

Benjamin

Genesis 35:17-19

35:17 And it came to pass, when she [Rachel] was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this **son** also. **35:18** And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name **Benoni**: but his father called him **Benjamin**. **35:19** And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

Genesis 43:29-43

43:29 And he [Joseph] lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother **Benjamin**, his mother's son, and said, Is this your **younger brother**, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my **son**. **43:30** And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his **brother**: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.

Genesis 44:18-25

44:18 Then Judah came near unto him [Joseph], and said, . . . **44:19** My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a **brother**? **44:20** And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a **child** of his old age, a **little one**; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. **44:21** And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. **44:22** And we said unto my lord, The **lad** cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die. **44:23** And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your **youngest brother** come down with you, ye shall see my face no more. **44:24** And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. **44:25** And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food.

Genesis 44:26-45:1

44:26 And we said, We cannot go down: if our **youngest brother** be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our **youngest brother** be with us. **44:27** And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons: **44:28** And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since: **44:29** And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. **44:30** Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the **lad** be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the **lad's** life; **44:31** It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the **lad** is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave. **44:32** For thy servant became surety for the **lad** unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. **44:33** Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the **lad** a bondman to my lord; and let the **lad** go up with his brethren. **44:34** For how shall I go up to my father, and the **lad** be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father.

45:1 Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.

little-known?

Although Jacob's youngest son, Benjamin, is well known in general, he is rarely studied. His service is overshadowed by that of his famous older brother, Joseph.

negatives

Benjamin is referred to as an individual 51 times in Genesis. That is considerably more than Judah (at 29 times), the third most commonly mentioned son of Jacob. Thus, Benjamin should be studied far more than he is. Nevertheless, it is easy to see why Joseph gets more attention, since he is mentioned nearly four times more often than Benjamin.

That said, the main reason that Benjamin is easily overlooked is because he was almost always the passive object of action rather than the active subject. For instance, it does not say that Benjamin went to Egypt on his own. Rather, Moses repeatedly shows that he was taken there by his brothers.

Though Judah is not mentioned nearly as much in Genesis as Benjamin, he was far more active. His actions were notoriously bad in chapters 37-38, but at least Judah stands out and is remembered for his deeds. Moreover, he said some good things. Benjamin, however, was mostly inactive and silent. How could God ever use him (A-6)?

Because of his passive role in chapters 42-45, it is easy to assume that Benjamin was still very young when he was taken to Egypt by his older brothers. He did not seem to make decisions on his own, and he was often referred to as a lad (43:8, 44:22, 30-34). Was he still young and single (46:21, A-4)?

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() Benjamin did not do much that we know about.
A-1	() He did not go to Egypt the first time (42:4).
A-2	() He was probably not a shepherd (37:12, 47:3).
A-3	() Jacob did not allow Benjamin to do much (42:4, 38).
A-4	() Benjamin was single when he moved to Egypt (46:21).
A-5	() He caused a big problem by stealing Joseph's cup (44:1-2).
A-6	() Benjamin did not do enough for the Lord to be useful like Joseph.
B	() Benjamin did not say much that we know about.
B-1	() He did not say anything in chapters 42-45.
B-2	() He probably said a lot which is not in the Bible.
B-3	() Others talked about Benjamin, but he did not speak.
B-4	() Judah spoke instead of Benjamin himself in 44:18-34.
B-5	() Benjamin's lack of words helps keep Moses' focus on Joseph.
B-6	() Like Benjamin, Lazarus said nothing that is reported (John 11:1-44).
B-7	() Benjamin may have spoken to Joseph (<i>with others</i>) in Gen. 50:15-18.

positives

Joseph and Benjamin were full brothers, since they had the same mother, Rachel. (The other ten brothers were only their half-brothers.) This along with the fact that Jacob had loved Rachel more than his other wives helps explain much that happened in the final chapters of Genesis. (See 44:20-29.) Love is an important theme.

Another key background factor was what Joseph's ten older brothers did to him (37:18-35). They sold him as a slave and lied to their father *and Benjamin*, who was too young to be with them, about what had really happened. In order to bring the family together again, this sin had to be dealt with.

