

# God at Work

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[ 0 : 00 ] Jesus. Approximately 22 years after his 10 older brothers sold Joseph into slavery, Joseph saw those! brothers again when they made their first trip to Egypt to buy food during the famine.

! Benjamin, the youngest brother who had no part in what had happened to Joseph was absent. Although we tend to think of Benjamin as a little boy when we read the story, remember he was at least in his late 20s, but more likely in his mid-30s by then.

Joseph subjected his brothers to seven tests during that first visit. Those tests were all designed to see whether the brothers' character had changed. We studied those tests last week when we looked at chapter 42, and the first test was whether Benjamin was still alive.

Joseph knew that his father played favorites. He also knew that his older brothers had treated him poorly when he was the favored son. And Joseph knew that Benjamin would have taken his place as his father's favorite.

That gave Joseph legitimate reason to be concerned when Benjamin didn't show up with the rest of the boys. Throughout the first meeting with the older brothers, Joseph said or did things designed to remind them of what the brothers had done to Joseph.

[ 1 : 24 ] Joseph repeatedly accused the brothers of being spies. That likely mirrored what the brothers had said to him when he gave bad reports to his father. Remember that the brothers claimed to be honest men, and Joseph told the brothers that to prove their honesty, they must bring their younger brother alive to Egypt.

Only when Joseph saw Benjamin would he believe that Benjamin was still alive. But of course, nobody knew that Joseph was Joseph, except for Joseph himself.

Let's recap the second through fifth test. The second test occurred when Joseph put all ten older brothers into prison. Joseph requested that one volunteer to get Benjamin, while the others waited in jail.

Nobody volunteered for that one. So Joseph reversed the test, and the third test occurred when Joseph asked the brothers for a volunteer to stay in jail while the others went to get Benjamin. Again, nobody volunteered to stay this time. And the fourth test occurred when Joseph chose Simeon to stay, and that test was whether the brothers would care enough about Simeon to return with Benjamin to get him out of jail.

[ 2 : 42 ] The fifth test occurred when Joseph had the brothers' money secretly replaced. He wanted to see what they would do when they showed up with money that they weren't expecting.

That also sort of reenacted what had happened when they left Joseph behind in the pit. They came home with one less brother, but they came home with money from when they had sold Joseph.

The sixth and seventh test occurred after the nine brothers returned home. The sixth test was whether Jacob would trust his older sons enough to send Benjamin with them to retrieve Simeon.

And then test seven was whether Benjamin would trust his older brothers enough to go to Egypt with them. The older brothers completely failed every test, except perhaps the first.

Benjamin was still alive, but nobody was willing to step up and prove it. Jacob failed test six because he refused to send Benjamin, although that meant Simeon would rot in jail.

[ 3 : 44 ] After his returning sons told Jacob that Benjamin must go with them on the next trip to Egypt, chapter 42 ended with Jacob saying these words. Verse 38 said, My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left.

If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol. And Benjamin failed test seven because he stayed silent.

He never overruled his father. He was big enough to say that he could go on his own and help retrieve his brother. So the testing did not go well, but Joseph was much more successful at poking

his brother's consciences.

Listen to verses 21 and 22 of chapter 42. This happened when Joseph jailed the brothers for three days. Verse 21 starts, Then they said to one another, In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul when he begged us and we did not listen.

That is why this distress has come upon us. And Reuben answered them, Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.

[ 5 : 04 ] Joseph meanwhile gave his brothers a clue that something was different about the gruff-talking Egyptian ruler. Verse 18 of chapter 42 said, On the third day Joseph said to them, Do this and you will live, for I fear God.

A typical Egyptian would never profess allegiance to the Hebrew God, especially not an Egyptian ruler. But the brothers had no idea that Joseph was that Egyptian ruler, in part because Joseph always used an interpreter when he interacted with his brothers.

We've discussed throughout the Joseph studies that the story is not about Joseph, meaning that Joseph's life is not the main point.

The main point of the book of Genesis, including Genesis 37 through 50, is to show the progression of redemptive history, or how God will redeem his people from the curse of sin.

Throughout Genesis, God shows that he's faithful to preserve the line of the seed who will redeem God's people. Tonight we'll look at chapter 43, and in that chapter, the progression of redemptive history takes an obvious step forward.

