

### Joseph Gave His Brothers a Test

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why Joseph placed his brothers in the prison in Egypt for three days. That gave them time to think about their past, as well as fear for their future. In our topic today, we will see that Joseph took his brothers out of the prison and sent them home with food to keep their families alive as he further tested them.

Genesis 42:18-24 says, “Then Joseph said to them the third day, ‘Do this and live, *for* I fear God: If you *are* honest men, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses. And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die.’ And they did so. Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.’ And Reuben answered them, saying, ‘Did I not speak to you, saying, “Do not sin against the boy”; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.’ But they did not know that Joseph understood them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter. And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.” Here, we see that on the third day, Joseph had his brothers brought out of the prison and had them stand before him again.

Joseph then explained the test he had prepared for them to see if their hearts had really changed. Joseph said he feared God. The brothers probably did not realize that he was talking about the true and living God who created the heavens and the earth. Joseph then told the brothers how he would find out if they were honest men. He told them that one of their brothers would be confined in the prison where they had been and the rest of them would be allowed to take grain to feed their families because of the famine. He said when they returned, they would have to bring their youngest brother with them to show that what they had said about their younger brother was true. Joseph said then they would not die.

The brothers immediately began to talk to one another in front of Joseph. They did not realize that Joseph understood them because he had been talking to them through an interpreter. They said to one another, “We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.” Here, we see that the days they had spent in the prison certainly made them think about their past. In fact, we see that Joseph had pleaded with them not to do what they chose to do. They had seen the great suffering he was experiencing but refused to listen to him. Their first thought was that they were being punished by God for their sin. Then, Reuben reminded them that he had told them not to

do what they did, but they had refused to listen to him. Now, the blood of their brother was being required of them. That was too much for Joseph to hear and he had to get away from them for a few minutes to cry. After a few minutes, he came back and talked with them again and told them what he was going to do. Then, as they watched, he took Simeon and bound him to return him to the prison. Parents who have been in court when their child has been convicted of a crime, and is immediately bound and taken back to prison, can certainly understand how the brothers felt at that moment. The words that Joseph had heard Reuben speak, just a few minutes earlier, were probably the reason why the second son, instead of the oldest son, was bound before their eyes.

Genesis 42:25-28 says, “Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man’s money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them. So they loaded their donkeys with the grain and departed from there. But as one of *them* opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment, he saw his money; and there it was, in the mouth of his sack. So he said to his brothers, ‘My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!’ Then their hearts failed *them* and they were afraid, saying to one another, ‘What *is* this *that* God has done to us?’” The brothers apparently gave their money to Joseph to pay for the grain they would take back to their families. Once his brothers had gone out of the place where they met with Joseph, he instructed the men who served him to fill the sacks of those men with grain. Then, he told them to put each man’s money back in the bag of that man. He also told the men who served him to give the men food for their trip back to their homeland.

Once the men who served Joseph brought the bags out to the brothers, they loaded them on their donkeys and began the trip back to the land of Canaan. It would have been about a ten-day trip back to the land of Canaan. That evening, when the brothers got to the place where they were going to camp for the night, one of the brothers opened his sack to get some grain to feed to his donkey. Suddenly, he saw his money right at the top of his sack. He immediately spoke to his brothers and said to them, “My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!” He was shocked to see his money and he also saw that it was the exact amount he had paid for his grain. We read that their hearts failed them. The word translated “failed” is used over a thousand times in the Old Testament and usually means *to go out*. One of the major uses of the word is to speak about the way the people of Israel went out of Egypt in the Exodus. Here, it has the thought that the brothers were filled with great fear. All they could say was, “What is this that God has done to us?” As we see in the following verses, this fear became even greater when they got home and all of the men found that their money was in their sacks.

Genesis 42:29-38 says, “Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying: ‘The man *who* is lord of the land spoke roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. But we said to him, “We *are* honest *men*; we are not spies. We *are* twelve brothers, sons of our father; one *is* no more, and the youngest *is* with our father this day in the land of Canaan.” Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, “By this I will know that you are honest men: Leave one of your

brothers *here* with me, take *food* for the famine of your households, and be gone. And bring your youngest brother to me; so I shall know that you *are* not spies, but *that you are* honest men. I will grant your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.” Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man’s bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid. And Jacob their father said to them, ‘You have bereaved me: Joseph is no *more*, Simeon is no *more*, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me.’ Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, ‘Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.’ But he said, ‘My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.’” The brothers were very anxious to tell their father how they had been treated in Egypt because that was the first thing they told him when they returned to him.

They said that the lord of the land had spoken very roughly to them because he thought they were spies. They then told their father what they had done to convince the man that they were honest, not spies. They said they had told the lord of the land that there were a total of twelve brothers from the same father. One of their brothers was no longer alive and their youngest brother was at home with their father in Canaan. It was then that the lord of the land told them what they had to do to prove they were honest men. They said they had to leave one of their brothers in Egypt. Then, the lord of the land said that they could take grain with them to feed their households as they returned to their land. However, he also said that the way they would prove they were not spies was to bring their youngest brother back with them so he could see they were telling the truth. That way, they would prove they were honest men, not spies. Once they brought their youngest brother, their other brother would be returned to them and they would be able to trade in the land.

Later, when they emptied their sacks, they suddenly realized that all of their money had been returned to them and the money of each man was in his sack. This time, their father was filled with fear, along with the brothers. The word translated “bereaved” means to *make childless or to have great sorrow at the loss of children*. Jacob said that he had lost Joseph, he had lost Simeon, and now they wanted to take Benjamin. Since they had told him how the lord of the land had talked, he immediately feared that he would also lose Benjamin. He felt like everything had been turned against him.

Reuben then said to his father, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.” This offer did not bring any comfort to Jacob because it meant he would also lose two of his grandsons. Jacob quickly rejected the offer of Reuben as he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone.” Rachel had been the favorite wife of Jacob. Here, he made it clear that the two sons of Rachel were still his favorite sons as he said that Benjamin was the only one that remained from that wife. The word translated “calamity”

means *evil, mischief or harm*. Jacob was saying that if any harm, evil or hurt happened to Benjamin on a trip for grain to Egypt, it would cause his grey hair to go to the grave because of his sorrow. If something happened to Benjamin, Jacob said the sorrow would kill him. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain what Jacob said the death of Benjamin would do to him if Benjamin died. This helped the other brothers to understand how much sorrow Jacob had experienced through all of those years because he thought Joseph had been killed. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.