

Genesis

Chapter 42



**Michael Fronczak
Bible Study Resource Center
564 Schaeffer Dr.
Coldwater, Michigan 49036**

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The following narratives show that God used the famine to bring Israel into Egypt under the ruler-ship of Joseph. The nation would remain there some 400 years, as God had prophesied to Abram (Gen 15:13).

Jewish Study Bible Introduction: The first reunion of Joseph and his brothers. In this chapter, Joseph and his brothers meet again, through in radically different and, in fact, reversed roles from the ones in which we last saw them (ch. 37). Now, just as he has dreamt, it is they who are the subordinates, and, moreover, he is the only one who recognizes the situation. Joseph reenacts his brothers' mistreatment of him, only with them now as the victims – and with a dose of mercy altogether missing in Ch. 37 (with the exception of Reuben's botched attempt to rescue him).¹

McGee Introduction: The dramatic incidents in the life of Joseph are beginning to unfold. The pattern of God in using Joseph to preserve the race during the famine and the removal of Jacob and his sons to Egypt begins to emerge in clear detail. When Joseph was back in that dungeon, he couldn't see all of this. But he believed God. He is a man, who, because of his faith, was always enthusiastic and optimistic. Frankly, I wish my faith would get down far enough into shoe leather so that regardless of what happened, and regardless of what the circumstances are, I could be optimistic. I tell you, it doesn't take much rain or many dark clouds to make me less optimistic than I should be. I'm sure that is true of many of us today.

Joseph is in a unique position. I think you could almost guess what is going to happen. The famine is over all the earth, and all the earth is coming to Egypt to get grain. Guess who's coming for dinner!

The famine forces Jacob to send his ten sons to Egypt to buy food. Why only ten? Why didn't he send Benjamin? He didn't want to lose Benjamin. It would have killed him to have lost Benjamin.

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize Joseph. Why not? Well, there are several reasons. First of all, they thought he was dead; so they were not looking for him at all. They never expected to see him again, but he did expect to see them.

Then, we must remember that many years had gone by. He was seventeen when they sold him, and now he is thirty-seven years old, plus however many years the famine has been going on. Let's say it was one year; so they hadn't seen him in twenty-one years. He's almost forty and he is dressed like an Egyptian, speaks and acts like an Egyptian.

But we are getting ahead of our story—²

¹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

² McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:169). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Torah Class Introduction: At the end of our last lesson, the 7 years of abundant crops and livestock had passed, and the great 7-year famine of Pharaoh's dream had begun. Joseph was now in charge of Egypt...and this food program..... and was 2nd in Command of the nation with only Pharaoh above him. Joseph was one of the most powerful men on earth at this time in history.

This famine of Genesis 41 was caused by low rainfall; a drought. This drought that apparently affected Northern Africa, where Egypt lay, also affected much of the Middle East.

Let's talk a little about the geography because it helps to understand the overall situation of this section of the Torah, and explains why many things happened in the way they did.

First: the regional designations of Egypt are virtually backwards of what we would normally think. Egypt was spoken of as Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt; interestingly UPPER Egypt is to the south, and LOWER Egypt is to the north. Further, this is because the Nile River flows from south to north.....it flows from Upper Egypt to Lower Egypt. And, this helps to explain just why southern Egypt is called Upper. Obviously, water flows downhill. As it turns out, the southern end of Egypt is a slightly higher elevation than the northern end; therefore, as anyone knows that a River flows from UP to DOWN, the southern end of River is called upper, and the northern end is called Lower.

The southern end of the Nile.....Upper Egypt.....is where the Nile begins and there are two enormous geographical basins where the rainfall occurs, and where the water from that rainfall naturally funnels towards the Nile to fill it. From one basin flows what is called the White Nile, and from the other the Blue Nile. Around the city of Khartoum the White Nile and Blue Nile come together to form the Great Nile River.....which we typically just call the Nile River.

The Great Nile then flows UP (in our way of thinking), north, towards the Mediterranean Sea. As it approaches the Land of Goshen in Lower Egypt, it encounters what is called the Delta Region, and the River dissipates into a number of natural fingers that all eventually find their way to the Sea. Even though the Delta Region (as is most of Lower Egypt) is a virtually rainless desert, due to the abundant waters of the Nile, and the marsh lands that are created by all those fingers spreading out in the Land of Goshen area allowing the water to flow across the lands much like the Florida Everglades, the area is fertile and great for growing crops and grazing animals.

The bottom line here is that the ONLY thing that makes Egypt inhabitable is the Nile. And, the only thing that creates the Nile is rainfall from these two great basins far to the south, in Upper Egypt.

Even though the Egyptians very early on began digging canals to channel water from the Nile to water crops, it was the annual rising and falling of the water levels of the Nile that determined feast or famine. It is crucial that the Nile overflow its banks during the 3 summer months; an overflow caused by monsoon type rains that occurred far to the south, in the two southern river basins that formed the headwaters of the Nile. The overflow not only watered the land, but it brought silt, rich in nutrients necessary to grow crops all along the Nile. But, it takes only a few inches of rainfall deficit in but one of the two great southern river basins to destroy the delicate balance and prevent sufficient water flow to cause the necessary downriver flooding.

So, it's not that the Nile dried up in Joseph's time, nor that people didn't have sufficient water to drink; it's simply that for a several year period, the Nile did NOT overflow, and the marshlands of the Delta receded, and therefore sufficient crops were not produced to feed the citizens of the Egypt. To be clear: all food production did NOT cease. But, it was dramatically reduced and there was not enough to sustain the people. Now, just so we understand the supernatural nature of this widespread famine: the weather systems that govern rainfall in southern Egypt, and those that govern rainfall in the Middle East are totally separate. That very low rainfall occurred for several years in southern Egypt during the same time there was a drought for several years in Canaan was a God thing; that does not normally occur.

One of the reasons that Egypt and the people of Canaan knew each other so well, and had since time immemorial established trade, was because usually when there was crop failure in Egypt due to low levels of the Nile, Egypt could count on going up to Canaan to buy extra food.....and vice-versa. But, this time it was different. Had God not given Pharaoh the prophetic dream, and then given him Joseph to interpret it, there would have been widespread death in both Egypt and Canaan because of low food supplies in both lands. But, God warned Egypt, and Egypt prepared because it was ABLE to prepare. God FIRST gave them Supernatural abundance that they would have hefty surpluses for 7 straight years; Joseph planned and used this so they could build up enormous stores of grain for the coming 7 bad years.

Later, upon the onset of the drought, Egypt, partly from a sense of compassion but primarily from a sense of self-interest, made food available from its warehouses to people of other nations. This was not welfare. The price for those stored grains was VERY high. We see from the upcoming story of Genesis 42 and 43 that several BAGS of silver was required to buy food from Egypt for the clan of Jacob; food would normally not have required a sum of money that would be spoken of in terms of "bagfuls" of silver. Rather, Egypt was going to make a huge profit on its adept handling of this extended and extensive food crisis. But, make no mistake, these high prices were not only for foreigners; Egyptian citizens also were required to purchase their food from Pharaoh....or better, Joseph.....a supplement to be sure, usually not their sole source of food. But, for those who were poorer, and did not have access to other more commercially available food sources, this famine wound up costing hundreds of thousands of Egyptians..... possibly a million or more.....their liberty. For, as these lower-class Egyptians ran out of money to buy food, they had no choice but to sell themselves and their families into bond service to the Pharaoh in exchange for grain. But, from their standpoint, it was this Semite foreigner.....Joseph.....who was to blame for this travesty and humiliation; because Joseph was the front man, the visible symbol, for the entire food program; getting both credit and blame.

This was not something Egypt would soon forget; after Joseph's death, and a long period of social upheaval, the Egyptians would blame Joseph's kin.....the tribes of Israel... for their condition. This would eventually lead to the Egyptians turning the tables on Israel; the peasant Egyptians would enslave the more well-to-do, and free, Israelites, beginning a cycle of persecution of the Hebrew people in foreign lands that we read of throughout the Bible, have witnessed ourselves in the last century, and will continue to witness until Messiah comes.³

³ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

Genesis 42:1

Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another?

[saw] Jacob heard, as in Genesis 42:2; “I have heard” Hebrew: ra'ah, (H-7200) *raw-aw'*; a primitive root; to *see*, literal or figurative (in numerous applications, direct and implied, transitive, intransitive and causative), appear, approve, behold, discern, (make to) enjoy, have experience, gaze, perceive, present, provide, think, view, visions.

[Why do ye look one upon another?] Joseph's brothers were becoming concerned about food.

