

## August 13, 2017 - Gen. 42:18 – 43:13 - Joseph's Brothers Return to Jacob

**Torah Reading: Gen. 42:18 – 43:13 - Joseph's Brothers Return to Jacob**

**Psalm 35**

**Haftorah - Isaiah 50:10 – 51:7 + 11**

**Hosea 6:2-11**

After the brothers' three-day imprisonment in the pit/prison:

**Genesis 42:19-20** - "If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses: But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so."

Faced with putting the second remaining son of Rachel into danger, the brothers' guilt over their previous betrayal of Joseph looms large in their minds. They speak to one another, without realizing Joseph can understand their language. He had been using an interpreter.

**Genesis 42:21** - "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us."

This is the first time we hear the details of Joseph's cries for mercy and his brothers' indifference. Now his brothers realized they were feeling what Joseph must have felt.

This is the first level of repentance for them. Two more incidents will take them to deeper levels.

Joseph weeps, but then orders Simeon to be tied up as a hostage. (Simeon was the ringleader in the sale of Joseph)

Why did he need to inflict suffering on his brothers, when he would forgive them in the end?

Nachmanides pointed to this psalm:

**Psalm 119:71** - "It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes."

Joseph put them to the test, to both refine them and determine if they still harbored enmity toward Rachel's children. Would they abandon Benjamin to an uncertain fate?

**Genesis 42:25** - "Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return each man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. His orders were carried out."

This was a further test.

When the brothers discover the money in their bags, they realize that on top of being suspected as spies, now they might be charged with theft. ("The one" who opened his

sack is said by the Targum of Jonathan to have been Levi, one of the main instigators of Joseph's sale)

**Genesis 42:28** - "And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?"

Or, as the Rabbis interpret it: "What is this?" Surprise at the discovery. Then, as it sinks in, "The Lord has done this to us." Divine justice had tracked them down.

This is a deeper stage of their repentance, a more intense realization of their guilt.

Also, the confusion caused by these false accusations - they knew they had not taken the money, so why was it here in their bags? - This must have resembled the confusion of Joseph as he was rudely sold and made a slave in circumstances out of his control.

The brothers return to Jacob and recount the story

They toned it down so as not to upset Jacob too much. Simeon is merely staying at the Egyptian governors house. No mention of their three days in prison, and no threat of death. They knew if the situation sounded too dangerous, Jacob would never allow Benjamin to go.

Now a new level of repentance is displayed by Reuben and Judah. They are willing to lay down their lives (in Judah's case) or the lives of their own children (Reuben).

**Genesis 42:37** - "And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again."

**Genesis 43:9** - "I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever:"

As the famine increased, Judah implores Jacob on behalf of the "little ones" - the children of the families, who are going hungry. And Jacob relents.

**Genesis 43:8** - "And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones."

**Genesis 43:13-14** - "Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

(Compare Esther's response: **Esther 4:16** - "And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.")

These are the last words we hear from Jacob until Joseph reveals his identity to them all.

The Rabbis suggest that Jacob had not completely given up on Joseph's being alive. It remained a hope, if only in his subconscious. They focus on an anomaly in the text. Instead of reading "your other brother," instead it says ungrammatically: "your brother, another."

"Jacob prophesied but knew not what he was prophesying ... "your brother" refers to Simeon; "another" refers to Joseph; "and Benjamin" is as its plain sense indicates." (Avot d'rabbi.Natan)

Rashi adds: "The Holy Spirit prompted him to include Joseph."

Nachmanides suggests that Simeon is not mentioned by name because he was out of favor with Jacob because of the incident at Shechem.

(See a detailed discussion of this whole story in "Studies in Bereshit/Genesis" by Nehama Leibowitz)