

**GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 31 (44:1-45:28): Some Summary Thoughts:**

**Final Chapters:** The closing chapters of Genesis take us between Canaan and Egypt in three major scenes: The first scene opened in chapters 42 – 44. Scripture allows us to view the initial interaction between Joseph and his brothers, 13 or more years after they sold him into slavery. The second scene that we enter into today portrays a family reunion of sorts. The pivotal passage has to be Joseph’s revelation of his identity to his brothers in 45:4-8. For them a worst-case scenario has to be unfolding. The youngest son of their father (Benjamin) is being held hostage, an innocent victim of a trumped-up charge, and all of a sudden, they now hear this vizier announcing his *true* identity! Joseph’s speech to them at this point is remarkable!

In chapter 44, the goblet of “divination” (44:5) is placed by Joseph into Benjamin’s bag as a ruse to force the brothers’ return to Egypt. The scene is rich with meaning. When they return, Joseph talks of their guilt, saying their crime is folly since he can practice divination without the goblet (44:15). While Joseph speaks of their guilt, Judah takes up the theme and expresses his own long-standing guilt concerning the brothers’ former treatment of Joseph. In a fascinating reversal, Judah no longer seeks to “turn a profit” (37:26) from the sale of his brother; rather, he voluntarily offers to sell himself into slavery to save Benjamin (44:32-34). Compassion has replaced hostility, greed, and envy. What a powerful transformation on his behalf.

**Chapter 45:** This chapter along with chapter 50 serve in the Joseph cycle to highlight the mercy of God and the attitude a true believer in God can have toward his brother. It amplifies similar actions and responses seen powerfully in chapter 22 (sacrifice of Isaac), and then in chapters 28 and 32 in the Jacob cycle (the dream at Bethel and the wrestling match at Jabbok). In Chapter 45, we are once again treated to a remarkable scene. In revealing himself to his brothers, Joseph spends no time indulging in self-pity. Instead, he focuses totally on God’s purpose in bringing him to Egypt to prepare him for future action. In a scene set up potentially to reflect “revenge,” we now witness a powerful demonstration of “reconciliation” instead. We witness the impact a faithful life has on others. As brother and viceroy, Joseph addresses his brothers:

*“3 Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still living?’ But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me.’ When they had done so, he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 5 And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, **because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.** 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. 7 **But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.** 8 **‘So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.** 9 **Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay.’”***

In this response, Joseph is using the language and trappings of royalty to frame his declaration of God’s intent in all the actions involved. The rest of the chapters bear the fruit of this understanding. Jacob’s family is reunited in Egypt, given prime land by the Pharaoh, and there Jacob lives out the rest of his days.

- Once again, we are reminded that we all live within a Divine – human drama, one where God is sovereign and in charge, but also one where the humans are neither puppets in God’s plan, nor do they have the power to thwart His plan. Like Joseph, humans can exhibit and bring about good in the midst of evil or even when evil has been exercised against them. But, like the brothers, humans can temporarily hinder the working of good in the world. What is beyond dispute is the final outcome!