

**“A SECOND TRIP TO EGYPT”**

This passage records the second of three journeys to Egypt in this section of Genesis. Actually, this second visit spans all of chapters 43-45, which form a single literary unit. Three chapters would be a lot to cover in one sermon, so we will take it one chapter at a time over the next few weeks. And as we do so, we will continue to see how the Lord in his providence worked to bring about repentance and reconciliation in the covenant family. And in this chapter in particular, we will see how the Lord’s providence provided the brothers with clues that were intended to point them to the fact that he was at work in their midst.

There are three main scenes in this chapter: verses 1-14 tell us how it came about that the brothers returned to Egypt; verses 15-25 show us what took place when the brothers arrived in Egypt this second time; and verses 26-34 relate what happened when the brothers dined in Joseph’s house.

We begin by looking at the first scene: the events that led to the return trip to Egypt. As we saw last week, Jacob was not about to send Benjamin, his favorite son, back to Egypt with his other sons. He did not trust them, and he could not bear the thought of losing Benjamin. But when their food ran out and the famine continued to go on, Jacob began to see that he was going to have to relent.

However, he still held back from offering to send Benjamin with his other sons. His words almost sound as though he was sending them on a small errand, like running out to the corner market: “Go again, buy us a little food.” But Judah reminded his father of the

things that the man in Egypt had told them when they left the last time. The only way they would be able to get grain in Egypt again, and the only way their brother Simeon would be released, would be if they brought Benjamin back with them. Jacob responded to this with a pointless accusation, saying that they never should have volunteered such information in the first place. But the brothers explained that they had no choice in the matter. They were pinned down by that stern man whom they had met there, and they had to tell the truth in order to convince him that they were not spies.

As I said last week, God was using these events not only to test Joseph's brothers, but to test Jacob as well. Jacob was never able to get over the news of Joseph's death. For twenty years, he nursed his sorrow and pledged that he would go down to the grave in mourning. He could not let go of Joseph. But here we see how the Lord confronted him with his need to let go. In his providence, the Lord so ordered things that Jacob was going to have no choice in the matter. He was going to have to let go of Rachel's other son. He was going to have to send his favorite son off to a distant land with his other sons, the same sons who had hated Joseph so much because of the special place he had in his father's heart. Try to imagine what this must have been like for Jacob. He had refused to let go of his sorrow over losing Joseph, but now he was being forced to send Benjamin away. It was a hard test. Yet the Lord was going to use it to do something that was beyond anything Jacob could have imagined. He was going to answer the prayer that Jacob offered in verse 14 in an astounding way. Look at that prayer. Jacob prayed: "May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other

brother and Benjamin.” Notice that Jacob said “other brother.” We know that he meant Simeon, who was being held prisoner in Egypt. But Moses, the author of Genesis, seems to have chosen to refer to Simeon generically rather than by name in order to call our attention to the fact that God was going to do much more than what Jacob was thinking when he answered that prayer. He was going to bring Joseph back. God was going to bless Jacob beyond his wildest imaginings. But first, Jacob would have to let go of his favorite son. He had to send Benjamin to Egypt.

And that is exactly what Jacob did. He let go of Benjamin. He entrusted him into God’s hands. But this was not an entirely passive thing on Jacob’s part. His faith was displayed in the things that he did as he prepared to send his sons away. He made sure that they were well-equipped for their appearance in Egypt. In that culture, it was very important to bring a present with you if you were going to appear before a person of rank. Even though they were experiencing famine, Jacob made sure that they had a gift to present to Joseph. Also, he instructed his sons to bring enough money to pay for the grain that they had bought on their last visit, so that they might explain the mistake that had been made. Jacob did all that was within his power to ensure that they would find success on their trip to Egypt. And then, after doing that, he sent his sons off with a prayer, asking the Lord to bless them and grant them success.

Now, before we move to the second scene, I want to say a word about Judah. Do you remember last time Judah was mentioned by name in the book of Genesis? It was back in chapter 38, the chapter that recounted Judah’s sordid dealings with his daughter-in-law

Tamar. That episode showed us what kind of man Judah was. He was not a man of high moral fiber. Nevertheless, as we noted when we studied that chapter, Judah was humbled by what transpired with Tamar. The Lord worked through those events to open Judah's eyes to see the ugliness of his sin. And as a result, the Judah that we see here is not the same man that we saw back in chapter 38. His actions here reflect a significant degree of heart transformation. He tells his father that he will take responsibility for the Benjamin's safety. Unlike the rash offer made by Reuben in the previous chapter, in which he said that Jacob could kill his two sons if he failed to bring Benjamin back, Judah's offer was both serious and responsible. And, as we will see in the coming chapters, Judah will make good on what he promised his father.

We turn now to the second scene, which describes the reception the brothers received as they arrived in Egypt. If you try to put yourself in their shoes, you will be able to see that they would have been very tense as they made their way to Egypt with Benjamin. All sorts of questions would have been going through their minds. What will the lord of the land say to us after we have delayed our return for so long? Will he believe what we tell him about the money? Is Simeon still alive? What will happen to Benjamin? Their hearts would have been filled with anxieties.