Jacob saw that there was corn—That is, Jacob heard from the report of others that there was plenty in Egypt. The operations of one sense, in Hebrew, are often put for those of another. Before agriculture was properly known and practiced, famines were frequent; Canaan seems to have been peculiarly vexed by them. There was one in this land in the time of Abraham, Genesis 12:10; another in the days of Isaac, Genesis 26:1; and now a third in the time of Jacob. To this St. Stephen alludes, Acts 7:11: there was great affliction, and our fathers found no sustenance.⁴

Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt—learned from common rumor. It is evident from Jacob's language that his own and his sons' families had suffered greatly from the scarcity; and through the increasing severity of the scourge, those men, who had formerly shown both activity and spirit, were sinking into despondency. God would not interpose miraculously when natural means of preservation were within reach.⁵

Genesis 42:2

And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die.

[heard] shama`, (H8085) *shaw-mah'*; to *hear* intelligently (often with implication of attention, obedience, etc.; causative to *tell*, etc.)

[get you down thither] The same thing Abraham had done in the first famine (Genesis 12:10-20).

(Genesis 12:10) *And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.*

Why was grain so valuable in those days? As a food source it was universal and used in nearly everything eaten. It could be dried and stored much longer than any vegetables, milk products, or meat. It was so important that it was even used as money.

⁴ Adam Clarke's Commentary

⁵ JFB Commentary

This illustrates faith. A great many people say that faith is so mysterious to them and that they don't know *how* to believe. I talked to a man who did not want to believe, but his argument was, "Well, how can I believe?" Notice here how Jacob believed. He heard something: "I have *heard* that there is corn in Egypt." He believed it, believed that it would bring life to them. So he acted upon his belief: "Get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die." My friend, that is what saving faith is. Some folk ask, "How can I believe in Jesus?" Can you imagine Jacob standing there before his ten sons and saying, "I've heard that there is corn down in Egypt, but how am I going to believe it?" Well, the way to believe it is to act upon it. The Bible says, "... *Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ..." (Acts 16:31). You hear something and you believe it. That is what old Jacob did. That is the way he got corn which brought life to his family. And the way you and I get eternal life is through faith in Christ.⁶

Genesis 42:3

And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.

Torah Class: If we can but grasp that **Israel** was the tool that God would use to bring about His divine purposes from this point forward in history, until time comes to an end sometime in the near future, then perhaps we can begin to comprehend the significance of what is about to happen in this Biblical narrative.

We have now moved from Egypt and Joseph, back to Canaan and Jacob. The great famine having now affected an enormous area, Jacob's clan is in a bad way. And, the first verse of this chapter we see Jacob, Israel, in a rather sarcastic mood, as he says to his sons: "Why are you STARING at each other?" In other words, you KNOW we're in dire straits, you KNOW that there is grain available in Egypt, so why are you all sitting here waiting for SOMEBODY else to do something. Let's remember, he was not speaking to children. These men were all middle aged and beyond, most with their own families children by now.

While I wish I could find some good and lovely things to say about Jacob's sons, the tribes of Israel, the Bible doesn't offer much about their character that is admirable at this point. God didn't choose Israel because they were great men.....He chose them because He is a great God and uses ordinary people to carry out His will. And, by the way, we're not told to stand with Israel because they're a specially good or extraordinary or sympathetic race (which they're not), we're to stand with them because that's what God has instructed all the people of this planet to do.....with dire consequences for those who do not heed Him. So, brace yourselves America: our president has now put his desire for a legacy of peace in the Middle East, regardless of the cost, ahead of his God commanded concern for Israel. We are going to pay an awful price.....every one of us.

So, Jacob, unable to wait any longer for these sons to do (on their own volition) what is right and necessary, orders all of them, except for Benjamin, to go to Egypt, to buy grain.

⁶McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:169). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Was Benjamin not old enough to go? Certainly he was. But, Benjamin had taken the place of Joseph in Jacob's heart, because Benjamin and Joseph were his two sons through the wife Jacob loved the most. . . . Rachel, now deceased. He simply wasn't going to risk Benjamin, after having lost Joseph. As the sons of Israel arrive in Egypt, they join in with many more tribes and peoples from other nations, all in need of being saved from starvation. And, who is it they must go to for their salvation? Joseph.⁷

Genesis 42:4

But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, Lest peradventure mischief befall him.

[Lest peradventure mischief befall him] Jacob evidently centered his love on Benjamin after Joseph was gone, and feared something would happen to him also (Genesis 42:35-38; Genesis 43:1-9; Genesis 44:12-34). He may also have suspected that his other sons were responsible for Joseph being gone and was afraid to trust them with Benjamin.

Jacob was especially fond of Benjamin because he was Joseph's only full brother and—as far as Jacob knew—the only surviving son of his beloved wife, Rachel. Benjamin was Jacob's youngest son and a child of his old age.

Once again, Jacob shows preference for a son of Rachel (cf.. 37:3). AS the events unfold, Benjamin, Joseph's only full brother and the youngest of the brood, serves as Joseph's alter ego.⁸

Genesis 42:5

And the sons of Israel came to buy *corn* among those that came: for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

the famine was in the land of Canaan—The tropical rains, which annually falling swell the Nile, are those of Palestine also; and their failure would produce the same disastrous effects in Canaan as in Egypt. Numerous caravans of its people, therefore, poured over the sandy desert of Suez, with their beasts of burden, for the purchase of corn; and among others, "the sons of Israel" were compelled to undertake a journey from which painful associations made them strongly averse.⁹

⁷ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

⁸ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁹ JFB Commentary

Genesis 42:6

And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.

[Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land] Next to piety, wise leadership is Joseph's most outstanding trait. He personally sold all corn in Egypt, from one storehouse to another.

[Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth] This is what Joseph had waited for. His dreams were thus fulfilled in part (Genesis 37:5-11).

Joseph was the governor; *shallit*, an intendant, a protector, from *skalat*, to be over as a protector; hence *shelatim*, shields, or arms for protection and defense, 2 Samuel 8:7; and *shilton*, power and authority, Ecclesiastes 8:4, 8; and hence the Arabic *sultan*, a lord, prince, or king, from *salta*, he obtained and exercised dominion, he ruled. Was it not from this very circumstance, Joseph being *shallit*, that all the Mohammedan governors of Egypt, etc., took the title of sultan? Bowed down themselves before him—Thus fulfilling the prophetic dream, Genesis 37:7, 8, which they had taken every precaution to render null and void. But there is neither might nor counsel against the Lord.¹⁰

he it was that sold—that is, directed the sales; for it is impossible that he could give attendance in every place. It is probable, however, that he may have personally superintended the storehouses near the border of Canaan, both because that was the most exposed part of the country and because he must have anticipated the arrival of some messengers from his father's house.¹¹

Their prostration fulfills the dreams of 37:5-11. Little did anyone suspect at the time, however, that their prostration would be in supplication for their very lives or that Joseph would keep them from death.¹²

Ramban, (Nachmanides): HE IT WAS THAT SOLD GRAIN TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND. Now it is not befitting a ruler of a land, second in rank to the king of Egypt, that he sell everyone a *se'ah* [a dry measure] or a half thereof of grain. It was for this reason that our Rabbis were impelled to say that Joseph had ordered at that time that all storehouses except one be closed so that he would be sure to meet his brothers.

In line with the literal interpretation of the verse it is possible that the people from all lands came before him, and he would question and investigate them, and then command the officers, "Sell so much food of this – and that – to the people of that city." Thus it was necessary for the children of Jacob to come before him among those who came from the land of Canaan, that he could issue an order concerning them, specifying

¹⁰ Adam Clarke's Commentary

¹¹ JFB Commentary

¹² The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

how much grain should be sold to their land, since they were the first to come from the land of Canaan and they came before him for the sake of all.¹³

Genesis 42:7

And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.

[spake roughly unto them] Each step in Joseph's treatment was designed to convict them of their sin, and compel their confession. That climax was finally reached in Genesis 42:21 and in Judah's plea for mercy in Genesis 44:18-34. Joseph by this time was thirty-nine (Genesis 37:2; Genesis 41:46-54; Genesis 45:11). Twenty-two years had passed since they had last seen him, and they didn't know him because of the change in his appearance.¹⁴

Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, . . . but they knew not him—This is not strange. They were full-grown men—he was but a lad at parting. They were in their usual garb—he was in his official robes. They never dreamt of him as governor of Egypt, while he had been expecting them. They had but one face; he had ten persons to judge by.

made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly—It would be an injustice to Joseph's character to suppose that this stern manner was prompted by any vindictive feelings—he never indulged any resentment against others who had injured him. But he spoke in the authoritative tone of the governor in order to elicit some much-longed-for information respecting the state of his father's family, as well as to bring his brethren, by their own humiliation and distress, to a sense of the evils they had done to him.¹⁵

Joseph could have revealed his identity to his brothers at once. But Joseph's last memory of them was of staring in horror at their faces as slave traders carried him away. Were his brothers still evil and treacherous, or had they changed over the years? Joseph decided to put them through a few tests to find out.¹⁶

Ramban, (Nachmanides): AND JOSEPH SAW HIS BRETHREN, AND HE RECOGNIZED THEM. Immediately as he saw them he recognized them, and he feared lest they recognize him. *And he made himself strange ('vayithmakeir') unto them by putting a mitre upon his forehead and part of the face, thus disguising himself, just as it is said concerning the wife of Jerobam, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself that thou be not known to be the wife of Jerobam, and it further says, For it will be, when she cometh in, that she 'mithmakeirah' (will pretend to be another woman).* It may be that the word *vayithmakeir* here means that he made himself strange by his words, speaking to them

¹³ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

¹⁴ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

¹⁵ JFB Commentary

¹⁶ Life Application Notes

harshly and asking them in anger – as if it were not customary to come before him to purchase food – “from where do you come to appear before me?” And they said, *From the land of Canaan t buy food*. When they mentioned this to him, it then became clear to him that they were indeed his brothers. This is the meaning of the expression, *And Joseph recognized his brethren*, which is mentioned a second time to indicate an additional sense of recognition and knowledge of the truth with respect to them.

