

## SOVEREIGN GRACE CREATES AND CONQUERS DESPAIR Genesis 42: 29 – 43: 14

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

### INTRODUCTION

In what sorts of circumstances do you most often feel overwhelmed, depressed, discouraged, in despair, etc.? How does the emotion of discouragement/despair affect your life? Have you often felt despair?

As we continue following the story of Jacob and his twelve sons in Genesis 37-50 we have come to the low point in the life of Jacob. Throughout the passage are expressions of human despair. Jacob at one point declares, "Everything is against me." Those are the words of a despairing man. We see an entire family placed in the most difficult of situations. God is the one who has put them in this circumstance. However, not only are we observing a family in despair but we also see the way out of despair. This story tells us something of God's purposes in putting us in desperate circumstances. God creates temporary despair in order to deliver us from eternal despair.

### STUDY

1. What was the experience of the 10 brothers from the time they sold Joseph until 42:1?

*For the past 22 years these men have lived with their father as if they were innocent. They have experienced no remorse for their crime. They have enjoyed all the pleasures of life without the least twinge of conscience. They are able to do this because they believed it was unjust for their father to prefer Rachel, the mother of Joseph, above their mothers. They believed it was unjust for the second to the youngest son to be put in charge of the family. They believed Joseph*

*deserved what he got. They lived as if this is all there is and that they would never have to give an account to anyone for their actions.*

2. Review the hardships that God brought upon the ten brothers in 42:1-28 and how they are responding.

*He brought them to Egypt by the famine and, unknowingly, into the presence of their despised brother Joseph who is now the lord of Egypt. Then, through Joseph, God did to them what they had done to Joseph. They were thrown into prison, even though they had not committed the crime of which they were accused. In 42:21-22 they begin the road back to God by admitting their guilt to one another in selling Joseph into slavery. They recognize that God is punishing them for their crime. He is calling them to account for their sin. They have to leave Simeon in prison in Egypt and return to their father and explain how they've lost another son. They have to convince their father to let Benjamin return to Egypt in order to get Simeon out of jail.*

3. After they explain to their father what happened to them in Egypt they open their sacks of grain. What do they discover? How do they respond? Why do they respond in this way (cf. v. 28)?

*The nine brothers discover that their silver also has been returned in the mouths of their sacks. This again creates fear in them. They fear because this is another sign that God is after them. He has seen their sin, he remembers it, and he is going to make them pay for it.*

4. While they are full of dread, what does their father say to them? What does this tell us about what Jacob really thinks about these brothers?

*Jacob accuses the nine sons of being the agents of the disappearance of both Joseph and Simeon. Two other times in this passage (42:38 & 43:6), Jacob says that the trouble he experiences is due to the actions of these sons. We know and the brothers know that what Jacob says is exactly true. Joseph and Simeon are no more because of the actions of these sons. However, does Jacob know? He is very suspicious of these sons and he does not trust them. He remembers their hatred of Joseph and most likely, there have been whispered rumors in the*

*camp. While Jacob has no proof, he has his suspicions and he is voicing them for the first time. He does not know how but he knows that Joseph's disappearance is due to these hate-filled brothers.*

**5.** What does Reuben's response tell us about how Jacob's accusation has affected at least him? What is he trying to prove to Jacob?

*He offers up his two sons in order to prove to their father that he is a trustworthy son. Reuben and the other brothers know that Simeon is in jail due to their sin and they know that the only way out is to prove they are honest men. The sons must prove to both the "lord of Egypt" and to their father that they are honest men. In Egypt they are accused as spies, in their home they are blamed for the evil that has befallen their two brothers. How can they prove they are honest? How can they escape their guilt? God has backed them into a corner. Therefore, like an animal in a corner, Reuben proposes a desperate action.*

**6.** How should the brothers have responded to their father's accusation? Why didn't they?

*There is only one way out and that is the way of open and honest confession of their sin. Yet, they are unwilling to take that avenue. They would rather sacrifice their own children than openly confess their crime. They have not yet fully faced their sin. They are not as passionate about showing God they are honest men as they are proving to their father and to the prince they are honest men. They still love the pleasures of this world too much. They still think that they can figure a way out of this trap on their own. They are willing to leave Simeon in prison rather than acknowledge their guilt.*

**7.** What other distressing thing does their father say in v. 38?

*He calls Benjamin "my son". He says that Benjamin is the only son he has left. He says that if something were to happen to Benjamin they would bring his gray head down to the grave in grief. He isn't saying that about Simeon. Jacob would rather leave Simeon in prison in Egypt forever than risk anything happening to Benjamin. He talks as though only Joseph and Benjamin are his sons, not them. These*

*brothers have always known that Joseph and Benjamin, the sons of his preferred wife, Rachel, were his favorites but they have never had Jacob say it to their face with such bluntness. How hopeless is their situation. God is after them for their crime against Joseph.*

**8.** Compare 35: 9-15 with 37:34-35 & 42:36. How has Jacob lived for the past 22 years? How does he view his life? What impact has and does the promise of God have on his life?

