

Lesson 032

Joseph Tests His Brothers

Genesis 43:1→44:34

MEMORY VERSE

Genesis 44:4 “Why have you repaid evil for good?”

ATTENTION GRABBER!

Puzzles

You will need magazine pictures (or other pretty pictures), sheets of cardboard or poster board, rubber cement, scissors, and markers. Glue several pretty pictures to the sheets of cardboard, trim the edges neatly, and cut the glued boards into pieces to create homemade puzzles.

In class, mix all the pieces of all the puzzles together and form as many groups as you have finished puzzles. Let the class work on them collectively.

Explain that even when things are a great big mess God can still put things together. All things work together for good to those who love God.

LESSON TIME!

GENESIS 43: 1- 10

Now the famine was severe in the land. 2 And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, “Go back, buy us a little food.”

3 But Judah spoke to him, saying, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ 4 If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. 5 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.’”

6 And Israel said, “Why did you deal so wrongfully with me as to tell the man whether you had still another brother?” 7 But they said, “The man asked us pointedly about ourselves and our family, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?’ And we told him according to these words. Could we possibly have known that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’”

8 Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. 9 I myself will be surety for him; 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. 10 For if we had not lingered, surely by now we would have returned this second time."

The famine continued to be severe and now, the grain the brothers had brought back from Egypt was gone. Jacob instructed his sons to go back to Egypt to buy more food. Judah urged Jacob to let them take Benjamin with them. The governor he feared, would not even talk to them without Benjamin; he would just believe that they had lied to him earlier about having another brother, presume that they were spies, and put them in prison or kill them.

Now Jacob would have to trust his beloved Benjamin to the Lord. How often do we, as Jacob, complain and become fearful in time of heavy trial? Interestingly enough, it is at this point that the name Israel begins to be used instead of Jacob. The name had not been used since Genesis 37:13. It seems that losing Joseph caused a struggle once more with the nature of the "old Jacob." Perhaps the faith he stirred in willingness to release of Benjamin meant that God was once more assuming control.

Judah argued that if they did not go back to get more grain, they would all die, including Benjamin, and offered himself as a guarantee for his youngest brother. He also reminded Jacob that, if they had not waited so long, they could already have made the trip to Egypt and back twice.

Jacob saw the situation and knew that it was out of his hands. So, he prepared a gift for the man. He also reminded them to take back the bundles of money that had been restored in their sacks on the first trip, and "double money" for the purchase of grain. He then told them to take their brother Benjamin with them to the man down in Egypt with the prayerful hope and confidence that God Almighty would overrule in the heart of the man and have him return both Benjamin and Simeon to them again. If not, Jacob was content to leave the matter with God. Jacob committed Benjamin into the hands of God. God often touches that which we cling to the most. He wants us to surrender everything to His control and trust in Him.

GENESIS 43: 15- 25

15 So the men took that present and Benjamin, and they took double money in their hand, and arose and went down to Egypt; and they stood before Joseph. 16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my home, and slaughter an animal and make ready; for these men will dine with me at noon." 17 Then the man did as Joseph ordered, and the man brought the men into Joseph's house.

18 Now the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, "It is because of the money, which was returned in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and seize us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys."

19 When they drew near to the steward of Joseph's house, they talked with him at the door of the house, 20 and said, "O sir, we indeed came down the first time to buy food; 21 but it happened, when we came to the encampment, that we opened our sacks, and there, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it back in our hand. 22 And we have brought down other money in our hands to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks." 23 But he said, "Peace be with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

24 So the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys feed. 25 Then they made the present ready for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they would eat bread there.

Now the brothers were on their way to Egypt. When their arrival was announced to Joseph, he immediately had them brought into his presence. Imagine the emotions Joseph must have felt when he laid his eyes upon his little brother Benjamin for the first time in twenty years. He then gave instructions to prepare a dinner at noon for the men at which time he would join them.

Since the brothers will still be concerned about the money that had been replaced in their bags, this lavish display of kindness made them suspicious. They feared a trap. Before, they entered Joseph's house, they told the steward about the discovery of the money in their bags and explained that it had been returned to them entirely without their knowledge.

The steward assured them that they needed not fear, because he himself had received the money from them in payment for the grain. They should thank God and the God of their father who must have mysteriously put the money in their bags. Simeon was then released to them.

GENESIS 43: 26- 34

26 And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house and bowed down before him to the earth. 27 Then he asked them about their well-being, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?"

28 And they answered, "Your servant our father is in good health; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads down and prostrated themselves.

29 Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." 30 Now his heart yearned for his brother; so, Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to weep. And he went into his chamber and wept there. 31 Then he washed his face and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, "Serve the bread."

32 So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. 33 And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked in astonishment at one another. 34 Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin's serving was five times as much as any of theirs. So, they drank and were merry with him.

Finally, Joseph arrived. When they brought him the present, they bowed themselves before him calling him, "Thy servant our father." Again, we are reminded of the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams.

Joseph then inquired about the welfare of his father and was moved to tears when he saw his youngest brother, Benjamin. We see that Joseph's heart had remained tender as he embraced the Lord through his years of difficulty.

