

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY
WEEK 14: Genesis 43-44 – The Return of the Brothers

THE JOSEPH STORY QUIZ

- Who was Joseph's mother? (see Genesis 30:22-24)
- Where did Joseph fit in the birth order of his brothers and sister? (see Genesis 29, 30)
- Who was Joseph's full blood younger brother? (see Genesis 35:16-18)
- Which brother wanted to save Joseph and set him free from his brothers? (see Genesis 37:21; 42:22)
- Which brother convinced the others to sell Joseph into slavery instead of killing him? (see Genesis 37:26)
- To whom did the brothers sell Joseph; Ishmaelites or Midianites? (see J source, Genesis 37:25, 27, 28b or E source, Genesis 37:28a, 36)
- Although abandoned by his brothers, how do we know Joseph wasn't abandoned by God? (see Genesis 39:2-6, 21-23; 41:38-45)
- What special talent gave Joseph a "get out of jail free" card with Pharaoh? (see Genesis 41:9-16)
- Which brother gets left behind as a ransom in Egypt during their first visit? (see Genesis 42:24)
- Which brother pledges to Jacob the safety of Benjamin upon the lives of his two sons? (see Genesis 42:37)
- How does Jacob respond? (see Genesis 42:38)

THE JOSEPH STORY UP TILL NOW

So, Joseph is now second in command in Egypt and he has welcomed (kinda sorta) his brothers who had come to buy grain during the famine. These were the same brothers who sold him into slavery to some Ishmaelites (or Midianites) depending on which source is telling the story. But he keeps his identity a secret because he is going to test his brothers. He accuses the brothers of being spies and has placed them in jail for three days. Then he makes a deal with them: If nine of them return home with the food they bought (and their silver; unbeknownst to them) and then come back to Egypt with their little brother, Benjamin, then he will set Simeon free and will give them permission to live and trade among the Egyptians. But if they don't return with Ben, then Simeon has had it. So, the brothers returned home and reported their experience in Egypt to their father who now figures that he has lost two sons: Joseph and Simeon. Losing Benjamin would be more than he could bear, so he refuses to allow them to return with Benjamin, even though Reuben has vowed to keep him safe.

SOURCE THEORY – DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

Almost all of chapters 43 and 44 come from the Yahwist (J source) and Judah acts as the leader of the brothers; whereas Reuben, as first born, had been acting as the leader in the Elohist (E source) version of the story. The E source only pops up in two verses; 43:14, 23b (italicized below).

Genesis 43–44 (NRSV)

43 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 forever. ¹⁰ If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice." 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. 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." 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.* 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!" 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." 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. 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.

44 Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the top of his sack. ² Put my cup, the silver cup, in the top of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. ³ As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. ⁴ When they had gone only a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, "Go, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup? ⁵ Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.' "

⁶ When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them. ⁷ They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! ⁸ Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? ⁹ Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." ¹⁰ He said, "Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free." ¹¹ Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. ¹² He searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ At this they tore their clothes. Then each one loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

¹⁴ Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house while he was still there; and they fell to the ground before him. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that one such as I can practice divination?" ¹⁶ And Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; here we are then, my lord's slaves, both we and also the one in whose possession

the cup has been found.”¹⁷ But he said, “Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father.”

¹⁸ Then Judah stepped up to him and said, “O my lord, let your servant please speak a word in my lord’s ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself.”¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father or a brother?’²⁰ And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead; he alone is left of his mother’s children, and his father loves him.’²¹ Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, so that I may set my eyes on him.’²² We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’²³ Then you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.’²⁴ When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord.²⁵ And when our father said, ‘Go again, buy us a little food,’²⁶ we said, ‘We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother goes with us, will we go down; for we cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’²⁷ Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons;²⁸ one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since.’²⁹ If you take this one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.’³⁰ Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life,³¹ when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol.³² For your servant became surety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I will bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.’³³ Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers.³⁴ For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father.”

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS 43-44

Genesis 43:1-14	The Promise – After Judah guarantees Benjamin’s safety, a reluctant Jacob finally lets him go.
Genesis 43:15-17	The Preparation – Joseph sends brothers to his home where food is being prepared for them.
Genesis 43:18-25	The Panic – The manager reassures the frightened brothers and Simeon is released.
Genesis 43:26-30	The Presentation – Joseph enters and is introduced to Benjamin.
Genesis 43:31-34	The Placement – Joseph seats his brothers according to birth order; brothers are amazed
Genesis 44:1-17	The Plot – Joseph orders that his silver cup be placed in Benjamin’s sack.
Genesis 44:18-34	The Plea – Judah begs Joseph to release Benjamin, offering to be imprisoned in his place.

