

Judah's Plea for Benjamin

Genesis 44:18-34

Genesis 44:18-34 - *"Then Judah came near to him and said: "O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you are even like Pharaoh. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' ²⁰ And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, who is young; his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' ²¹ Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' ²² And we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' ²³ But you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.'*

²⁴ "So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord. ²⁵ And our father said, 'Go back and buy us a little food.' ²⁶ But we said, 'We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' ²⁷ Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; ²⁸ and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn to pieces"; and I have not seen him since. ²⁹ But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.'

³⁰ "Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, ³¹ it will happen, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die. So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave. ³² For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.' ³³ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. ³⁴ For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?"

Background Notes

When the brothers returned to Joseph's house in Egypt, they still had no idea that they were dealing with the brother whom they had once hated and betrayed. They thought that the man with whom they were dealing was an Egyptian prime minister who governed all Egypt. Certainly this man could have no knowledge of their past - but he seemed to know all about them! This man even seemed to understand what they were saying to one another in Hebrew! This man, to whom they had already bowed down several times in fulfillment of the dreams God had given to Joseph many years ago, was none other than Joseph himself.

Judah now came before this prime minister to plead Benjamin's cause. Judah (not the firstborn, Reuben) had clearly become the leader and spokesman for the brothers. Judah was the brother who had persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go with them to Egypt (chapter 43).

Judah's petition before Joseph is one of the finest speeches in the Bible. It was true. It came from the heart. It led to reconciliation with Joseph. Notice what Judah said: *For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.'* Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers" (v32-33).

Judah was willing to take Benjamin's place and become a slave so that Benjamin could go free. What a beautiful picture of "substitutionary atonement"! Throughout the story of Joseph we have seen many parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ, and I believe we have a parallel here between Judah and the Lord Jesus, who was a descendant of Judah. Judah, now a changed man, is a picture of Christ as the willing Substitute.

Doctrinal Points

1. God's discipline can change a person's character.

Judah had hated Joseph. Judah was the brother who came up with the plan to sell Joseph as a slave to the Midianite traders. But Judah had changed! In Genesis 43 Judah promised Jacob that he would be surety for Benjamin, and bear full responsibility for anything that might happen to him. In Genesis 44, before the prime minister of Egypt, Judah made good on that commitment. Judah was willing to become a slave for Benjamin's sake - out of love for his father, and out of love for his brother.

What brought about this change in Judah's character? It was God's discipline - plain and simple! God let Judah reap what he had sown from his illicit and immoral behavior (Genesis 38). God disciplined Judah through the famine. God further disciplined Judah through the rough treatment the brothers received when they first went to Egypt. I'm sure God used other events in Judah's life for discipline.

As a result, Judah was a changed man. In his impassioned speech in verses 33-34, we see his concern for Benjamin's welfare, and we see his love for Jacob, their father. *"Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?"* What a change in Judah's character!

God's discipline can change a person's character. Listen to the well-known words of Hebrews 12:11: *"Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."* If your personal character needs some changes, expect some discipline from God.

Perhaps you're undergoing God's discipline right now. Don't fight God's discipline! Submit to it, so your character can become more conformed to the character of Jesus Christ. The goal of God's "changing process" in your life and in mine is to make us more like our Lord Jesus! God's discipline can change a person's character.

2. God's discipline can change a nation's character.

In Genesis 44, that truth was displayed in Judah as a representative of the nation of Israel. Judah was the spokesman for the brothers when they rejected and betrayed Joseph, and he was the spokesman for the brothers when they repented of their sin and were changed.

Notice the parallels here:

- As the brothers rejected Joseph, the beloved son of his father, so the nation of Israel rejected their Messiah, the beloved Son of God.
- As God disciplined the brothers and brought about a change in their character, so God has been disciplining the nation of Israel, and will continue to do so until there is a change in their attitude toward their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- As the brothers repented of their sin and were reconciled to Joseph, so a believing remnant of the nation of Israel will repent for the nation's sin in rejecting Jesus Christ, and they will be reconciled to Him at His return in the future.
- In Judah's impassioned speech, the changed character of that future "believing remnant" of Israel is represented.

Regarding this believing Jewish remnant, Zechariah 13:9 says: *"I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; and each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"* The **discipline** of God will bring about the change in Israel's character.

Isaiah 59:20 says, *"The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the LORD.*" It's clear that this verse refers to the future "believing remnant" of Israel, because Isaiah 59:20 is quoted in Romans 11:26. In Romans 11, Paul was definitely writing about the future return of the Jewish people. Romans 11:26: *"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.'"*

Through the discipline of God, the character of unbelieving Israel will be changed. They will confess their sin, and be reconciled to the Messiah whom they once rejected. God's discipline can change a nation's character.

Practical Application

Don't misinterpret God's providence.

You remember the definition of "God's providence," right? The doctrine of the providence of God teaches that our sovereign God is not only in full control of every event of our lives, but that He accomplishes His good plans and purposes through these events.

Up to this point in the story of Joseph, if we were the brother, we probably would **not** have jumped to the conclusion that God was working out good plans and purposes for our lives through these events! Forced to travel down to Egypt because of a famine, accused of being spies, thrown into prison, accused of stealing the prime minister's cup? No way! If we were the brothers, when Judah was voicing their confession of guilt and pleading for Benjamin, we wouldn't have had a clue that all of this was part of God's providential plans for our good. We wouldn't have guessed that God was planning our reconciliation with the brother we had once betrayed; that He was planning for our move to Egypt to become the heads of a new nation that God was forming; for the spiritual benefit of being removed from their neighbors, the pagan Canaanites: for many other blessings. I'm sure we would have misinterpreted all the unhappy and puzzling events. We never would have thought that it was actually God's providence at work!

Just as it was then, it's very easy to misinterpret unhappy events or the tragedies that come into our lives today. It's difficult to see how God's providence could possibly be at work through illness, loss, grief and other painful circumstances. Well, as an illustration, think about having a wisdom tooth extracted. If we didn't know what was going on, I'm sure we would misinterpret the event! An aching jaw, the dental chair, needles, blood, tools reaching into the mouth, a tooth being pulled out - how could anything good come out of this horrible scenario? But we know something good is going on, because we know the purpose. And - and we know the end of the story!

God is like the "good and perfect dentist"! Many times the things He allows in our lives seem to be even more unpleasant than pulling out teeth - because we don't have the whole picture! Don't misinterpret God's providence!

Are some things in your life difficult to understand? Hard times? Disappointments? Illnesses? Tragedies? Losses? God knows the end of the story, and He is working out His good and perfect plans.

Psalms 13:5 says, "*I trust in Your unfailing love...*" Trust Him! And don't misinterpret His providence.