Now Rashi wrote in explanation of the word *vayithmakeir*: “He made himself like a *nochri* (stranger) in conversation by speaking harshly to them.” According to Rashi’s opinion, the word *vayithmakeir* signifies that he spoke to them as a man who is a *nochri* (stranger). But this is not correct.¹⁷

Genesis 42:8

And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.

Genesis 42:9

And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

Recognizing his brothers, Joseph tested them by accusing them four times of being spies. His language, his dress, his official bearing, and his position did their part in disguising him. He *was* handling them roughly, but underneath his severity was affection, as the later reunion makes clear. Ironically the brothers were speaking to a person they thought was dead (v. 13). Their presence in Egypt confirmed the truth of his dreams, but not their fulfillment. Joseph knew that all the family must come to Egypt *under his rulership*.¹⁸

[Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come] Egyptians were exposed to incursions from the northeast so it was natural to make such an accusation and act as he did.

Ye are spies *meraggelim*, *attem* ye are footmen, trampers about, footpads, vagabonds, lying in wait for the property of others; persons who, under the pretense of wishing to buy corn, desire only to find out whether the land be so defenceless that the tribes to which ye belong (see Genesis 42:11) may attack it successfully, drive out the inhabitants, and settle in it themselves; or, having plundered it, retire to their deserts. This is a frequent custom among the Arabs to the present day. Thus Joseph spake roughly to them merely to cover that warmth of affection which he felt towards them; and that being thus brought, apparently, into straits and dangerous circumstances, their consciences might be awakened to reflect on and abhor their own wickedness.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

¹⁸ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

¹⁹ Adam Clarke’s Commentary

Joseph remembered his dreams about his brothers bowing down to him (Genesis 37:6-9). Those dreams were coming true! As a young boy, Joseph was boastful about his dreams. As a man, he no longer flaunted his superior status. He did not feel the need to say “I told you so.” It was not yet time to reveal his identity, so he kept quiet. Sometimes it is best for us to remain quiet, even when we would like to have the last word.²⁰

To see the land in its nakedness recalls the episode in Ch 39, in which Joseph is unfairly accused (and convicted) of a sexual crime (see 9:22-24 n.).²¹

Torah Class: Verse 6 makes it clear that it was common knowledge that it was this great Vizier of Egypt.....who was now going not by the name Joseph, but by the EGYPTIAN name the Pharaoh had given him, Zaphenath-Panea.... that everyone must go to in order to buy grain. Joseph must have had an immense organization to deal with the millions who needed food, and certainly it would have been rare for Joseph himself to deal directly with those who sought to buy grain.

But, of course, Joseph’s brothers didn’t recognize him. It’s not just that 20 years had passed since they had last seen their little brother, and his boyish features had become manly; it was that he now looked Egyptian. He was clean shaven (Hebrews, by tradition, always wore beards); he wore his hair in Egyptian fashion and would have used certain cosmetics that Egyptian royalty typically applied to their faces.....he also spoke Egyptian. And, the mannerisms of that former tent-dwelling boy with all of his teenage gawkiness had been exchanged for the refined and confident regal bearing that was now Joseph. But...*he* recognized *them* right away.

And, we can only imagine what must have flashed through his mind upon seeing his brothers: deep pain, from being so long ago torn from his family at the hands of these same men. But, in a nano-second, it says in V9 that he remembered those dreams of his youth.....of the 11 sheaves of grain bowing down to his; and of the 11 stars, the moon, and the sun paying homage to him. And, it must also have been at that moment, with all the preparation so carefully guided by the invisible God, that those dreams that his brothers AND his own father, Jacob, had chastised him for.....were TRUE! Joseph realized for the first time that Divine Providence had been at work all along. He now knew with certainty why God had allowed to happen all that had happened to him. Yet, some testing was needed to see if his brothers had also been prepared by El Shaddai.²²

Ramban, (Nachmanides): Scripture states that when Joseph saw his brothers bowing down to him, he remembered all the dreams which he had dreamed concerning them and he knew that in this instance, not one of the dreams had been fulfilled. He knew that it was inherent in their interpretation that according to the first dream, at first all his brothers would bow down to him, as it says, *And, behold we were binding sheaves*, for “we” refers to all eleven of his brothers. The second time, in accordance with the second dream, *the sun, the moon and eleven stars* would bow down to him. Now since he did not see Benjamin with them, he conceived of the strategy of devising a charge against them so that they would also bring his brother Benjamin to him, in order to first fulfill the

²⁰ Life Application Notes

²¹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

²² Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

first dream. It is for this reason that he did not wish to tell them at this time, I am Joseph your brother, and to say, Hasten and go up to my father, and send wagons as he did to them the second time, for in that case his father would undoubtedly have come at once. It was only after fulfillment of the first dream that he told them, I am Joseph your brother, etc., in order to fulfill the second dream. Were it not for this consideration, Joseph would indeed be regarded as having committed a great sin: bringing anguish to his father, leaving him for many days in the position of being bereft and mourning for Simeon and him. Even if it was his intention to cause his brothers minor anguish, how did he not have compassion for his elderly father? But he assigned each to its proper time in order to fulfill the dreams, knowing that they would truly be fulfilled. Also, the second matter, which he effected against them in connection with the goblet, is not to be interpreted as if his intention was to cause them anguish, but rather because he suspected that they might hate Benjamin as a result of their jealousy of him on account of his father's love for him, just as they were jealous of Joseph. Perhaps Benjamin had sensed that they had harmed Joseph, this causing a quarrel and hatred to erupt between him and his brothers. Therefore, Joseph did not wish Benjamin to travel with them until he had tested their love for him, lest they harm him.

It is to this matter that our Rabbis in Bereshith Rabbah referred when they said: "Rabbi Chiya the son of Rabbi Abba said, "When you read the entire plea which Judah made in the presence of his brothers, until you reach the verse, Then Joseph could not refrain himself, [you can see that] there was in it an attempt to win the sympathy of Joseph, the sympathy of his brothers, and the sympathy of Benjamin. Joseph's sympathy [would be gained since Joseph would think], "See how he is ready to give his life for Rachel's children, etc.""

Similarly I say that all these acts of Joseph are accounted for by his wisdom in the interpretation of the dreams. Otherwise, one should wonder: After Joseph stayed in Egypt for many years and became chief and overseer in the house of a great lord in Egypt, how was it possible that he did not send a single letter to his father to inform him of his whereabouts and comfort him, as Egypt is only about a six-day journey from Hebron? Even if it were a year's journey, out of respect to his father, he should have notified him, in which case even if the ransom of his person would be every so costly, he would have redeemed him. But it was because Joseph saw that the bowing down of his brothers, as well as his father and all his family, could not possibly be accomplished in their homeland, and he was hoping that it would be effected in Egypt when he saw his real success there. This was all the more so after he heard Pharaoh's dream, from which it became clear to him that all of them were destined to come there, and all his dreams would be fulfilled.²³

Genesis 42:10

And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come.

²³ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

Genesis 42:11

We *are* all one man's sons; we *are* true *men*, thy servants are no spies.

[**one man's son's**] No man would expose ten of his sons at once to the dangers of being spies. He tested them for proof they were of the same family (Genesis 42:9-16).

We are all one man's sons—We do not belong to different tribes, and it is not likely that one family would make a hostile attempt upon a whole kingdom. This seems to be the very ground that Joseph took, viz., that they were persons belonging to different tribes. Against this particularly they set up their defense, asserting that they all belonged to one family; and it is on the proof of this that Joseph puts them, Genesis 42:15, in obliging them to leave one as a hostage, and insisting on their bringing their remaining brother; so that he took exactly the same precautions to detect them as if he had had no acquaintance with them, and had every reason to be suspicious.²⁴

The first clause is truer than the brothers recognize; the second remains to be established; only the third is straightforward fact.