When they arrived in Egypt, they appeared before Joseph, the powerful man who had treated them so harshly when they were there the last time. And what did Joseph have to say to them? Amazingly, he invited them to have lunch at his house. As you can imagine, the brothers were utterly shocked at this. They did not understand what was

going on. They concluded that it had to be a trap, a way for Joseph to enslave them and seize their donkeys. So they decided to be forthright about the matter of the money from their previous visit. They went up to the steward and explained the mistake to him. But then he said something that puzzled them even more. He said, “Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money.” Now when we first read this, we might think that the steward was being dishonest. We know how the money got back in the sacks. Moses told us in the previous chapter. It was Joseph who gave the order to put his brothers’ money back in their sacks. While this is certainly true, but it does not mean that the steward was lying. It was Joseph who ordered that the money to be returned, but it was the Lord who was behind Joseph’s order. Here is an example of how the Bible teaches that God accomplishes his purposes through secondary causes.

What was God’s purpose in having Joseph place the money back in their bags? Several things. For one thing, as we said in last week’s sermon, it was one of the ways in which the Lord tested the brothers and brought them under conviction for their sin. Also, it was a sign, among many signs in these chapters, that caused the brothers to recognize the Lord’s sovereign control over what was happening. And lastly, God’s purpose in giving them the money was exactly what the steward said. It was treasure from the Lord. God was blessing the brothers, even though they did not deserve such blessings. Once again, as we have seen over and over again in Genesis, the Lord shows his people that the blessings that he pours out upon them are utterly undeserved.

This brings us to the third scene in our passage, which shows us what happened when the brothers dined in Joseph's house. Once again, Joseph was reminded of his dream, when he saw his brothers bowing down before him. But there was still one thing missing. In his dream, his father also bowed before him. And this prompted him to ask about Jacob's welfare. As Joseph had said back in chapter 41, God made him forget about his father's house during his twenty years in Egypt. It seemed like another life to him. Yet now he could see that the Lord was bringing about what he had showed him in his dream. Could it really be true that, after all those years, he would be reunited with his father? Seeing his brother Benjamin stirred up the love that he still had for his family. He blessed Benjamin, and then he was so overcome by emotion that he had to excuse himself in order to regain his composure.

Now, put yourself in the position of Joseph's brothers once again. They must have been wondering whether this was the same man that they had met on their previous visit. The last time, he accused them of being spies, had them thrown in prison, and held one of them captive while the others were sent off to prove their story. But this time, he invited them to dine at his own house, asked about the welfare of their father, and pronounced a blessing upon Benjamin. And that was just the beginning. While Joseph followed the Egyptian practice of not dining with these foreigners in person, which was similar to the later Jewish restrictions about table fellowship, he made sure that his brothers were seated in their proper birth order. This was nothing short of amazing. They were grown men, some of whom were fairly close in age. And there were eleven of them. They marveled

at how in the world Joseph could have known their exact ages. It was not as though he was able to look at their passports to find their birthdates. This was something very strange, and it amazed the brothers. It was another way in which the Lord was impressing upon them that his hand was behind the things that they were experiencing. They did not know what God was doing, but they could see that there was much more going on here than met the eye. And this prepared them for the tests that would soon follow.

The first of these tests came when they sat down to eat. While Joseph did not dine with them, he shared his food with them. Again, the brothers would wonder why this man was being so gracious to them. And then, when the food was served, Benjamin was given five times as much as the others. Why would Joseph do that? Because he wanted to see how the brothers would respond to it. Benjamin was being singled out and given special treatment, just as Jacob had singled Joseph out and treated him as his favorite so many years before. Joseph wanted to see if his brothers had changed. He wanted to see if the sorrow that they expressed in the last chapter over what they had done to him was a sign of genuine repentance. And what did Joseph's test reveal? It showed that the brothers had in fact changed. Instead of being jealous of Benjamin, they rejoiced in the hospitality that Joseph was extending to all of them. They drank and were merry with him, with Benjamin.

God's hand was behind everything that took place in this chapter, even though the people involved could not see what God was doing. Jacob could not see what God was

doing when he forced him to send Benjamin to Egypt. The brothers could not see what God was doing when Joseph greeted them so differently than he had on their previous visit. And not only did they not know what God was doing, they did not even know what they needed God to do for them. If you were able to go back in time and ask them what they thought they needed God to do for them at that particular moment, they would not tell you that they needed God to do what he ended up doing. This teaches us a crucial lesson about God's providence. We do not know why God orders our lives in the specific ways that he does. If we were given the power to order our lives ourselves, we would often choose something other than what God appoints for us. But the irony is that, if we were allowed to do so, we would ruin everything. We do not know what we need God to do for us. Our perspective is far too limited. But the Lord sees everything. He knows exactly what needs to happen in order for his purposes to be worked out in our lives. As Samuel Rutherford put it,

“For howbeit we cannot win to the bottom of His wise providence, who ruleth all; yet it is certain this is not only good which the Almighty hath done, but it is *best.*” [*Letters*, 103-104]