

Genesis 42

The Testing of Joseph's Brothers: The Role of a Guilty Conscience

Introduction

- This chapter takes place approximately 9 years after Pharoah's dreams and Joseph's promotion.
- Seven years of plenty had come and gone, and now famine has gripped the land and people are suffering from a food shortage.

1. Jacob commissions his sons to go to Egypt to buy grain (42:1-5)

- (Read Genesis 42:1-5)
- Jacob had a large family with many servants; and as the famine continued, it became more and more difficult to feed them.

- **Genesis 46:26** All those who went to Egypt with Jacob-- those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons' wives-- numbered sixty-six persons.
- Jacob notices his sons strange attitude: “Why do you look at one another?”

- Perhaps the memory of selling their innocent brother to traders 22 years earlier is haunted them? ($30 + 7 + 2 = 39$ yrs old; Age 17 to age 39 = 22 years has passed)

- Jacob refuses to let Benjamin, his only remaining son of Rachel, go with them. He has not gotten over the loss of Joseph and fears for Benjamin.
- The 10 brothers don't seem to be angry that Benjamin does not go with them.

2. Joseph confronts his brothers and accuses them of being spies (42:6-20)

- (Read Genesis 42:6-20)
- No doubt Joseph had commissioners assisting him as he provided for the Egyptians in a routine matter.

- Why does Joseph get involved with foreigners? No doubt foreigners had to be screened carefully lest they had plans for invading the land to capture the grain (42:56-57).
- The brothers bow down to Joseph (42:6), a foretaste of the fulfillment of His earlier dream. (37:7, 9)

- However, Joseph knew all eleven brothers had to bow down before him as God had shown him. Therefore he accuses them of being spies to find out more about their family.
- The brothers tell of their family, thinking Joseph is dead (42:13).

- Joseph imprisons them for 3 days.
- Joseph releases all but one, lets them buy grain and return home warning them not to come back without their youngest brother with them to prove their honesty.

3. God convicts the brothers of their past sin against Joseph (42:21-24a).

- (Read Genesis 42:21-24a)
- After they were released from custody, they began to realize that God was dealing with them because of their sin and confessed to each

- other, in Joseph's presence, the sin of treating their brother Joseph as they had by selling him.

- Gen. 42:21: Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us."

- Reuben is the one who verbalizes what they were all thinking: “Now there comes a reckoning for his blood.”
- They did not realize Joseph could understand everything they were saying (42:21).
- Joseph was emotionally moved by their self-recrimination. (42:24)

4. Joseph jails Simeon and lets the other nine brother go home demanding that they return with their youngest brother as proof of their honesty (42:24b-35)

- (Read Genesis 42:24b-35)
- Why did Joseph choose to imprison Simeon? Perhaps he appreciated Reuben's attempt to rescue him from his brothers?

- Simeon was the 2nd oldest and known to be a violent and cruel man (34:25; 49:5-7). Perhaps Joseph wished to teach Simeon a lesson?
- Joseph generously let them buy grain, gave them provisions for their journey and, unknown to them, had their money put back in their sacks.

- According to Genesis 43:23, Joseph's steward said he received money for the grain he had given them. Most likely Joseph paid for the grain himself so he could show his love and concern for a family that he had not seen for many years.

- Joseph's actions parallel the actions of God recorded in Romans 11:22: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God."
- Joseph was kind to his brothers in spite of the severity of his speech and some of his actions.

- What he did was for their good. His motivation was love and his purpose was to bring them to repentance and reconciliation. We need to think of this the next time we are tempted to think God is treating us unjustly.

5. Jacob's lament – Reuben's offer – Jacob's refusal (42:36-38)

- (Read Genesis 42:36-38)
- When Jacob said, “You have bereaved me of my children,” is this a hint that Jacob suspected that his sons were behind Joseph's mysterious disappearance?

- Jacob's statement, "All this has come against me," was a valid statement from a human point of view, but from God's perspective, everything that was happening was working for Jacob's good and not his harm.
- For God's children, there is a smiling face behind a frowning providence!
(Rom. 8:28-29)

- It is sad to see Jacob again expressing his special love for Joseph and Benjamin, something that must have hurt the other sons.
- In the next chapter (Gen. 43), we will see Joseph's test concerning jealousy.
- They were jealous of Joseph. Are they jealous of Benjamin?

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