Joseph's test is devised to see if they are truly honest, or if they will do to Simeon or to Benjamin what they did to him. Their repentance is shown in v. 21.

Genesis 42:12

And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

Genesis 42:13

And they said, Thy servants *are* twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest *is* this day with our father, and one *is* not.

Every time they spoke Joseph got more news from home, which is probably why he continued questioning them. He now knew that both Benjamin and Jacob were alive.

[**and one is not**] An elliptical sentence, One is not alive.

Genesis 42:14

And Joseph said unto them, That *is it* that I spake unto you, saying, Ye *are* spies:

[**That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies**] In other words, The improbability of your statements increases my suspicion of you.

²⁴ Adam Clarke's Commentary

[spies] Just as the Israelites later send out spies to reconnoiter the land of Canaan, so Joseph's brothers are accused of working on behalf of another country. Traders and merchants would have been commonly employed for such business, as they could move around the country unnoticed or unsuspected. Some governments are naturally suspicious of foreigners, and the charge of spying is always difficult to disprove.

Having lied to their father about Joseph's fate (37:31-33), the brothers now find themselves unable to convince Pharaoh's vizier of the truth. The Heb of the clause and one is no more echoes Reuben's cry of desperation in 37:30 (cf. 42:36).²⁵

Genesis 42:15

Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither.

[**Hereby ye shall be proved**] In his position Joseph could make very strict inquiry. There was nothing cruel about his treatment of his brothers. He knew the wickedness they were capable of, and it was his plan to get information about home without causing suspicion about himself. How did he know but that they had done to Benjamin as they had done to him, and that his father was now dead?

[**By the life of Pharaoh**] This was a common way to express an oath. Similar oaths are heard daily in the East.

[**ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither**] Joseph may have wanted proof that Benjamin was still alive. He relented in Genesis 42:19, however, and kept only one as security for bringing Benjamin (Genesis 42:15). Joseph wanted to be certain that his brothers had not killed Benjamin, as they had tried to kill him.

By the life of Pharaoh *chey Pharaoh* Pharaoh liveth. As if he had said, As surely as the king of Egypt lives, so surely shall ye not go hence unless your brother come hither. Here therefore is no oath; it is just what they themselves make it in their report to their father, Genesis 43:3: the man did solemnly protest unto us; and our translators should not have put it in the form of an oath, especially as the original not only will bear another version, but is absolutely repugnant to this in our sense of the word.²⁶

By the life of Pharaoh—It is a very common practice in Western Asia to swear by the life of the king. Joseph spoke in the style of an Egyptian and perhaps did not think there was any evil in it. But we are taught to regard all such expressions in the light of an oath (Matthew 5:34; James 5:12).

²⁵ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

²⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary

Joseph was testing his brothers to make sure they had not been as cruel to Benjamin as they had been to him. Benjamin was his only full brother, and he wanted to see him face to face.²⁷

Genesis 42:16

Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether *there be any truth in you*: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye *are spies*.

He demanded that one of them bring their little brother as proof that they were not spies.

Genesis 42:17

And he put them all together into ward three days.

[three days] This was nothing compared to his many years in prison which they were responsible for.

put them . . . into ward three days—Their confinement had been designed to bring them to salutary reflection. And this object was attained, for they looked upon the retributive justice of God as now pursuing them in that foreign land. The drift of their conversation is one of the most striking instances on record of the power of conscience [Genesis 42:21-22].²⁸

By reaffirming the specialness of the favored son, Joseph's test requires the brothers to confront anew the factor that led them to commit their infamous crime. Having taken one "child of [Jacob's] old age" (37:3) away from his father on the basest motivation, they must now persuade the old man to give up his stand-in (cf. 44:20) in the interest of life itself. Similarly, their imprisonment reenacts Joseph's own fate after they sold or abandoned him (39:1-20).²⁹

Genesis 42:18

And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; *for I fear God*:

[I fear God] Hebrew: I also fear (*ha- 'Elohiym* (H430)) the Gods (Genesis 42:18). Joseph used the emphatic "ha-" with '*Elohiym*, (H430), emphasizing the Supreme Being, the God of Israel in contrast with the idols of Egypt. He told them he worshiped the true God and they had nothing to fear if they were telling the truth. This sudden change of providence awakened them, who for twenty-two years had likely

²⁷ Life Application Notes

²⁸ JFB Commentary

²⁹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

lulled their conscience to sleep concerning Joseph, not knowing whether he had perished or not. Their conscience condemned them in Genesis 42:21.³⁰

I fear God *eth haelohim ani yare*, literally translated the passage runs thus, I also fear the gods; but the emphatic **א** *ha* is probably added by Joseph, both here and in his conversation with Pharaoh, the more particularly to point out the eminence and perfection of the Supreme Being as contradistinguished from the gods of Egypt. He seems to say to his brethren, I am a worshipper of the true God, and ye have nothing to fear.³¹

If there was anything that should have given the brothers an inkling of an idea who Joseph was, this statement was it. He says, "I fear God." Apparently in that day there were people other than just Jacob and his family who knew God. They knew that the way to God was by sacrifice. However, this sort of thing probably would not have excited the interest of these brethren. Maybe it even made them a little suspicious of this man. At least he gave a testimony for God. I want you to note that Joseph never misses an opportunity to give a testimony for God. Certainly he is giving one here. He always gives God the glory as the One who is directing his life. At least the statement that he fears God should have encouraged the brothers to believe that they would be treated justly at his hand.³²

Genesis 42:19

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:

Three demands by Joseph:

1. Let one of you be bound in prison (Genesis 42:19)
2. Go with food for your families (Genesis 42:19)
3. Bring your youngest brother (Genesis 42:20)

Genesis 42:20

But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so.

[And they did so] They promised to meet his demands.

These brothers are men, some of them being over fifty years old, and now they find themselves in a real predicament. They are being dealt with by one who fears God, but they are afraid because they don't know what he is going to do. Joseph makes the pretext

³⁰ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

³¹ Adam Clarke's Commentary

³² McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:170). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

of testing them to see whether they are true men, but what he really wants is for his younger brother to come the next time.³³

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.

We are verily guilty How finely are the office and influence of conscience exemplified in these words! It was about twenty-two years since they had sold their brother, and probably their conscience had been lulled asleep to the present hour. God combines and brings about those favorable circumstances which produce attention and reflection, and give weight to the expostulations of conscience. How necessary to hear its voice in time, for here it may be the instrument of salvation; but if not heard in this world, it must be heard in the next; and there, in association with the unquenchable fire, it will be the never-dying worm. Reader, has not thy sin as yet found thee out? Pray to God to take away the veil from thy heart, and give thee that deep sense of guilt which shall oblige thee to flee for refuge to the hope which is set before thee in the Gospel of Christ.³⁴

Genesis 42:22

And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.

Reuben couldn't resist saying "I told you so." To "give an accounting for his blood" means that they thought they were being punished by God for what they had done to Joseph.

Just as his brothers saw only domination (and not deliverance) in his dreams (37:5-11), so here they see only punishment, never suspecting the larger design that will lead to survival and reconciliation (45:5; 50:20).³⁵

Genesis 42:23

And they knew not that Joseph understood *them*; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.

A taste of retribution began to awaken feelings in the brothers, feelings that Joseph's cries for mercy (v. 21) and Jacob's tears (37:34-35) had failed to awaken. They sensed

³³ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:171). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁴ Adam Clarke's Commentary

³⁵ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

that having to bring Benjamin back to Egypt against the wishes of their father would be punishment for their having sold Joseph.³⁶

[understood them] Joseph no doubt had many of his own questions answered, including who was most responsible for his abuse.

For he spake unto them by an interpreter—Either there was a very great difference between the two languages as then spoken, or Joseph, to prevent all suspicion, might affect to be ignorant of both. We have many evidences in this book that the Egyptians, Hebrews, Canaanites, and Syrians, could understand each other in a general way, though there are also proofs that there was a considerable difference between their dialects.³⁷

Genesis 42:24

And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes

[wept; and returned to them again] He left them alone while he wept.

[communed with them] He continued to question them until he was satisfied (Genesis 43:6-7).

[Simeon] Simeon, because of his cruel nature (Genesis 34:25; Genesis 49:5), was evidently the one most responsible for Joseph's sufferings. He may have been the one who bound Joseph and cast him into the pit. Hence, he was left bound while the others were back in Canaan.

[before their eyes] This impressed the other brothers and Jacob when they got home. Whether he was bound the whole time is not stated.

This was retaliation, if, as the rabbins suppose, it was Simeon who bound Joseph, and put him into the pit. A recollection of this circumstance must exceedingly deepen the sense he had of his guilt.

took . . . Simeon, and bound him—He had probably been the chief instigator—the most violent actor in the outrage upon Joseph; and if so, his selection to be the imprisoned and fettered hostage for their return would, in the present course of their reflections, have a painful significance.

