

Famine and Family

Genesis 42 and 43

This story is about a family and the painful process of reconciliation between family members. It is set against the backdrop of world-wide famine and shows God's care and protection of his people...

Joseph's brothers go to Egypt (Genesis 42)

The last few verses of Genesis 41 set the scene: "All the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world." This included the land of Canaan (Israel), so Jacob sent 10 of his sons down to Egypt to buy grain. However, Benjamin, who was Joseph's only true brother, was 'special', so Jacob kept him at home...

- "Although Joseph recognised his brothers, they did not recognise him" (verse 8). Why do you think this was so? What was the motive for Joseph's apparent harshness towards his brothers (verse 9)?
- In verse 16 Joseph decrees that nine of the brothers would be kept in prison, while only one brother would be sent home to get Benjamin; however, three days later the numbers are reversed – only one brother is to be kept in prison while the other nine are allowed to return home (verse 19). Why the change?
- What brought the brothers to a recognition of their guilt (verses 21 and 22)?
- What were Joseph's real feelings (verse 24)? So why did he keep up the pretence?
- What do you think was going through the brothers' minds in verse 28?
- How was Jacob's attitude mistaken in verse 36? Why do you think he was so far off the mark?

The second journey to Egypt (Genesis 43)

- In verses 11 – 14 of this chapter, why do you think Jacob agreed to Judah's proposal, when he had refused Reuben's earlier appeal in Genesis 42 verses 37 and 38? What had changed?
- Verse 23: "Your God, the God of your father..." How did Joseph's (Egyptian) steward know about the true God? How is Joseph a model for us?
- When the brothers were seated before Joseph in the correct order of their ages, why were they astonished (verse 33)?
- A 'portion' (verse 34) was a small token piece of choice food to indicate a shared meal. Why was Benjamin's portion five times as much as anyone else's? Was it affection for Benjamin, or a further test for the brothers?

Prayer – Lord, as we look once again at the life of Joseph, help us to learn to honour you in all that we do. Help us also to remember that people and families matter to you, and that we can trust you to take care of our families and loved ones. Amen.