[ 6 : 17 ] We will see God at work transforming the hearts of Jacob and his sons so that they eventually will become worthy leaders of God's covenant nation. That's the main idea of the chapter.

We will see God at work transforming the hearts of Jacob and his sons so that they eventually will become worthy leaders of God's covenant nation. Along the way, we'll be reminded of three attributes of God that all people need.

Let's go ahead and read all of chapter 43. Chapter 43 says, Now the famine was severe in the land, and when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, Go again, buy us a little food.

But Judah said to him, The man solemnly warned us, saying, You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you. If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food.

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. Israel said, Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?

[ 7 : 36 ] They replied, The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother? What we told him was an answer to these questions.

Could we in any way know that he would say, Bring your brother down? And Judah said to Israel his father, Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you, and also our little ones.

I will be a pledge of his safety. 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.

If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice. Then their father said to them, If it must be so, then do this.

Take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds.

[ 8 : 43 ] Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take also your brother and arise.

Go again to the man. May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

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.

The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph's house. 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 assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys.

[ 9 : 54 ] So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the door of the house and said, Oh my Lord, we came down the first time to buy food.

And when we came back to the lodging place, we opened our sacks, and there was each man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight.

So we have brought it again with us, and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.

He replied, Peace to you. Do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money.

Then he brought Simeon out to them, 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 given their donkeys fodder, they prepared the present for Jacob's coming at noon, for they heard that he should eat bread there.

[ 10 : 56 ] When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground. And he inquired about their welfare and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke?

Is he still alive? They said, Your servant, our father, is well. He is still alive. And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. 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. Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there.

Then he washed his face and came out, and controlling himself, he said, Serve the food. They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.

And they set before him the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs.

[ 12 : 21 ] And they drank and were merry with him. So we'll study tonight's passage under three headings. Each section centers around the particular attribute that everyone needs God to supply.

That first section covers verses 1 through 14, and there we see people needing God's mercy. People needing God's mercy. We'll go through these verses a little at a time.

Look at verses 1 and 2 first. They say, Now the famine was severe in the land, and when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, Go again, buy us a little food.

These verses show just how dysfunctional Jacob's family still was. Jacob and the now ten brothers living with him appear to have been going about their lives as if nothing unusual had happened. We get no indication that they had even thought about retrieving Simeon. Jacob seems to minimize reality here. You see where he says, Go again, buy us a little food.

[ 13 : 36 ] He makes what will require another trip to Egypt sound more like a trip to the corner store. But Judah really brings him back to reality, and that happens in verses 3 through 5.

Judah said to him, The man solemnly warned us, saying, You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you. If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food.

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. This is the first time Judah's name has been mentioned since chapter 38.

Before we go further, let's remind ourselves of what we know about Judah. We've consistently seen Judah behaving badly. We saw Judah's character in chapters 34, 37, and 38.

In chapter 34, Judah was one of the brothers who plundered Shechem after Simeon and Levi killed all the men in the city. In chapter 37, Judah prevented the others from killing Joseph, but Judah's motive had nothing to do with love for his brother or concern about how his father would react.

[ 14 : 53 ] Judah's motivation was financial gain. Then, of course, chapter 38 was the low point for Judah. That was where Judah refused to give his youngest son in marriage to his daughter-in-law, Tamar, after Judah's two older sons had died while being married to her.

Tamar took matters into her own hands and pretended to be a prostitute. Remember that Judah fathered twins by her without realizing until after the fact that the supposed prostitute was his daughter-in-law was his daughter-in-law, Tamar positively identified Judah as the twin's father by producing things, including Judah's staff, that Judah had given to her in pledge for a future payment.

Until Tamar exposed Judah's guilt, Judah was ready to burn Tamar to death. Then chapter 38 ended with something that seemed very difficult for us to understand.

One of those twins born to Judah and Tamar would be in the line of God's promised Messiah. That put Judah himself in the land of the Messiah when Joseph, to us, would seem to be the obvious choice.

Genesis 38, though, served as the checkpoint along the road to redemption in Judah's life. It's where he got separated from the rest of the sinners and where the light really shined on his particular need of a Savior.

