

GENESIS 43:1-14 (A DIFFICULT DECISION FOR ISRAEL)

Introduction: Joseph was sold by his brothers in Genesis 37. It is now about 22 years later and in all of that time, and until chapter 42, Jacob is never discussed nor mentioned. In chapter 42, the sum events of his recorded life are no more than a few words.

But it's already evident that the loss of Joseph was never forgotten by him. He has refused to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt even at the expense of another of his sons. But now the food is running low and his decisions will affect not just Benjamin, but the entire family. He can no longer stubbornly refuse to act.

If desperation in God's people is what it takes for God to move them, then desperation is what He will send. Israel today is still stubbornly refusing to accept His leadership. Whether some in Israel are religious, whether some in Israel have called on Jesus, it is irrelevant to the greater plans spoken of in the Bible.

As a collective whole they must call on Him as Lord and acknowledge His Lordship. This isn't a New Testament concept either, but one which travels all the way through the Bible. He has called them and they must acknowledge that. There is Jacob the man of flesh and there is Israel who is spiritually tied to His God.

There is the whole nation of people who strive with God - either for Him or against Him, but they strive with Him. There has been exile and punishment, but the future says there will be restoration and exaltation. In order to bring about the anticipated meeting between Jacob and Joseph, God sent a famine.

And in order to bring about a meeting between Jesus and Israel, God will send the time of Jacob's trouble. The New Testament calls it the tribulation. The people will be refined and they will call out and He will respond. The story of Jacob here follows that same path, foreshadowing the events of the future.

Text Verse: I have done justice and righteousness;
Do not leave me to my oppressors.
¹²² Be surety for Your servant for good;
Do not let the proud oppress me. Psalm 119:121, 122

The psalmist cried out to the Lord concerning his integrity and asking for relief from his oppressors. In doing so, he asks the Lord to be his surety, his pledge of covenant faithfulness. Jacob has fretted and anguished over the oppressors of chance and circumstance - harsh and oppressive foes whom he cannot control.

Today, he is going to have to let go of his fears and put his trust back in the God who made personal promises to him time and again in years past. He is going to have to petition Him for mercy while at the same time acknowledging that God is God and we are utterly dependent on Him for everything that that comes our way.

The sovereignty of God is something we cannot ignore in the pages of the Bible, and therefore, something we cannot ignore in the world around us. No matter what foe or oppressor we face, real or imagined, we can only place our trust and cares in His capable hands. This is that great truth that we discover in His word. And so... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Severe Famine and a Shortage of Food (1-5)

¹ Now the famine was severe in the land.

The Bible has an amazing way of telling us something will happen and then showing the fulfillment of it. Sometimes, what we might think *is* the fulfillment, isn't the fulfillment at all, usually because of the translation into English. And what we might think of as unimportant is actually more important than we thought.

Chapter 43 begins with the words, "Now the famine was severe in the land." Chapter 41 ended with the words, "So all countries came to Joseph in

Egypt to buy *grain*, because the famine was severe in all lands." Looking at these two, you'd think it was saying the same thing, but it's not.

Here is why it's important. Earlier in chapter 41, when interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph said this to Pharaoh -

"So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it *will be* very severe." (31)

When Joseph said that, he used the words *khaved hu meod* - it will be "very heavy." But at the end of chapter 41 it said *hazaq ha'raav*. This means that the famine had strengthened or grown strong, but it wasn't the crushing burden that Joseph had said was coming.

When the strengthening famine came, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for food and that made up all of chapter 42. Now other than Simeon, they're all back in Canaan for a while. And it doesn't tell us how long it's been because that doesn't matter. What matters is that whether a few weeks or a few months, the famine hasn't just strengthened, it has become heavy, a crushing burden.

It now uses the same word to describe the famine that Joseph said would come about. Why is this important? It's important because Jacob has to face reality because of the famine. If the famine weren't so severe, Simeon may have been left to rot in jail forever ... Poor Simeon. Jacob may have found some other way to work things out back in Canaan.