*He is the recipient of great and wonderful promises from God. Over the course of his life God has assured him that his sons will become a great nation. Great kings will come from his descendants. He is going to be fruitful in the land of Canaan. However, for the past 22 years he has lived a despondent life due to the loss of Joseph. He loved Joseph more than he loved God and his promises. He has lived as if God's promises died when Joseph died. He hangs on to Benjamin as if losing him would mean losing everything. Jacob's hope is not in God and his promises but in the sons of his beloved wife Rachel. As he says, he believes that "everything is against me." This is not a statement of faith but of unbelief and despair. We know, as the reader, that not everything is against Jacob. In fact, God is at work to accomplish a great salvation. He is fulfilling all his promises. Jacob ought to know this as well, but he does not. Jacob has fixed his affections, his hope; upon life going the way he wants it to go. He has not been able to believe the promises and move beyond his despair.*

**9.** Jacob refuses to send Benjamin back to Egypt right away to free Simeon. He does not trust the nine brothers or the prince of Egypt. How does God force Jacob's hand (43:1-2)?

*The famine continues to be severe and they run out of food again. God has sent this famine into the world to create misery so that men, and especially Jacob, will learn to not trust in themselves or in the comforts of his world, but in God.*

**10.** What does Judah say to him in vv. 3-5?

*Judah reminds Jacob in very strong language that the "man" warned them that they would get no help from him unless they brought along*

*their brother Benjamin. He says that they will go and get food if he sends Benjamin but if he won't then they won't go.*

**11.** 43:6 has a double meaning that the brothers and we, as the readers, understand but that Jacob does not get at all. What is it?

*Jacob is absolutely right in saying that all this trouble has come to him because of these sons. However, he is wrong in saying that this trouble has come to him by their "telling the man" they had another brother. Verse six condemns the brothers as criminals and Jacob for not trusting God's promises, for preferring Benjamin to Simeon, for loving the comforts of this life more than God.*

**12.** What does Judah tell Jacob to do and what does he say he will do in vv. 8-10?

*He tells Jacob to send Benjamin with him to Egypt so they can get food. He tells him that if anything happens to the boy that he, Judah, will be responsible and pay for any harm that comes to Benjamin.*

**13.** Why does Judah tell Jacob what to do (v. 8)? Compare to what Joseph told the brothers in 42:18. Compare to Gen 2: 15-17 & Deut. 30:15-20 & John 6: 28-29, 35-40. What is God saying to Jacob through Judah?

*Judah, using the same language Joseph used when he let the brothers out of prison, tells his father what he must do if they are going to live and not die. God, through Judah, shows to Jacob what faith will do if he wants to live and not die. The reason God tells sinners to repent and to trust in him is so that we will live and not die. He says to Jacob, "The path you must take if my promises are going to come true to you, if you want you and your family to live and not die, is to send Benjamin to the prince of Egypt with your other sons." God has sent to Jacob a temporary despair so that he might escape eternal despair and enjoy eternal life and joy. God has made it impossible for Jacob to continue loving the world. He must either perish or trust God to fulfill his promises.*

**God creates temporary despair in order to deliver us from eternal despair because by nature we love the world.**

**14.** How does Jacob respond to the command of God given to him by Judah?

*He does all he can to prepare his sons for their meeting with the fierce "lord of Egypt." He sends a gift and double the silver they will need to show his sincerity. He agrees to send Benjamin with the brothers to the fierce lord of Egypt. He gives his most prized and loved possession into the hands of his sons. He risks everything that he loves.*

**15.** According to v. 14 why does Jacob do this?

*Nothing has changed since the end of chapter 42 when he says that there is no way that Benjamin will accompany his brothers to Egypt. He does not decide to send Benjamin because he now trusts his sons and the prince of Egypt. He sends Benjamin because he now trusts God. He denies himself and takes up his cross because he believes that to lose his life in this world means that he will gain the life of God, eternal life. God has wrought a miracle in this man through the desperate conditions in which he has placed him. He views the journey of his sons to Egypt as if they are on a mission for God. They are going to obtain the release of captive Simeon and prevent harm to Benjamin. He knows that God is able to change the heart of the fierce prince and bring about the deliverance. His hope is in God, not in his sons or in the goodwill of the prince.*

**16.** What does Israel's prayer, "May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man..." tell us about how he views the relationship between God and human decisions (See Prov. 21:1)?

