

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 43

43:1-3 *Now the famine was still severe in the land. So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food." But Judah said to him, "The man warned us solemnly, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'* (NIV)

Reuben and Judah

Reuben had pleaded with Jacob to send Benjamin back with them at the end of the last chapter. Now Judah tries to succeed where Reuben failed. In an interesting parallel, only Reuben and Judah had attempted to save Joseph's life 20 years earlier.

43:4-9 *If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'* Israel asked, "Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?" They replied, "The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family. 'Is your father still living?' he asked us. 'Do you have another brother?' We simply answered his questions. How were we to know he would say, 'Bring your brother down here?'" Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life." (NIV)

43:10 *If we had not wasted all this time, we could have made the journey twice by now.* (REB)

43:11 *Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift—a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds."* (NIV)

Some Produce

The land still produced some foodstuffs, but there was not sufficient rain for the grain crops to mature to harvest. Balm was a resin from trees used for its aromatic and healing properties. They could water nut trees from wells, and the bees could still produce honey from the moisture and flowering plants around the wells.

43:12-14 *Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake. Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. And may God Almighty [TAN: "El Shaddai"] grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved."* (NIV)

Hope

The ultimate end of repentance is forgiveness and mercy. Jacob now points to the only hope they have. They could not go back into the past and undo what they had done to Joseph, no more than we can go back into the past and undo the sins we have committed that made Christ's sacrifice necessary.

43:15-23 *So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; they are to eat with me at noon." The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph's house. Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house [since Joseph's command was in Egyptian, they did not know what was happening]. They thought, "We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys." So they went up to Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. "Please, sir," they said, "we came down here the first time to buy food. But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our sacks." "It's all right," he said. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." Then he brought Simeon out to them. (NIV)*

"Your God"

It is interesting that Joseph's steward refers to their one God rather than to the traditional the gods of Egypt. It is reasonable to assume that Joseph's steward had been told by Joseph of the God of Joseph's people.

43:24-26 *The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. They prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to eat there. When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him [the second time (42:6 = first time) – this twice fulfills Joseph's prophetic dream (37:7)] to the ground. (NIV)*

The brothers had bowed before Joseph once already (42:6). This marks the second time and partly fulfills the dreams Joseph had of their sheaves bowing before his sheaf and the eleven stars bowing before him (37:7-10).

43:27 *He greeted them, and he said, "How is your aged father of whom you spoke? Is he still in good health?" (TAN)*

Translator

Joseph is still using a translator at this point.

43:28-32 *They replied, "Your servant our father is still alive and well." And they bowed low [third time] to pay him honor. As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there. After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, "Serve the food." They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians.* (NIV)

Prohibited Dining

One Jewish tradition states that the Egyptians would not sit with the Hebrews "because the latter ate the flesh of the animals to which the former paid divine worship" (Legends of the Bible, Louis Ginzberg, 1956, p.243).

43:33 *The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment.* (NIV)

Seating Chart

Josephus states about this meal, "and they were set down in the same order as they used to sit at their father's table" (Antiquities, II.VI.6). Another tradition relates that when it was time for them to be seated "Joseph raised his cup, and, pretending to inhale his knowledge from it, he...assigned places to all his brethren corresponding to their dignity and their age" (Legends of the Bible, p.243).

43:34 *When portions were served to them from Joseph's table, Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's. So they feasted and drank freely with him.* (NIV)

Testing the Brothers

This may have been a test by Joseph to see if the other brothers would become jealous of Benjamin, to determine whether it really was Benjamin, who had aged 22 years since he had last seen him [Benjamin had been approximately 10 years old]. Jewish tradition explains the amount Benjamin received as follows: "During the meal, Joseph took his portion, and gave it to Benjamin, and his wife Asenath followed his example, and also Ephraim and Manasseh, so that Benjamin had four portions in addition to that which he had received like the other sons of Jacob" (Legends of the Bible, p.244).