But with the famine now in its full force, he no longer has that choice. And why is that important? It's important because God showed in advance that it would be that way. And so then, why is that important? The reason why *all* of this is important is because God has a plan and in order to make that plan happen, He has arranged everything to have an exact and intended effect.

In Acts 17, it says, "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they

should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us..." (26, 27)

Every person is in exactly the place and time that God wants them and which He knew is the opportune time and place for them to seek Him out. What we see as arbitrary, actually has a purpose. Your car didn't start and you get angry, but if you had left on time, you would have hit the guy on the bicycle who swerved to miss the lizard that ran in front of him.

You find a quarter on the sidewalk and, if you're like me, you're all excited and put it in your pocket. The quarter was dropped by someone sneezing because of their flu. Later you get the flu and are miserable, but you're home. You look out the window and your neighbor falls off the ladder while cleaning the gutters and he hits the concrete.

You call the paramedics and they come and save the guy. They tell you that he would have died without your call. Things like this happen all the time. Nothing is random with God. The famine has gone from *strong* to *heavy* and Jacob has choices to make.

The economy is falling apart and we have choices to make. Our health insurance is cancelled and now what do we do? We get frustrated and we get upset, but it all keeps showing purpose. I don't believe anything is arbitrary. If it is, then what is the purpose of life?

My wife and I watched the Ken Burns documentary on the Civil War a while ago. If the word "arbitrary" describes what happens around us, then think of those hundreds of thousands of people that died in battle - some of them as young as 13. Unless there is a purpose for every single one of them, then those gruesome pictures show a very uncaring God.

And that's just one war in a line of wars, plagues, natural disasters, and horrifying accidents that reaches all the way back to the beginning of human existence. As Paul says, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." It just doesn't matter...

If "arbitrary" is a part of our human existence, then Christ may have come or He may not have come. Thank goodness Mary didn't catch some flu bug and die before she had Jesus. Nothing is arbitrary. So as you go about your day, don't be afraid to keep seeing His hand in everything that happens.

It all has meaning. Jacob either never really understood this, or he has forgotten it. He is now a man who is overwhelmed with the events around him. Where there should be trust and faith, there is the man afraid of how things will turn out.

Philippians 4 gives us the remedy for what ails Jacob -

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (6, 7)

*Now the famine was severe in the land
And Jacob is forced to finally act
He has failed to see in this God's divine and purposeful hand
And this is because his faith has slacked*

*Remember the Lord, Jacob... He is right there with you
This is the thing that God asks you to do*

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."

The time has come where the duration and immensity of the famine has once again brought the household to an immediate need. Nothing has grown and the food has been eaten up to the point where Egypt is the only option left.

The grain is almost gone, but he doesn't tell them to get more grain. Instead, he tells them to go back and buy a little food. Don't

misunderstand, the grain is the food, but grain can also be used for planting. Last time when he sent them, it was to buy grain.

Maybe they would eat some, maybe plant some. This time, it will only be used as food; they simply need to survive and nothing more. The words for "grain" and "food" are being used synonymously in one way, but they are also being used to show a distinction.

Joseph did the same thing in chapter 41 when speaking to Pharaoh. There he said, "And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities."

He said "grain" and "food" synonymously. The grain is food because it will be good for nothing else. It won't grow during those seven years of famine. Jacob finally has to face the inevitable, but instead of facing it directly, he will try to get around it.

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.'

At the end of the last chapter, it was Reuben who tried to convince Jacob that Benjamin was needed. He said to Jacob, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him *back* to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." That didn't work and Jacob refused.

Judah now steps forward. He is the one in line for the birthright because his three older brothers all committed offenses which removed them from that right. Now he, in this position, reminds Jacob what came about in Egypt.

He says they were given a solemn warning - *ha'ed he'id*, "did warn, solemnly warn" that without Benjamin, they were not to come back. It would be pointless to even try and certainly life-threatening if they did. Which leads to verse 4...

⁴ If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food.

If Benjamin is with them, they will go down to buy food. The people will eat, the family will survive, and there is always the prospect of a future... *if* Benjamin will go too.

