

# Jacob's Descendants

## Joseph's Testing of His Brothers

*Genesis 43:1-45:28*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

March 4, 2018

# Joseph's Testing of His Brothers

## Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons that I am calling "Jacob's Descendants," based on Genesis 37-50.

Previously, we read about young, seventeen-year old Joseph sold by his brothers to Midianite traders on their way to Egypt. The brothers then deceived their father Jacob into thinking that a fierce animal had devoured Joseph. Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Because the Lord was with Joseph and caused him to be successful in all that he did, he became the chief overseer in Potiphar's house. After a while, however, Potiphar's wife wanted Joseph to lie with her. He refused, and Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of wanting to molest her. When Potiphar learned of this he had Joseph put in the prison where the king's prisoners were confined. While Joseph was in prison the Lord was still with him, and Joseph was placed in charge of all the prisoners in the prison.

Some time after this, Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker committed offenses against Pharaoh. They were put in the same prison with Joseph. One night they each had a dream, which God enabled Joseph to interpret for them. The cupbearer was restored to his position in the palace of Pharaoh, and the baker was executed. Unfortunately for Joseph, the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

After two whole years, Pharaoh had two dreams. None of his magicians and wise men could interpret his dreams. It was then that the chief cupbearer remembered Joseph and told

Pharaoh about him. Pharaoh summoned Joseph, who interpreted his dreams. Egypt and the surrounding region was to receive seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine. Joseph suggested that Pharaoh save twenty percent of the grain each year for the next seven years to provide food for the coming famine. Pharaoh immediately promoted Joseph to Prime Minister so that he could implement that plan.

After the seven years of plenty, the famine came. Probably sometime during the first year of the famine Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph learned that Jacob was still alive, and that Benjamin had stayed in Canaan with their father. Joseph said that they would not get grain again unless Benjamin came down to Egypt. He imprisoned Simeon as a security that they would bring Benjamin with them the next time they came to buy grain. On their way back home to Canaan the brothers discovered that the money they had used to buy grain had been replaced in their sacks. Later, when the first supply of grain had run out, they had to return to Egypt. This is where we pick up the narrative for today's lesson.

Let's read about Joseph's testing of his brothers in Genesis 43:1-45:28. However, for the sake of time, I am going to read only Genesis 43:1-14, and invite you to keep your Bibles open so that you can follow the rest of the story in this sermon:

**<sup>1</sup>Now the famine was severe in the land. <sup>2</sup>And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food." <sup>3</sup>But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' <sup>4</sup>If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. <sup>5</sup>But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with**

you.’”<sup>6</sup> Israel said, “Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?”<sup>7</sup> They replied, “The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?’ What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’”<sup>8</sup> And Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones.<sup>9</sup> I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.<sup>10</sup> If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.”

<sup>11</sup> Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds.<sup>12</sup> Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight.<sup>13</sup> Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man.<sup>14</sup> May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”  
(Genesis 43:1-45:28)

## Introduction

When preaching a sermon, every preacher has to decide what verses to include in his sermon. Generally, the sermon text is a complete unit of thought. It is sometimes easier to identify the complete unit of thought in a narrative portion of Scripture than in a didactic portion of Scripture.

The beginning of today's narrative is easy to identify. Genesis 42:1-38 is a narrative about Joseph's brothers' first visit to Egypt to buy grain. During this visit they met Joseph, but they did not recognize him. Joseph learned that his father and younger brother, Benjamin, were still alive in Canaan. Knowing that famine was going to last many more years, Joseph had Simeon imprisoned and told his brothers that they would not be able to buy grain again or have Simeon released unless they brought Benjamin back with them. On their way home, the brothers discovered that the money that they had used to buy the grain had been returned in their grain sacks. When they arrived home, Jacob was distraught to learn about all that had happened. All of this is in Genesis 42:1-38.

Our current narrative begins at Genesis 43:1, "Now the famine was severe in the land." And so a second journey to Egypt was required. The question is: Where does this narrative end? Some suggest that it ends at Genesis 43:34, others at the end of Genesis 44:34, and still others at the end of Genesis 45:15. However, it seems to me, and several other erudite scholars, that, "despite the chapter divisions, 43:1–45:28 constitutes a single unit within the Joseph story."<sup>1</sup> The main reason for this is that the structure and contents of these chapters are similar to chapter 42.

## Lesson

Joseph's testing of his brothers in Genesis 43:1-45:28 teaches us that in his providence God can use evil human deeds to accomplish salvation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 410.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Joseph Received His Brothers (43:1-34)
2. Joseph Tested His Brothers (44:1-34)
3. Joseph Saved His Brothers (45:1-28)

## I. Joseph Received His Brothers (43:1-34)

First, Joseph received his brothers.

Genesis 43:1 says, **“Now the famine was severe in the land.”** Jacob and his family were experiencing severe famine in the Promised Land. They were running out of food again. Jacob and his family were about to starve to death. That would mean the end of God's promise to Abraham to “multiply his descendants greatly” (17:2).

