

# The Famine

## GENESIS 42–43

### FIRST DAY: Introduction

Romans 8:28 is one of the greatest assurances found in the Bible: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

Even when our circumstances seem dire, desperate, and disastrous, God is at work! Behind the scenes, God is weaving all the different elements of our lives together to fulfill His great and good plans for us.

In Genesis 42 and 43, the family of Jacob was in dire straights. They ran out of grain. The famine was devastating. Jacob had to send ten of his sons to Egypt to try to purchase grain. After a somewhat disastrous encounter with the prime minister of Egypt, Jacob's sons returned with grain, but without their brother Simeon. When the grain was finally consumed, the brothers were forced to return to Egypt. Jacob, at that moment, wrongly concluded, *All these things are against me* (Genesis 42:36). He had no idea how God was, and had been, working in all the tragedies of his life in order to save his whole family.

As the reader of this story, you have the advantage—you already know the miraculous movement of God in Joseph's life. Unfortunately, you do not have the same vantage point in your own circumstances. Nevertheless, the God of Jacob is still working in all the circumstances of your life for your ultimate good.

*Take a moment to entrust any seemingly dire, desperate, or disastrous circumstances in your life to the Lord.*




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**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**


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Famines were common  
in patriarchal times.

Both Abraham  
(Genesis 12:10) and  
Isaac (Genesis 26:1) had  
to deal with famines.




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**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**


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Egypt was about a  
three-week journey,  
250–300 miles from  
Canaan.

**SECOND DAY:** Read Genesis 42:1–17

1. The great famine that was prophesied in Genesis 41 came to pass. Because it was so severe and widespread, it soon reached Jacob's family in Canaan. As a result, what did Jacob tell *his sons* to do? Genesis 42:1–2
  
2. *Joseph's ten brothers* did as their father asked (Genesis 42:3). However, why did Jacob *not send* Benjamin with them? Genesis 42:4
  - a. What does Jacob's concern suggest?
  
3. The *sons of Israel went to buy grain* in Egypt, where they encountered Joseph. He was the one who sold grain *to all the people of the land* (Genesis 42:5–6a). Genesis 42:6b–17 captures the drama of their first interaction. Use these verses to note and comment on the following:
  - a. The demeanor of Joseph's brothers (verses 6b, 8b)
  
  - b. Joseph's demeanor (verses 7–8a)
  
  - c. Joseph's recollection (verse 9a)

(1) Link this with Genesis 37:7, 9 and share your thoughts.

d. Joseph's accusations (verses 9b, 12, 14)

e. The claims of Joseph's brothers (verses 10–11, 13)

f. Joseph's test (verses 15–17)

(1) Why do you think Joseph put his brothers *in prison*?

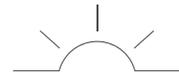
(2) Considering how the brothers treated Joseph twenty years earlier, how would you describe Joseph's conduct toward them?

4. Share a way you see God's hand at work in the events portrayed in your study today.

**THIRD DAY:** Read Genesis 42:18–38

1. After keeping them in prison *three days*, Joseph spoke to his brothers. What do you find interesting about what Joseph acknowledged about himself? Genesis 42:18
  - a. How would Joseph allow them to prove their innocence? Genesis 42:19–20a
  
2. Joseph's brothers had no choice to but comply (Genesis 42:20b). Why did they believe this was happening to them? Genesis 42:21
  - a. What did Reuben say about the matter? Genesis 42:22
    - (1) Even though it had been over twenty years since Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, what does their reaction indicate?
      - (a) What does this convey to you about the nature of unconfessed sin? See also Psalm 32:3–4.

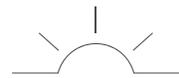
3. Because Joseph *spoke to them through an interpreter*, they did not realize he understood them (Genesis 42:23). How did Joseph react to their words? Genesis 42:24a
- a. Why do you think Simeon was singled out? See also Genesis 34:30.
4. From Genesis 42:25–38, share your insights about the following:
- a. Joseph’s command (verse 25)
- b. The journey home (verses 26–28)
- (1) The brothers’ reactions (verse 28b)
- (a) Why do you think they felt this way?
- c. The brothers’ report to Jacob (verses 29–35)
- d. Jacob’s assessment (verses 36, 38)




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**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Joseph probably did not know about Reuben’s attempt to save him until he overheard his brothers talking (Genesis 42:22–23).




