

JANUARY 19

Genesis 42, 43

Genesis 44-46 (also referenced January 20)

Today you read Genesis 42 thru 44. Our daily accelerator will cover 42-43 today and we'll lump in chapter 44 with tomorrow's readings. In the story of Joseph and his brothers the plot is thickening. The story is a very familiar one to some of you and the account in chapters 42 and 43 is quite straight forward. Nevertheless, there are at least a few things that I want to point out to you.

The first is to simply remind you that Joseph's enslavement, his unjust imprisonment, the imprisonment of the chief cup bearer and the chief baker, Pharaoh's dream, Joseph's elevation and the subsequent famine were all divinely ordered events with one ultimate goal in mind - the preparation of a place in Egypt for Israel to develop as a nation. It's amazing when you think about it. God did all these things to build an "incubator" for His chosen people. God's meticulous planning even extended to the prophecy made to Abraham at the inception of the covenant, telling him far in advance that this period of enslavement in a land not their own was coming. It would be easy enough, I guess, to say that God had Joseph's life all planned ahead of time and in great detail only because he was so critical to the survival of the covenant, and to conclude from that fact that no such detailed plan exists for ordinary people like you and me. But there are a host of verses and passages in Scripture that teach just the opposite of that. Psalm 139, that great and wonderful Psalm about God's omniscience and His omnipresence: *"All the days of my life are written in His book when as yet there are none of them."* There is the fascinating verse in Ephesians 2:10 which says that *"we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do."* That verse surely seems to be teaching that just as surely as God specifically planned the life of Joseph, so He has my life planned as well! Okay, you may not be God's chosen instrument to rule a nation or change modern history, but you are still extremely significant to Him and God cares deeply about you!

Now in your mind's eye picture yourself sitting with Joseph in the great Chair of Administration in the Great Hall of Pharaoh. Everything has happened just as you told Pharaoh it would. The seven years of plenty were extraordinary and you stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sands of the seashore, so much that record keeping became impossible. Then the famine came and these foreigners from all over began showing up in Egypt to buy grain and everyone had to appeal to you personally. Everyone in Egypt, except Pharaoh, is bowing down to you. Then one day you look up and there they are - you rub your eyes, your heart skips a beat or two, but there can be no mistaking it. They're your brothers. In just a moment, you're overwhelmed - there is anger - and all the loneliness of the many years in prison is suddenly back again. You want to know about your father and your younger brother Benjamin. You start to speak but then you catch yourself - better not to reveal your identity too quickly. Let's see what we can find out about them.

They approach your chair and then it happens. They bow down and you remember the dream - the one that got you into so much trouble twenty years ago.

It took twenty years but God brought it to pass just like He said He would!! Friends, I know I've already said it this week, but it is so important to know that God will keep every single promise He has made to us, maybe not in our time frame, but in His, and if you have to wait for twenty years like Joseph did...so what?! God's promises are absolutely certain and secure and sure to be carried out.

Now we need to say here that Joseph's "coyness" with his brothers has nothing whatever to do with revenge. I don't think he even took much pleasure in watching them squirm! I think that the strategies and ploys were all meant to test their character to see if they had really changed - and to make certain that his younger brother Benjamin was well. Joseph has already decided how he will deal with his brothers, but he wants first to know about their character, so he puts an extraordinary amount of pressure upon them by keeping Simeon in custody and by returning their silver. Keeping one of the brothers was designed to accomplish two things for Joseph: first, it forced his father's hand into letting Benjamin go, and that strategy also ensured their return to Egypt. Having now established contact after twenty years, Joseph does not want to lose it!! He knew old Jacob well enough to realize he would never let Benjamin go unless something forced him to do so. A third tactic to keep the heat on, and one Joseph probably enjoyed, involved the seating arrangements at the banquet after his brothers returned and they are brought to eat with Joseph in the household of Pharaoh. Everyone is seated by age and they were astonished and amazed how this man could know these things about them.

The scholars who would like to prove there are multiple authors for the Genesis account usually divide the Joseph material into at least two sources. First they point to verse 27 where one of the brothers discovers his silver in the sack while they are still in transit from Egypt back to Canaan and then to verse 35 which says that they made the discovery after they had arrived at home and in the presence of Jacob. The conclusion is that the 'editors' (these mythical redactors) used two accounts and mingled them, leaving contradictory material in the record. The possibility that one brother made the discovery while on the road and the others made similar discoveries at home, is not even considered as a possible explanation, but it works for me, and it works for the original writer of the book.

Two quick observations to lock somewhere in the back of your brain:

1. Chapter 43 says Judah has become spokesman for the group, a role that he does not appear willing to relinquish. He personally guarantees Benjamin's safety with his own life in order to bring him back, and break the log jam that was keeping Jacob's permission to return to Egypt for food and Simeon.

Reuben previously made a similar offer, and as the oldest should have been the leader, but he does not appear to have as much credibility with his

brothers or with Jacob. Remember it was Reuben who planned to deliver Joseph many years earlier, but his plans were thwarted by a money-raising scheme of Judah's.

It is perhaps because of Reuben's gentler intentions at the beginning of the story that Joseph chooses to retain Simeon instead of Reuben, the oldest and logical hostage. At any rate Judah is the stronger leader. Keep that in mind as it will have some significance later.

2. Secondly, it is just worth noting in passing that the brothers are called Israel's sons, not Jacob's sons, in chapter 42 - I think because the writer wants us to realize that in this story a family has become a nation.

Now there is just one last thing - to me in some ways the most important thing for us to see in these chapters...and that is that for twenty long years, the brothers have been carrying a very guilty set of consciences and in more than one point in this account, those guilty consciences betray themselves! When things don't go well and they are accused of spying, their immediate response is - "we're being punished for what we did to Joseph -- that's why this is happening." What a revealing incident. Friends, you can cover up guilt, you can disguise guilt, you can perfume guilt, but apart from the true forgiveness available from God through Christ Jesus, there is no way to ever get rid of it. It is not only true that you cannot get rid of it, but it refuses to stay buried, coming back over and over again to act as your accuser before God and before men. How wonderful it is to know that when you and I become Christians, God removes not only the sin but also the guilt from us - the Bible says "as far as the east is from the west" - and He "remembers it no more"!!!

This is Mark Ashton reminding you that God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Peace be with you.