

# **Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 23, Joseph Reunited with His Brothers, Genesis 42-45**

© 2024 Kenneth Mathews and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Kenneth Mathews and his teaching on the book of Genesis. This is session number 23, Joseph Reunited with His Brothers, Genesis 42-45.

Lesson 23 is Joseph who is reunited with his brothers in chapters 42 through 45, and this will take in the major section of the story of Joseph pertaining to what occurs in Egypt.

And so what I'd like for us to recall is the main ideas that have been taking place and how these, in a narrative fashion, proclaim how God is superintending the lives of the patriarchs and, in some way, will superintend the life of future Israel. And the way in which to teach Israel that this is the case is by showing the parallels between the patriarchs and then their descendants in terms of the nation. And what we find that just as Abraham descended into Egypt, just as we find that Joseph descends into Egypt, and in both cases, we find that Abraham arises and is enriched by Pharaoh.

And then we find that this is the case as well with Joseph and the household of Jacob. This will be the case for Israel. Israel, as we find in Exodus chapters 12 through 14, will be delivered from Egypt crossing the Red Sea and on their way to the promised land.

They will see God working out all things to the prosperity, really, you could say the survival and prosperity of Israel. So today, then, the couple of ideas we want to recall are that these chapters will describe the reconciliation of the brothers with Joseph. They reunited.

And so we can remember Isaac and Ishmael, if we can think of reunited brothers, because at least we can say they were both together at the death and burial of their father, Abraham. Then, one more elaborately told in chapters 32 and 33 was the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau. And now here we have it, the schism within the family that would always be threatening the promissory blessing that God has in mind.

There, there was reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. The schism beginning in chapter 37. Now, in these chapters, especially chapters 42 to 43.

Now, when we look at chapter 42, I want us to remind ourselves that chapter 42, verse 21 reads, They said to one another, that is the brothers, surely we are being punished because of our brother. See, they are coming to recognize that God is at work in their lives, and they are experiencing the full weight of their guilt and shame

and the punishment that they are experiencing. We saw how distressed he was, that is their father, that is Joseph rather, when Joseph when he pleaded with us for his life.

Now, we are not told this in chapter 37, but we are told here that they, with hatred in their hearts and coldness, just rejected and resisted his plea as a teenager, the youngest of the group, pleading, but we wouldn't listen. That's why this distress has come upon us. Of course, Reuben says, this isn't my fault. I was the one, he says in verse 22, who told you this was not a good idea.

Not a good idea at all. Now, look with me also in verse 28, chapter 42, verse 28. Where in the second part of that verse, when they discovered, you see, the silver in their backpacks, and we'll explain what this is about, but it gave the impression that they had stolen the silver.

And that's what they're just mortified over, that they will be charged with spying on the land, and they will be charged with stealing. So, it says in the second half of this verse that at their hearts sank, and they turned to each other trembling. They are mortified.

In their minds, they were as good as dead. They were caught between Egypt and Canaan, between this yet-to-be-revealed Joseph and then their father, Jacob. And they said, what is this that God has done to us? So, there is a growing sense, as we read these chapters, that God is at work again.

And what He's doing, as we've seen in the past with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a transformation that's taking place. This will be the case with Joseph as well. And this transformation begins with confession.

It begins with a recognition that they are altogether dependent upon God's grace and mercy. Now, this language is not used per se, but the idea here is that they are guilty and that their crimes are rightly accounted for by this judgment against them, the punishment that is befalling upon them. Now, let's look then at the parallels of chapters 42 and 43.

These two work together. The first is that we have two journeys that are in mind. So, the brothers have two journeys to Egypt within chapters 42 and 43.

And the first journey, we are told, is without Benjamin in chapter 42. And then the second journey is in chapter 43 with Benjamin. And this is critically important as to what is taking place as Joseph deceives them in order to discover if there's been any change in the case of his brothers.