[16:19] And that Savior would be born to him, from him, and for him as a direct result of his sin. Let's go back to tonight's text and read Jacob's reaction to Judah saying that Benjamin must go to Egypt with them if the others return to Egypt to buy food.

True to his character, Jacob deflects blame here. Look at the exchange in verses 6 and 7. Israel said, Why do you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?

They replied, The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother? What we told him was an answer to these questions.

Could we in any way know that he would say, Bring your brother down. Jacob tells his sons that the situation is their fault because they blabbed too much.

And this is a major test for Jacob. Is he going to be willing to let his new favorite son go when Jacob's own life and the life of the entire family is at stake?

[17:31] The words Jacob said in verse 6 show that Jacob has yet to change much. However, the opening of verse 6 shows us that God was at work in Jacob's life.

Notice that Jacob is being called Israel all throughout this chapter. Calling Jacob Israel throughout the chapter is really telling.

It's a sign to us that God is fulfilling his promise. He's indeed going to make out of Israel a great nation. Up to this point, that promise has appeared to be in jeopardy.

Judah is about to emerge as the head of the family and the son of promise. More importantly, under Judah's leadership, the family will become a nation. Up to this point, there's been nothing to indicate Judah's position.

In fact, there's been significant evidence to the contrary. Judah, though, refused to let his father divert the discussion from the main topic. Judah's words in verses 8 through 10 show that God also has been at work in Judah's life.

[18:38] Look at those verses. Starting in verse 8, it says, And Judah said to Israel his father, Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones.

I will be a pledge of his safety. 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.

If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice. Judah was prepared to act as a substitute for Benjamin. This was a huge step forward for Judah in terms of character and maturity. In earlier years, when plotting to rid the family of Joseph, he not cared at all for how his father might react to the loss of a son. By this point, though, we see Judah beginning to care and to take real and possible costly responsibility to make sure that Jacob didn't lose another son.

So it was a big move, and it was a move that brought him closer to repentance. In verses 11 through 14, we see that Jacob finally gives in to reality.

[19:54] Starting with verse 11, it says, Then their father Israel said to them, If it must be so, then do this. Take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds.

Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take also your brother and arise.

Go again to the man. May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. The most significant phrase in this exchange is, May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin.

Finally, we see Jacob start to trust God again. It is God who promised to make him a great nation, and if Benjamin is going to return to his father, it is going to be God who will bring it to pass.

[ 21 : 04 ] Jacob can hold on to that single son with all of his might. However, Israel has to have a broader vision than that. And as we see Jacob start to realize that, you see that he is beginning to be called Israel again.

Something else in this exchange perhaps pricked the brothers' consciences even more than what we saw last week. Look at the present that Jacob tells his sons to prepare for the man.

The Midianite traders to whom the brothers sold Joseph were carrying similar cargo to Egypt when they bought Joseph. We saw that in verse 37, or chapter 37, verse 25.

That's what happened when the brothers had thrown Joseph into the pit. Starting in Genesis 37, verse 25, it says, Then they sat down to eat.

And looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh on their way to carry it down to Egypt.

[ 22 : 04 ] So now the brothers are leaving to go down to Egypt carrying much of the same cargo. You think they remembered that day over two decades ago?

So the first section has shown us people needing God's mercy. The second section is going to show us people needing God's peace. People needing God's peace is your second section. We'll see that need in verses 15 through 25, and we'll walk through those verses again a few at a time. Let's look at 15 through 17 first.

So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. 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.

The men did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph's house. Joseph now knows that the brothers have passed three of his tests. First, he sees proof that Benjamin is indeed alive and well.

[ 23 : 21 ] The brothers who murdered an entire village and were about to murder Joseph have not harmed his only full sibling, and this touches Joseph deeply. Second, Jacob has come to trust them.

Regardless of what it took to bring it about, Jacob has come to trust his sons with his most precious possession, and that's Benjamin himself. Jacob didn't pack up his mule and come with them to make sure they didn't harm the boy.

He sent the brothers alone. This is really no small task, because we've seen evidence that Jacob has suspected all along that the older sons had something to do with what happened to Joseph.

The third test that the brothers passed here is that Benjamin has come to trust his older brothers enough to go with them to Egypt. Benjamin had lived for over 20 years with the men who sold his brother into slavery.

