

CAPITOL STUDIES

MARCH 8, 2023 • WEEK 9



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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Verse of the Week

Genesis 43:14a

...[M]ay God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, so that he will release to you your other brother and Benjamin.

When It Seems Like Everything Goes Against You



THE GENERAL LAW IS, “If anything can go wrong, it will.” We laugh at Murphy’s Law because we’ve all had times when it seems like everything is against us. Of course, it’s never very funny at the time, especially if the things against us are of a serious nature. Before it was called Murphy’s Law, it could have been called Jacob’s Law. Long before Murphy, Jacob summed up the principle in Genesis 42:36, when he says to his sons: “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me.” Let’s not be too hard on Jacob because we’ve all been right where he was at one time or another.

God divinely orchestrates this time of testing for both Jacob and his sons to reveal the true state of their hearts. He continues to work supernaturally to bring this family to the place where they repent of sin and accept Joseph’s leadership. God’s ultimate purpose is to prepare the way for Israel to be sheltered in Egypt away from the ungodly culture of their world. Little by little we begin to see evidence of transformation in Jacob and his sons.

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INTRODUCTION

In our last study, we saw how God used varied circumstances to arouse the consciences of Joseph's brothers. God, undoubtedly, continues to prick their consciences as they are reminded daily of their unusual trip into Egypt. Whenever they miss Simeon, whenever they see Benjamin, whenever they notice their food supply getting low again, their thoughts turn to those recent events that they readily interpret as the judgment of God. Jacob steadfastly refuses to cooperate with the plan to let Benjamin accompany his brothers on their next journey. Jacob's grief over having presumably lost two sons (Joseph, Simeon), along with the potential for losing a third (Benjamin), colors his judgment.

I. JACOB'S FUTILE APPROACH TO SOLVING THE PROBLEM

Genesis 43:1-2

Now the famine was severe in the land. ²So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food."

Jacob reluctantly says, "Go back, buy us a little food." Why buy just a *little* food? Likely Jacob's hope was that if they just bought a little, the harsh governor in Egypt wouldn't require Benjamin to come down with his brothers.

Jacob says, "I can figure something out."

Scripture says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

Genesis 43:3-5

Judah spoke to him, however, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' ⁴"If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. ⁵But if you do not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You will not see my face unless your brother is with you.'"

Judah tells his father, "Unless we do as we were told, it will not go well." This "solemn warning" was with double emphasis. The fear of God was put in the brothers by this mighty governor of Egypt, and Judah did not want to cross him. Judah is now the leading spokesman for the brothers. Perhaps God has softened his heart through these years of learning in the school of sowing and reaping. Now Judah confronts his father with reality: "The only way forward is for you to send Benjamin with us. The governor said that we would be wasting our time if our younger brother is not with us."

Jacob says, "I don't want to hear what you have to say."

Scripture says, "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed" (Prov. 15:22).



Genesis 43:6

Then Israel [Jacob] said, “Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had another brother?”

Jacob thinks only of himself and believes that everyone is against him. He still is not willing to make the hard decision to send Benjamin, so he starts blaming: “Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had another brother?” Isn’t that true of human nature? When boxed in by circumstances, we want to blame others like Jacob. “I’m a victim! Why weren’t you omniscient? Then this wouldn’t be happening to me!” Can you feel his frustration?

Jacob says, “This is your fault. I am the victim.”

Scripture says, “My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’ ... Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence” (Psalm 42:3, 5).

II. THE BROTHERS’ HUMANISTIC APPROACH TO SOLVING THE PROBLEM

Genesis 43:7

But they said, “The man questioned particularly about us and our relatives, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?’ So we answered his questions. Could we possibly know that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’”

Their fear of the governor causes the brothers to be truthful. They are finally being honest. Despite Jacob’s irrational blame, Judah stays calm and reasons with his father. The plural pronouns (“we”) indicate that the other brothers joined the discussion at this point. They said, “The man asked questions, so we answered them. How could we know he would ask us to bring Benjamin down?”

The brothers say, “There is a problem, but what could we say? He’s the governor.”

God says, “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Rom. 13:1).

Genesis 43:8-10

Judah said to his father Israel, “Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. ⁹I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever. ¹⁰For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice.”