And he zeroes in on what is most precious to Joseph, and that would have been his brother Benjamin. Joseph and Benjamin were born by the same mother, Rachel. They were the closest in their relationship.

And also, you see, Joseph was favored by his father, and the brothers couldn't stand that. They couldn't tolerate it. And they went to desperate means to rid themselves of this rival.

Could this also be what's taking place with young Benjamin? No doubt Benjamin was precious to their father, Joseph. What had become of Benjamin? Had they already rid themselves of Joseph's precious brother, Benjamin? All these questions need to be answered. And so, he decided, that is Joseph, to learn of this before revealing himself.

And so, let's look then at the first journey where we have in verses 1 through 5 the ten brothers who are on their way to Egypt. So, it's important for us to recognize that as Jacob sends them on this mission, he says, Go down to Egypt where I've learned that there is grain, in verse 2, so that we may live and not die. So, this is a matter of life and death.

They're in a desperate situation. There's really not an option for them. And that is what will become very important for why the brothers will pursue taking with them Benjamin.

Initially, they don't take Benjamin, you see. Their father wouldn't let them do so. He was not seen as necessary.

Well, you get the idea also that Jacob has always been suspicious of his sons, what became of Joseph. And he wasn't about to let them have Benjamin. The last child born to his household and the last child that was born to his favorite, Rachel, who died in giving birth to Benjamin.

So, if you look at chapter 5 with me, you can see that this is actually what comes to pass. They do live as a consequence of going down to Egypt. And so, in chapter 5, when the revelation of Joseph has been made to his brothers, we find it says, he says that is Joseph to his brothers.

Don't be distressed. He says in verse 5, do not be angry with yourselves any longer. We've got to put this behind us because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

And then again in verse 7, but God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. As I commented last time, this was a salvation that was extended to all people groups, to all nations who

went into Egypt to gather the food necessary to sustain their lives during this great famine. A famine that evidently was unprecedented.

So, the mention of the 10 brothers then would be this group of hateful, vitriolic kind of brothers. The 11th brother, of course, would be Joseph, and then the 12th brother would be Benjamin. So, in going down to Egypt, we are told that the famine in verse 5, the famine was in the land of Canaan also.

So, we're going to have this reversal of famine and then fullness, famine, and fullness, famine, and fullness. The household of Jacob will experience moral famine, but then it's going to be reversed, and we will see a spiritual vivaciousness on their part, a spiritual renewal, a renewed appreciation for who they are and what their mission is about. Now, when we come to what follows in verse 6, all the way through verse 28, we have this recounting of Joseph, who receives the brothers.

They don't recognize him, of course. And he dresses, he speaks, he acts, and he has all the royal splendor of a man in great Egyptian reputation. So, we are told in verse 6, So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

Now, the importance of that will not be lost on you, will you? The bowing down is projected in the dreams that Joseph had back in chapter 37, when the sheaves bowed down to his sheaf and when the stars, sun, and moon bowed down to him. Now, so this is actually coming to pass. The author wants us to show them that the dreams that God has given are coming to pass and that this is the result of God's work in their midst.

So, they come from the land of Canaan, they declare in verse 7. Verse 8 is important. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. And so, what's at work here is that this deception is designed with a test, as we will see.

Now, in order to achieve this test, he charged them with being spies. He says in verse 14, So he interrogated them. He learned that there was a youngest son that was left behind.

And so, to see if they are, in fact, what they claim, namely, honest men who are just on a mission to buy food like other people, not a spy. He sets up this testing so that they will be forced to bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, back to Egypt. Verse 14, On the third day, Joseph said to them, Do this and you will live, because I am a moral man, I am an honest man, for I fear God.

And so he compromises, if you'll notice in verse 19: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, and the rest of you go home, get your youngest brother, bring him back to me, and this will prove that what you said is true. And

then we had read earlier, in verse 21, they said, Now we are surely under the judgment of God. And the quarreling continues, Reuben claims, if you'd only done what I said, then this would not have occurred to us.