The brothers knew that Simeon was imprisoned in Egypt. They knew that Joseph would not even see them unless their youngest half-brother Benjamin was with them. They did not know, however, that Joseph was testing them. He wanted to see whether their attitude had changed to Rachel's sons over the twenty-two years that he had been in Egypt.

When the nine brothers returned from Egypt and told Jacob what had happened, he said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me” (42:36).

So, **when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from their first trip to Egypt, their father said to his sons, “Go again, buy us a little food”** (43:2). Of course, he did not want the nine brothers to take Benjamin with them. Finally, **Judah** stood up to his father and **said to him, “The man, that is, Joseph, solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’** If

**you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, ‘You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.’ ”**

Jacob hesitated. He had already lost Joseph, the first son of his favorite wife, Rachel. And now, he imagined that he would lose Benjamin, the second son of Rachel. Judah said that he would be the pledge for Benjamin’s safety.

Still distraught, but desperate for food, Jacob agreed. He told his sons, **“If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man”** (43:11-13). And then he prayed, **“May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved”** (43:14).

Verse 15 says, **“So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.”** In a single verse, Moses described their journey from the Promised Land to Egypt, a journey that took several weeks, most likely all on foot. What was important for Moses was not the journey, however, but what would happen to the brothers once they were back in Egypt. How would Joseph act once they arrived there? Would he exact revenge for what they did to him twenty-two years earlier? Would he be reunited to Benjamin and throw the rest of his brothers in prison?

Apparently, Joseph saw them from afar, and he must

surely have replayed in his mind what had happened twenty-two years earlier, when in Dothan the brothers saw Joseph “from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him” (37:18). But Joseph did the complete opposite when he saw his brothers. We read in verses 16-18:

**When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.” The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph’s house. And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph’s house, and they said, “It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys.”**

The brothers thought that this was a trick. They thought that the Prime Minister of Egypt was going to make slaves of them, in the same way that they had sold Joseph into slavery twenty-two years earlier. How would the brothers react? We read in verses 19-23:

**So they went up to the steward of Joseph’s house and spoke with him at the door of the house, and said, “Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food. And when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each man’s money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us, and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.” He replied, “Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money.”**



**Then he brought Simeon out to them.**

The steward followed Joseph's instructions. His answer to the brothers about how the money got into their sacks is instructive. As readers, we know that Joseph had the money placed in their sacks. But the brothers did not know that. Moreover, they did not know that God was working behind the scenes. God does his work through human agents. God working behind the scenes is an important idea in this story.

Verse 26 says, **“When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground.”** All eleven brothers bowed down to him, just as Joseph had dreamt long ago (37:9). Verses 27-28, **“And he inquired about their welfare and said, ‘Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?’ They said, ‘Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.’ And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves.”** Now, the brothers not only bowed their heads, but in fact they **prostrated themselves** before Joseph.

Verse 29a, **“And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, ‘Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?’ ”** And before they could even answer Joseph, he exclaimed, **“God be gracious to you, my son!”** (43:29b).

Joseph was suddenly overcome with emotion, and so he hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there (43:30). After a while, he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself he said, **“Serve the food”** (43:31). Joseph almost gave himself away. However, his brothers did not notice anything.

What they did notice, however, is what happened next. They all sat down in separate places to eat: Joseph by himself, the Egyptians by themselves, and the brothers by themselves. Verse 33, **“And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement.”** How in the world could Joseph have known how to seat them in order of their birth? How did he know their ages? How did he know so much about them?

And something else amazing happened. **“Portions were taken to them from Joseph’s table, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs”** (43:33a). That was very unusual. If anyone would get a larger portion, it would have been the oldest, not the youngest. What was going on?

Joseph was testing them. Joseph was testing his ten half-brothers, the ones who had been jealous of the favoritism that he had received from his father more than twenty-two years ago. Joseph was now testing his half-brothers to see if they were still jealous of another son of Rachel who received special treatment. And so he rubbed it in by seating the brothers in order of their birth and giving the youngest five times as much as the oldest. But the brothers passed this test because **they drank and were merry with him** (43:33b).

The next test, however, would be much more challenging.

## II. Joseph Tested His Brothers (44:1-34)

Second, Joseph tested his brothers.

In Genesis 44:1-2 we read that Joseph **“commanded the steward of his house, ‘Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the**

**mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain.’ ”** And the steward did exactly as he was commanded.

Early the next morning the eleven brothers left for home with their donkeys. They had barely left the city when **Joseph said to his steward, “Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid evil for good? Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this’ ”** (44:3-4).

The steward soon caught up to the brothers. He accused them of stealing Joseph’s silver cup. Naturally, the brothers vehemently denied the charges. They knew that not one of them had taken Joseph’s silver cup. They were so sure that they had not taken the cup that they offered the one who had taken it to be executed and that the rest would become his slaves.

But the steward reduced the penalty. He said that only the one with the silver cup would become his slave; the rest would be free to go. Interestingly, while reducing the penalty, the steward was sharpening the test. We know that the cup will be found in Benjamin’s sack. Rachel’s other son would soon become a slave, and the ten brothers would retain their freedom.

