the gospel.”*

During a trip in another country I had an opportunity to talk about the God of the Bible with a Muslim graduate student. He thought “Allah” was the “one and only god.” After I explained the true God, the God of the Bible to him, I’ll never forget what he said to me: “If Jesus is God, then Allah is not God.”

We don’t have to go to other countries to find people who believe in false gods. People all around us, right in our neighborhoods, believe in all kinds of false gods - and not just the false gods of false religions.

Many people worship the god of their own personal happiness. They may worship their own business success, or social status, or their homes and possessions, or their athletic and fitness goals. **Anything** that people put in place of God, or place above God in the way they think and live, is a false god. Let’s explain the true God of the Bible to people who believe in false gods.