Verse 24: There he turned away from them, that is Joseph, and he wept, he was beside himself. He was, and he knew that he was doing this, but he felt it necessary to test him, but he knew he was torturing them, he was tormenting them. And so, Simeon is the one who is left behind in prison.

And Joseph gave orders, in verse 25, where they were to put each man's silver back in his sack and to give them the provisions. Now this was under the deception that they would have given the money to Joseph, they get their provisions, they go back. But by, you see, surreptitiously replacing the silver, it would fully give the charge of being spies, of being thieves, credibility.

So, he's setting them up for this great terror. It's not a disappointment. Notice it says, as we said earlier, in verse 28, the last part, Their hearts sank, and they turned to each other, trembling.

What is this that God has done to us? Well, they return to Jacob and explain what took place. And this is the report made to Jacob in verses 29 through 34. And they do detail a great deal of what occurred on that occasion with them.

And verse 33 says, Then the man, or rather the man, that would be Joseph, who is Lord over the land, said to us, then they report how he required of them to bring back the youngest brother. Then, you see, he's holding Simeon hostage. Then I will release Simeon, because I will find that you are honest men.

And then he says, in verse 34, You can continue to trade with us. And when you need food and sustenance, then you may enter into our land, and we will provide that for you. And so, Jacob said to them, after hearing this report, In verse 36, You have deprived me of my children.

Joseph is no more. And Simeon is no more. And now you want to take Benjamin? Everything is against me.

Now, we will see on the part of Reuben, a change taking place. And Reuben said to his father, in verse 37, He's the firstborn. You'll recall he had an incestuous relationship with Bilhah, one of Jacob's wives or handmaidens.

He said to his father, You may put both of my sons to death. Now, that is out of desperation. There was nothing more precious to a person in that culture at that time than the children born who would continue his name, his inheritance, his legacy.

Now, of course, this would be true for our culture as well. And that is, we would not dare to think about executing our own children or making that a possibility. You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you.

Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back. But Jacob said, My son will not go down there with you. His brother is dead.

He's the only one that's left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to Sheol, the land of the dead. Translated to the grave in sorrow.

In other words, Jacob is saying, If I lose Benjamin because of your deceit, your jealousy, or for any other reason by this man in Egypt, I will die. You will be taking my own life. Well, that brings us then to the second journey, in this case, with Benjamin.

And how does this come about? I had said last time that there was a prominence given to Jacob and Joseph, but also Judah. And he comes to prominence in chapter 43. So, in the opening verses, Jacob is going to instruct his sons.

Now, the famine was still severe in the land, and of course, they were going to use up the revisions they had initially brought on their first journey. So, when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, Go back and buy us a little bit more food. But Judah, here's the promise, said to him, The man warned us, We can't go back unless Benjamin goes with us.

If you will send our brother along with us, we'll go down and buy the food for you. But there's no reason for us to go down. And all of us will be subject to the punishment, either imprisonment or death, at the hands of this Egyptian overlord.

So, Israel asked, now notice the name shift here from Jacob to Israel. Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother? That's what he also said about Simeon and Levi when it came to the murderous vengeance carried out against the Shechemites. This is recalled for us in chapter 34, where these two brothers, and then they were assisted, I think, by the other brothers.

They used circumcision as a means of disabling the Shechemites because Shechem, the prince, they were also called the Hivites, had kidnapped, molested, and harmed their sister Dinah. And they murdered him. And you remember that Jacob said, Look at the trouble you have given me because now I will be rejected.

Now, I will be subject to any hostilities and retaliation against me. He says I will become odorous in the nostrils of my neighbors. So that kind of idea is that everywhere I turn, my sons give me great grief.

Well, you recall that this is what Jacob had done in the household of Isaac, his father. The great grief that came upon that household. So, we've come full circle in the life of Jacob that his sons is also trying his soul Verse 8 Judah said to Israel his father, Send the boy along with me and we will go at once so that we and you and our children may live and not die.