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**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

This is the first time in the narrative that Joseph’s brothers mention God (Genesis 42:28).

e. Reuben's offer (verse 37)

(1) Why do you think Jacob was not appeased by Reuben's offer? See also Genesis 49:3–4.

5. Like Jacob, when in dire circumstances we are inclined to believe, *All these things are against me*. Yet, this is never true for a child of God. Use the following Scriptures to affirm what is true:

a. Psalm 56:9–11

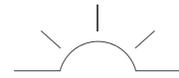
b. Lamentations 3:31–33

c. Joel 2:25–26

d. Romans 8:31

**FOURTH DAY:** Read Genesis 43:1–14

1. According to Genesis 43:1–2, the *famine* continued to be *severe*, so when Jacob’s family had *eaten up the grain* from Egypt, he told his sons to *go back* for more food. However, of what did Judah remind his father? Genesis 43:3–5
  
2. Jacob was not pleased with Judah’s reply. Use Genesis 43:6–10 to note and comment on:
  - a. Jacob’s complaint (verse 6)
  
  - b. His sons’ explanation (verse 7)
  
  - c. Judah’s offer (verses 8–10)
    - (1) What does this reveal about Judah?
  
3. Jacob finally acquiesced when he saw there was no other option. From Genesis 43:11–13 record the things he told his sons to *take* with them to Egypt:
  - a. Verse 11

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

A famine is not a short-term situation. When sufficient rain finally falls, it still takes at least one full season before crops can produce enough grain.

b. Verse 12

c. Verse 13

(1) Why do you think Jacob did this?

4. Genesis 43:14 (NLT) says, *May God Almighty give you mercy as you go before the man, so that he will release Simeon and let Benjamin return. But if I must lose my children, so be it.* What do Jacob's words reveal about his perspective?

5. Jacob invoked the title *El Shaddai (God Almighty, the All-Sufficient One)*. Why are these attributes of God crucial to remember when *all these things* seem to be against you?

**FIFTH DAY:** Read Genesis 43:15–34

1. Jacob's sons did as their father said, and brought the gifts, Benjamin, and *double money* with them *to Egypt*. Once more they *stood before Joseph* (Genesis 43:15). Use Genesis 43:16–23 to answer the following questions:

a. What did Joseph do when he *saw Benjamin with them?* (verse 16)

b. When the *steward* brought the brothers to Joseph's house, why were they *afraid*? (verses 17–18)

c. What did they explain to the *steward*? (verses 19–22)

d. How did the *steward* respond? (verse 23)

(1) What does the steward's mention of God indicate to you?

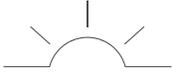
2. According to Genesis 43:24, Joseph's brothers were given water to wash their *feet* and food for their *donkeys*, implying that they were honored guests in Joseph's home. What do you find remarkable about this?

3. Joseph's brothers then *made the present ready* for Joseph's arrival (Genesis 43:25). From Genesis 43:26–28, comment on their interaction *when Joseph came home*.



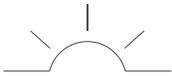
#### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Ironically, Joseph's brothers were afraid they would be enslaved or imprisoned by Joseph—the very fate that they had constrained him to.



**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Benjamin is the only brother Joseph declared a blessing over (Genesis 43:29b).



**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Dr. Henry Morris notes that the probability of randomly seating the eleven brothers according to their age was one in 39,941,000.<sup>34</sup>

4. Use Genesis 43:29–31 to describe Joseph’s encounter with Benjamin.
  
5. Joseph’s brothers then *ate with him*. Use Genesis 43:32–34 to note and remark on:
  - a. Where they sat (verse 32)
  
  - b. How they were seated (verse 33)
  
  - c. How they were treated (verse 34)
    - (1) Why do you think Joseph gave Benjamin more than his brothers?
  
    - (2) Observe that Joseph’s brothers *were merry with him* regardless of his favor toward Benjamin. Contrast this with the brothers’ behavior in Genesis 37:3–4 and share why this is notable.
  
6. From your study today, what stands out most to you about Joseph’s interaction with his brothers?

**SIXTH DAY:** Review

1. From your study this week, share a way you see God working in:
  - a. The famine
  
  - b. Joseph
  
  - c. Judah
  
  - d. Simeon
  
  - e. Reuben
  
  - f. The brothers
  
  - g. Jacob
  
2. Using Genesis 42–43, share something you observed about the activity of Our Great Creator.