He must have had suspicions, too, about what had happened. No single person is that good a liar, and certainly ten people can't manage any better.

[ 24 : 29 ] Lives become more difficult as the circle of liars grows larger. So Jacob sees some changes in his sons throughout this time, and he changes himself because he sent Benjamin with them.

Joseph also sees some hope for his older brothers. They were once hardened criminals, but Joseph sees the evidence of God at work. Joseph's day certainly improved when he saw Benjamin, but the older brothers' guilty consciences only made things worse for them.

Verses 18 through 22 show that the brothers were the people needing God's peace. Look at verses 18 through 22 again. 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 were brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys.

So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the door of the house and said, Oh my Lord, we came down the first time to buy food. And when we came to the lodging place, we opened our sacks.

[ 25 : 44 ] And there was each man's money in the mouth of a sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us. And we have brought other money down with us to buy food.

We do not know who put our money in our sacks. Verse 18 shows just how fearful the brothers are. They, as foreigners, get the nearly unheard of privilege of going to the Egyptian ruler's home. However, that privilege only makes the brothers more fearful. They focus on the negative. Look at the verbs the brothers used in verse 18. They say that Joseph is going to assault, fall upon, and seize.

They fear that Joseph is going to make them his servants and take their donkeys. You think maybe they were thinking about what had happened to the brother that they sold when they knew that he was going to become somebody's servant?

The verse also shows us that humans fail to think clearly when we are put under stress. Do you find it odd that the brothers, fearful of becoming slaves, were worried about what might happen to their donkeys?

[ 26 : 52 ] This seems an odd thing to add. That would be kind of like us saying, people are coming to take us captive, and they're going to take our cars. I'm not sure I would be too worried about what was going to happen to my car if I knew that I was going to be taken captive.

But despite their obvious fear and their delay in returning to Egypt, we have to give the older brothers at least partial credit regarding two more tests. They eventually came back for Simeon, and they did return the money that was found in their sacks.

Keep in mind that the older brothers demonstrated their character to more than just Joseph. They demonstrated their character before the entire Egyptian court. Every time that they have interacted with Joseph, Joseph has servants, interpreters, and other officials around him during those interactions.

Let's look at verses 23 through 25 now. In verse 23, Joseph's steward addresses the older brothers' concern about unexpectedly finding their money in their sacks.

The steward's reply gives the brothers the peace that they need. It's the steward talking here, and it says, He replied, Peace to you. Do not be afraid.

[ 28 : 08 ] Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money. Then he brought Simeon out to them, 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 given their donkeys fodder, they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there.

The steward calms the brothers' anxiety in three different ways. The first way is that he wishes them peace and tells them to avoid being afraid.

Picture the scene here. This is an Egyptian servant, and he's telling the brothers in their native language that they should have peace. Second, the steward says, Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you.

Think about what must have been going through the brothers' minds when they heard those words. First of all, you have to wonder, did those words even register with them at all because they were so scared, but if the brothers really did hear those words about their God, how would this Egyptian servant know anything about the God of the Hebrews?

And then, how would this Egyptian servant know anything about what their God had promised their family? We know the ending, but it's important to remember that none of the main characters in this drama knew the ending when the events were happening.

[ 29 : 35 ] The third way the steward calms the brothers' fear is the declaration, I received your silver. That answers for the brothers why they are welcomed.

The implication there is that they can retain the money as a divine gift. Then proof of their safety was the immediate release of Simeon. Moreover, the steward then provided them and their animals the customary acts of hospitality.

So, all appeared to be working out even better than they could have hoped. And that brings us to the third section of the lesson. So far, we have seen people needing God's mercy and people needing God's peace.

In the last section of the lesson, we see people needing God's grace. So, people needing God's grace is the third section. To this point, we focus primarily on how Joseph's father and older brothers have needed God's mercy and peace.

The brothers have some measure of that mercy and peace now. Their father does not. The brothers were unable to call Jacob on his mobile phone to report what had happened.

[ 30 : 48 ] He hadn't bought the international plan for his cell phone. But Jacob then is at home wondering, and it will be a while before Jacob experiences God's mercy, peace, and grace.

At least the mercy, peace, and grace that relates to what is happening in Egypt with all 12 of his sons now. But more than just the older brothers receive God's mercy, peace, and grace, these last verses will show that Benjamin and Joseph also receive mercy, peace, and grace from God.

