

## THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS

*"To be punished is not an evil; but it is an evil to be made worthy of punishment...Fault has more of the nature of evil than pain has."*  
 –Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

## God & Joseph: His Brothers in Egypt

### The Background:

- Having sold Joseph into slavery, his brothers then lied to their father about what had happened to him. Believing that they would never see him again, the brothers moved on with their lives. In time, it became necessary for them to travel to Egypt to purchase grain due to the spread of the famine into Canaan.

### Joseph's Brothers' First Trip to Egypt: Genesis 42:1-38

Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. –Gen. 42:6-9b

- We can only imagine Joseph's internal, emotional response to seeing his brothers. In the midst of this, however, he immediately recalled the dreams that he had as a young man.

➔ God is using his brothers to test him. Given the opportunity, will he now seek \_\_\_\_\_?

- Joseph then spoke harshly to his brothers and accused them of being spies. This response humanizes Joseph.

### A Recognition of Sin

Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us." And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. –Gen. 42:21-23

- The brothers understand that their sin has found them out. This terrible act, though committed long ago, has not been forgotten.

➔ God is using Joseph to test the brothers. Will they continue to \_\_\_\_\_ in order to advance themselves?

Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them. –Gen. 42:24-25

- Joseph was firm but merciful in his dealings with his brothers.

### Back in Canaan

And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me." Then Reuben said to his father, "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." But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol." –Gen. 42:36-38

➔ God is using these circumstances to test Jacob. Does he trust that God's \_\_\_\_\_ to him will be kept?

### The Brothers' Return to Egypt: Genesis 43-44

- With the severity of the famine, the brothers were forced to return again to Egypt.

Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." –Gen. 43:11-14

- Jacob's reference to God as *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) demonstrates his trust in the Lord's sovereignty over all of these events.

## Joseph's Testing of His Brothers

- From the events that we read about in Genesis 43-44, it seems clear that Joseph had determined to specifically test his brothers to see whether or not their hearts had changed at all in the years following what they had done to him.
- In order to test his brothers, Joseph undertook several specific actions which would essentially present to the brothers a similar opportunity to rid themselves of Benjamin just as they had done of Joseph.

### 1. Joseph seated them in their birth order at the feast.

*And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. –Gen. 43:33*

### 2. Joseph then publically favored Benjamin, the youngest and least to be respected according to his birth order.

*Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him. –Gen. 43:34*

### 3. Joseph then framed Benjamin with a crime that would allow the brothers to be rid of him if they so chose.

*Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. –Gen. 44:1-2*

⇒ Specifically, they have the chance to leave him as a \_\_\_\_\_ in Egypt (Gen. 44:9-13)

## The Leadership of Judah—44:18-34

- While the narrative does not specifically convey this, Judah appears to have been given the role of leadership by Jacob. This was probably due to the indiscretions of Reuben (His affair with Billah) and Simeon and Levi (Deception and murder).
- 1. Judah conveys their concern for the desires of Jacob as well as the fear that he will die as a result of losing Benjamin.  
*Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One left me, and I said, "Surely he has been torn to pieces, and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.'" –Gen. 44:27-29*
- 2. Judah then explained to Joseph the commitment that he had made to his father to protect the boy. In light of this, he offered himself in the place of Benjamin in order that he might go free.  
⇒ This act on the part of Judah is highly commendable, and demonstrates the change that has taken place in the brothers in light of the previous events of their lives. It is, however, incomplete because Judah remained guilty of his own sin against Joseph.

## God's Testing of Mankind

1. God's testing of mankind is always purposeful, serving to reveal either their \_\_\_\_\_ or the \_\_\_\_\_ that He has worked in them according to His Word and by the power of His Spirit.

Deut. 8:1-3—"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

2. Judah's willingness to substitute himself for Benjamin pictures for us the more complete \_\_\_\_\_ that Christ came to accomplish on behalf of those who were truly guilty of sin.

Matt. 4:1—Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (*peirazo*—to test the quality/character of) by the devil.

Matt. 4:3-4—And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

3. God's intention for the believer is that their faith is progressively proven and \_\_\_\_\_ over the course of their lives.

1 Pet. 1:6-7— In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Vengeance