As Leah's second son (29:31-33), Simeon is the appropriate hostage for Benjamin, Rachel's second son (35:18). His name echoes the Heb of "paid no heed" in 42:21,22.³⁸

³⁶ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

³⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary

³⁸ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

The character of Joseph is observable in that he had no aspiration to retaliate against the wickedness of his brothers, and in that Joseph patiently waited upon God to work out His plan for the restoration of his family. Joseph's grief and joy showed in his periodic tears (cf. 43:30; 45:2). The great men of the Bible had no inhibitions about weeping when appropriate. Note especially the lives of David and of Jesus, the God-Man.³⁹

They say that this evil thing is coming upon them because of the evil they had done to Joseph. They are really repentant now. Joseph hears every bit of it, and he is moved toward them. He would love to walk up to them, throw his arms around each one of them, and call them "brother." But he dares not do it because he would never get Benjamin here.

He gives them a real test now. They must leave one of the brothers, and it is Simeon who is to stay. Joseph was so moved, so emotionally charged by all this that he had to weep. But he goes aside and washes his face; then comes in again as if nothing has happened.

I don't have any idea why they chose Simeon. I take it that while Joseph was gone out of the room, his brothers made the choice for Simeon to stay, and Joseph accepted that choice.⁴⁰

Genesis 42:25

Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them.

[sacks] Two different Hebrew words are used for sack in this verse. One was for the animals' food (where the money was put, Genesis 42:25,27), and one they filled with corn (wheat). The latter were large woolen bags lined with leather to keep out dust and sand. There must have been hundreds of them for such a large tribe. Genesis 45:11.

[trading of silver] Coined money was not invented and put into common use until the sixth century B.C. Thus precious metals, gems, spices, incense and other luxury items were bartered by weight. Their relative value would also depend on scarcity. Silver was used throughout antiquity as a common item of exchange. Since Egypt lacked native silver deposits, this metal was particularly desirable as a standard for business transactions.⁴¹

Joseph's returning their silver (which was weighed out and used as money for much of the biblical period) deftly symbolizes the movement of the whole chapter. The brothers are getting what they gave!⁴²

³⁹ Believer's Study Bible

⁴⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:171). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴¹ Bible Background Commentary

⁴² The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

Genesis 42:26

And they laded their asses with the corn, and departed thence.

Genesis 42:27

And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money; for, behold, it *was* in his sack's mouth.

[inn] A resting place for the night by some well.

One of them opened his sack—From Genesis 42:35 we learn that each of the ten brethren on emptying his sack when he returned found his money in it; can we suppose that this was not discovered by them all before? It seems not; and the reason was probably this: the money was put in the mouth of the sack of one only, in the sacks of the others it was placed at or near to the bottom; hence only one discovered it on the road, the rest found it when they came to empty their sacks at their father's house.⁴³

In the inn *bamma lon*, from לָן *lan* to lodge, stay, remain, etc. The place at which they stopped to bait or rest themselves and their asses. Our word inn gives us a false idea here; there were no such places of entertainment at that time in the desert over which they had to pass, nor are there any to the present day. Travellers generally endeavor to reach a well, where they fill their *girbahs*, or leather bottles, with fresh water, and having clogged their camels, asses, etc., permit them to crop any little verdure there may be in the place, keeping watch over them by turns. This is all we are to understand by the *malon* or inn in the text, for even caravansaries were not then in use, which are generally no more than four walls perfectly exposed, the place being open at the top.⁴⁴

he espied his money—The discovery threw them into greater perplexity than ever. If they had been congratulating themselves on escaping from the ruthless governor, they perceived that now he would have a handle against them; and it is observable that they looked upon this as a judgment of heaven. Thus one leading design of Joseph was gained in their consciences being roused to a sense of guilt.⁴⁵

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?

⁴³ Adam Clarke's Commentary

⁴⁴ Adam Clarke's Commentary

⁴⁵ JFB Commentary

“What is this that God has done to us?”: This was a fruitful reaction to trouble. They apparently felt that Joseph would accuse them of theft, which would support his contention that they were spies.⁴⁶

This was the second time they were convicted in conscience and attributed things that had happened to God (Genesis 42:21,28).

What is this that God hath done unto us?—Their guilty consciences, now thoroughly awakened, were in continual alarms; they felt that they deserved God’s curse, and every occurrence served to confirm and increase their suspicions.

They feel that this is the judgment of God upon them. Ordinarily it would have been good news and a wonderful thing to have your money returned to you! Let me ask you this: Wouldn’t you like to go down to your favorite supermarket to do your weekend grocery shopping, load up several of those great big carts and buy for your whole family; then wouldn’t you like to open up your grocery sack at home and find that they had given you back all of the money you had paid for the groceries? Do you think that would be bad news to you? Especially, would it worry you if you learned that the grocer was giving this to you as a gift from him? Don’t we all agree that under ordinary circumstances that would be good news? We would actually take it as an encouragement.

Well, it wasn’t that for these men. They already feel that they are in hot water with this hard-boiled ruler down there in Egypt who has made it so difficult for them. This only adds to their concern.

We may wonder why they didn’t go back to Egypt immediately. What would you have done under the circumstances? I think they feared they would really be in hot water had they gone back. Then this man would accuse them of stealing the money. They are not taking any chances. They are going on home, intending to bring the money back when they return.⁴⁷

Genesis 42:29

And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them; saying,

Genesis 42:30

The man, *who is* the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.

⁴⁶ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

⁴⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:171). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Genesis 42:31

And we said unto him, We *are* true *men*; we are no spies:

Genesis 42:32

We *be* twelve brethren, sons of our father; one *is* not, and the youngest *is* this day with our father in the land of Canaan.

Genesis 42:33

And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye *are* true *men*; leave one of your brethren *here* with me, and take *food* for the famine of your households, and be gone:

Genesis 42:34

And bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye *are* no spies, but that ye *are* true *men*: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffic in the land.

I will then restore your brother to you (not reported in vv. 18-20) refers most immediately to Simeon, but unbeknownst to the brothers (and perhaps even to Joseph himself at this point), the release of Benjamin will result in the restoration of Joseph as well.⁴⁸

Genesis 42:35

And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money *was* in his sack: and when *both* they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.

[every man's bundle of money was in his sack: and when both they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid] Returning their money publicly might have caused suspicion and the discovery of Joseph's identity. He may have been trying to help his father provide for his large household during the famine. Joseph may also have been impressing them with the thought of God's supply. He could also have been testing them to see if they had become honest (cp. Genesis 43:12). Jacob and his sons no doubt thought it was a trap to enslave them. It seems the money of all but one was at the bottom of the sacks, undiscovered until they were emptied (Genesis 42:27,35). When they returned to Egypt for more corn the money was taken back and offered to Joseph, whose servant would not take it (Genesis 43:12-25).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁴⁹ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Practitioners of source criticism tend to see this verse as a variant of vv. 27-28, with the latter as the secondary passage (note that the brothers say nothing about any returned money in vv. 29-34). The supplementation (if such it was) was aided by the difference between the two variants: vv. 27-28 speak literally of only one brother, whereas v. 35 speaks of all of them.⁵⁰

Genesis 42:36

And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.

Me have ye bereaved—This exclamation indicates a painfully excited state of feeling, and it shows how difficult it is for even a good man to yield implicit submission to the course of Providence. The language does not imply that his missing sons had got foul play from the hands of the rest, but he looks upon Simeon as lost, as well as Joseph, and he insinuates it was by some imprudent statements of theirs that he was exposed to the risk of losing Benjamin also.⁵¹

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.

[Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee]
Reuben offered himself and his sons as a pledge for Benjamin's safe return.

Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee—What a strange proposal made by a son to his father, concerning his grandchildren! But they show the honesty and affection of Reuben's heart; he felt deeply for his father's distress, and was determined to risk and hazard every thing in order to relieve and comfort him. There is scarcely a transaction in which Reuben is concerned that does not serve to set his character in an amiable point of view, except the single instance mentioned Genesis 35:22 (note), and which for the sake of decency and piety we should wish to understand as the Targumists have explained it.⁵²

Reuben spake, . . . Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee—This was a thoughtless and unwarrantable condition—one that he never seriously expected his father would accept. It was designed only to give assurance of the greatest care being taken of Benjamin. But unforeseen circumstances might arise to render it impossible for all of them to preserve that young lad (James 4:13), and Jacob was much pained by the prospect. Little did he know that God was dealing with him severely, but in kindness

⁵⁰ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁵¹ JFB Commentary

⁵² Adam Clarke's Commentary

(Hebrews 12:7-8), and that all those things he thought against Him were working together for his good.⁵³

Genesis 42:38

And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

It was necessary that the brothers be tested before they could participate in God's blessing. Joseph's prodding had to be subtle; the brothers must perceive the hand of God moving against them so that they would acknowledge their crime against Joseph and their previous unbelief in his dreams. But one test was not enough; there must be *two*.⁵⁴

[My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone]

Jacob may have suspected his sons of doing away with Joseph. Now, when Benjamin was involved, he spoke out of his heart and determined not to let Benjamin go.