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.'"

But... if no Benjamin, no go. He speaks in a way which will preempt Jacob from coming up with some other scenario. There is none which will work in this instance. Either Benjamin goes, or there will be no meeting with Joseph.

It's a good time to stop and remember who these each represent. Joseph pictures Christ the Lord. The brothers picture the people of Israel, all the tribes. Judah is the tribe of Judah but who speaks collectively for the Jewish people today. Benjamin is Christ and those Jews in Christ.

*Without Jesus, we cannot approach the Lord
It doesn't really matter what we like or choose to believe
Only Jesus can save as is recorded in His word
Only Jesus can wash our sins and only He our burdens can relieve*

II. Judah Will Bear the Burden (6-10)

⁶ And Israel said, "Why did you deal so wrongfully with me as to tell the man whether you had still another brother?"

Five times in the last chapter, the name Jacob was used. The name Israel was used only when speaking of the sons, not the man. Now in this chapter, Jacob is never used and Israel is used three times. The last time the name Israel was used for *Jacob the man* was back in chapter 37 when he sent Joseph up to look for the other brothers.

In that chapter, 15 sermons ago, Joseph left the family circle and now he may lose Benjamin as well. There is Jacob and there is Israel. There is

reliance on self and there is reliance on God. There is each of us... are we walking in the Spirit or walking in the flesh?

The Bible is asking us to look at this man and decide how we will conduct our own lives. He is already a member of the covenant community, but will he live as a faithful one or not. And you? How will you act when adversity looks you in the face? Where is your trust? Jacob is going to now have to trust God.

He asks, "Why did you deal so wrongfully with me as to tell the man whether you had still another brother?" It is his note that he knows Benjamin must go, even though he doesn't actually say it yet. The irony is almost dripping from the moment.

"He who is my only hope of holding on to the past is now my only hope of having a future." And though he doesn't know it, the one who he is so afraid of losing is the only one who can bring him back to the presence of the one he believes he has lost. Irony abounds.

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?'"

The man asked and they answered. It never would have dawned on them that one thing would lead to another. There was no evil intent in what they said, just matter of fact questions and answers. He also asked about their father and they answered accordingly.

How could they possibly know that he would ask for Benjamin to come down? He didn't ask for Jacob to come down. It is all just the way it turned out and the fault can't be placed on them.

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.

With the explanation complete, he makes his petition again and gives the reason for it clearly and completely - "Send him with me and we will go. This involves our very lives and the lives of the children. Benjamin needs to go."

What actually makes this surprising is that Benjamin is upwards of 30 years old by this point. It's not like he's a little boy anymore. This shows the obedience of the family to their father and the immense passion Jacob still feels even after all the years since Rachel's death.

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.

In chapter 37, Judah is the one who recommended selling Joseph when he was in the pit. In chapter 38, he was the one who traded his signet, cord, and staff for a tryst with a prostitute. In both of those pictures, Judah pictured the Jewish people.

Now this same Judah offers himself as the pledge for Benjamin. The situation is completely reversed from what it once was. Again, if there's anything we can learn from things like this, it is that God's divine favor isn't dependent on our past, but on our present.

The things we've done can't be changed. If our past is all that God judges us on, then when would there ever be a time that we *could* get right with Him? It would never happen! In other words, there is no thing that you *have done* that will keep God from forgiving you because there is always right now.

Only when "right now" ends at your death is the chance lost. God is always extending His hand out to you. And as a demonstration of that, he says that if he doesn't bring Benjamin back, then let me bear the blame forever. In Hebrew, *v'khatati lekha kal hayammim*, "I shall be a sinner against you all the days." I make myself liable as a sinner forever.

Benjamin is the key. If you have Benjamin all is good. If you have the Son of the Right Hand then God is on your side. Stop dwelling on your past and look to the future. If God forgives you for your past, then your past is forgiven. After that, the only bonds on you are the ones you impose.