Let's read what happens when Joseph comes home for lunch. Here are verses 26 through 30. And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves.

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.

Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. When Joseph walks in the doors of his house, that's the first time in over 22 years that all 12 of the brothers have been together.

[ 32 : 22 ] The pieces of God's puzzle begin to fit even more closely than before. Verse 26 reveals that the brothers take the first chance they get to give Joseph the present that they have brought.

Then they bow down before him to the ground. Think about what must have been going through Joseph's mind at this site because now he saw the 11 men paying him homage.

Their actions were a tangible fulfillment of the dream that he had when he was 17. When the 10 brothers bowed down to Joseph during the first meeting, we talked about how Joseph recalled his dream.

I mentioned then that Joseph's dream had come true exactly as Joseph said it would, but that wasn't entirely accurate. Here is actually the first complete fulfillment of Joseph's original dream.

Remember that only the 10 older brothers bowed down to Joseph the first time, but Joseph dreamed that all 11 brothers would bow down to him. And here, in this chapter, all 11 do bow down.

[ 33 : 25 ] Then we see what happens next. Joseph first asks the brothers how they are. Then Joseph asks about Jacob. And then finally, he sees Benjamin.

Think about what was going through his thoughts then. He must have been flooded with memories of his mother, her gentleness, and her tragic death when she gave birth to the person now standing before him.

His only full brother stands in his presence, and yet there can be no contact or no acknowledgement of that relationship, at least not for the time being.

That's because the test is not yet complete. He becomes so overcome with emotion, though, that he has to rush from the room and into a private chamber where he sheds tears of joy and heartache until he composes himself again.

And this is where we get reminded that Joseph himself received and is continuing to receive mercy, peace, and grace from God. Remember that he was nearly killed by his brothers.

[ 34 : 27 ] He also could have been killed when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of rape. And he could have become a hardened, bitter man in prison. What we see instead, though, is that God's mercy, peace, and grace have made Joseph better instead of bitter.

So once again, God's mercy, peace, and grace have made Joseph better instead of bitter. God is allowing him to see the purpose for what he'd endured in Egypt.

And remember, he has called Egypt the land of my affliction. Verses 31 through 34 tell us what happens after Joseph regains control of his emotions.

Look at verses 31 through 33 again. They say, Then he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself, he said, Serve the food.

They served him by himself and them by themselves and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.

[ 35 : 32 ] And they said before him the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. Last week, Joseph told his brothers that he feared God.

We saw Joseph orchestrate tests designed to remind the brothers of their sins. Just a few verses ago, we saw the Egyptian servant reference the Hebrew God.

Those things should have made the older brothers think that something is unusual about this place and about this ruler. Meanwhile, the scene in verses 31 through 33 provided two more clues that this Egyptian ruler was unusual.

First, Joseph eats by himself instead of eating with the Egyptians. The last clause of verse 32 tells us why. It says, The Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.

Joseph's separation from the Egyptians was a sign that Joseph must have been of a different nationality than they are. And that separation reminds us why God sent Joseph to Egypt and why God caused the famine to happen in Egypt.

[ 36 : 47 ] God could have made the famine happen in any country. The strict segregationist policy of the Egyptians ensured that Jacob's family would not be assimilated into Egypt and lose their identity as God's covenant people.

living in Canaan where they were though before they went to Egypt posed exactly the opposite threat. Both Judah and Simeon had intermarried with the Canaanites and so God in his wisdom moves the small family into Egypt where they'll grow into a mighty nation over the next 430 years as they're segregated from the pagans.

Again, we see that the main point of the Joseph narrative is about the progression of redemptive history. God's providence makes Joseph's misfortune calls the immediate salvation of his family and that salvation of Joseph's family leads to a mighty nation.

Back in tonight's text, we see in verse 33 that the brothers finally are beginning to realize that something unusual has happened. Look at verse 33 again.

It says, And they set before him the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement.

[ 38 : 02 ] Somehow the Egyptians managed to seat the eleven brothers correctly in order by age. I looked it up and the odds of that happening randomly are 1 in 39,916,800.