[grave] Hebrew: *she'owl* (H-7585), the unseen world, the place of departed spirits after they leave the bodies at physical death, in the Old Testament.

Reuben once again proves ineffectual (cf. 37:18-30; 42:22). A Midrash paraphrases Jacob's decline of Reuben's offer this way: "This is a foolish first-born son! Are your sons not my sons?" (Gen. Rab. 91.9). The theme of the loss of two sons - Jacob's and Reuben's - recalls ch 38, in which Judah loses two sons and withholds the third. Reuben's foolish offer thus sets the stage for Judah's successful interventions in 43:8-14 and 44:18-34.⁵⁵

My son shall not go: Jacob was resolute. He had lost enough sons; he didn't want to risk Benjamin, his favorite. **with sorrow:** He assured his sons that risking the loss of Benjamin in addition to having already lost Joseph would lead him into depression and cause his premature death.⁵⁶

Jacob's life was wrapped up in the life of this boy Benjamin. You see, Joseph was his favorite because he was the firstborn of his lovely Rachel. Now Joseph is gone, which is a heartbreak to him. Now he faces the chance that he may lose this other son of Rachel, and he says that if this takes place he will die. Very candidly, he would have. His life was absolutely tied up in the life of Benjamin. He is the son of his right hand. He is the walking stick for Jacob. Jacob leans on him. That is what he has been doing these past

⁵³ JFB Commentary

⁵⁴ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

⁵⁵ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁵⁶ The Nelson Study Bible

years; so Jacob says that he will not let him go down to Egypt. In the meantime, poor Simeon is down there cooling his heels in jail!⁵⁷

Torah Class: Joseph, knowing otherwise, accuses them of being spies. The brothers are utterly taken aback by this, for the accusation doesn't even make sense.....it borders the irrational. But, they are afraid, for they are totally at this ruler's arbitrary mercy. Truth and justice matter not at all at this point, and they know it. For a ruler of Joseph's stature can decide matters summarily, and order whatever punishment he deems appropriate. They are helpless and powerless to control their fate....just as Joseph found himself helpless, so long ago, lying at the bottom of a dry well; begging and crying for mercy that would not come from these same pitiless brothers, now standing before him hat-in-hand. He questions them, and finds out his father is still alive, as is his little brother Benjamin, and so orders that one brother was to go and bring back the youngest brother, Benjamin, to prove their assertion that they were not spies.....that they were truthful. But, this would not happen until all 10 were to be put into prison for 3 days. Of course, the reason behind Joseph's decision to jail them was to separate his brothers from the myriads of Egyptian citizens and foreigners who daily came hoping to buy from Egypt's reserve grain supplies. He wanted, and needed, to deal with his family separately and not under the gaze of everyone else.

At the end of the 3 days, he now gave a different order. Nine brothers were to return with the grain they needed to feed their clan. One, Simeon, was to remain in custody, as surety for the rest. And, if they did not bring back Benjamin, Simeon would forfeit his life (or so was the implication).

The brothers discussed their plight among themselves in front of Joseph.....assuming he was an Egyptian and would not be understanding what they were speaking in Hebrew. And, Joseph kept up the ruse by using an interpreter as a go-between during his dealings with his brothers. What he heard made him weep; the guilt of over 2 decades overcame them, and they knew that this was the day of reckoning for what they had wrongly done to their little brother, Joseph. But, he also heard Rueben try to absolve himself, with apparently no disagreement as to his position of innocence. And, Joseph must have believed him. For, rather than keeping the all-important first-born, Rueben, as a prisoner, Joseph ordered Simeon, the 2nd son of Jacob, to be held hostage.

Now, Joseph REALLY messes with their heads. He orders that the money the brothers paid for the grain be hidden in the necks of the grain sacks. The very first night on their way back home, one of them went to get some grain for his donkey, and there was the money! Oh my gosh. What in the world was going on here?! They quickly decided that God was giving them their just desserts.

One wonders what must have gone through their minds on that many day journey back to face their father. Who would be the spokesman among them to tell their fragile father that not only had they come back one short in their number, but that now they were to take Benjamin, Jacob's most beloved child, back to Egypt with them, or Simeon would die, along with the rest of them when Pharaoh's men caught up with them.

⁵⁷McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:172). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jacob's reply is obvious: you've taken 2 of my children away from me, and now you want to take a 3rd? Rueben then gives Jacob the guarantee that he will bring Benjamin back. But, if he fails, Jacob can kill Rueben's two sons as punishment. Though we're not given Jacob's reply to this offer, one can only imagine the unbelieving look on Jacob's face. I think his stunned reply would have been something like, "Brilliant!" Only you would figure that after I had lost 3 sons, I should now kill my own grandchildren as retribution?! Are you insane?!"

More and more we see the wisdom in Rueben being denied his firstborn birthright. Rueben is a politician...a wind bag. He is always making these grandiose, unwise statements and promises that are worthless and designed to do little but elicit an emotional response. In fact, we won't hear from Rueben any more. He is set aside, and we'll hear Judah's voice more than any other brother from here forward.

For the time being, though, Jacob simply is paralyzed and cannot fathom what to do. All he knows is that should Benjamin be taken from him, he could not survive it. He doesn't really trust those sons of his anymore, so he's not about to entrust Benjamin to them. Yet.....how are they going to survive without more grain?⁵⁸

Adam Clarke's Summary:

The following observations of Dr. Dodd on this verse are very appropriate and judicious: "Nothing can be more tender and picturesque than the words of the venerable patriarch. Full of affection for his beloved Rachel, he cannot think of parting with Benjamin, the only remaining pledge of that love, now Joseph, as he supposes, is no more. We seem to behold the gray-headed, venerable father pleading with his sons, the beloved Benjamin standing by his side, impatient sorrow in their countenances, and in his all the bleeding anxiety of paternal love. It will be difficult to find in any author, ancient or modern, a more exquisite picture."

1. THERE is one doctrine relative to the economy of Divine Providence little heeded among men; I mean the doctrine of restitution. When a man has done wrong to his neighbor, though, on his repentance, and faith in our Lord Jesus, God forgives him his sin, yet he requires him to make restitution to the person injured, if it lie in the compass of his power. If he do not, God will take care to exact it in the course of his providence. Such respect has he for the dictates of infinite justice that nothing of this kind shall pass unnoticed. Several instances of this have already occurred in this history, and we shall see several more. No man should expect mercy at the hand of God who, having wronged his neighbor, refuses, when he has it in his power, to make restitution. Were he to weep tears of blood, both the justice and mercy of God would shut out his prayer, if he made not his neighbor amends for the injury he may have done him. The mercy of God, through the blood of the cross, can alone pardon his guilt; but no dishonest man can expect this; and he is a dishonest man who illegally holds the property of another in his hand. The unnatural brethren who sold their brother are now about to be captivated themselves; and the binder himself is bound in his turn: and though a kind

⁵⁸ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

Providence permits not the evil to fall upon them, yet, while apprehending it, they feel all its reality, conscience supplying the lack of prison, jailer, and bonds.

2. The ways of Providence are often to us dark and perplexed, so that we are ready to imagine that good can never result from what appears to us to be directly contrary to our interest; and we are often tempted to think that those very providential dealings of God, which have for their object our present and eternal welfare, are rather proofs of his displeasure, or evidences of his vindictive judgment. All these things are against me, said poor desponding Jacob; whereas, instead of being against him, all these things were for him; and by all these means was the merciful God working for the preservation of himself and his family, and the fulfillment of his ancient promise, that the posterity of Abraham should be as the stars of heaven for multitude. How strange is it that our faith, after so many evidences of his goodness, should still be so weak; and that our opinion of him should be so imperfect, that we can never trust in him but while he is under our own eye! If we see him producing good, we can believe that he is doing so, and this is all. If we believe not, he abides faithful; but our unbelief must make our own way extremely perplexing and difficult.⁵⁹

Book of Jasher:

CHAPTER 51

1 And Jacob afterward heard that there was corn in Egypt, and he called unto his sons to go to Egypt to buy corn, for upon them also did the famine prevail, and he called unto his sons, saying, 2 Behold I hear that there is corn in Egypt, and all the people of the earth go there to purchase, now therefore why will you show yourselves satisfied before the whole earth? go you also down to Egypt and buy us a little corn amongst those that come there, that we may not die. 3 And the sons of Jacob hearkened to the voice of their father, and they rose up to go down to Egypt in order to buy corn amongst the rest that came there. 4 And Jacob their father commanded them, saying, When you come into the city do not enter together in one gate, on account of the inhabitants of the land. 5 And the sons of Jacob went forth and they went to Egypt, and the sons of Jacob did all as their father had commanded them, and Jacob did not send Benjamin, for he said, Lest an accident might befall him on the road like his brother; and ten of Jacob's sons went forth. 6 And whilst the sons of Jacob were going on the road, they repented of what they had done to Joseph, and they spoke to each other, saying, We know that our brother Joseph went down to Egypt, and now we will seek him where we go, and if we find him we will take him from his master for a ransom, and if not, by force, and we will die for him. 7 And the sons of Jacob agreed to this thing and strengthened themselves on account of Joseph, to deliver him from the hand of his master, and the sons of Jacob went to Egypt; and when they came near to Egypt they separated from each other, and they came through ten gates of Egypt, and the gate keepers wrote their names on that day, and brought them to Joseph in the evening. 8 And Joseph read the names from the hand of

⁵⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary

the gate-keepers of the city, and he found that his brethren had entered at the ten gates of the city, and Joseph at that time commanded that it should be proclaimed throughout the land of Egypt, saying, 9 Go forth all ye store guards, close all the corn stores and let only one remain open, that those who come may purchase from it. 10 And all the officers of Joseph did so at that time, and they closed all the stores and left only one open.

