

The Testing of Joseph's Brothers

Genesis 42-44

Genesis 41:56 - 42:2 – A famine occurred which achieved the fulfillment of God's prophecies in Gen. 15:12-16 and 37:6-9

God will bring the entire family of Jacob into Egypt, where they will be isolated from the surrounding people for some 400 years. In that time, they will multiply greatly, increasing to millions (Exodus 1:6-7). If God had allowed them to remain in Canaan, they would have simply assimilated into the corrupt and godless peoples of Canaan.

God not only had to take the family of Israel out of the corrupt environment of Canaan, but He had to put them among a racist people who would not intermarry or even mingle with them (43:32). God simply sent Joseph on ahead to make the arrangements.

Read Genesis 42:1-29

v. 20 - Joseph's last interaction with his brothers had been pleading with them for his life (42:21). He wanted to make sure they had not been as cruel to Benjamin, his only full brother, and the other brother favored by their father Jacob.

v. 21 – Joseph's brothers acknowledged their sin, and God's justice.

Read Genesis 42:36-38

Faith hopes for the best, despair expects the worst

v. 36 Examine Jacob's cry: "Everything is against me." For Jacob it certainly must have felt that way. Jacob had his eyes off God and on the problem. His despair came from imperfect knowledge.

v. 37 Notice Reuben's offer of accountability: Jacob would be free to kill both Reuben's sons, Jacob's own grandsons! Jacob surely was unlikely to follow through on that exchange, and he is not comforted, v. 38, and refuses to let Benjamin go.

Read Genesis 43:1-15

v. 8 – Notice Judah's offer of accountability: his own life. This comforts Jacob, and he entrusts Benjamin to Judah.

Read Genesis 43:16-25

v. 16 -18 – If there was ever an example of looking at a situation through another person's eyes, it might be this. The brothers now feared happening to them exactly what they did to their brother Joseph. Instead, the brothers received the blessings of love and kindness from Joseph without knowing who he was.

Read Genesis 43:26-34 – The First Test

Joseph wanted to see how the brothers reacted when the younger brother (Benjamin) was favored, because they resented it so much when Joseph was favored by his father. How did their reaction (or lack of reaction) show a change of heart?

Read Genesis 44:1-17 – The Second Test

v. 1-4 - Joseph was not using his position to torment his brothers in revenge for their cruelty towards him. He was testing the hearts of his brothers guided by the hand of God.

v. 5 – The cup: Joseph's spiritual wisdom was due to his relationship with the living God (41:38). The reference to the cup's divining powers was therefore part of his charade of being an Egyptian in high authority, as well as stressing the severity of the staged theft. Such cups were a symbol of an individual's authority and power within kingdoms like Egypt.

v. 16 – "our guilt." With these words, Judah revealed God's work among the brothers and exposed their remorseful hearts. The brothers accept God's justice, that they must live as slaves in Egypt because they sold Joseph as a slave so many years before.

v. 17 Joseph's testing of his brothers is now complete. Will they abandon Benjamin, or stay with him in Egypt?

Read Genesis 44:18-34

Judah shines forth as one willing to be a surrogate sacrifice, out of love for his father and for his brothers. Judah was the one who suggested selling Joseph years earlier (37:26-27); here he offers to lay down his life for the favored brother (John 15:13).

Sacrificial love is evidence of our transformation. Moses was willing to offer himself for the salvation of Israel (Exodus 32:31-32), as was Paul (Romans 9:1-4). These accounts each serve as reminders that true love is not self seeking (1 Corinthians 13:5). Look up: John 13:34

Notice the pattern of repentance displayed by this story: acknowledgment of sin, change of heart, and acceptance of just punishment. Then, in the action of Judah, Jesus' ancestor, we have a reminder of Jesus' substitutionary atonement for sin.