*Be freed from your guilt, you are free from your sin
Jesus washed it all away on Calvary's cross
Look forward now, forgetting what is past because of Him
Don't fret and have another moment of loss*

*Eyes on Jesus! Fix them on your eternal life ahead
Because of Him you too have been raised from the dead*

¹⁰ For if we had not lingered, surely by now we would have returned this second time."

Two things can be inferred from this short verse. The first is that of a mild scold to Jacob. "If you had let us go when we asked, we would have returned *from the second trip* already. Time is wasting, stop being so stubborn." The second is exactly the opposite.

"If you had let us go when we asked, *we would have returned* from the second trip already. Benjamin will be fine, stop worrying."

III. A Present for Pharaoh (11-14)

¹¹ And their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: Take some of the best fruits of the land in your vessels and carry down a present for the man—a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds.

Proverbs 18:16 says -

"A man's gift makes room for him,
And brings him before great men."

Solomon may have remembered this story when he wrote that. Israel is looking to pacify the ruler and to show that what the sons told him originally was true. If they were spies, they could bring anyone along and claim he was their brother.

But going the extra step was intended to convince him that they had been straight with him all along. It was also a gift to pacify him before they dealt again over whatever matters would arise. This worked for Jacob when he finally met up with his estranged brother Esau many years before.

Before meeting him, he sent a sequence of extravagant gifts to him in order to soothe any continuing bitterness. And it worked. Esau met him with hugs and kisses. He is hoping this gift now will bring about peace as well. And so he tells them to take along six special things, balm, honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds.

Sending along something like this would be all the more special considering that with the famine as harsh as it is, it would be that much less for them to eat if things got worse. It is truly a gift of faith, regardless of the size or amount of the gift.

¹² Take double money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight.

Jacob's instructions to "take double money" can mean one of two things. In Hebrew, it says "money of a second." So it could mean the same amount as the first time, not twice as much as the first time. Or, it could mean twice as much as the first time.

If he meant "double" then he may want them to buy more than the first time, or he may have expected the cost to have risen because the famine has continued. I always assumed it was the same amount as they took the first time, but people debate...

Along with that money though, he tells them to take back the original money too, thinking that the return of the money may have been an

oversight. He uses a word, *mishgeh*, which isn't found anywhere else in the Bible. It means "something caused to wander" which implies "a mistake." It was an unintentional oversight.

This term recalls to mind the words of Peter to Israel in Acts 3:17, "I know you did this in ignorance..."

¹³ Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man.

What was implicit before is now explicit, Benjamin will go. The future keeps unfolding in the present and there is nothing we can do to stop it. We can wring our hands, fret and stamp our feet, but time keeps moving forward. At times like this, we're much more fortunate than Jacob.

He was an ancestor of Jesus and had personal dealings with Jehovah, but he lacked the wise words that we can refer to anytime we start to forget that it will all work out. When Jesus came, He told us this -

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. ²³ Life is more than food, and the body *is more* than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? ²⁵ And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁶ If you then are not able to do *the* least, why are you anxious for the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more *will He clothe* you, O you of little faith?" Luke 12:22-28

And Paul gives us a briefer, but equally important, insight into the things we can't control -

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom

He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." Romans 8:28-30

God cares for the birds and he has clothed mere grass in unparalleled beauty. And even more, He has wisely taken everything that happens and woven it together into a tapestry of goodness for His called people.

His child who died on the battlefield of Antietam was already glorified in His mind before the rifle bullet ended his life. Nothing is random chance with God.

¹⁴ And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin.

El Shaddai, God Almighty, has been named only four times so far in Genesis. The first was when He spoke to Abraham in chapter 17 at the time of the covenant of circumcision. Then in chapter 28 when Isaac blessed Jacob before he went away, he blessed him using the name El Shaddai.

After that in Genesis 35, El Shaddai appeared to Jacob at Bethel. In each of those accounts, a blessing for fruitfulness and a multitude of descendants is promised or pronounced. Now, as a hope that those blessings include Simeon and Benjamin, Jacob invokes the name once again.

"May this great God who made these promises to our people and to me personally show us this mercy." He is placing his trust in the providence of God to restore to him those whom he has lost. And in fact he has already lost both Simeon and Benjamin. The moment they left they were lost.

