



Genesis

Reconciliation and Reunion

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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Introduction

We saw in the first half of Genesis that it is part of the way God works with men that He tests them. He tests in order to purify and to draw out the kind of self-donating love that mirrors the love among the Trinity. In Joseph's dealings with his brothers we see him acting much the same way. A cursory reading may leave you with the impression that Joseph is playing with his brothers or treating them unfairly. Read closer and you will see that underlying all that he does is a deep love for his brothers and father and a desire to see them reunited once again. In the last lesson Joseph proposed a test 'to prove their honesty.' He discovered that they did know they had sinned and deserved punishment. Although he continued to test them, he sent them back to their father with their money secretly back in their sacks. They had the very difficult challenge of persuading Jacob to entrust them with Benjamin. What is Joseph doing? It is hard to tell at this point. The nature of the test will be revealed over the next few chapters as Joseph continues to draw out from his brothers evidence that they not just acknowledge their sin, but have turned their lives around as well. Once he has tried them and found them truly changed, Joseph will reveal himself and his plan for their aid.

Joseph is more than a model of the way God works with us, or of the work Christ does to reconcile us; he is a model also of the loving forgiveness that must underlie all our relationships. And because he has set his eyes on God, he is able to see in his brothers' worst behavior, in their very act of selling their own brother, the hand of God turning what was meant for evil, to good.

Read Genesis 43:15-45:8 all the way through at least once before answering the questions that follow.

Genesis 43:15-34



15 So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin; and they arose and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph. 16 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." 17 The man did as Joseph bade him, and brought the men to Joseph's house. 18 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 seek occasion against us and fall upon us, to make slaves of us and seize our asses." 19 So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house, and spoke with him at the door of the house, 20 and said, "Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food; 21 and when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was every man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it again with us, 22 and we have brought other money down in our hand to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks." 23 He replied, "Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them. 24 And when the man had brought the men into Joseph's house, and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had



Genesis 43:15-34 (cont.)

given their asses provender, 25 they made ready the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there. 26 When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which they had with them, and bowed down to him to the ground. 27 And he inquired about their welfare, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" 28 They said, "Your servant our father is well, he is still alive." And they bowed their heads and made obeisance. 29 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? God be gracious to you, my son!" 30 Then Joseph made haste, for his heart yearned for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. 31 Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, "Let food be served." 32 They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. 33 And they sat before him, the first-born according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked at one another in amazement. 34 Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.



Genesis 44

1 Then he 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, 2 and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. 3 As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their asses. 4 When they had gone but a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup?' 5 Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he divines? You have done wrong in so doing." 6 When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. 7 They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! 8 Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; how then should we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? 9 With whomever of your servants it be found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." 10 He said, "Let it be as you say: he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be blameless." 11 Then every man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and every man opened his sack. 12 And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. 13 Then they rent their clothes, and every man loaded his ass, and they returned to the city. 14 When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there; and they fell before him to the ground. 15 Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed divine?" 16 And Judah said, "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 slaves, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found." 17 But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father." 18 Then Judah went up to him and said, "O my lord, let your servant, I pray you, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. 19 My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?' 20 And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the



Genesis 44 (cont.)

child of his old age; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children; and his father loves him.' 21 Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes upon him.' 22 We said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' 23 Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.' 24 When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. 25 And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' 26 we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' 27 Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; 28 one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. 29 If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.' 30 Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the lad's life, 31 when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. 32 For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.' 33 Now therefore, let your servant, I pray you, remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord; and let the lad go back with his brothers. 34 For how can I go back to my father if the lad is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would come upon my father."



Genesis 45:1-8

1 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him; and he cried, "Make every one go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. 4 So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, I pray you." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 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. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt."



Questions on the Text

Joseph Receives His Brothers

Read Genesis 43:15-34

1. Re-read Gen. 42:27-28,35, which gives Joseph's brothers' reaction when they found their money had been returned to their sacks, and compare it with the steward's explanation of the money's presence (Gen. 43:23). How are they similar and how do they differ? How do you account for the brothers' response?
2. Do you see a similar misunderstanding when Joseph invites them to his house in vs. 16-18?



Questions on the Text

Joseph Receives His Brothers (cont.)

3. In vs. 26, the brothers bow down before Joseph for the second time. If Joseph had been harboring feelings of revenge for their earlier treatment of him, how would you expect him to react? How did he react instead, and what does this say about the attitude of his heart?

4. At table, Joseph sat the brothers in order of birthright and age, with Benjamin presumably at the end, but Benjamin was given five times as much food as anyone else. How might this be looked on as a test of his brothers? Do they pass?

The Final Test

Read Genesis 44:1-13

5. Through his testing so far, Joseph has gotten his brothers to “prove their honesty” by bringing back Benjamin. He has seen that they show no hard feelings or jealousy toward their youngest brother, now their father’s favorite. He has heard them acknowledge their guilt. Isn’t this enough? Why do you think he continues to test them?

6. What is the nature of the test?

7. Given that Benjamin appeared to be guilty, what is remarkable about his brothers’ actions on discovering the cup (vs. 13)?

Judah's Plea

Read Genesis 44:14-34

8. Read what Judah says to Joseph in vs. 16. If he is only referring to Benjamin’s sin (of supposedly stealing the cup), why does he refer to “the guilt of your servants (plural)? To what does he seem to be referring and why?

9. Read Judah’s plea to Joseph carefully (vss. 18-34). What is Judah’s chief concern? What do his words reveal about how things have changed?