I myself will guarantee his safety. You can hold me personally responsible for him. So here is his pledge for Benjamin.

Do you see the movement between Reuben, his offer, I'll give you my two sons, and then Judah? He takes personal responsibility. And if I don't bring him back, I will bear the blame before you all my life. Verse 10 As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and already come back two times.

Okay, now, Jacob is willing to concede the necessity of this. And so, he sends them on their way. He sends a gift of the best products of the land.

He says in verse 11. Then he also sends the young brother, his youngest, Benjamin with them. Now, he says in verse 13, take your brother also and go back to the man at once in my God Almighty.

How shall I? This is a prayer. Jacob becomes a man of prayer throughout his later years. When he returns to meet with Esau, he says perhaps God will grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you.

As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved. If I'm going to lose my family, then this is all in God's hands. And I've got to entrust all of you to God's promises, my family, having a future.

I'm entrusting this to El Shaddai, God Almighty. So that's what took place. They took back the best products of the land.

They took a double amount of silver. And so, Jacob wisely understood that the best way to show that the brothers were innocent of spying and stealing was to overwhelm Joseph with gifts. Now this had sort of worked one time quite well for Jacob in the past.

And you remember the waves of Jacob's wealth, his flocks, that his servants produced and presented to Esau as a way of reconciling with Esau. Esau was rather impressed by this and was happy that they could be reconciled. And it was a sign, I think, of repentance and humility on the part of Jacob.

Jacob knew that he had robbed his brother, Esau. He had mistreated him. So, this is a way of, again, winning at least a hearing on the part of the man and Joseph's steward.

So, this is what takes place and it's recounted for you in verse 17. The man did as Joseph told him, that is, the steward, to present a meal for the men. And the meal was a means of, again, testing.

And we'll see this evolve in the remainder of the chapter because there he brought out, that it is probably better to read this so it would be clear to us beginning in verse 23. These men, of course, are making their appeal. We brought back the double silver, they say.

And then, in verse 23, it's alright, the steward said. Don't be afraid. Now, here's some insight.

Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks. I received your silver. Then he brought out Simeon.

So, things are looking very positive for the brothers. It looks like the plan is going to work out. Now, Joseph, when he arrives, sees the gifts, and they again bow down.

You remember this is in accord with the dreams of Joseph. This is what they did in the first case.

Now, here is the second case. He asked him how they were, and then he said, how is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living? And they said, yes, our father is still alive and well. And they bowed low to pay him honor. Then he saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son.

He said, is this your youngest brother? And he said, God be gracious to you, my son. That's a blessing. He hurried out.

He was so moved. This was some evidence put forward that their brothers had changed. They had not taken advantage of Benjamin.

And then he returned. Now, this is an important point that is to be made in verses 32 and following. They served Joseph by himself.

So, picture this. Here they are in this house where the meal is taking place. They served Joseph in distance apart from the brothers by themselves and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews.



For that is detestable to Egyptians. The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages. Firstborn to youngest.

And they looked at each other in astonishment. Now, when portions were paid to them, Benjamin's portion was five times greater. And they feasted and drank freely with Joseph, not knowing it was Joseph.

Now this is what's important for us. Two things. One is the culture in Egypt despised shepherds.

And so, they would not eat with shepherds. They distinguished themselves of being of a higher culture, higher learning. And that's why you have this segregation when it comes to eating.

The Egyptians in one place, the Hebrews in another. The reason why this is important is because ultimately, Pharaoh is going to give the family of Jacob a land, a very prosperous land, called Goshen. And this will come about later in the book.

But what is important when you look at the big picture is they're going to be segregated from the Egyptian populace. Now, before the brothers, you'll remember, began to be assimilated into the culture of the Canaanites. And a chief example of that is the way in which Judah married a Canaanite woman.

