

DHW

## LESSON 34

### THE BOOK OF GENESIS

#### CHAPTERS 43 & 44

##### *INTRODUCTION*

These two chapters have to be taken together for the obvious reason that the events are closely connected. The families of the patriarch, Jacob, whose name is also Israel, had consumed much of the corn which they had bought from Egypt. The supply was low and the famine severe. It would be a matter of life-and-death situation. They had to go again to Egypt to get more food. But Jacob's refusal to let Benjamin go with his brothers made it impossible. How the brothers overcame this seemingly insurmountable hurdle is instructive. In Egypt, Joseph, having seen his brother Benjamin, continued with his examination of his brothers to ascertain their change of character. Envy is a corrupting sin and in the

case of Joseph's brothers this sin had to be removed. Because of this envy they had committed a grievous sin selling off Joseph whom they originally intended to kill, and saddened the heart of their father Jacob whom till now could not overcome the loss of his favourite son.

While God was with Joseph, He also was with his brothers in a different way. As the chosen children of God, they had to be chastened. God was with them by not letting their conscience rest. Joseph was determined to find out whether his brothers had changed or still envious of his youngest brother Benjamin, who was now their father's favourite son. In chapter 44, we will witness the transformation of Joseph's brothers. Judah stood head and shoulders above his brothers in his display of self-sacrificing love and concern for his father, brothers and their families. He was the spokesman and intercessor for the brothers. His passionate plea for mercy before Joseph involves such matters as conscience, repentance, intercession, sacrifice and substitution. He was realistic and sensible.

The following is a suggested outline of the two chapters:

- 1) Jacob finally let Benjamin go to Egypt (43:1-14);
- 2) Joseph invited his brothers for lunch at his home (43:15-25);
- 3) Joseph sat with them for lunch enquiring about his father's well-being (43:26-34);
- 4) Joseph tested his brothers' sincerity and honesty (44:1-13);
- 5) Judah pleaded for Benjamin and Jacob's well-being (44:14-34).

### *STUDY THE WORD*

#### **Jacob Allows Benjamin to Go to Egypt**

The famine remained severe. Food had run out again in Jacob's household. They must go back to Joseph to get more food or die of starvation. But there was a big problem. They would have to present Benjamin before Joseph. That was Joseph's unbending requirement. At first, Jacob was uncooperative and refused to let Benjamin to go to Egypt. But Judah reasoned with him. He pointed out that they had no choice but to take Benjamin along with them as

required by *the man* (43:3). If not, they would die of starvation. He assured his father that he would take special care of Benjamin, when he said (43:8-9): *Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever.* He was prepared to take the blame if Benjamin failed to return. He reasoned that if they had not delayed they would have already gone and returned with more food. This indicates that there had been previous discussions about going back to Egypt but it had not materialised because of Jacob's stubborn insistence that his favourite son, Benjamin, remained with him. After listening to Judah, Jacob finally relented. He entrusted the whole matter now by trusting God Almighty (Hebrew, *El Shaddai*).<sup>1</sup> He prayed invoking the name of God Almighty to show mercy to them

---

<sup>1</sup> **Genesis 17:1-2** - *And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.*

when they stood before *the man* (43:14, Joseph). He put his trust and faith in God Almighty, who had promised him as He had promised Abraham and Isaac, a great nation from out of his seed.

### **Joseph Invites His Brothers for Lunch at His Home**

The ten brothers arrived in Egypt and they were brought before Joseph. Evidently, they had been specially treated, for among all the hundreds of people who went to Egypt to buy corn, these brothers, who were Hebrews, had an appearance with the Prime Minister! They brought with them gifts, double the amount of money to buy corn, and not the least Benjamin, their youngest brother, whom Joseph had demanded to see. After seeing Benjamin with them, Joseph instructed his chief steward to lead them to his house and prepare lunch that day for he wanted to have the lunch-meal with them (43:16). His brothers were afraid and lost no time in trying to make restitution for the money that they had found in their sacks on their first trip. They explained how and when they discovered the money. They were ready to give back the money as well as paying for a fresh supply of

corn. They confessed that they did not know who put the money in their sacks. We see that they were absolutely honest. The explanation was undoubtedly brief and clear. Joseph's steward responded thus (43:23): *Peace (shalom) be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money.* He then brought Simeon to them, and now the eleven brothers were all together. The steward might have initially allayed their fears and put them at ease. However, the mention of God could have stirred up their conscience about their past evil deeds. The steward then gave them water to wash their feet as it was customary before eating. Their asses were also fed. Everything was now ready waiting for Joseph to be present.

### **Joseph Sits with His Brothers for Lunch Enquiring About His Father**

When Joseph came his brothers presented to him the gifts they had brought with them and bowed themselves before him. Joseph spoke nothing of the gifts they brought to him. He was more interested in other things. He asked about the welfare of his father, Jacob

(43:27): *And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?* The brothers humbly and courteously answered that *he is in good health, and he is yet alive* by bowing their heads to the ground. This is in fulfilment of his dream twenty years ago when he had told them that they would bow down before him. Joseph then turned his attention to Benjamin. He lifted up his eyes suggesting that he and his brothers were sitting a distant apart – he being the Prime Minister was seated separately from them, who were grouped together. Maintaining his act as an Egyptian, he had kind words for Benjamin. He blessed him (43:29): *God be gracious unto thee, my son.* At this time, Joseph was so overwhelmed with emotion that he hastily withdrew to his room to cry.

