

Israel and the sons of Israel and their families are starving.

A year has passed since they were last in Egypt where they purchased grain.

Since then they have eaten all of that grain... they and their now starving flocks and herds.

The famine covers all of the known world. There is nowhere else they can go to buy grain. Nowhere else has grain.

They must again go to Egypt.

But, that last visit there was horrible, a disaster really.

The prime minister of the land, the big man, found out everything about them and demanded that next time they come...

they must bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, their father's favorite.

But, in order to make them understand, he took Simeon as captive.

He might have kept all of them captive. He threatened to keep 9 of them, but then changed his mind.

This was no man to trifle with, he seemed to have both power and cunning, they dared not cross him.

And, yet, on their way back that last time they discovered that the money they paid was all left in their luggage.

If they returned, would this man think that they were thieves, or even spies again?

What could they do? And, could they just write Simeon off as a lost cause?

They all knew why this had all happened, and even why they were still hungry...

It was because of that sin some 25 years ago... that sin against their brother Joseph.

They were jealous of him then. They hated that their father, Israel, loved him the most.

So they decided to kill him. They ended up selling him for 20 pieces of silver... selling him into slavery.

He would be dead by now. Of that they were sure. Slaves rarely lived long.

He probably went to Egypt to be put to work on the great building projects, wonders they had seen last time they were there.

They had tried to forget that horrible family betrayal... but God had not forgotten.

They still remembered all of it, the distress of Joseph's soul as he looked at them as they handed him over.

He pleaded with them to not do what they were doing, but they would not listen.

Now they were paying for that sin in so many ways... the famine, the loss of Simeon, the demand for Benjamin.

Father, Israel was not doing well with all this...

and he knew... he knew something... that the brothers were the demise of Joseph.

And, the famine would not relent. They were starving.

But, lessons were being learned... important lessons... lessons from God... wilderness sorts of lessons.

Lessons that would be needed by a people rescued from slavery some 400 years later.

Lessons needed by people like us living 3500 years later.

I want to focus this morning on three people in these two chapters and the lessons they were learning.

## I. Israel: Submission to the will of God **Gen. 43:1-15**

Have you ever been in a place where you felt like you were losing everything? That everything was failing?

This is where Israel, the man who's name God had changed from "Jacob."

Israel = "struggles with God"

And, he certainly was struggling now. Everything was a struggle, and God seemed to be letting him have it.

He was losing money, that was for sure. He was losing livestock.

He had lost Joseph, now he had lost Simeon... and now Benjamin was to go off with the other 9.

He feared what would happen to Benjamin, his youngest.

After all, the last time he'd sent his favorite out, Joseph, he never came back.

He was fearful. All of life seemed to be filled with fear. There seemed to be no real choices. Trapped. Fearful.

Have you ever been there?

Have you ever been so fearful and scared that you cannot even think that things are going to get better.

You have this sinking sensation... finances, career, family, everything seems to be headed in the wrong direction.

You've heard that "no news is good news."

Well, sometimes it feels like all news is bad news. You're fearful of every phone call, every letter, everything.

What can you do?

So, Israel put together gifts for that man in Egypt who had so much power, cunning, and insight.

And, money... double the money, triple the money just in case the man thought them thieves.

And, he sent Benjamin. It was the only way... they had to have food.

But, all this was not that important. These things were not the primary plan.

We find the real hope in **Gen. 43:14**... God has to do it. And whatever God does do, with that I must be content.

It turns out that in the context of this story, this is just the right place for Israel to be...

He knows now that he is in God's hands. He has no other hope, no other plan. Israel is at the end of his resources.

God brought Elijah to a place like this, and Jonah, and David, and Jeremiah, and Job... and many many others...

Where they said, OK God, I don't know what You're doing. I don't have any answers. I have no hope but You.

So, I'm just going to trust You and pray and be content with what You will do.

You have my life in Your hands and I am going to trust You that in Your hands is the best place for my life to be.

And, everything in my life, money, possessions, career, family, everything... God, they're yours. I let them go.

Please, Lord, let me be content with what you do.

There is another lesson, to another person, in a very different situation...  
Joseph was not trapped. He was enjoying great success. He had many options.  
Among them... retribution, vengeance, vulnerability, kindness...  
What should he do? How will he know?

