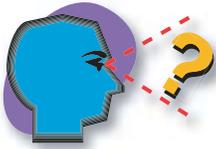


Genesis

Responses to the Questions



NOTE; BE SURE TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THE ANSWERS IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

Joseph Receives His Brothers Read Genesis 43:15-34

1. When the brothers first discover the money in their sacks they are afraid. They think it is a punishment from God for what they did to Joseph. In contrast, the steward assures them that he has their silver and so God must have returned it to them. Interestingly, both attribute the money's appearance in the sack to God. The brothers' guilty consciences make them see it as punishment, where the steward sees it as found treasure.
2. Joseph invites them to his house to feast with them. His brothers are so worried about the money, and so certain that they deserve to be punished, that they mistake his invitation for a ruse to capture them, seize their animals and make them slaves. Given what we know of the way they treat those who wrong or pose a threat to them (they killed the people of Shechem; they plotted to kill Joseph and sold him into slavery), it is not surprising they would assume this.

The brothers misunderstood Joseph's motives the way they misunderstood God's. Similarly, we sometimes misunderstand God's actions in our lives, so that what is prompted by love and meant for our wellbeing may be misinterpreted as punishment or vengeance.

3. You can tell as much about Joseph's heart from his actions, as you can tell about the brothers' from theirs. The temptation for a man bent on vengeance would be to make the brothers pay for their misdeeds. He might gloat over them as they bowed; make them realize to whom they were bowing and rub their noses in it. Joseph accepts their obeisance quietly and turns the conversation to them and their welfare. He inquires after Jacob and blesses Benjamin. If he leaves them abruptly it is only to weep, for "his heart yearned for his brother." Love and forgiveness is guiding him, not thoughts of revenge.

When Joseph invites his brothers to feast at his table, knowing all he does about them, it is a beautiful anticipation of the time when "Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom...He invites them to that conversion without which one cannot enter the kingdom, but shows them in word and deed his father's boundless mercy for them..." (CCC #545)

4. Joseph was showing a strong preference for the younger son, as his father once bypassed his older brothers for him. This allowed Joseph to see whether the others were as jealous of Benjamin (who was now evidently Jacob's favorite) as they once were of him. They are amazed at being placed in the right order, but no reaction to Benjamin's portion is recorded. There is no sign of the old jealousy or of any jockeying for position among them.

The Final Test Read Genesis 44:1-13

5. Repentance entails not just sorrow over wrong done in the past but a determination to change in the future, and it is possible that he wanted to see evidence of a changed life and character. But there is something else needed as well. In Gen. 42:22 Reuben says, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the lad? But you would not listen. So now



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The Final Test (cont.)

there comes a reckoning for his blood.” He sees what they did as a sin against Joseph. And yet it was Jacob’s love they were jealous of. Jacob is the one they deceived, that they hurt, that they offered hollow comfort to. And even before selling Joseph, they overstepped Jacob in the matter of Dinah and tried to hide their exploits from him. Joseph’s brothers are estranged not from Joseph but from their father. Their sin is primarily against Jacob—even as our sin is first an offence against God.

Joseph seems to realize that what his brothers did to him was evidence of a deeper rupture in their relationship to Jacob. He thus is looking for evidence they now love their father. The testing he does is directed toward reconciliation with their father; reconciliation with himself will follow on that. He is giving us a foretaste of the kind of mediation that will one day be done by Jesus Christ to reconcile us with our heavenly Father.

6. To determine the extent of their love for their father, Joseph puts his brothers in a situation where they must act on that love. They don’t seem to be jealous of Benjamin, so Joseph sets him up to give them a cause to mistreat their father’s favorite. How will they react if they think Benjamin has jeopardized all of their lives by stealing Joseph’s silver cup? Will they abandon him to his fate and increase their father’s grief just to save their own skins? Or will they stand in for Benjamin out of brotherly love and respect for their bereaved father? If they do this, Joseph will have drawn out of them self-donating love, the kind of love that animates the Trinity and that God draws out of all those who are His.

7. Benjamin’s brothers are filled with grief and despair, but not a word of reproach is said to Benjamin. They don’t defend themselves, where previously on discovering money in their sacks they are very vocal both to Jacob and to the steward. Instead of allowing the supposedly guilty one to take his own rap, they go straight back to Egypt together in a remarkable display of unity.

