



Genesis - Chapter Forty Three

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.c Genesis 37:1-50:26 - Jacob's Descendants (continues)

Summary of Chapter Forty Three

The ongoing famine eventually forces Jacob to send his sons back to Egypt with Benjamin. When the brothers return, they are unexpectedly invited to dine at Joseph's house. Taken by surprise, they suspect that this may be a ploy to enslave them because of the money in their sacks. The lavish meal prepares the way for Joseph's disclosure of himself to his brothers, which comes in the next chapter.

II.c.viii Genesis 43:1-34 - The Brothers Come Again, Bringing Benjamin

As the famine continues to make life difficult in Canaan, Jacob finally relinquishes Benjamin into the care of his brothers as they make their return to Egypt to purchase more supplies. They are taken by surprise when they are invited to dine with the governor of Egypt, their as yet unidentified brother Joseph.

¹ Now the famine was severe in the land. ² And when they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, 'Go again, buy us a little more food.' ³ But Judah said to him, 'The man solemnly warned us, saying, "You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you." ⁴ If you will 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 Israel said, 'Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?' ⁷ They replied, 'The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our

kindred, saying, “Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?” What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, “Bring your brother down”?’⁸ Then Judah said to his father Israel, ‘Send the boy with me, and let us be on our way, so that we may live and not die – you and we and also our little ones.’⁹ I myself will be surety for him; you can hold me accountable for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame for ever.¹⁰ If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.’

Genesis 43:1-10

When they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt. Perhaps Jacob originally hoped they had enough to survive the remainder of the famine and they would never need to go back with Benjamin, even though that might mean the loss of his son Simeon. The famine wore on, and eventually they ran out of food, leaving no other realistic option than to return.

Go again, buy us a little more food. Necessity drove Jacob to do something he would normally never do. It might be imagined Jacob prayed so hard for the famine to break, and asked God to send relief. It might be imagined Jacob became angry and bitter against God for not answering those prayers. God knew what he was doing and had something so much better for Jacob than he could ever have imagined: <<*Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine*>> (Psalm 33:18-19). As later comments will show, God would ultimately take them into Egypt away from the temptations of Canaan so they could grow into a strong nation without inappropriate outside influence.

Judah takes the lead in successfully persuading his father to permit the brothers to take Benjamin with them to Egypt. His approach differs markedly from that of Reuben (42:37). First, he repeats in quick succession what the man, i.e. Joseph, said, emphasising that he will not see them unless their brother is with them. Second, Judah offers himself as a surety for the safety of Benjamin. He will take full personal responsibility and bear the blame if anything should happen to him. The apostle Paul made a similar pledge to Philemon for the debt owed by Onesimus: <<*If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self*>> (Philemon 18-19).

¹¹ Then their father Israel said to them, ‘If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry them down as a present to the man – a little balm and a little honey, gum,

resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. ¹² Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the top of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. ¹³ Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; ¹⁴ may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, so that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.’ ¹⁵ So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, as well as Benjamin. Then they went on their way down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

Genesis 43:11-15

Take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry them down as a present to the man. Perhaps Jacob remembered how well it seemed to work when he showered Esau with gifts (33:10-11). However, the giving of gifts was part of the accepted culture.

Take double the money with you. They took double money with them to Egypt to buy grain and the Egyptian leader’s favour. Since ten brothers went to Egypt and they took double money, there were 20 units of money. This answered exactly to the 20 pieces of silver they sold Joseph for (37:28). The words for silver and money are the same.

Perhaps it was an oversight. Jacob wanted them to take the money that was returned in the top of your sacks so that they could pay for the grain they had received on their first visit without risk of being accused of its theft. His hope was that the Egyptian officials would see it as a genuine error and would not take any action against the brothers. Paying double was a principle later enshrined in the law: <<*When someone delivers to a neighbour money or goods for safe keeping, and they are stolen from the neighbour’s house, then the thief, if caught, shall pay double*>> (Exodus 22:7).

May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man. This is part blessing part prayer: <<*Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old*>> (Psalm 25:6), that Jacob would ask for God’s protection on them and success in the mission, both to return with the needed provisions and Simeon and Benjamin.

As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. Jacob shows an almost fatalistic approach rather than placing his full trust that God will fulfil the promises he had made. Queen Esther showed more trust as she resolved to go to the king in order to save the Jewish people: <<*Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I*

will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish>> (Esther 4:16).

¹⁶ When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, ‘Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.’ ¹⁷ The man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph’s house. ¹⁸ Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph’s house, and they said, ‘It is because of the money, replaced in our sacks the first time, that we have been brought in, so that he may have an opportunity to fall upon us, to make slaves of us and take our donkeys.’

Genesis 43:16-18

Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon. Joseph invites his brothers to dine with him at his house. This was unusual interest and kindness. The brothers must have wondered why the powerful Egyptian official took such an interest in them. Yet Joseph’s intention is like that of the father of the prodigal son: <<*And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate*>> (Luke 15:23).

Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph’s house. They clearly thought they were going to be accused of theft because they still had the money from the previous visit. Perhaps they feared that this unexpected kindness from the Egyptian governor was just the prelude to their arrest and execution.

¹⁹ So they went up to the steward of Joseph’s house and spoke with him at the entrance to the house. ²⁰ They said, ‘Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food; ²¹ and when we came to the lodging-place we opened our sacks, and there was each one’s money in the top of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it back with us. ²² Moreover, we have brought down with us additional money to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.’ ²³ He replied, ‘Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money.’ Then he brought Simeon out to them.

Genesis 43:19-23

So they went up to the steward of Joseph’s house and spoke with him at the entrance to the house. The brothers thought it was wise to explain things to the steward of Joseph’s house before they had to explain it to the Egyptian official

himself. Perhaps he would be more understanding and would present their case to Joseph as their advocate.

Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money. This was not a lie, because he really did have it, and he gave it back. It really was because of God's goodness and grace expressed through Joseph that they had the money back.

Then he brought Simeon out to them. Their brother was released from his imprisonment and restored to them. Whether they saw this as a sign of hope or of further trepidation is not revealed.

²⁴ When the steward had brought the men into Joseph's house, and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, ²⁵ they made the present ready for Joseph's coming at noon, for they had heard that they would dine there. ²⁶ When Joseph came home, they brought him the present that they had carried into the house, and bowed to the ground before him. ²⁷ He inquired about their welfare, and said, 'Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?' ²⁸ They said, 'Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.' And they bowed their heads and did obeisance. ²⁹ Then he looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, 'Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!'

Genesis 43:24-29

The steward gave them water, and they had washed their feet. To their surprise the brothers were being treated as honoured guests. The brothers had expected to be seized as slaves and have everything taken from them. Yet Joseph treated them with kindness. This love and goodness from Joseph would win them over and bring them to full repentance. The brothers received the blessings of love and kindness from Joseph without knowing who he was. In the same way, God showers love and blessing upon man even when man does not know from whom the blessings come.

When Joseph came home. Having accepted their gifts, Joseph then makes polite enquiry about their father, themselves and then their youngest brother. They must have thought he was simply following the conventions of the day but he was genuinely concerned for the well-being of Jacob and delighted to see Benjamin again, for he was **his mother's son.**

They bowed their heads and did obeisance. They were showing the deference his high position demanded and in doing so they once again fulfilled the dreams that Joseph had told them of so many years earlier (37:5-11).

God be gracious to you, my son! Whether they realised that Joseph was bestowing God's blessing on them and not a blessing from an Egyptian god is not made clear. He did not say to them your god but God! Joseph only knew one God but they were still unaware of whom it was they were speaking to. Many others have called for such a blessing as this, including: <<*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you*>> (Numbers 6:25), <<*May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us*>> (Psalm 67:1), and: <<*O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for you. Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble*>> (Isaiah 33:2).

³⁰ With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there. ³¹ Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, 'Serve the meal.'

Genesis 43:30-31

He was overcome with affection for his brother. Drawn to Benjamin after two decades of being apart, Joseph swiftly retires to his chamber **to weep** with the joy of being reunited with his family and especially at seeing Benjamin, who was only a child when Joseph had last seen him and was now a full grown man. Jesus too had such compassion as shown by Joseph here: <<*When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept*>> (John 11:33-35 NIV).

Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, 'Serve the meal.' Joseph was finding it hard to maintain his composure and keep up the pretence of not knowing his family: <<*For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself*>> (Isaiah 42:14), but, after refreshing himself, he returns and the meal begins. He will not be able to maintain his composure for much longer though: <<*Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, 'Send everyone away from me.'* So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers>> (Genesis 45:1).

³² They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.

Genesis 43:32

By himself. Joseph did not eat with his brothers because at the time, Egypt was one of the most racially separated societies on earth. The believed that Egyptians came from the gods, and all other peoples came from lesser origins. There was little social mixing with foreigners in the Egypt of Joseph's day. Joseph needs to keep this separation in order to maintain his guise, since as the narrator observes, it was an abomination to the Egyptians to eat with these foreigners, the Hebrews; refer to the comments made on 10:21-32 and 14:13-16.

The Jewish nation would later maintain similar segregation from Gentiles although this was something Peter realised, following a revelation in a vision, was no longer required following the death and resurrection of Jesus: <<*Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him'*>> (Acts 10:34-35). However, even he was misguided into being drawn back to the old ways for a time: <<*But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction'*>> (Galatians 2:11-12).

The Egyptians who ate with him by themselves. The Egyptians would not eat with Joseph, much less these strangers from Canaan. Even with all his status and power, Joseph could still not eat with real Egyptians or they with him. His brothers would not have suspected this was a separation of race but of rank. Leupold wrote: 'It is known from Herodotus that Egyptians so abhorred things foreign, that priests, at least, ate and drank nothing that was imported, nor would they use utensils for eating that had been used by Greeks.'

Herein is the wisdom of God. Before Genesis is finished, God brought the entire family of Jacob into Egypt, where they were isolated from the surrounding people for some 400 years. In that time, they multiplied greatly, increasing to about one million. If God had allowed them to remain in Canaan they would have simply assimilated into the corrupt and godless peoples of Canaan. The rape of Dinah and its aftermath (Chapter 34) and the sin of Judah's sons and Judah with Tamar (Chapter 38) revealed this danger. God not only had to take the family of Israel out of the corrupt environment of Canaan, but he had to put them among a racially separated people who would not often intermarry or mingle with them. God simply sent Joseph on ahead to make the arrangements.

³³ When they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, the men looked at one another in amazement. ³⁴ Portions were taken to them from

Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

Genesis 43:33-34

The firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. No wonder the brothers were filled with amazement. The arrangement of the brothers was so amazing because it could not happen by chance. Statistically, the odds of placing eleven brothers in their precise order of birth are something like 1 in 40 million.

Joseph's feelings for Benjamin, his only full sibling, result in his being given portions that are five times those given to his brothers.

Joseph perhaps wanted to see how the brothers reacted when the younger brother, in this case Benjamin, was favoured, because they had resented it so much when Joseph was favoured by his father. Joseph wanted to see if there was any change in the heart of his brothers, or if they were the same men who threw him into a pit and were deaf to his cries for help. This might have been his whole motivation in asking for Benjamin to be brought to Egypt. He wondered if they would take care of Benjamin on such a journey, something they had failed to do with Joseph.