Lunch was served. Joseph was seated separately by himself. The brothers were together seated according to their seniority in age. Reuben was seated first and down to Benjamin, last in order of their ages. The brothers looked at one another in amazement and trepidation. When the food was dished out, Joseph deliberately showed special

favour towards Benjamin. He gave him five times more than whatever was given to each of his brothers. It was quite obvious that Joseph wanted to find out whether his brothers harboured feelings of envy against Benjamin, who was now their father's favourite (just as they were envious of him before). The brothers' reaction would have betrayed their true feelings. But the brothers *drank, and were merry with him.* In other words, Joseph must have concluded that his brothers had changed and had grown out of such ill feelings towards Benjamin. However, the real test is yet to come.

### **Joseph Tests His Brothers' Sincerity & Honesty**

Joseph wanted to do one final test on his brothers. The time had come for them to return home with the provisions for their families. Joseph instructed his steward to fill their sacks to the fullest, and to return their money into their sacks. He also instructed them to put his silver cup into Benjamin's sack. Joseph's steward followed his instruction to the letter. Early the next morning, the eleven brothers departed for Canaan.

But as soon as they stepped out of the city limits, Joseph ordered his steward to catch up with them and to accuse them thus (44:4-5): *Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good? Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth? ye have done evil in so doing.* They were accused of being ungrateful people, who returned evil for kindness shown to them. They were accused of being thieves. These were very serious charges. Joseph had treated them well but they were ungrateful and had stolen his personal cup.

Their responses were immediate and firm (44:7): *Wherefore saith my lord these words? God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing.* They defended and proved themselves that they were honest people by returning the money for their earlier purchases, which were found in their sacks. It was absurd that they should steal Joseph's personal silver cup. They presented a strong and convincing argument in their defence. They were so confident that none of them would be guilty of the theft that they said (44:9): *With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him*

*die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen.* Of course, the brothers did not know that the "culprit" would be Benjamin, their youngest brother. Joseph's intention was apparent. He wanted to find out whether his brothers would abandon Benjamin to die or really would care for him. The jealousy, which his brothers previously had towards him, was no more. They had a change of heart.

The search began from the eldest to the youngest, and of course, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Without uttering any word of accusation against Benjamin, they immediately tore their garments, reloaded their asses, and returned to Joseph's house. They acted together. It showed brotherly concern and solidarity. They would not abandon Benjamin, their father's favourite son to be killed. Once again when they were brought before Joseph, they bowed before him. Joseph simply asked them why they had committed this theft. Still playing up to his pretence as an Egyptian, he questioned them that did they not know that *I can certainly divine!* In other words, he had divinely found out that Benjamin was the thief (44:15).

Joseph being a person who trusted only the LORD God and no one else, would not practise divination. He said those words in order to conceal his true identity.

Judah spoke on behalf of his brothers. He confessed that *God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants* implying that it was not Joseph (44:16). They attributed the discovery of their wrong doing to God. Observe that they did not accept the charge against Benjamin alone, but that they collectively shared the same guilt. The brothers were working together as a family and not as individuals. And to be true to their word, they were prepared to be slaves of Joseph. However, Joseph replied that only “the guilty one” would be his slave and that the rest of them could return to their father in peace.

### **Judah Pleads for Benjamin & Jacob’s Well-Being**

Joseph’s proposition to detain Benjamin and let the other brothers return to Jacob would not be acceptable to them. We understand Joseph’s intention. He wanted to know whether his brothers would abandon Benjamin. And if they had accepted his proposition and returned home without Benjamin, it

would devastate Jacob. Joseph’s proposition demanded an instant response, which would prove whether the brothers really cared for Benjamin and his father.

Judah, who guaranteed his father for the safety and return of Benjamin, was the man of the hour. He rose up to the occasion. He pleaded passionately with Joseph. He related how he managed to persuade his father to let Benjamin come with them this time because Joseph had demanded that. Now if Benjamin, whom his father loved very much, was not back with them this time, his father would be heart-broken and might even die. And they would be guilty of causing their father to die with much sorrow to the grave. Judah then revealed that he stood surety for Benjamin to his father. He pleaded with Joseph to take him instead of Benjamin to be his slave, and let Benjamin return with his brothers. He was prepared to sacrifice his life for his half-brother Benjamin.

This is the longest speech in the book of Genesis. Judah’s speech was simple and orderly presented. It was straightforward and sincere. Judah was a transformed man whose speech indeed reflected the feelings

of his brothers. They were not the same as before when they did not care for their younger brother Joseph and their father, who favoured him more than the other sons. They were now doubtlessly changed men.

### *PRACTICAL VALUE*

The events that happened in these two chapters are very moving. We saw how Joseph tested his brothers to see if they had changed for the better. Of course, Joseph meant well. If they had not passed his tests, he would have used other measures to change them. But Joseph found that his brothers had matured and become morally strong. They had reasoned rationally and firmly with their father to let Benjamin accompany them to Egypt. Judah had made a pledge to his father to take special care of Benjamin and ensure his safe return. They behaved admirably before Joseph by being humble and submissive to all his orders. They showed loyalty and solidarity when Benjamin was alleged to have stolen the cup. Judah spoke up and pleaded passionately and powerfully for the sake of Benjamin and their father. A valuable lesson which all of God's people can learn is to demonstrate such wonderful character traits in

our relationship with one another. This is what God wants His people to show love, solidarity, and care for one another. Does not God say in His Word that if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation, and be a partaker of the divine nature?<sup>2</sup>

Another precious lesson is to have unwavering faith and trust in God whenever we are in dire circumstances. There is need to examine ourselves when bad things happen to us whether it is God who is chastening us. Then we need to confess, change and to repent. God used Joseph to bring about change to Jacob's children. They were convicted of their sins. They acknowledged them. They moved on and grew spiritually. They became morally strong. They acknowledged the greatness and goodness of God. These things are recorded for our learning. AMEN

---

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

2 Peter 1:4 *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*