Now Judah sees the truth of the situation and attempts to do what he believes is responsible and right. His is a more rational proposal than Reuben’s earlier extreme one. First, he appeals to Jacob with the severity





of their circumstances: “Send Benjamin with me or everyone is going to die” (43:8). Then he proposes to become surety for Benjamin: “If anything happens to him, I will bear the blame before you forever.” This may have meant he would be cut out of his inheritance. Lastly, Judah points out the result of Jacob’s obstinacy: “For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice” (43:10). This is a nice way of saying, “We wouldn’t be in this mess if you weren’t so stubborn.”

Judah says, “I guess it’s up to me to take responsibility and do what is right.”

God says, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not” (Rom. 7:18).

III. JACOB’S LAST-DITCH RESPONSE

Genesis 43:11-13

Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. ¹²Take double the money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake. ¹³Take your brother also, and arise, return to the man.”

Jacob feels the pressure and reluctantly agrees to let Benjamin go. (Benjamin is not a youth; he is about 23 by now.) But Jacob still wants to do things his way: “Let’s put together a gift for the man down in Egypt.” Perhaps he reasoned, “It worked with Esau (even though it was unnecessary); maybe it will work again.”

Jacob says, “There must be something I can do. Let me try another way. Maybe a bribe?”

Scripture says, “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Genesis 43:14a

“...and may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, so that he will release to you your other brother and Benjamin.”

In the end, Jacob sends Benjamin with the half-hearted hope that God Almighty (“El Shaddai,” the All Powerful One) would grant him mercy with compassion and that Simeon would be released.

Jacob says, “I hope that God will bless you.”

Scripture says, “Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He will do it” (Psalm 37:5).

Genesis 43:14b-15

“...And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” ¹⁵So the men took this present, and they took double the money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.



Jacob finally resigns himself to the ultimate worst-case scenario: “If the man kills them all, that’s the way it goes!” Everything seems to be against Jacob. You’ve been there, haven’t you? Maybe, like this “harsh” man down in Egypt, some difficult person was/is against you: a boss, a coworker, a teacher, a family member. Perhaps you feel as if your past is against you. Jacob thinks that his past is against him: “Joseph is dead, Simeon too,” he complains. He doesn’t know that, in fact, both statements are false. It’s easy to focus so much on past trials that you think circumstances have always been against you. It’s also easy to think the worst about the future. Jacob is certain that if Benjamin goes to Egypt, he will never see him again (42:38). In fact, he thinks all his sons might perish (43:14).

Jacob says, “This is my lot in life. Whatever will be, will be.”

Scripture says: “I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living (Ps. 27:13).

CONCLUSION

Paul expresses the kind of active faith in God we should have when faced with trials: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.... If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:28, 31-32). How can everything be against us when God says that He is for us? The best Jacob can hope is that Simeon will be released, and Benjamin spared. Little does he know that God will do far more than he can ask or even think (Eph. 3:20)! He promises to do that for us, as well!

***When everything seems to be against you,
remember you can trust in the God who is for you!***

(1) Put God into the equation. Ask yourself these questions: “Is God in this or not?” “Is God for me or against me?” Rehearse the answers, “God is always working in my behalf.” “He is for me!” I must believe, then, that God is and that He rewards those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6). I must make a deliberate choice to trust in the unseen God.

(2) Put your situation into historical perspective. View your situation in the context of God’s dealings with His people in Bible times, in church history, and in today’s world. I am not the only one who is suffering. Others have suffered and endured for the cause of Christ. Reading biographies of people like Martin Luther, Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Gracia Burnham, and others who have overcome severe hardships helps strengthen my trust in God.

(3) Put down selfish, unbelieving thoughts. You can’t allow yourself the luxury of a pity party. When you surround yourself with reasons why everything is against you, you give yourself excuses for not believing God. You *can* trust God! You must take unbelieving thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ! When it seems like everything is going against you, you *can* trust in the God who is for you!



Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren,
whatever is **true**,
whatever is **honorable**,
whatever is **right**,
whatever is **pure**,
whatever is **lovely**,
whatever is of
good repute,
if there is any
excellence
and if anything is
worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.

Questions to Consider:

- How can we know whether a trial is from the Lord or if the devil is against us?
- How can we realistically look at all the problems in the world and yet be genuinely positive?
- 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?



Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.

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