

# Genesis 41-43: Joseph and the Famine

## An Outline

- I. Joseph goes from prison to power (41:1-57).
- II. Joseph's brothers are tested (42:1-28).
- III. Jacob resists then agrees to send Benjamin to get more food (42:29-43:14).

## Observations

1. **Joseph provides us an example of how to properly respond to success. (Genesis 41:1-57):**

**To properly respond to success, honor God and be diligent in your work.**

**Four ways we can honor God from Joseph's example (cf. 1 Sam. 2:30 "Those who honor Me I will honor"):**

- (1) Honor God by remembering that He is the source of all success (41:16; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 15:10; cf. Deuteronomy 8:17-18).
- (2) Honor God by bearing witness of His enabling in all you do (41:15 contrasted with v. 16; also 41:25, 28, 32 compare with 41:38-39). H.C. Leupold observed, "After twelve years and more injustice, Joseph's first consideration is not deliverance but to take care that his relation to his God be entirely upright."
- (3) Honor God by bearing witness to His sovereignty over all (Genesis 41:25, 28, 32). God is sovereign over everything, both good tidings and tragedies. He not only *allows* them, He *sends* them (Isaiah 45:7).
- (4) Honor God in our family life (41:51, 52).

**Two things to remember from Joseph's example of diligence in work:**

Both Joseph and Daniel served God in important secular, government jobs in foreign lands. They did their work well without compromising their faith and integrity. While we are "citizens of heaven," we are also citizens of earth and have a calling to be involved in solving some of the problems confronting our world while maintaining our purity and integrity.

- (1) Be diligent to keep character above career (41:33-36) – This was no lucky break for Joseph, for his integrity and excellence were forged through the fires of being a slave and a prisoner. (1) Joseph does not compromise his integrity with Potiphar's wife (39:8-10), and (2) he gives witness to God rather than take credit before Pharaoh (41:16).
- (2) Be diligent to keep competence alongside character (41:33-36; cf. 39:2-6; 39:20-23) – Some Christians just sit around praying for the promotion instead of developing competence on the job to go with their Christian character. Be godly, but also be the best at what you do (Colossians 3:23-24; cf. Ecclesiastes 9:10).

2. **Joseph's brothers provide us an example of the opportunities God gives us to respond properly to His discipline (42:1-28):**

**God uses severity and grace to awaken our consciences and bring us to repentance.**

**Consider how he does this in us from the example of Joseph's brothers:**

- (1) God uses pressure to awaken our consciences (42:1, 11, 13).
- (2) God uses reciprocal treatment to awaken our consciences (42:21) – (1) You are spying (cf. 37:2, 14, 18), and (2) Throw in cistern/dungeon (37:24).
- (3) God uses time for thinking about our past to awaken our consciences (42:17, 18, 28).
- (4) God uses grace to temper the whole process and bring us to repentance (Romans 2:4; Genesis 42:28 cf. 27:33 and 42:35). John Newton – “Twas grace that caused my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.” Genesis 42:8-9 suggests Joseph used the occasion to bring his brothers to repentance, not vindictively but compassionately (42:24).

**Consider how God's grace shines through Joseph's actions:**

- (1) God's grace shines through when we are not treated as harshly as we deserve (42:19, 21; Psalm 103:1, 10).
- (2) God's grace shines through when He makes us become what we profess to be (42:11 cf. 42:16, 19) – God graciously holds us to our claim: “You say that you're a Christian, do you? Well, let's put that claim to the test. Let's make you into what you claim to be.”
- (3) God's grace shines through in His compassion, which underlies His discipline (42:18, 24) – Of Simeon's binding George Bush (not the president) comments: “Joseph bound Simeon in prison, but he did it to set him free from the far worse chains of his own fierce passions” (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5 cf. 2 Corinthians 2:5-8; Hebrews 12:4-13).
- (4) God's grace shines through when He blesses us when we know we deserve punishment (42:25). Joseph's act of grace taught them to fear God; later it would relieve those fears and teach them the joy of knowing that their sins were forgiven (Genesis 50:19-21).

**3. Jacob provides us an example of how NOT to respond to adversity (42:29-43:14):**

Ten things in Jacob's life that tell you when you are not trusting in the Lord;

- (1) Are you governed by irrational fears? (42:4)
- (2) Do you have a negative, pessimistic attitude? (42:36, 38)
- (3) Are you self-centered? (42:36, 38; 43:6)
- (4) Are you blaming others for your problems? (42:36; 43:6)
- (5) Are you stubbornly refusing to admit you were wrong? (42:38)
- (6) Are you reluctantly yielding because you have to? (43:11a)
- (7) Are you excluding God from the events of your life? (43:12b, contrast 42:28 and 45:5-9)
- (8) Do you rely on human schemes rather than the grace of God? (43:11-12)
- (9) Do you resort to God last, as a hope, but not in prayer? (43:14a)
- (10) Are you stoically resigning yourself to fate? (43:14b)

**When things seem to be against you, trust in the God who is for you (Romans 8:28, 31-32; Ephesians 3:20).**

**Instead of following Jacob's example, consider doing these things:**

- (1) Put God into the equation (Hebrews 11:6).
- (2) Put your situation into historical perspective (Hebrews 11 and 12:1-3).
- (3) Put down selfish, unbelieving thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:5).

# Discussion Questions

## 1. Questions for Genesis 41

- (1) When (if ever) is it proper for a Christian to accept honor, and when must we defer all the honor to God?
- (2) How can a Christian harmonize career success with biblical values? Is it wrong to seek career success?
- (3) How can a man putting in the hours necessary to succeed in his career honor God in his family life?
- (4) Is it wrong for a Christian business owner or employee to pursue the company's "bottom line"? Is this serving mammon?

## 2. Questions for Genesis 42:1-42:28

- (1) How can a Christian develop and maintain a good conscience? Can one's conscience be too sensitive?
- (2) If we have confessed our sin but still have a troubled conscience, does it mean that Satan is accusing us or could there be the need for deeper repentance?
- (3) Can repentance without any feeling of remorse be genuine?
- (4) Is there a difference between God's discipline and punishment? Does He punish Christians?

## 3. Questions for Genesis 42:29-43:14

- (1) How can we know whether a trial is from the Lord or if the devil is against us?
- (2) How can we realistically look at all the problems in the world and yet be genuinely positive?
- (3) It would be fairly easy to trust God if you knew His specific will in advance. Since we don't, how do we trust Him? Is "if it be your will" a cop out?
- (4) Some would say that Jacob's gift was a prudent measure in line with prevailing customs. How can we know when prudent plans cross the line into wrongful scheming?