The steward searched each sack, **beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack** (44:12). But, instead of abandoning their brother Benjamin, **they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city** (44:13).

Somewhat surprisingly, when they arrived back at Joseph’s house, Judah said that they would all be his slaves. He said in verse 16, **“What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s**

**servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.”** One commentator believes that it is at this point that the brothers finally come to true faith in God. No more excuses. No more deceptions. No more treachery. **“God has found out the guilt of your servants.”** Judah was not talking about stealing the cup. He knew that they did not steal it. Judah was talking about the guilt that had been gnawing at the brothers for more than twenty-two years, ever since the day they sold Joseph into slavery. “This is God’s way, says Judah, of visiting their past misdeeds upon them. They withheld mercy from Joseph (42:21). Now God will withhold mercy from them. They deserve what is happening to them even if they are not guilty of this particular crime.”<sup>2</sup>

But Joseph presses the test further. He said in verse 17, **“Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.”** All the brothers could go free. Only Benjamin would be enslaved. It is a virtual replay of what happened twenty-two years earlier at Dothan, where Judah proposed and the brothers agreed to sell Joseph as a slave. Would the brothers agree this time to have their youngest brother become a slave not for twenty pieces of silver (as at Dothan) but this time for their very own freedom? All ten of the them could go home to their father. All ten could be reunited with their families. Only Benjamin would be enslaved.

At the height of the tension Judah mounted an impassioned plea for Benjamin’s freedom. His concern now was not for himself. It was not so much even for Benjamin. His concern was for his father Jacob. In the longest speech in the entire

---

<sup>2</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons*, 426.

book of Genesis, from verse 18 to verse 34, Judah used the word “father” fourteen times. Four times he mentioned that his father would die if he lost Benjamin too. He finally offered himself as a slave, to take the place of Benjamin. One commentator says, “Judah so feels for his father that he begs to sacrifice himself for a brother more loved than himself.”<sup>3</sup> Another commentator says, “Twenty-two years earlier, Judah engineered the selling of Joseph into slavery; now he is prepared to offer himself as a slave so that the other son of Rachel can be set free.”<sup>4</sup>

### III. Joseph Saved His Brothers (45:1-28)

And third, Joseph saved his brothers.

Joseph had heard enough. The brothers have passed the test! They have dramatically changed from that day when they sold him into slavery twenty-two years earlier. They were willing to offer their own freedom for Rachel’s son Benjamin. Genesis 45:1 says, **“Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, ‘Make everyone go out from me.’ So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.”** In verse 3 Joseph said to his brothers, **“I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?”** Understandably, **his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed** (literally, terrified and panicked) **at his presence.**

So, Joseph reassured his brothers that he was Joseph. But then he also explained how God was behind what they had

---

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons*, 428.

<sup>4</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons*, 428.

done to him. Verse 5, **“And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for *God* sent me before you to preserve life.”** He repeats this in verse 7, **“And *God* sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.”** And he repeats it a third time in verse 8a, **“So it was not you who sent me here, but *God*.”** Joseph pressed home to his brothers the truth that the sovereign God had sent him to keep alive the seed of Abraham by saving the people of God.

Joseph also told his brothers that there was still going to be five more years of famine. He urged them to return to Canaan and bring their father Jacob down to Egypt.

When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, he offered Jacob and his family the best of the land in Egypt.

Joseph's brothers immediately went back to Jacob with the astonishing news that Joseph was still alive, and that he was now the Prime Minister of Egypt. Understandably, Jacob was initially shocked, but his spirit was soon revived, and he said, no doubt with great joy, **“It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die”** (45:28).

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Joseph's testing of his brothers in Genesis 43:145:28, let us be assured that our sovereign God is able to use even evil human deeds to accomplish salvation.

In God's sovereign providence, he used Joseph's brothers' evil deed to sell him as a slave to go to Egypt where God used him to preserve Israel from the famine. God's promise to make out of Abraham “a great nation” (12:2) and to “multiply his descendants greatly” (17:2) have not come to naught; they

are still in the process of being fulfilled.

Last time we noted that Joseph prefigures Jesus. Note the parallels between Joseph and Jesus. As God sent Joseph to Egypt to save his family, so God sent Jesus to earth to save his people. John 3:16 makes this point, “For God so loved the world, that *he gave his only Son*, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus saves from more than famine. Jesus saves his people from their sin so that they might receive eternal life.

Another parallel between Joseph and Jesus: As the brothers bowed before Joseph, so people will bow before Jesus. Philippians 2:9–11 makes this point, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow*, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

A final parallel between Joseph and Jesus: As Joseph invited his family to settle in Egypt, so Jesus invites his people to settle in his Father’s kingdom. Jesus makes this point in John 14:2–3, “In my Father’s house are many rooms.... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, *that where I am you may be also*.”

Have you accepted Jesus’ invitation to settle in his Father’s kingdom? All you need to do to accept his invitation is to repent of your sin and believe that Jesus is the one who has paid the penalty for your sin. Amen.

## **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz).

## **Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)**

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)