The moment our children walk out the door for the school bus, they are, in essence lost to us. The last time we saw someone was the last time because we no longer see them. There are no guarantees that the separation won't be permanent.

We don't normally think this way, but eventually everything has a last time. Jacob's calling on El Shaddai is for mercy that this loss won't be permanent.

But God is God and Jacob has now faced that. And in acknowledgement of it, he says...

14 (con't) If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"

Adam Clarke translates this as "and I, as I shall be childless, so I shall be childless." When the sons walk out the door, he will in fact be childless. "If God decides that is how it shall be, then that is what I must accept."

There are things that are simply beyond our control and all we can do is petition God and wait on His answer. Esther realized this before she had to face the king over the preservation of the Jews. It was this same attitude of resignation to forces beyond her control that she said this to Mordecai -

"Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" Esther 4:16

And the young man went off to battle, hugging his mom and kissing his little sister. "If I return, I know not, but God does."

There are few real assurances in life and so when one comes along, we should hold onto it, even cling to it. Of those few available assurances, the one that matters most is found tied up in the same God whom Jacob just petitioned, God Almighty.

He is the one who sits on heaven's throne and superintends over the spinning of billions of galaxies. And yet, He also watches over the souls of men. The God who cares about the flitting sparrow cares much more about the destiny of those souls. He cared enough to send His Son to restore us to harmony with Him.

Closing Verse: Like a swallow or a crane, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward; O LORD, I am oppressed, be thou my surety. Isaiah 38:14 (ERV)

Next Week: Genesis 43:15-25 (Peace To You, Do Not Be Afraid) (108th Genesis Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you and He has a good plan and purpose for you. Call on Him and let Him do marvelous things for you and through you.

If I Am Bereaved, I Am Bereaved

Now the famine was severe in the land
Things in Canaan weren't lookin' too grand

And it came to pass, when...
They had eaten up the grain
Which they had brought from Egypt, then
Their father said to them, "Buy us a little food, Go back again."

But Judah spoke to him, he did express
Saying, "The man solemnly spoke
You shall not see my face unless
Your brother is with you. This is no joke

If you send our brother with us, that is good
We will go down together and buy you food

But if you will not send him along
We will not go down; this we will not do
For the man said to us, in a manner strong
You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you

And Israel said, "Why did you deal
So wrongfully with me as to tell another
To the man why did you squeal?
Whether you had still another brother?"

But they said, "The man asked us with care
About ourselves and our kin

Asking, 'Is your father still alive over there
Have you another brother?' Tell me therein

And according to these words him we told
Could we possibly have known
That he would say, as from his tongue the words rolled
"Bring your brother down, let him be shown

Then Judah said to his father Israel
"Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go
That we may live and not die as you know well
Both we and you and our little ones also

I myself for him will be surety
From my hand you shall require him, I the guarantee

If I do not bring him back to you and him before you set
Then let me bear the blame forever
You shall never forget

For if we had not lingered it's true
By now we would have returned this second time to you

And their father Israel to them spoke
"Then do this if it must be so
Take some of the best fruits of the land to that bloke
In your vessels, carry down a token and go

A little balm and a little honey
Spices and myrrh take along too
And some pistachio nuts and almonds
Take these for the journey, this you shall do

Take double money in your hand
And take back in your hand the money
That was returned in the mouth of your sacks
Perhaps it was an oversight, but it seems kind of funny

Take your brother also, and arise
Go back to the man, do as I advise

And may God Almighty give you mercy...
Before the man, that he may release
Your other brother and Benjamin
So that this difficult ordeal will finally cease

If I am bereaved, I am bereaved
If my son dies my heart will be forever grieved

God sent His Son on a mission too
But He knew the outcome from the start
And still He sent Jesus for me and you
To show us the depth of the love in His heart

This is the love of God in Christ our Lord
And the beauty of the good news for each of us
There we see it recorded in His superior word
The marvelous majesty of our King, Jesus

And so with a song of thanks and praise
Let us hail our great God for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...