Because of their great sin, it is not surprising that Joseph treated his ten older brothers harshly at first (42:7). It was not in order to get even, however. Joseph's ten brothers needed to repent and he helped them do so. The harsh treatment was good for them. Though there was a hopeful comment early on (42:21), their repentance took time.

Joseph used harsh words in 42:7 and 44:15, but his main tool was his innocent brother, Benjamin. His use of Benjamin was painful to Jacob, the older brothers, and to Joseph himself. Even so, God directed Joseph to use his innocent younger brother to test the repentance of the other ten brothers.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() Benjamin was different from most of his brothers.
C-1	() He did NOT betray Joseph (37:18-36).
C-2	() He did not need to repent like the other ten.
C-3	() He was not afraid of Joseph (44:16, 50:15-21).
C-4	() He did not have a guilty conscience (42:21, 50:15-21).
C-5	() He had more in common with Joseph than the others (46:19).
C-6	() The eleven disciples were different from other Jews (Acts 2:14).
D	() Jacob and Joseph loved Benjamin in a special way.
D-1	() Joseph blessed Benjamin in a special way (43:29).
D-2	() Judah explained Jacob's love for Benjamin in 44:20-29.
D-3	() Joseph gave more to Benjamin than to the others (43:34).
D-4	() Judah (Gen. 37:26-28) and Judas (John 12:4-6) loved money.
D-5	() Joseph loved Benjamin (43:29-30) but not the other ten (50:21).
D-6	() Like Benjamin (44:20), John was beloved (John 20:2, 21:7, 20).
D-7	() New Testament believers were / are beloved (Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 15:58).

worksheet answers

Although little is known about what Benjamin did (A), he probably worked as a shepherd (A-2). Though Jacob was very protective (A-1, A-3), Benjamin was not a child. Rather, he was old enough to be married with ten sons (46:21, A-4). Many believe that he was about 32 years old when he moved to Egypt.

It is important to note what Benjamin did not do. He did not betray Joseph like his older brothers had done (C-1), nor did he steal Joseph's cup (A-5). Thus Benjamin did not need to repent of those two particular sins (C-2). Yet, though he was innocent, he joined his brothers in confession in 44:14-16. He may have done so in 50:15-18 as well (B-7).

Benjamin feared Joseph out of respect for his great authority (44:14), but he did not fear him in the way that his older brothers did (50:15, C-3). Benjamin did not have a guilty conscience (C-4), and, from chapter 45 onward, he knew that Joseph loved him in a special way (D). Moreover, Joseph loved all his brothers (45:15, 50:21, D-5).

Benjamin's silence in the final climactic chapters of Genesis helps keep the focus on Joseph (B-5), who is a well-known type of Christ. In addition, Benjamin, by his silence, helped pave the way for the beloved Apostle John who likewise tried to say as little as possible about himself (D-6).

So what?

The Lord used Benjamin despite the fact that he did not do or say nearly as much as Joseph. Though he was not the center of attention, Benjamin was still useful (A-6). In John chapters 11-12, Lazarus likewise shows that a believer does not need to be a hero or a great speaker to be useful to God (B-6).

That said, the Bible does not teach that believers should sit back and do nothing. Benjamin was not totally passive, since his older brothers did not need to carry him down to Egypt. Likewise, Lazarus walked out of the tomb on his own (John 11:44), and, despite danger, he did not go into hiding in the following chapter (John 12:2, 10-11).

Like Benjamin, the eleven disciples in Acts 2:14 were different from their Jewish brethren in an important way (C-6). Benjamin did not betray Joseph like his brother Judah and the others with him did (37:26-28). Likewise the eleven did not betray the Messiah like Judas and many other men of Judea did (Acts 2:36-40).

Thankfully, Judah and his nine brothers repented in Gen. 44:14-34 and three thousand Jewish brethren likewise repented in Acts 2:37-41. In both cases, the blessings of forgiveness and genuine love immediately came to the forefront, in Jacob's family in Gen. 45:1-15 and in the early church in Acts 2:38-47.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.