Even natural affection is often destroyed by adversity and prosperity. Joseph could have become bitter and hardened. May we as Joseph remain tender-hearted through times of difficulty. When we walk in fellowship with God, we understand His great love and realize even our most adverse circumstances are working together for good for us. God keeps our hearts tender and protects us from bitterness. *All things work together for good to those who love God.*

Upon seeing Benjamin, Joseph could no longer hold back his emotion; he quickly left the room before they could see him crying. Finally, he was able to keep his feelings under control and gave instruction to begin the meal. Joseph sat apart from his brothers according to the custom of the land (Egyptians were not permitted to eat bread with the Hebrews).

There were three tables: one for the Hebrews, one for the Egyptian guests, and one for Joseph himself. The brothers noticed something incredible. They had been seated in order of age, from the oldest to the youngest.

Just a fun little fact: If one were to do the math, there are no less than 39,917,000 different orders in which eleven individuals could have been seated. They were seated perfectly in order.

Evidently, this man knew more about their family than they realized. They also saw that Benjamin was given five times as much as the others. Thus, Joseph was deliberately honoring Benjamin five times as much as the others. Perhaps he wanted to see if there was any resentment towards Benjamin. There was not, and Joseph was happy with their attitudes.

GENESIS 44: 1- 3

And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, "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 Also put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his grain money." So, he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. 3 As soon as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys.

Joseph commanded the steward to fill his brothers' sacks with food, as much as they could carry. He instructed him to return their money once again, in the mouth of each sack. Then the steward was told to place Joseph's own personal drinking cup, made of silver and beautifully ornamented, in Benjamin's sack. In the morning, at dawn, the brothers found their donkeys loaded and ready to go. And thus, they left.

GENESIS 44: 4- 6

4 When they had gone out of the city, and were not yet far off, Joseph said to his steward, "Get up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? 5 Is not this the one from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination? You have done evil in so doing.'" 6 So he overtook them, and he spoke to them these same words.

After the brothers left the city, Joseph ordered his steward to follow them. When he had overtaken them, he was to accuse them of stealing his lord's most cherished possession, the silver cup from which he drank and which he used for divining the future. (The Egyptians must have attributed Joseph's prophetic insight to his cup of divination.)

GENESIS 44: 7- 13

And they said to him, "Why does my lord say these words? Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing. 8 Look, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? 9 With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves."

10 And he said, "Now also let it be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and you shall be blameless." 11 Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. 12 So he searched. He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the

cup was found in Benjamin's sack. 13 Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city.

When the steward overtook the brothers and accused them of the theft, they denied the charge. They proposed death for the thief and slavery for the rest of them if the missing cup should be found in one of their bags. The steward, offering easier terms, said the thief alone should be enslaved. He then started searching the bags, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

Would these same brothers who had sold Joseph into slavery leave Benjamin to bear the blame of the "theft" and continue on home? The Lord had been at work in the hearts of these men. They stood by Benjamin and returned to Joseph to plea for their brother. They who had once sold a brother were now willing to be sold into slavery rather than give up another brother.

GENESIS 44: 14- 17

14 So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there; and they fell before him on the ground. 15 And Joseph said to them, "What deed is this you have done? Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?"

16 Then Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord's slaves, both we and he also with whom the cup was found." 17 But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave. And as for you, go up in peace to your father."

As they came back to Joseph's house, he asked them why they had done such a thing. How did they expect to get away with such a crime? Judah could say nothing in defense of himself or his brothers except that God was evidently punishing them for some secret sin they had committed. Judah proposed that they all remain in Egypt as Joseph's slaves.

Joseph refused the severe proposal. He suggested that only Benjamin stay in Egypt as his slave while the rest of them return to their aged father. By giving them this choice, Joseph was subjecting the brothers to a hard test. Would they abandon Benjamin, as they had abandoned Joseph before, or would they refuse to return to Canaan without their brother?

Even though they were innocent in this particular situation, they were guilty sinners. Judah and his brothers were deeply burdened with the enormity of their misdeed in selling Joseph into bondage 20 years ago; now, it was only fitting that they themselves should also become slaves in Egypt for the rest of their days.

GENESIS 44: 18- 34

18 Then Judah came near to him and said: "O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you are even like Pharaoh. 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 child of his old age, who is young; 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 on him.' 22 And we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' 23 But you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.'

24 "So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord. 25 And our father said, 'Go back and buy us a little food.' 26 But we said, 'We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not 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 and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn to pieces"; and I have not seen him since. 29 But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.'

30 "Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, 31 it will happen, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die. So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave. 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 before my father forever.' 33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. 34 For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?"

Judah came to Joseph and pleaded for Benjamin, his brother. With tenderness and beauty, Judah described the aged father's unwillingness to let Benjamin go with his brothers to Egypt for food. Particularly moving is the description of Jacob's feeling for his lost, beloved son, Joseph.

Those who had cruelly torn their young brother from their father's side now plea for mercy and offer themselves as slaves rather than see Benjamin suffer the same fate as his brother.

Joseph had been severely tested by the wickedness of his brothers as well as Potiphar's wife. Yet, man's designs cannot thwart God's well laid plans; more often, they contribute to the accomplishment of His purposes. May we, as Joseph, remain faithful through adverse times.

God is faithfully working out His good plan. All things work together for good to those who love God.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of thanksgiving for God's grace in working our circumstances for good.