Now, the moral decline is a consequence of the brothers losing sight of the great tradition of their fathers. The promises that God made to Abraham and Isaac and also that of Jacob. But by virtue of being segregated from the Egyptians, they will have an opportunity then to rediscover their identity as unique, to revive their appreciation of what God is bestowing upon them, to revisit the mission that God has set them on, to bring to the whole world, the nations, the blessing of God.

That's the first thing for us to keep in mind. The second thing is by giving Benjamin five times as much, how will the brothers respond? Will it be quarreling? Will it be bitterness? Will it be hatred? So that's an additional way of Joseph coming to learn. Now, in chapter 44, we will find then that there is this testing of the brothers.

It comes front and center. So, the steward is told, I want you to take my cup, the silver one, verse 2, and I want you to put it in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, Benjamin, along with the silver for his grain. In other words, the silver that was used to buy the grain.

And he did as Joseph said. Now, this cup is a diviner's cup, a means of discovering the will of the gods, the future. Now, is this simply an artifact? Is this simply a decorative in the life of Joseph? Or was this something that he actually used in his life and he

had believed, which, of course, would indicate that Joseph had more and more assimilated in the culture of Egypt.

And so, it does remind me a bit of the household gods that were stolen by Rachel when they left Laban's household. Now, so in the morning, the men just sat on about their business and they left. And then the steward catches up with them, and charges them with being wicked, having stolen the master's cup for divination.

The brothers are beside themselves because this cup, this personal item of the master, is found in Benjamin's sack. Let's pick that part of the story up in verse 11. Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it.

Then the steward proceeded to search beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. Can you imagine the drama as each one's sack is discovered? And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. At this, they tore their clothes.

There's that clothing motif again. It was a sign, you see, of the most bitter, bitter emotional response to disaster. This is disastrous.

Could it have been any different? Reuben would have been better pleased if it had meant the loss of his own sons. Judah would like to have given his own life up. Benjamin.

Precious Benjamin to our father. So, we want to continue then in verse 16. Here is what Judah says in leading the group.

What can we possibly say? What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? Verse 16. God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now, my Lord, slaves.

We ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup. All is lost. And then, in verse 18, Judah went up to him and said, Please, my Lord, let your servants speak a word to my Lord.

And he confesses his sins. He confesses the brother's sins. And he recounts what has occurred.

And he says in verse 30, So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant, my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with his boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our Father down to the grave in sorrow. Your servant, speaking of himself, guaranteed the boy's safety to my father.

I said, if I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life. What Joseph is discovering is that there is true remorse on the part of the

brothers regarding what they did to their father when they sold off Joseph. And they would not do that again in losing Benjamin.

So, there is a plea to liberate Benjamin, to restore him to their father. Now, when it comes to chapter 45, Joseph reveals his identity, in verses 1-38. And so, in the first 15 verses, he's going to make himself known.

And Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants. And he cried out, clear the hall! He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and the Pharaoh's household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, here in verse 3, what a declaration, what a moment of terror on the part of the brothers.

I am Joseph. Then he shows his love and passion for his father. Is my father still living? But his brothers are not able to answer because they are terrified of his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, come close to me. I remember that when Esau raced to Jacob, they embraced and kissed. When they had done so, he said, I am your brother, Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt.

Now, he's going to have to convince them. And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now, there has been famine in the land, and for the next five, they will not be plowing and reaping.

But God, verse 7, sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So, there are two ways we see that this is discernible. The first is a way that you may have forgotten.

You may have forgotten that in chapter 37, that when Joseph was sent by his father Jacob to Shechem to check in on his brothers and to bring back a report, he arrived in the area of Shechem. His brothers were not to be found, and he was wondering about someone who was lost. And we are simply told that there was this man.

He's not identified. At that time, we talked about the possibility that the man was actually an angel of the Lord manifesting himself as a man or God himself manifesting himself as a man. But here the hiddenness of God, God at work, he says, your brothers have gone down to Dothan, and there you will find them.