Again, that's 1 in 39,916,800. None of the brothers may have known the formula for calculating the number of possible permutations, but they still were amazed.

They didn't have Google back then. No, they didn't. It was almost as if somebody there knew them. So think about where we are.

Joseph has seen some good signs from his older brothers. They have passed many of his tests even if it took them more than one attempt to get through those tests and it took them more than one visit to get through those tests.

Still, Joseph needs more proof that the older brothers have changed before he reveals himself. Chapter 43 has one more test and that comes in the last verse.

[ 39 : 07 ] Verse 34 says, Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs and they drank and were merry with him, meaning with Benjamin.

So do you see the test there? Joseph wants to know how the older brothers will react to Benjamin being singled out as the obvious favorite. He's looking for signs of the brothers being envious of Benjamin like they once were envious of him.

Joseph creates that test by giving Benjamin five times more than any of the others. We need to remember that they're dining with an Egyptian ruler here, so the portions would have been of royal size anyway, so one portion would have been a big portion, but Benjamin gets five times that much. One pastor suggested that perhaps Benjamin could no longer be seen behind all the piles of food. I don't know, that's a good question whether he ate it all or not.

You also must be wondering what's going through Benjamin's mind here because quite likely he's never been out of the land of Canaan before and all of a sudden he's sitting in a ruler's residence and being just given piles and piles of food.

[ 40 : 24 ] He must think, this is not so bad after all, I wish I'd come with him the first time. The older brothers actually do well on this test. Unlike the previous test, the brothers passed this test on the first attempt because the chapter ends by saying that the brothers drank and were married with Benjamin.

Next week, we will see how chapter 44 documents the brothers' final exam. Meanwhile, Joseph has to be encouraged by the main idea of this chapter and that is that we have seen God at work transforming the hearts of Jacob and his sons so that they eventually will become worthy leaders of God's covenant nation.

In addition to that main idea, we can take a few other things from this chapter. Some of those things are ones that we've seen throughout our Joseph study. Moses and God apparently want us to get that message and they say some of the same things again and again.

And one of those things is the first thing to see and that is God does whatever it takes to bring his people back to him. God does whatever it takes to bring his people back to him.

Think about Romans 8, 28, and 29. Those verses remind us of how God works in believers' lives. Those verses say, and we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose.

[ 41 : 51 ] For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Nearly everybody likes quoting Romans 8, 28, but we often omit verse 29.

God's primary concern is doing whatever it takes to bring us back to him and conform us to the image of Christ. Joseph's older brothers were long gone from this earth before Paul wrote Romans 8, 28, and 29, but they illustrate the truth of these verses.

We've seen evidence tonight of changed character, primarily from Judah, but we've also seen evidence of changed character from Jacob because he finally released his grip on the one thing that he valued more than God up to that point, and that's his youngest son, Benjamin.

We also saw from verse 34 that the older brothers showed no sign of envying Benjamin. That's an obvious change for the better. A second thing we can take away from this chapter is that everyone needs mercy, peace, and grace from God.

That applies to believers and unbelievers alike. non-believers experience those qualities at salvation. Believers experience those qualities again and again as we see God at work in our lives.

[ 43 : 16 ] Joseph's life is a prime example of God at work in a believer's life. Joseph consistently has shown some of the strongest faith documented in the Bible. However, he never could have made it through the 22 or 23 years we've studied so far without God's mercy, peace, and grace.

The last thing we should take away from this chapter is that we can serve God anywhere regardless of our circumstances. Those who receive God's mercy, peace, and grace need to tell others about it.

And Joseph is an example of serving God anywhere regardless of the circumstances. How did the Egyptian steward know about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

Well, the answer is obvious. He heard about the true God from Joseph, or at least from somebody that Joseph had told. Joseph likely told the steward about the steward's sins demanding payment from a holy God, but he probably told him that that same God would provide a way of salvation from those sins.

Joseph lived out another passage of New Testament Scripture long before that passage was written, and that's 2 Corinthians 5, 19-21. That's where the Apostle Paul wrote, In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

[ 44 : 45 ] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the reminder of how you are at work in people's lives, even when we may not realize it, and even when some of those things that you work through are things that we would rather skip.

Help us continue to develop our faith in you and trust you as we go through this life, and help us become more and more willing to share that faith with others. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.