*Israel sees the decision that the prince will make concerning his two sons as not being in the prince's power. Rather, if God wants the prince to release Simeon and Benjamin then God will cause him to have mercy upon them. However, if it is God's will not to release Simeon and Benjamin, then God will not interfere with what the prince wants to do. God rules over human affections and human hearts. When humans do evil, it is because they want to do it and God permits*

*them to do it for his good, but secret reasons. However, whenever God wants a human to do a good thing he puts a new desire in their heart and they gladly, willingly do the good thing. This is what Jacob means by his prayer. The Almighty God, if he wants, is able to make this cruel prince willingly compassionate.*

17. What does the last sentence of v. 14 mean, “If I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”? (Compare with Esther 4:15-16, Daniel 3: 16-18, Luke 22:42)

*Israel has determined that he wants what God wants and that what God wants is what is best, even if what he wants is to take all 12 of his sons away. Here is Israel sending all of his sons into Egypt where it is quite possible that none of them will ever return. He will not know for at least two months what has happened to these sons. Please note, his concern now is not just with Benjamin, but he sees himself as placing all of his sons at risk. He is putting all of his earthly treasures into the hands of the Sovereign, wise, powerful and loving “Almighty God.” He is completely confident that God will be his refuge and strength. He asks God for mercy, for the deliverance of his sons from this dangerous tyrant, but “his soul finds rest in God alone.”*

18. What are some things that Israel’s sending his sons to Egypt tell us about the nature of faith?

*There is no way to live by faith in the promises of God without taking risks. There is no way to live by faith in God alone without being submissive to the will of God. Faith is not believing that whatever I want God to do is going to happen. Faith is believing that to be loved by God, to belong to him is better than the world. If you will permit me to quote John Piper, “Faith is not only believing that Jesus will do what he has promised but that what Jesus promises is better than the whole world.” Then it is making choices and living in the world in a manner that shows we believe that to be true. It is to live depending upon him to be all that we need so that if we lose everything we love on planet earth, which is going to happen to all of us one day, we can still be infinitely happy. God and his promises are better than 12 healthy sons and their families living next door in prosperity.*

19. What are some risks God is asking you to take that will show that you prefer him to everything else?

**God creates temporary despair in order to deliver us from eternal despair because faith lives as if God is the greatest treasure.**

20. As the readers of this story we have God’s viewpoint. What do we know that neither Jacob nor his sons know?

*What we know is that they have nothing to fear. Jacob has had no reason to be in despair for the past 22 years. They talk about “the man” in Egypt who is full of threats and appears dangerous and yet we know they are talking about Joseph. Joseph is alive and the most powerful man in the world. Benjamin is in no danger and neither is Simeon. We have seen the compassion of Joseph already and know that he is working with God in order to bring life and not death to his family, including his brothers. We know that there are enormous resources available for them to escape the devastation of the famine. We know there is nothing to fear. There is no reason for despair because the brother they rejected is now exalted to the highest place and is seeking their salvation.*

21. What does this knowledge tell us about how we ought to view our own lives?

*Just as God was working out a plan for their eternal and infinite joy so is he working out a plan for our eternal and infinite joy. It may require 22 years of living with some great loss but it is going to end. There is forgiveness and joy awaiting you. Don’t be afraid. Don’t live in despair. God has a great and glorious future planned when everything sad will become untrue for those who will turn from their sins and go to the crucified Savior who is now exalted as lord of the earth. He is patiently waiting. You can give up your life on planet earth. You can entrust your life to his care. He has a plan that he is working out for your eternal good, if you will love him and trust him. Trust God and live a life that risks the comforts and pleasures of this life because you know that you have better and more lasting pleasures in heaven. Submit to the will of your loving father because you know*

*that he has a glorious future that he is preparing and all the details of your life are part of his giving you that future.*

**22.** How will this story help you deal with difficult and distressing circumstances?

**God creates temporary despair in order to deliver us from eternal despair.**