God used this man as a means whereby Joseph and his brothers in that day would be gathered together at Dothan. God in a most unusual turn of events is working again so that the brothers will be reunited in a solidarity, a unity. The second is the way that God used dreams.

The dreams in chapter 37 showed that in the case of the sheaves and the stars, that there was a unification, a reunification at work between the master and the brothers. So , with this in view then, we look at chapter 50. And this also is important for us because after the death of Jacob and his burial, the sons are reignited in their fear.

I think they reasoned that as long as Jacob was alive, Joseph wouldn't do anything to them. And so, they acknowledge in verse 18, his brothers came to Joseph and said, We are your slaves. But Joseph said to them, Don't be afraid.

Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me. But God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done: the saving of many lives. So, this is the attitude that Joseph adopts.

He, too, undergoes a change. He doesn't any longer want to forget. You remember the naming of his child Manasseh.

All the sorrow of his household. Rather, he wants to embrace the legacy of Jacob, his father, and recognize God's bigger plan. And this is important for us to take away from this story of Joseph.

The sorrows, the trials that Joseph underwent that Jacob underwent, which the brothers themselves, year after year after year of the guilt and the shame, all of that sorrow did have meaning. It was not arbitrary. It was not capricious.

It was not just simply a happenstance. It was a happening of God. And when we take our losses, our sorrows, our struggles, our failures as sinners, and our immoralities, and our offenses against others, when we put it in the larger framework of God's working out human accountability, human responsibility, human action, he is still taking these threads of life, weaving them into a beautiful garment of a plan whereby he can carry out those promises of blessing for all peoples that have been threatened from the Garden of Eden by the sin of our first parents.

And then, as we trace this through Genesis, we see time and again the threat that would arise, but a threat that was not greater than God's grace and his overcoming whatever that threat might be. And now he says, go back, get Jacob, get the families, bring them here. A provision will be made with you.

Verse 14. Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and he wept over them.

Afterward, his brothers talked with him. Now that seems like a little aside, doesn't it? Afterward, his brothers talked with him. I wonder what they talked about.

But you can see that they were favorably at peace with their brother Joseph. Now, what's important about this? This expression then shows us the change that has taken place in the heart of Joseph and especially in the hearts of these brothers. And here is why.

In chapter 37, verse 4, they so hated their brother, we are told, because of the favor that had been shown Joseph that they would not even talk to him. And now after all these many years, after all these many trials, this is an indication of a great change that has occurred in this family. Now, with the approval of Pharaoh, we find that Pharaoh is going to set aside a place for them to live when they return.

And so, Pharaoh enriches Joseph. He wants Joseph to bring his family, his father, and the families. And he says then, as Pharaoh in verse 17, I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you can enjoy the fat of the land.

And then in verse 20, the best of all Egypt. And then again, in verse 23, the best things of Egypt. Then Joseph sent his brothers, verse 24, and said, don't quarrel on the way.

I think he knows the nature of his brothers, doesn't he? But also, don't delay. You're going and returning with my father. So, they went up out of Egypt, had Abraham before them, and came to their father, Jacob, in the land of Canaan.

They told him Joseph was still alive. This is smacks of a resurrection. In the mind of Jacob, Joseph is still alive.

In fact, he is the ruler of all Egypt. Jacob was stunned. I don't blame him.

He wouldn't believe them. When they told him everything Joseph had said to them. And when he saw the carts, Joseph has sent to carry him back.

The spirit of their father, Jacob, revived. Jacob, too, had a resurrection. And Israel said, I'm convinced my son Joseph is still alive.

I will go and see him before I die. Our subsequent session then sees the great return of the family together in Egypt, beginning in chapter 46.

This is Dr. Kenneth Mathews and his teaching on the book of Genesis. This is session number 23, Joseph Reunited with His Brothers, Genesis 42-45.