Judah's Plea

Read Genesis 44:14-34

8. What Judah does not say is as interesting as what he does. Notice that he doesn’t defend Benjamin. He doesn’t say “please excuse my little brother, he doesn’t know any better;” nor even “please forgive him and take me instead, because I promised I’d take care of him.” He doesn’t bargain, he simply surrenders, and he surrenders for all of them together. It seems that in his mind, the stolen cup is all of a piece with their earlier sin, which he may think God revealed to Joseph through his divining. Ever since Joseph first started to question them, they have been waiting for the punishment they are sure God is bringing on them for their sin. It is this that he must be alluding to.

9. It is not for Benjamin’s life for Benjamin’s sake that Judah appeals to Joseph. Joseph’s closing words (vs. 17), which sound so reassuring, stir up a storm of anguish. How can they “go up in peace to [their] father” without his beloved son? They had no trouble doing that 20 years earlier, but now Judah is consumed with love for his father. Look at how many times the word “father” appears in his plea! It is hard not to feel his anguish over the pain losing Joseph caused Jacob. Judah is no longer willing to let him suffer. He is so determined not to cause his father any more grief that he offers himself as a sort of atonement, standing in not just for Benjamin’s supposed sin but for all of them.

10. Jesus Christ one day would give up all his rights and offer himself as atonement to save his brothers from slavery and reunite them with his father.



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Judah's Plea (cont.)

11. The Bible doesn't tell us, but it looks as though God has used Judah's mistakes, his pain, the years of seeing his father suffer, the exposure of his sin with Tamar, the famine and Joseph's testing to draw out of him a thorough repentance, to bring him to a complete about-face. It shouldn't be surprising to read later in Genesis 49 the prediction that Judah's brothers will praise him, or later to hear Jesus being called the Lion of Judah. Judah is finally living up to his name.

Joseph Makes Himself Known

Read Genesis 45:1-8

12. Whether at the change in Judah or at the thought of Jacob's anguish, Joseph can no longer control his emotions. He sends the Egyptians out so he can make himself known to his brothers. And still the emphasis is on Jacob: "I am Joseph," he says. "Is my father still alive?" As we surmised earlier, Joseph's testing was directed to establishing reconciliation with their father first as the necessary foundation for their own reunion. In the same way, we are reconciled to one another and the Church after reconciling first to God. The Catechism says that "Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church (#1440)"—which needs to be dealt with as well, but only after our relationship with God is first healed.

13. It must have been a shock to discover that the very boy they sold and believed dead (or serving in slavery, not as Pharaoh's right hand!) was the one who had brought them to this emotional turning point. They may have been dealing with disbelief or denial; certainly they are afraid. Their fear, as earlier, is colored by their assumption that he has been sent by God to punish them—a thought that may have intensified when they learned who he was.

14. Joseph brings up their sin not to incriminate his brothers but to help them believe that he is who he says he is. It also serves to reinforce what he tells them next: that God was working all the time to bring good out of what they'd done, and brought him to Egypt ahead of the others to save lives. God's hand in the whole thing is so obvious to Joseph, he disregards his brothers' culpability. Joseph reassures them by letting them know that he has forgiven them to the point of not holding them responsible.

15. Instead of being motivated by vengeance, Joseph does all in his power to bring his brothers to repentance and reconciliation. Only love could overlook the hurt they'd done to him, a love that was based on a love of God and for his father. That Joseph forgave his brothers even before seeing them again is abundantly evident from the moment he first sees them bowing before him. Because he forgave them, he was able to look past their sin and his own hurt and work for their good and for reconciliation with Jacob and with himself.

16. It is difficult to understand why his brothers never come out and apologize for what they've done to Joseph, and it's hard to imagine "letting them off" the way Joseph does. It can be equally hard to imagine doing the same to someone who hurts us and never says "I'm sorry." Joseph models for us what Christ would later do. On the cross he said, "forgive them, father,"—not because they are sorry for what they have done, but because "they know not what they do." Joseph, like Jesus, is able to leave judgment to God. God knows how the others have acted and will deal with them in His way and in His time. By being willing to forgive them even before they were sorry, Joseph was able to accomplish a far greater thing than simply exacting a confession or getting some sense of retribution. He was able to see his brothers restored to his father and his family reunited.