

## The Book of Genesis

### Chapter 42

**42:1-2** *When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."* (NIV)

#### Famine

Droughts and resulting famines seemed to have been fairly common in Canaan. Abraham left Canaan during a famine for Egypt around 1901 B.C. (12:10) and Isaac left Canaan during another famine to live in Philistia sometime between 1836 B.C. and 1815 B.C. (26:1). It was now 1687-1686 B.C.

**42:3-8** *Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked. "From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food." Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.* (NIV)

#### Appearance

Joseph was still a teenager when he was sold by his brothers while his brothers were much older. After 21 years their appearances had not changed as much as his due to the differences in ages.

**42:9-13** *Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected." "No, my lord," they answered. "Your servants have come to buy food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies." "No!" he said to them. "You have come to see where our land is unprotected." But they replied, "Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more."* (NIV)

The first impression is that Benjamin is still a young boy. In reality, by this time he is in his early thirties with ten sons of his own.

**42:14-18** *Joseph said to them, "It is just as I told you: You are spies! And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!" And he put them all in custody for three days. On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God:"* (NIV)

## Repentance

Joseph, symbolically representing the Savior, initiates repentance in his brothers by putting unexpected obstacles before them in order to re-orient their thinking. Then, after giving them time to focus on their present plight offers them life, and tells them how it is possible: fear God.

***42:19-21 If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die." This they proceeded to do. They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."*** (NIV)

They comprehended that sin demanded a penalty, the first step toward repentance.

***42:22 Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood."*** (NIV)

The second step toward repentance is understanding that we are individually responsible for shedding the blood of our Savior and brother. The brothers are now coming to this point. They acknowledge that they mistreated Joseph and were, in their minds, guilty of his death.

***42:23 They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.*** (NIV)

This was necessary to prevent Joseph's brothers from becoming suspicious.

***42:24 He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back*** [NKJ: "returned", apparently Joseph left the room until he could regain his composure] ***and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.*** (NIV)

Jewish tradition states that Simeon was the one who bound and put Joseph in the pit. Joseph had Simeon bound to focus their memories back to their sin to help deepen their repentance.

***42:25-26 Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left. At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. "My silver has been returned," he said to his brothers. "Here it is in my sack." Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, "What is this that God has done to us?"*** (NIV)

## God's Involvement

It seemed that everything they did was cursed. They now began to focus on the explanation as being from God. They sold Joseph as a slave, and they knew the normal penalty for stealing in Egypt was enslavement. They saw the money in their sacks as a setup that would cost them their liberty. It was just another indicator that God was bringing on them what they had done to their brother. It led to the third step of repentance: recognizing that God is becoming involved in your life.

**42:29-34** *When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, "The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land. But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies. We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan.' "Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, 'This is how I will know whether you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go. But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade [TAN: "shall be free to move about"] in the land.'"* (NIV)

#### Addition of Statements

In the recorded statement of Joseph, he mentioned nothing about trading in the land—only that they would be allowed to live if they returned with Benjamin. The brothers may have included this addition to influence Jacob, who was a trader, to cooperate with Joseph's demands.

**42:35** *As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man's sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened.* (NIV)

#### Distrust

The first part of this verse took place earlier, during their journey back to Jacob (43:21). The last part depicts the brothers producing the silver as proof to Jacob of what they were reporting. They knew it would be difficult to convince their father of what had happened. Jacob had not had trust in his sons since Joseph's disappearance.

**42:36** *Their father Jacob said to them, "It is always me that you bereave: Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you would take away Benjamin. These things always happen to me!"* (TAN)

**42:37-38** *Then Reuben said to his father, "You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back." But Jacob said, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow."* (NIV)