## II. Joseph: Testing, hope, and learning to trust Gen. 43:16-44:13

At first it seems like Joseph is acting very strangely.

Why does he hide himself from his brothers?  
Why does he seem to toy with them and their emotions?  
Why does he trap Benjamin?

Some people read this and think that Joseph is getting back at his brothers. After 25 years he's making them scared.  
But, there are reasons in the text to reject this view.

One is in **Gen. 43:30** Joseph is moved to the core of his being because of the presence of Benjamin.  
Then, later, in **Gen. 45:1-3** Joseph finally breaks down. He misses his brothers. He loves them.  
Much later, in **Gen. 50:19** Joseph tells them all that they shouldn't be afraid because he is not God.  
The Lord says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."

No, Joseph is not giving them what he thinks they deserve for their sins. That is God's job. He knows it.

Joseph is testing them. He says so back in **Gen. 42:15**. Why?

Well, he is testing them because he doesn't know if he can trust them.  
Are they still the lying, jealous, treacherous, murderous bunch that he remembers from 25 years ago?  
What will they do to Simeon? To their youngest brother, and father's favorite, Benjamin?  
Will they turn them over? Will they sell them as slaves?

Joseph has seen indication in the earlier visit that they recognize their sin and are sorry for it.

Have they turned from sin? Has there been a change of heart?  
If not... well, maybe he would just leave them in their ignorance and never tell them who he was.  
They might wreck his new family.

But, Joseph knows God and he knows that God can change people. He has hope because of God.

But, he's going to guard his heart before he opens himself to these people who were so treacherous.

And, what a model for us... God can change people, even when we don't see how. Even when we have not seen anything.

There is always hope that God can change even the worst people. Even our own family.

You might say, I know these people. I know what they are capable of doing. Yes, that may be so.  
But God can change them. Keep hoping. Keep praying.

This does not mean that you lower your defenses without actually seeing repentance.

You love them. You are good to them. But, you don't let them all the way into your life and family where they can do damage.  
You might even test them in some way to see if God is changing them... in some way that is not harmful...  
Not in the way that Joseph does... for you are not the unknown man who is prime minister of Egypt.

And what does Joseph's test reveal?

Now we hear from Judah... remember him?

He's the guy who came up with the idea to sell Joseph into slavery and make a little money.  
He's the guy who, in Gen. 38, slept with his daughter-in-law, but then recognized her righteousness.  
Was God working on him then? Well, God certainly is now.

## III. Judah: The sacrifice of a changed heart Gen. 44:14-34

All of a sudden, of no fault of his own, Benjamin is in trouble and doomed to a life of slavery... like Joseph was.

What will the brothers do? Judah steps forward. Not the oldest, Reuben, but Judah.  
What does he do?

1. He confesses his (and his brothers') sin to Joseph. (vs. 16)
2. He considers himself and all his brothers as slaves. He will not leave Benjamin.
3. He then pleads for mercy for the sake of his bereaved father... who loves Benjamin most of all. The jealousy is gone!
4. He speaks of his deep concern for his father who will die if he loses Benjamin. There is no thought of lying.
5. He offers himself in the place of Benjamin. He offers himself as a sacrifice. The selfishness and greed is gone.

The long road back from his former sin is complete. Judah is prepared to give himself up so as to not sin like that again.

This is the real evidence of a changed heart... for all of us. It is brokenness.

This is where God wants to take the sinner who has been serving himself for so long. This is what losing yourself looks like.  
When you say, "I don't care what happens to me. I don't care who finds out..."

"I don't care if I lose money, friends, future, freedom... I just don't want to go back to that sin again."

And all of a sudden you realize that you are free from sin and a slave to righteousness in Jesus Christ. **Rom. 6:20-23**

This is what Jesus Christ came to do in your life. He came to free you from slavery to former sins, and present sin.

And, it is when you can say following Jesus is more important to me than myself... then you know that you are really free.

Is it hard? Sure it's hard. It is a self sacrifice. You die to yourself so that you can live for Jesus.

But, that is why Jesus sacrificed Himself for you... so that you can be one with Him and walk as He walked.