11 And Joseph gave the written names of his brethren to him that was set over the open store, and he said unto him, Whosoever shall come to thee to buy corn, ask his name, and when men of these names shall come before thee, seize them and send them, and they did so. 12 And when the sons of Jacob came into the city, they joined together in the city to seek Joseph before they bought themselves corn. 13 And they went to the walls of the harlots, and they sought Joseph in the walls of the harlots for three days, for they thought that Joseph would come in the walls of the harlots, for Joseph was very comely and well favored, and the sons of Jacob sought Joseph for three days, and they could not find him.

14 And the man who was set over the open store sought for those names which Joseph had given him, and he did not find them. 15 And he sent to Joseph, saying, These three days have passed, and those men whose names thou didst give unto me have not come; and Joseph sent servants to seek the men in all Egypt, and to bring them before Joseph.

16 And Joseph's servants went and came into Egypt and could not find them, and went to Goshen and they were not there, and then went to the city of Rameses and could not find them. 17 And Joseph continued to send sixteen servants to seek his brothers, and they went and spread themselves in the four corners of the city, and four of the servants went into the house of the harlots, and they found the ten men there seeking their brother. 18 And those four men took them and brought them before him, and they bowed down to him to the ground, and Joseph was sitting upon his throne in his temple, clothed with princely garments, and upon his head was a large crown of gold, and all the mighty men were sitting around him. 19 And the sons of Jacob saw Joseph, and his figure and comeliness and dignity of countenance seemed wonderful in their eyes, and they again bowed down to him to the ground. 20 And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but they knew him not, for Joseph was very great in their eyes, therefore they knew him not. 21 And Joseph spoke to them, saying, From whence come ye? and they all answered and said, Thy servants have come from the land of Canaan to buy corn, for the famine prevails throughout the earth, and thy servants heard that there was corn in Egypt, so they have come amongst the other comers to buy corn for their support. 22 And Joseph answered them, saying, If you have come to purchase as you say, why do you come through ten gates of the city? it can only be that you have come to spy through the land. 23 And they all together answered Joseph, and said, Not so my lord, we are right, thy servants are not spies, but we have come to buy corn, for thy servants are all brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and our father commanded us, saying, When you come to the city do not enter together at one gate on account of the inhabitants of the land. 24 And Joseph again answered them and said, That is the thing which I spoke unto you, you have come to spy through the land, therefore you all came through ten gates of the city; you have come to see the nakedness of the land. 25 Surely every one that cometh to buy corn goeth his way, and you are already three days in the land, and what do you do in the walls of harlots in which you have been for these three days? surely spies do like unto these things. 26 And they said unto Joseph, Far be it from our lord to speak thus, for we are twelve brothers, the sons of our father Jacob, in the land of

Canaan, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the Hebrew, and behold the youngest is with our father this day in the land of Canaan, and one is not, for he was lost from us, and we thought perhaps he might be in this land, so we are seeking him throughout the land, and have come even to the houses of harlots to seek him there. 27 And Joseph said unto them, And have you then sought him throughout the earth, that there only remained Egypt for you to seek him in? And what also should your brother do in the houses of harlots, although he were in Egypt? have you not said, That you are from the sons of Isaac, the son of Abraham, and what shall the sons of Jacob do then in the houses of harlots? 28 And they said unto him, Because we heard that Ishmaelites stole him from us, and it was told unto us that they sold him in Egypt, and thy servant, our brother, is very comely and well favored, so we thought he would surely be in the houses of harlots, therefore thy servants went there to seek him and give ransom for him. 29 And Joseph still answered them, saying, Surely you speak falsely and utter lies, to say of yourselves that you are the sons of Abraham; as Pharaoh liveth you are spies, therefore have you come to the houses of harlots that you should not be known. 30 And Joseph said unto them, And now if you find him, and his master requireth of you a great price, will you give it for him? and they said, It shall be given. 31 And he said unto them, And if his master will not consent to part with him for a great price, what will you do unto him on his account? and they answered him, saying, If he will not give him unto us we will slay him, and take our brother and go away. 32 And Joseph said unto them, That is the thing which I have spoken to you; you are spies, for you are come to slay the inhabitants of the land, for we heard that two of your brethren smote all the inhabitants of Shechem, in the land of Canaan, on account of your sister, and you now come to do the like in Egypt on account of your brother. 33 Only hereby shall I know that you are true men; if you will send home one from amongst you to fetch your youngest brother from your father, and to bring him here unto me, and by doing this thing I will know that you are right. 34 And Joseph called to seventy of his mighty men, and he said unto them, Take these men and bring them into the ward. 35 And the mighty men took the ten men, they laid hold of them and put them into the ward, and they were in the ward three days. 36 And on the third day Joseph had them brought out of the ward, and he said unto them, Do this for yourselves if you be true men, so that you may live, one of your brethren shall be confined in the ward whilst you go and take home the corn for your household to the land of Canaan, and fetch your youngest brother, and bring him here unto me, that I may know that you are true men when you do this thing. 37 And Joseph went out from them and came into the chamber, and wept a great weeping, for his pity was excited for them, and he washed his face, and returned to them again, and he took Simeon from them and ordered him to be bound, but Simeon was not willing to be done so, for he was a very powerful man and they could not bind him. 38 And Joseph called unto his mighty men and seventy valiant men came before him with drawn swords in their hands, and the sons of Jacob were terrified at them. 39 And Joseph said unto them, Seize this man and confine him in prison until his brethren come to him, and Joseph's valiant men hastened and they all laid hold of Simeon to bind him, and Simeon gave a loud and terrible shriek and the cry was heard at a distance. 40 And all the valiant men of Joseph were terrified at the sound of the shriek, that they fell upon their faces, and they were greatly afraid and fled. 41 And all the men that were with Joseph fled, for they were greatly afraid of their lives, and only Joseph and Manasseh his son remained there, and Manassah the son of

Joseph saw the strength of Simeon, and he was exceedingly wroth. 42 And Manassah the son of Joseph rose up to Simeon, and Manassah smote Simeon a heavy blow with his fist against the back of his neck, and Simeon was stilled of his rage. 43 And Manassah laid hold of Simeon and he seized him violently and he bound him and brought him into the house of confinement, and all the sons of Jacob were astonished at the act of the youth. 44 And Simeon said unto his brethren, None of you must say that this is the smiting of an Egyptian, but it is the smiting of the house of my father. 45 And after this Joseph ordered him to be called who was set over the storehouse, to fill their sacks with corn as much as they could carry, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the road, and thus did he unto them. 46 And Joseph commanded them, saying, Take heed lest you transgress my orders to bring your brother as I have told you, and it shall be when you bring your brother hither unto me, then will I know that you are true men, and you shall traffic in the land, and I will restore unto you your brother, and you shall return in peace to your father. 47 And they all answered and said, According as our lord speaketh so will we do, and they bowed down to him to the ground. 48 And every man lifted his corn upon his ass, and they went out to go to the land of Canaan to their father; and they came to the inn and Levi spread his sack to give provender to his ass, when he saw and behold his money in full weight was still in his sack. 49 And the man was greatly afraid, and he said unto his brethren, My money is restored, and lo, it is even in my sack, and the men were greatly afraid, and they said, What is this that God hath done unto us? 50 And they all said, And where is the Lord's kindness with our fathers, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that the Lord has this day delivered us into the hands of the king of Egypt to contrive against us? 51 And Judah said unto them, Surely we are guilty sinners before the Lord our God in having sold our brother, our own flesh, and wherefore do you say, Where is the Lord's kindness with our fathers? 52 And Reuben said unto them, Said I not unto you, do not sin against the lad, and you would not listen to me? now God requireth him from us, and how dare you say, Where is the Lord's kindness with our fathers, whilst you have sinned unto the Lord? 53 And they tarried over night in that place, and they rose up early in the morning and laded their asses with their corn, and they led them and went on and came to their father's house in the land of Canaan. 54 And Jacob and his household went out to meet his sons, and Jacob saw and behold their brother Simeon was not with them, and Jacob said unto his sons, Where is your brother Simeon, whom I do not see? and his sons told him all that had befallen them in Egypt.