GENESIS 43:1-17

We immediately hear an echo of the Abraham story where a famine caused he and his wife to journey down into Egypt and settle there as a resident alien; a foreshadowing of this story and the Exodus story to come.

Israel is disappointed that the brothers even mentioned that they had another brother, but the brothers insist that Joseph was questioning them carefully and they couldn’t lie about it or they would be found out. Judah recounts Joseph’s words and keen interest in the status of their father and their other brother. And here we see Judah, and not Reuben, pledging himself for the safety of Benjamin; which is one sign that the source behind this part of the story is the Yahwistic source and not the Elohist source from the chapter before. If you pay close attention to verse 11, you’ll hear an echo from the story where the brothers sell Joseph into slavery. They carry back to Egypt similar products that the Ishmaelite caravan were carrying: gum, balm and resin (see Genesis 37:25). We also notice that they are returning with their sacks of silver that was returned to them and so there is a little added drama and suspense. The last verse in this section where the Elohist source (the E source) pops up in the words of farewell of Israel.

GENESIS 43:15-17

When the brothers arrive and Joseph sees that Benjamin is with them, Joseph prepares a feast for them.

GENESIS 43:18-25

But the brothers are afraid, and they immediately go up to the steward of Joseph’s house to let the steward know that they have brought with them a double portion of silver; the coins they will use this time to buy more food as well as the coins they found that had been placed in their sacks. Of course, the brothers are afraid that Joseph will accuse them of stealing (which is exactly what Joseph will do, but not with this money, but with his silver cup that will be placed later in

Benjamin's bag; see vss. 44:1-17). The response of the steward is important. The steward insists that their God was behind all of this. This was an act of divine providence. And here we get another little interruption from the E source. We learn that Simeon was released.

GENESIS 43:26-30

In this section the brothers bow to Joseph twice (echoes of the dreams from Genesis 37:5-11). Joseph asks about their welfare and their father's welfare (Heb. *shalom*). Then the moment we've all been waiting for. Joseph sees his brother Benjamin and is overcome with emotion. And once again he has to excuse him to go into the other room to weep.

GENESIS 43:31-34

At the meal Joseph eats by himself, separate from both his brothers and the Egyptians. While he does rule over the Egyptians, he remains a Hebrew, but he must remain in disguise from his brothers. And the brothers are amazed when they are sat down in their correct birth order, from oldest to youngest. Also, to their amazement, Benjamin receives biggest portion, but amazingly, the brothers show no signs of jealousy. Instead they celebrate with him.

GENESIS 44:1-17

The brothers are now going to be sent on their way, but Joseph has one more test for his brothers. Once again, along with all the provisions they could carry, Joseph instructs his men to put their money back on top of their sacks. Because of Joseph, their money isn't any good in Egypt. But, this time, Joseph also instructs his men to put his silver cup in Benjamin's bag; a test to see if the brothers will abandon their favored little brother. After they leave a short distance, Joseph springs the trap and sends his men after them. They catch them and accuse the brothers of stealing Joseph's cup. And it very quickly turns into a very familiar scene; the scene where Rachel had stolen Laban's family gods in Genesis 31. Unaware that Benjamin has the cup, the brothers agree to the consequences stated by the steward: death to the one who stole the cup and slavery for the rest of them. Of course, the search begins with the eldest brother (which reminds me of the time when Samuel was searching for a new king to replace Saul and he selects David after having gone through all seven of his older brothers (see 1 Samuel 16).

When the cup is found with Benjamin, the brothers tear their clothes (which is exactly how their father reacted when he believed that Joseph had been eaten by a wild animal; see Genesis 37:34). The beautiful irony is that they experience the same grief that they had caused their father.

Joseph responds by saying that he will keep Benjamin but will let the others go... in peace (Heb. *shalom*; of which they have none).

GENESIS 44:18-34

Judah makes an impassioned plea to save his father from such deep sorrow, recalling his father's sorrow at the loss of Joseph. And so, Judah steps up, and true to his word, he offers his life for the life of his brother. Cue commercial... we have a cliffhanger.

NEXT WEEK: Read Genesis 45-50