

Joseph's Brothers Return to Canaan from Egypt

Genesis 42:22-38

Genesis 42:22-38 - *"And Reuben answered them, saying, 'Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.'" 23 But they did not know that Joseph understood them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter. 24 And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. 25 Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them. 26 So they loaded their donkeys with the grain and departed from there. 27 But as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment, he saw his money; and there it was, in the mouth of his sack. 28 So he said to his brothers, "My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!" Then their hearts failed them and they were afraid, saying to one another, "What is this that God has done to us?" 29 Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying: 30 "The man who is lord of the land spoke roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. 31 But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies. 32 We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is with our father this day in the land of Canaan.' 33 Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, take food for the famine of your households, and be gone. 34 And bring your youngest brother to me; so I shall know that you are not spies, but that you are honest men. I will grant your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'" 35 Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid. 36 And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me." 37 Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." 38 But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave."*

Background Notes

When Joseph's brothers returned to the land of Canaan, they still didn't know that they had been dealing with Joseph. They thought he was just a powerful ruler, the governor or prime minister of Egypt. The brothers probably thought Joseph was dead. Verse 22: *"And Reuben answered them, saying, 'Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us."*

Reuben believed that Joseph had died as a slave, and now Joseph's "blood was being required" because they had betrayed him. These are words that convey an avenging of a death. The guilty consciences of all the brothers had been awakened. *"Then they said to one another, "We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us" (v21).*

And notice what they said when the money was discovered in their sacks: *"My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!" Then their hearts failed them and they were afraid, saying to one another, "What is this that God has done to us?"*

Did you realize that this is the first time in the biblical record that the brothers mentioned the name of God? You see, when the guilty conscience is awakened, there is a consciousness of God. God finally invaded their thinking! God has designed it this way.

Not only had the guilty conscience of the brothers been awakened, but as a result they finally began to move in the right moral direction. They gave their father a truthful report. They still hadn't confessed their sin of betraying Joseph, but at least they were telling the truth - unlike the lies they told Jacob before.

Isn't it interesting to notice that the brothers considered themselves a unit of twelve, even though Joseph has been gone for more than twenty years. *"We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is with our father this day in the land of Canaan" (v32).*

All these events were paving the way for the brothers' reconciliation with Joseph. I believe that this is a picture of our Lord's present dealings with the nation of Israel. He is paving the way for Israel's future reconciliation with the Messiah, the One whom they once rejected.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord is still testing Israel.

Romans 11:1-2: *"I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew..."*

The point of this passage is that God still has plans for the nation of Israel, the Jewish people. They have not been abandoned, and God's promises to them still stand. They have been "set aside" at the present time, but only temporarily - not permanently! Romans 11:25-27: *"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."*

The Bible clearly teaches that a spiritual revival will take place among the Jewish people, the “nation of Israel.” In the meantime, God is testing Israel and working circumstances together to bring them to a place of repentance. All this was pictured in Genesis 42, in Joseph’s treatment of his brothers. The groundwork was being laid for reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers.

Throughout history the Lord has tested the Jewish people, preparing them to receive the Messiah they once rejected. Right now they think that Jesus Christ is dead. In Daniel 11:35 a prophecy is given that outlines God’s dealings with the nation of Israel from inter-testamental times to the End Times: *“And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time.”*

If anyone ever asks you, “Is the Nazi Holocaust in Scripture?” – well, there it is, in Daniel 11:35. God permitted the Holocaust. It was part of a testing and refining process. The history of the Jewish people from inter-testamental times to the present time, and until the time of the end, is the history of God preparing the Jewish people for reconciliation with their Messiah.

On the one hand, God has treated them with acts of kindness, as pictured in Joseph’s acts of kindness with his brothers. The Jewish people have been blessed in many ways. They have been preserved as a distinct people, despite being dispersed all over the world! Among all the nations throughout history, this is unique!

However, despite His acts of kindness, God has allowed them to be treated roughly. And the rough treatment is not over yet, as Daniel 11:35 says. Before the time of the end, Scripture tells us that there will be a great time of trouble on this earth, called the Tribulation period. According to Daniel 9, this time of trouble will last for seven years.

It is possible that the seven years of famine in Joseph’s time may be a picture of that seven years of trouble in the Tribulation period. The Tribulation period will test and try the entire world, but it will be particularly rough for Israel. In fact, the prophet Jeremiah calls it “the time of Jacob’s trouble.” *“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7).*

Out of this time of testing will come a believing remnant of Jews who are prepared for the return of Jesus Christ. That testing process, pictured here in Genesis 42, is still going on, and will go on until the time of the end. The Lord is still testing Israel.

2. The Lord is still weeping over Israel.

The Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem and the nation that had rejected Him: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” (Matthew 23:37-39).*

I believe we see that attitude pictured in Genesis 42. We have seen many parallels between Joseph and Christ, and here is another one. Just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem, so Joseph *“turned himself away from them and wept.”* (v24). Although Joseph had to treat his brothers roughly to test them and to see if their attitude had changed, yet he loved them and he wept for them.

What a picture of the present relationship between the Lord and His people Israel! Rough treatment, yes, but with a purpose. The Lord still loves Israel. The Lord is still weeping over Israel.

Practical Applications

1. Sometimes we have to use “tough love.”

“Tough love” can be defined as loving someone so much that you purposely allow life to be difficult for them, with the goal that the person will change his or her ways, and stop ruining his or her life, and stop ruining the lives of others. Tough love is the kind of love Joseph had for his brothers. A quick pardon with no repentance would not have been the right way to go with Joseph’s brothers.

Tough love is the kind of love God must sometimes have for many of us, His wandering children. Tough love is the kind of love that enables parents to discipline their children when they need it. As a college teacher, many times I have had to use tough love with students who are undisciplined, lazy, or generally messing up their lives.

Now notice - tough love is not a venting of anger! Joseph’s actions were not the result of anger or frustration. They were carefully planned for the brothers’ good, with the purpose of eventually restoring them. Our tough love should not be the result of anger or frustration. It is not easy, but sometimes we must use tough love.

2. Don’t keep the “blindness” on.

Look at what Jacob said in verse 36: *“And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me.”*

Poor old Jacob! He was so short sighted! “All these things” were **not** “against him!” You would think that after all Jacob had been through, he might have realized that God had been in control all along, and that God was still in control. Jacob needed to take the blindness off – and so do we! In the words of Romans 8:28, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*

Do you sometimes feel like Jacob? Are you blind to God’s work in your life because it seems that “everything has gone wrong?” Do you feel like “all these things are against me?” Take the blindness off! Look at your situation from God’s perspective. If you love God, you can be sure that all these things are working together for good. Don’t keep the blindness on!