

Comments on Genesis 43

Time passes and Jacob's family runs out of food, forcing them to return to Egypt and comply with Joseph's demands. Judah moves to the position of leader among the brothers by standing up to their father Jacob. The Lord starts softening Joseph's heart, but Joseph tests his brother's loyalty to Benjamin.

¹ And the famine was sore in the land. ² And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food.

³ And Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. ⁴ If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food: ⁵ But if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down: for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you.

⁶ And Israel said, wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother? ⁷ And they said, The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down?

⁸ And Judah said unto Israel his father, 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. ⁹ 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: ¹⁰ For except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time.

v1-10 The famine continues (v. 1) and all of the grain they had bought from Egypt in the previous chapter is consumed (v. 2), so Jacob tells his sons to send a smaller group to go back and buy a smaller amount of food (v. 3), in the hopes of avoiding being recognized.

Judah responds to his father's suggestion telling him it is too great of a risk, as the unrecognized Joseph effectively threatened them with an oath unless Benjamin is there (v. 3). Judah then says that unless Benjamin goes with them, they will not go (v. 4), because Joseph was adamant (v. 5).

Jacob complains about the situation, faulting them for revealing they had a younger brother (v. 6). The brothers protest in their defense that they were questioned vigorously and could not have predicted the outcome (v. 7).

Judah again speaks, saying if Jacob does allow Benjamin to travel with them then they will all go, otherwise everyone will die of starvation (v. 8). Judah swears an oath with his father

(v. 9). He then says they should get going, because they could have been there and back twice already had they not procrastinated (v. 10).

v1 "corn". i.e., grain.

v2 "buy us a little food", the Hebrew word me`at means "a little" or "some" in the sense of "not a lot". What Jacob is suggesting is to send only one or two of the sons instead of the remaining nine in the hopes of avoiding having to send Benjamin with all nine of them to fulfil Joseph's requirement from the previous chapter. Jacob is hoping the reduced numbers might result in them not being recognized or noticed among the throngs of others purchasing grain. Sending fewer sons means less of a caravan, and therefore purchasing less grain, but avoiding the risk of sending Benjamin.

v3 "Judah spake", The eldest son Reuben's offer was rejected at the end of the previous chapter (cf. 42:37-38), likely a result of the events of 35:22, so Judah takes the leadership position among the brothers.

From this point on in the narrative, Judah is the leader among the brothers and is the pivotal character among them in the reconciliation with Joseph. While Judah was present during the events of the preceding chapter, he is in the background. Here Judah moves to the foreground and this is where the narrative of Judah's life picks up from the events of ch. 38. The reader should recall the loss, suffering and repentance Judah has experienced through that chapter, and see how it has affected him personally as the narrative continues.

v5 "you shall not see my face", Judah recaps the force of Joseph's oath. The brothers will not have any opportunity to get anywhere near Joseph without bringing Benjamin up to them as proof they are not lying.

v6-7 This is yet another unfortunate case of Jacob playing favorites between the brothers. Jacob already knows all of the details, as they were related in the previous chapter, and yet he still sees fit to complain about and fault the others again, forcing them to defend themselves against their father.

v8 Judah is pointing out to Jacob that all will die if they starve to death, including the beloved Benjamin. He is arguing against Jacob's favoritism by pointing out that all of the sons

have their own beloved children whom they love as much as Jacob loves Benjamin. This is a telling argument Judah is using against Jacob, where Judah's bias is publicly exposed among all of the brothers and shown to be jeopardizing the welfare of all of them. But, note Judah isn't accusatory or judgmental in his argument, he is subtle. Judah is pointing out the only way out of the current situation is to send Benjamin with them, which has the possibility of success, or they will all definitely die, including Benjamin.

¹¹ And their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds: ¹² And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight: ¹³ Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: ¹⁴ And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.

¹⁵ And the men took that present, and they took double money in their hand and Benjamin; and rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

v11-15 Jacob gives in to Judah's reasoning and sends them back to Egypt, with all of the money for the first purchase of grain, in case it was an oversight, with more money for a second purchase of grain, and gifts of local produce (v. 11-12). He also tells them to take Benjamin as well (v. 13), hoping that God will make Joseph merciful and return both Benjamin and Simeon. Jacob is resigned to the risk he faces (v. 14). The nine brothers depart with Benjamin, and travel to Egypt (v. 15).

v11 The locals have not been reduced to utter privation, as evidenced by the availability of some local staples. However, there is clearly no grass in the field for the livestock and no wheat or other field grains, so they need the grain to make bread for themselves, but also to feed their livestock to keep them alive through the drought, otherwise they will be impoverished.

v12 "double money in your hand, and the money", i.e., take triple the charge for the grain to cover the first and second purchases and any possibility of inflation in price or as a ransom for Simeon or Benjamin. Jacob sends extra money to cover any possible eventuality so as to do everything in his power to ensure a favorable outcome.

v14 "God Almighty give you mercy before the man", Jacob hopes Judah and his brothers will obtain mercy and return with Benjamin and Simeon, which mercy we see in v. 30.

"If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved", Jacob's point of view is quite egocentric, cp. 42:36. He sees things from his own point of view, rather than considering things from their point of view. Jacob hasn't got past himself to consider those around him. This statement on his part is effectively a confession that he is a bad father. His bad parenting, to a considerable degree, caused the animosity between his sons, whom he treated very differently. He still doesn't see that, and is still more worried about himself than his sons.

¹⁶ And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the ruler of his house, Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready; for these men shall dine with me at noon. ¹⁷ And the man did as Joseph bade; and the man brought the men into Joseph's house.