CHAPTER 52

1 And they entered their house, and every man opened his sack and they saw and behold every man's bundle of money was there, at which they and their father were greatly terrified. 2 And Jacob said unto them, What is this that you have done to me? I sent your brother Joseph to inquire after your welfare and you said unto me. A wild beast did devour him. 3 And Simeon went with you to buy food and you say the king of Egypt hath confined him in prison, and you wish to take Benjamin to cause his death also, and bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave on account of Benjamin and his brother Joseph. 4 Now therefore my son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he is left alone, and mischief may befall him by the way in which you go, as it

befell his brother. 5 And Reuben said unto his father, Thou shalt slay my two sons if I do not bring thy son and place him before thee; and Jacob said unto his sons, Abide ye here and do not go down to Egypt, for my son shall not go down with you to Egypt, nor die like his brother.⁶⁰

Eidermein:

WE are now approaching a decisive period in the history of the house of Israel. Yet once again everything seems to happen quite naturally, while in reality everything is supernatural. The same causes which led to a diminution of rain in the Abyssinian mountains, and with it of the waters of the Nile, brought drought and famine to Palestine. It is quite in character that, in such straits, the wild, lawless sons of Jacob should have stood helplessly despondent, while the energies of their father were correspondingly roused. "Why do ye look one upon another? . . . I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence." The ten sons of Jacob now departed on this errand. But Benjamin, who had taken the place of Joseph in his father's heart, was not sent with them, perhaps from real fear of "mischief" by the way, possibly because his father did not quite trust the honest intentions of his sons. The next scene presents to us the Hebrew strangers among a motley crowd of natives and foreigners, who had come for corn; while Joseph, in all the state of the highest Egyptian official, superintends the sale. In true Eastern fashion the sons of Jacob make lowest obeisance before "the governor over the land." Of course they could not have recognized in him, who looked, dressed, and spoke as an Egyptian noble, the lad who, more than twenty years before, had, in "the anguish of his soul," "besought" them not to sell him into slavery. The same transformation had not taken place in them, and Joseph at once knew the well-remembered features of his brethren. But what a change in their relative positions! As he saw them bending lowly before him, his former dreams came vividly back to him. Surely, one even much less devout than Joseph would, in that moment, have felt that a Divine Hand had guided the past for a Divine purpose. Personal resentment or pique could not have entered into his mind at such a time. If, therefore, as some have thought, severity towards his brethren partially determined his conduct, this must have been quite a subordinate motive. At any rate, it is impossible to suppose that he cherished any longer feelings of anger, when shortly afterwards, on their expression of deep penitence, "he turned himself about from them and wept." But we prefer regarding Joseph's conduct as consistent throughout. The appearance of his brothers before him seemed to imply that God had not meant to separate him from his family, nor yet that he should return to them, but that they should come to him, and that he had been sent before to keep them alive. But for such a re-union of the family it was manifestly needful, that their hearts and minds should have undergone an entire change from that unscrupulous envy which had prompted them to sell him into slavery. This must be ascertained before he made himself known to them. Moreover, its reality must be tested by the severest trial to which their altered feelings could be subjected.

Thus viewing it, we can understand the whole conduct of Joseph. Of course, his first object would be to separate the sons of Jacob from the crowd of other purchasers, so as to

⁶⁰ The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

deal specially with them, without, however, awakening their suspicions; his next to ascertain the state of matters at home. Then he would make them taste undeserved sorrow by the exercise of an arbitrary power, against which they would be helpless - even as Joseph had been in their hands. Thus they might see their past sin in their present sorrow. All these objects were attained by one and the same means. Joseph charged them with being spies, who, on pretense of buying corn, had come to find out the defenseless portions of the land. The accusation was not unreasonable in the then state of Egypt, nor uncommon in Eastern countries. It was not only that this afforded a pretext for dealing separately with them, but their answer to the charge would inform Joseph about the circumstances of his family. For, naturally, they would not only protest their innocence, but show the inherent improbability of such an imputation. Here no argument could be more telling than that they were "all one man's sons," since no one would risk the lives of all his children in so dangerous a business. But this was not enough for Joseph. By reiterating the charge, he led them to enter into further details, from which he learned that both his father and Benjamin were alive. Still their reference to himself as one "who is not," seemed to imply persistence in their former deceit, and must have strengthened his doubts as to their state of mind. But now experience of violence would show them not only their past guilt, but that, however God might seem to delay, He was the avenger of all wrong. More than that, if Benjamin were placed relatively to them in the same circumstances of favoritism as Joseph had been; and if, instead of envying and hating him, they were prepared, even when exposed through him to shame and danger, not only to stand by him, but to suffer in his stead, then they had repented in the truest sense, and their state of mind was the opposite of what it had been twenty years ago.* Proceeding on this plan, Joseph first imprisoned all the ten, proposing to release one of their number to fetch Benjamin, in order to test, as he said, the truthfulness of their statements.

* This is substantially the view taken by Luther, and presented in his usual quaint and forcible language.

This excessive harshness was probably intended to strike terror into their hearts; and, at the end of three days, he so far relented as to retain only one of their number as a hostage; at the same time encouraging them both by the statement that, in so doing, his motive was "fear of God," and by the assurance that, once satisfied of their innocence, he cherished no evil design against them. The reference to "fear of God" on the part of an Egyptian, and this apparent shrinking from needless rigor, must have cut them to the heart, as it brought out in contrast their own implacable conduct towards Joseph. Simeon was chosen to remain behind as hostage, because he was the next oldest to Reuben, who was not detained, since he had endeavored to save the life of Joseph. This also must have contributed to remind them of their former wrong; and, for the first time, they avow to one another their bitter guilt in the past, and how God was now visiting it. So poignant were their feelings that, in the presence of Joseph, they spoke of it, in their own Hebrew, ignorant that Joseph, who had conversed with them through an interpreter, understood their words. Joseph was obliged hastily to withdraw, so as not to betray himself; but he wavered not in his purpose. Simeon was bound before their eyes, and the rest were dismissed; but each with ample provender for the journey, besides the corn they had bought, and with the purchase-money secretly restored to them.

The terror with which the unexpected turn of events had inspired them was deepened when, at their first night's quarters, one of them discovered the money in his sack. But, as before, the impression was wholesome. They traced in this also the avenging hand of God: "What is this that God hath done unto us?"

The narrative which, on their return, they had to tell their father was sufficiently sad. But the discovery they now made, that the money which they had paid had been secretly put back into each man's sack, seemed to imply some deep design of mischief, and filled Jacob and his sons with fresh fears. If the condition of their again appearing before the ruler of Egypt was, that they must bring Benjamin with them, then he, who had already lost two sons, would refuse to expose to such a risk his darling, the last remaining pledge of his Rachel. Reuben, indeed, volunteered the strange guarantee of his own two sons: "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee." But this language was little calculated to reassure the heart of Jacob. For a time it seemed as if Jacob's former sorrow was to be increased by the loss of Simeon, and as if Joseph and his family were never again to meet.

If we ask ourselves why Joseph should have risked this, or added to his father's sorrow, we answer, to the first question, that, since Joseph now knew the circumstances of his family, and had Simeon beside him, he could at any time, on need for it appearing, have communicated with his father. As to the second difficulty, we must all feel that this grief and care could not be spared to his father if his brothers were to be tried, proved, and prepared for their mission. And did it not seem as if Joseph had rightly understood the will of God in this matter, since the heart of his brethren had been at once touched to own their past sin and the Hand of God?

Could he not then still further commit himself to God in well-doing, and trust Him? Nay, could he not also trust Jacob's faith to bear up under this trial? At most it would be short, and how blessed to all the fruits expected from it! Once more the event proved the correctness of his views. As the stock of provisions, which the sons of Jacob had brought, became nearly exhausted, a fresh application to the royal granaries of Egypt was absolutely necessary. This time it was Judah who offered himself in surety for Benjamin. His language was so calm, affectionate, and yet firm, as to inspire Jacob with what confidence can be derived from the earnest, good purpose of a true man. But he had higher consolation - that of prayer and faith: "God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin." Yet, even if God had otherwise appointed, - if He saw fit to take from him his children, his faith would rise to this also: "And I, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved!" - good is the will of the Lord, and he would bow before it.⁶¹

⁶¹ Bible History, Old Testament, Eidermein