10. Can you see in Judah’s offer of vs. 33, any hint of what a future descendant of Judah would do?

11. Judah’s name means “praise” but his early life hardly lived up to it. In an earlier lesson we were surprised that the Messiah’s line would start from a man who left home for Canaan, produced sons so wicked God killed them, and slept with his daughter-in-law. How do you think he got from that point to this impassioned self-offering?

Joseph Makes Himself Known

Read Genesis 45:1-8

12. What reaction does Judah’s speech provoke in Joseph?

13. When Joseph makes himself known, his brothers are dismayed and can’t answer him. What must be going through their minds? What would color their interpretation of his behavior?

14. How does Joseph reassure them? (And if he wants to reassure them, why does Joseph reinforce his introduction by adding, “I am your brother...whom you sold into Egypt”—practically rubbing their noses in their sin?)



Questions on the Text (cont.)

Joseph Makes Himself Known (cont.)

15. How does Joseph's behavior throughout these chapters exemplify what Pope John Paul II has said, that "Forgiveness demonstrates the presence in the world of the love which is more powerful than sin. Forgiveness is also the fundamental condition for reconciliation, not only in the relationship of God with man, but also in relationships between people"? (Dives in misericordia, 14)
16. Does it seem strange to you that Joseph didn't seek or demand a personal apology from his brothers? Why do you think he did not? Is there a message here about how we should forgive others?



Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God's Word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. The suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the text (see Genesis 45 in this lesson). Or you may choose one of your own. For further reflection, consider these:

1. This story makes it clear that two different interpretations can be given for a single event. What was responsible for Joseph's brothers' misinterpretation of his actions? Could a similar problem be affecting your own interpretation of someone else's actions toward you? Is there anything you learned from these chapters that can help you?
2. Are you finding it hard to forgive someone who isn't sorry? Think on all God has forgiven you for, and ask for grace to extend forgiveness to others. "The heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession (CCC #2843)."
3. Read Judah's plea carefully and ponder it awhile. Is there a message there for you? If there is something you need to confess, look on Christ and on the greatness of his love for you. Make your confession, and pray for the strength to begin anew.



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

As Genesis began with a rupture in the relationship between man and God, it is fitting that the book draws to a close with a picture of the way God would one day heal that relationship by sending His Son to bring forgiveness and reconciliation. Joseph is in many ways a forerunner of Christ, and the deeper you dig, the more parallels you may find between him and the Messiah. A few are offered here for your consideration. Pondering them can enrich both your study of Joseph and your understanding of Jesus' work on your behalf.

Joseph and Christ are alike in person and in character:

1. Both Joseph and Jesus are greatly loved by their fathers and envied and hated by their brothers.
2. They are alike in character: meek and humble, compassionate, faithful in the face of opposition; tempted yet without sin.
3. They neither condemn those who wrong them nor seek vengeance or personal apologies, but leave judgment to God.
4. They both forgive unconditionally. Their actions are motivated by love.
5. Both Joseph and Christ set their eyes firmly on God and do not allow the way things appear to distract them or cause them to doubt.

...in suffering and in glory:

1. Betrayed by those close to them, both are wrongly accused and given over to die.
2. They are each sold for a few pieces of silver into the hands of gentiles.
3. Joseph—like Jesus—loses all his rights and becomes a servant, from which position he is lifted by God to a place of sovereignty at the king's right hand, where every knee bows to him.
4. Joseph is brought forth to life from the well and from prison; Jesus is brought forth to life from the tomb. After rising, neither is recognized by his brethren.

...and in their mission:

1. God sent Joseph to bring forgiveness and reconciliation to his people; to save them and the nations from starvation; and to pave the way for the growth and establishment of the people of God. God sent Jesus to bring forgiveness and reconciliation to all people; to save them from death; and to bring in the kingdom of God.
2. Both suffer that others can live.
3. Joseph, like Jesus, is able to save those who come to him, and is the source of food that brings new life.

Catechism Connection

The following excerpts from The Catechism of the Catholic Church are on repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation:

“Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace.” (1431)

“Conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church.” (1440)

“Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated...them.” (1443)



Catholic Scripture Study



Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

1. Joseph's brothers are so racked with guilt and so shaken by the return of their money that they see the money as a punishment from God and mistake Joseph's offer of hospitality for a prelude to revenge.
2. Far from seeking revenge, Joseph is solicitous for his brothers' welfare and invites them to feast with him. He weeps in longing for his younger brother and appears guided by love and forgiveness in all that he does.
3. The brothers' sin against Joseph was at root a sin against their father. Having established that they acknowledge their guilt and that they love one another (evidenced in their lack of jealousy of Benjamin and the absence of jockeying for position), Joseph puts his brothers to a final test to determine whether they now love Jacob. In doing so, he is modeling the kind of mediation that Jesus Christ would one day do to reconcile his brethren with their heavenly father.
4. In the process of testing them, Joseph puts his brothers in a situation where they must act, and thereby draws out from them a display of unity and love that is willing to sacrifice self for the others.
5. Judah's eloquent plea reveals a complete change of heart and a new depth of love for Jacob to the point where he offers himself as atonement for all of them. Thus he becomes a picture of Jesus, who would be born from Judah's line and who would one day offer himself as atonement to save his brothers from slavery and reunite them with his father.
6. When he finally revealed his identity, Joseph's brothers were understandably dismayed. Joseph put their minds at rest with the pronouncement that all they had done, however they meant it, was used by God to bring Joseph to Egypt and put him in a position to save lives. Even without a direct apology from them, Joseph forgives them, as Christ forgave those who killed him. By doing this, he accomplished something far greater than retribution: the restoration of his family.

A Message from the Authors

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