GENESIS

Chapter 42

*Joseph’s Brothers Go to Egypt*

**When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you just keep looking at each other?” 2 He continued, “I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.” 3 Then ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. 5 So Israel’s sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. 6 Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. 7 As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. “Where do you come from?” he asked. “From the land of Canaan,” they replied, “to buy food.” 8 Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. 9 Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.” 10 “No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.” 12 “No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.” 13 But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.” 14 Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies! 15 And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16 Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!” 17 And he put them all in custody for three days. 18 On the third day, Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 19 If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. 20 But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” This they proceeded to do. 21 They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come upon us.” 22 Reuben replied, “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.” 23 They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. 24 He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes. 25 Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man’s silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, 26 they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left. 27 At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. 28 “My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers. “Here it is in my sack.” Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?” 29 When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, 30 “The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land. 31 But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we are not spies. 32 We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan.’ 33 “Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, ‘This is how I will know whether you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go. 34 But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade in the land.’ ” 35 As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man’s sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened. 36 Their father Jacob said to them, “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!” 37 Then Reuben said to his father, “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.” 38 But Jacob said, “My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.”**

**42:1** *grain* … *in Egypt*. The flooding of the Nile normally kept Egypt fertile even in droughts. Inscriptions show Canaanites coming for food during famine. (TLSB)

*grain*. Such as barley and wheat; dietary staples. (TLSB)

*look at one another?* Failing to take action. (TLSB)

**42:2–3** Stephen refers to this incident (Ac 7:12). (CSB)

**42:4** *did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother.* Their mother Rachel had died (35:19), and Jacob thought Joseph also was dead (37:33). Jacob did not want to lose Benjamin, the remaining son of his beloved Rachel. (CSB)

At least age 22. Cf 46:21. (TLSB)

*feared that harm*. Having lost both Rachel and Joseph. (TLSB)

**42:5** *famine was in the land of Canaan also.* As in the time of Abram (see 12:10 and note). (CSB)

**42:6** *governor*. “Vizier,” chief administrator, who developed and implemented Pharaoh’s policies. (TLSB)

*sold*. As overseer. God providentially ensured that Joseph would notice the arrival of his brothers. (TLSB)

*bowed down.* In fulfillment of Joseph’s dreams (see 37:7, 9). (CSB)

Joseph’s dream is fulfilled. (TLSB)

**42:8** *Joseph recognized his brothers.* Although at least 20 years had passed since he had last seen them (see 37:2; 41:46, 53–54), they had been adults at the time and their appearance had not changed much. (CSB)

*they did not recognize him.* Joseph, a teenager at the time of his enslavement, was now an adult in an unexpected position of authority, wearing Egyptian clothes and speaking to his brothers through an interpreter (see v. 23). He was, moreover, shaven in the Egyptian manner (see note on 41:14). (CSB)

Now 22 years later, Joseph was a ruler in Egyptian royal garb, speaking a foreign language. (TLSB)

**42:9** *nakedness*. Weak and vulnerable spots. (TLSB)

**42:10** *my lord … Your servants.* Unwittingly, Joseph’s brothers again fulfilled his dreams and their own scornful fears (see 37:8). (CSB)

**42:11** *honest*. Though they had lied about Joseph for decades. (TLSB)

**42:13** *youngest*. Benjamin. (TLSB)

*no more*. They did not know Joseph’s fate. (TLSB)

**42:15** *tested*. To prove their honesty and character. Cf 22:1. (TLSB)

*As surely as Pharaoh lives.* Joseph did not invoke an Egyptian god (see Jer 12:16; Am 8:14; see also 1Sa 1:26; 17:55; 2Sa 11:11; 14:19). (CSB)

Oath by one greater than himself adds weight to the test (Heb 6:16).

**42:17** *custody*. Imprisoned, like Joseph (40:3). (TLSB)

*three days*. Time for a genuine change of heart to begin (see note, v 21). (TLSB)

**42:18** *I fear God*. Denotes Joseph’s faith and awe before God—a clue to Joseph’s character that the brothers did not notice. (TLSB)

**42:21** *guilty*. Repentance begins. Luther: “They confess that they are debtors; they acknowledge the cruelty with which they have despised the pitiful plea of their brother.” However, “it was indeed an atrocious crime … and they have not yet come to a full realization and knowledge of its hideousness” (AE 7:259). (TLSB)

*how distressed he was … distress has come upon us.* The brothers realized they were beginning to reap what they had sown (see Gal 6:7). (CSB)

**42:22** See 37:21–22 and note on 37:21. (CSB)

*reckoning*. Innocent blood seeks justice. Cf 4:10; 9:6. (TLSB)

**42:24** *wept*. Reveals love and recognition of their repentance. (TLSB)

*He had Simeon taken.* Jacob’s second son (see 29:32–33) is imprisoned instead of the firstborn Reuben, perhaps because the latter had saved Joseph’s life years earlier (37:21–22). (CSB)

The oldest of the brothers who had sold him had caused trouble before. Cf 34:25, 30. Reuben, the oldest brother, tried to spare Joseph and was not present when he was sold (cf 37:29–30). (TLSB)

**42:25** *money*. Lit, “silver.” Measured by weight. (TLSB)

**42:27** *mouth*. Top of the bag. (TLSB)

**42:28** *hearts failed*. Luther: “[The expression] points out that confidence, wisdom, and all courage failed them. They were terrified, not only when they saw the money in the sack but also when they were confronted with the sin they had committed.… As yet, however, they do not grieve; as yet they do not acknowledge their crime” (AE 7:271). (TLSB)

*God has done*. Luther: “But they ascribe this to God, the Judge.… And this came from the terror and anguish of conscience which, with great grief and anguish of heart, are wont to follow sin” (AE 7:271). (TLSB)

**42:34** *trade*. Or, “travel freely,” which was necessary for business. (TLSB)

**42:35** *afraid*. Because they feared they would be accused of theft, and their brother Simeon, still bound in Egypt, would have to suffer for it. (TLSB)

**42:36** *bereaved me*. Either Jacob suspected the brothers had something to do with Joseph’s demise, or he just meant that they brought him the news of it. (TLSB)

**42:37** *both of my sons.* Reuben’s generous offer as security for Benjamin’s safety (see note on 37:21). (CSB)

Reuben futilely and crudely offered his sons as hostages to assuage Jacob’s fear. Luther: “[Jacob] prefers saving Benjamin to saving Reuben and Simeon, and it seems that he regarded Simeon as lost” (AE 7:289). (TLSB)

**42:38** *Sheol*. Here, “death.” (TLSB)

**Ch 42** The sons of Israel enter Egypt for food and unknowingly fulfill the dream they had resented (37:5–8). Joseph, though harsh, was motivated by the fear of the Lord, and began a test to determine his brothers’ treatment of his father and Benjamin, and to encourage repentance and a renewed relationship with God. Luth: “In trials God conducts Himself toward His saints just as Joseph conducts himself toward his brothers” (AE 7:225). Unrepentant sin is not resolved by time or forgetfulness, but by true repentance and forgiveness. Joseph’s tears reveal affection. Luth: “Christ is our completely friendly Joseph, who died for us and shed His blood for the remission of our sins” (AE 7:256). • O Lord, no matter how high I sit, You are able to cast me down, and no matter how deep I have fallen, You are able to lift me up. To You be glory, through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)