¹⁸ And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses. ¹⁹ And they came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they communed with him at the door of the house, ²⁰ And said, O sir, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food: ²¹ And it came to pass, when we came to the inn, that we opened our sacks, and, behold, every man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight: and we have brought it again in our hand. ²² And other money have we brought down in our hands to buy food: we cannot tell who put our money in our sacks.

²³ And he said, Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them. ²⁴ And the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender. ²⁵ And they made ready the present against Joseph came at noon: for they heard that they should eat bread there.

v16-25 Joseph sees his brothers have returned and have Benjamin with them, so he tells his steward to bring them to his house and prepare a meal for them, and he does as instructed (v. 16-17).

The brothers panic when told they are going to Joseph's house, fearing Joseph is planning on taking them and their entire caravan captive (v. 18). At the first opportunity, they talk to the steward and attempt to explain they paid the first

time and do not understand how their money came back to them (v. 19-22).

The steward tells them to relax and not worry, and brings Simeon out to them (v. 23). The steward then takes them into Joseph's house, treating them as guests, not slaves (v. 24). The brothers prepare their payment and gifts of local produce for Joseph, preparing for the lunch meeting with Joseph (v. 25).

v18 "and our asses", the brothers are panicking and assuming Joseph is going to take the entirety of their caravan. It isn't that Joseph is interested in the donkeys themselves, they fear his is taking everything in the caravan, including the donkeys. All they have, including themselves, will be taken by Joseph and made part of his estate. The phrase is used to emphasize how much of a panic they are in. They recognize they are completely powerless in a foreign land and are in a very compromising position because their payment was in their bags.

v19 "at the door of the house", their fear of being taken into slavery in Joseph's house motivates them to immediately address the matter of payment with the steward before entering into the house.

v23 The steward tells them it was God who returned their money into their bags and he has received payment for the grain they previously purchased. He is telling them there is no outstanding debt, so they have no reason to worry. For the likely reason behind this, see comments on 44:1

²⁶ And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth. 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? ²⁸ And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance. ²⁹ And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son. ³⁰ And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there. ³¹ And he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread. ³² And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians, which did eat with him, by themselves: because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians. ³³ And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright,

and the youngest according to his youth: and the men marvelled one at another. ³⁴ And he took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of their's. And they drank, and were merry with him.

v26-34 Joseph returns home and they immediately offer the presents and bow low as a sign of respect (v. 26). Joseph asks them how they are and how their father is, seemingly making small talk (v. 27). They answer him that their father is well and bow low again (v. 28). Joseph sees Benjamin, his full brother, and asks the others if this is in fact him, and then blesses him (v. 29). Joseph leaves quickly because his emotions are overwhelming him, and he retreats to his bedroom and cries (v. 30). Joseph cleans himself up, composes himself and returns to the guests and announces it is time to eat (v. 31). The brothers are seated separately from Joseph and the other Egyptians, as the Egyptians will not eat with foreigners (v. 32). When they are seated, the brothers see they have been placed in age order and are surprised (v. 33). Joseph has them served from his own table, and Benjamin receives a significantly larger portion than the others. They all eat and drink without measure (v. 34).

v29 "my son", Joseph calls him "son" figuratively as an elder addressing a junior. He is careful to not refer to him as "brother" and give anything away. But, Joseph only blesses Benjamin, not the other brothers, testing them to see if they will be jealous of preferential treatment.

v30 relates a similar, but much more effusive, reaction as that in 42:24.

"his bowels", the Hebrew [term](#) here is identical that in v. 14 where Jacob is praying for the man to have mercy. In v. 14 Jacob prays the Lord will give Joseph mercy, and here is where the Lord begins to soften Joseph's heart. Compare 1 Kings 3:26 where the same term is used.

v32 The JPS Torah Commentary states:

Joseph eats alone undoubtedly because of his exalted status; but the segregation of the Hebrews was due to the Egyptian feeling of racial and religious superiority that engendered contempt for foreigners, who were regarded as unclean. Herodotus (Histories, 2.41) reports that because the cow was taboo to Egyptians but eaten by Greeks, no

native of Egypt would kiss a Greek, use his kitchen utensils, or even eat the flesh of an ox that had been cut with the knife of a Greek. It is therefore likely that Egyptian particularism asserted itself here because the Hebrews were shepherds -an abhorrent profession (46:34) - and because they ate sheep -an abomination to the Egyptians (Exod. 8:22).

v33 The brothers are astonished because Joseph has seated them in age order. Joseph placing them in age order is to acknowledge the age order of the brothers and put Benjamin at the end. Joseph is checking to see if there is a pecking order among the brothers, and if they will be jealous that the youngest brother got the most food. The brothers are astonished at the apparent feat, but the text doesn't say anything about them saying this is how they should be treated because it is their right. They pass the test.

Also, the other Egyptians were probably astonished as well that Joseph would even deign to eat with Hebrews present.

v34 The JPS TC suggests Joseph places more at Benjamin's table to see if the older brothers hold animosity for the youngest brother, just as they formerly did with himself. Again, the text is silent, suggesting the elder brothers pass the second test.

"And they drank, and were merry with him.", the NAS renders this "So they feasted and drank freely with him." The JPS renders it "And they drink their fill with him." Alter renders it "and they drank, and they got drunk with him." Alter's rendering is the most accurate to the Hebrew [term](#) used. The intent of the text is to show the brothers are presently completely at ease, and even celebratory, after coming into his house totally panicking in v. 18. Getting the brothers to drink freely would also make them speak their mind freely, so if there were problems between the brothers, it would manifest itself. Again, the text is silent, so they pass the third test.

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