

CHAPTER 42

We had, in the foregoing chapter, the fulfilling of the dreams which Joseph had interpreted: in this and the following chapters we have the fulfilling of the dreams which Joseph himself had dreamed, that his father's family should do homage to him. The story is very largely and particularly related of what passed between Joseph and his brethren, not only because it is an entertaining story, and probably was much talked of, both among the Israelites and among the Egyptians, but because it is very instructive, and it gave occasion for the removal of Jacob's family into Egypt, on which so many great events afterwards depended. We have, in this chapter,

- I.** The humble application of Jacob's sons to Joseph to buy corn (v. 1-6).
- II.** The fright Joseph put them into, for their trial (v. 7-20).
- III.** The conviction they were now under of their sin concerning Joseph long before (v. 21-24).
- IV.** Their return to Canaan with corn, and the great distress their good father was in upon hearing the account of their expedition (v. 25, etc.).

~~42~~ GENESIS 42:1-6

JACOB SENDS TO EGYPT TO BUY CORN

Though Jacob's sons were all married, and had families of their own, yet, it should seem, they were still incorporated in one society, under the conduct and presidency of their father Jacob. We have here,

- I.** The orders he gave them to go and buy corn in Egypt, v. 1, 2. Observe,
 - 1.** The famine was grievous in the land of Canaan. It is observable that all the three patriarches, to whom Canaan was the land of promise, met with famine in that land, which was not only to try their faith, whether they could trust God though he should slay them, though he should starve them, but to teach them to seek the better country, that is, the heavenly,

8114 Hebrews 11:14-16. We have need of something to wean us from this world, and make us long for a better.

2. Still, when there was famine in Canaan, there was corn in Egypt. Thus Providence orders it, that one place should be a succour and supply to another; for we are all brethren. The Egyptians, the seed of accursed Ham, have plenty, when God's blessed Israel want: Thus God, in dispensing common favours, often crosses hands. Yet observe, The plenty Egypt now had was owing, under God, to Joseph's prudence and care: if his brethren had not sold him into Egypt, but respected him according to his merits, who knows but he might have done the same thing for Jacob's family which now he had done for Pharaoh, and the Egyptians might then have come to them to buy corn? but those who drive away from among them wise and good men know not what they do.

3. *Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt;* he saw the corn that his neighbours had bought there and brought home. It is a spur to exertion to see where supplies are to be had, and to see others supplied. Shall others get food for their souls, and shall we starve while it is to be had?

4. He reprov'd his sons for delaying to provide corn for their families. *Why do you look one upon another?* Note, When we are in trouble and want, it is folly for us to stand looking upon one another, that is, to stand desponding and despairing, as if there were no hope, no help, — to stand disputing either which shall have the honour of going first or which shall have the safety of coming last, — to stand deliberating and debating what we shall do, and doing nothing, — to stand dreaming under a spirit of slumber, as if we had nothing to do, and to stand delaying, as if we had time at command. Let it never be said, “We left that to be done to-morrow which we could a well have done to-day.”

5. He quicken'd them to go to Egypt: *Get you down thither.* Masters of families must not only pray for daily bread for their families, and food convenient, but must lay out themselves with care and industry to provide it.

II. Their obedience to these orders, v. 3. They *went down to buy corn;* they did not send their servants, but very prudently went themselves, to lay out their own money. Let none think themselves too great nor too good to take pains. Masters of families should see with their own eyes, and take heed of leaving too much to servants. Only Benjamin went not with them,

for he was his father's darling. To Egypt they came, among others, and, having a considerable cargo of corn to buy, they were brought before Joseph himself, who probably expected they would come; and, according to the laws of courtesy, *they bowed down themselves before him*, v. 6. Now their empty sheaves did obeisance to his full one. Compare this with ~~204~~ Isaiah 60:14 and ~~689~~ Revelation 3:9.

~~142~~ GENESIS 42:7-20

JOSEPH SPEAKS ROUGHLY TO HIS BRETHREN

We may well wonder that Joseph, during the twenty years that he had now been in Egypt, especially during the last seven years that he had been in power there, never sent to his father to acquaint him with his circumstances; nay, it is strange that he who so often *went throughout all the land of Egypt* (~~145~~ Genesis 41:45, 46) never made an excursion to Canaan, to visit his aged father, when he was in the borders of Egypt, that lay next to Canaan. Perhaps it would not have been above three or four days' journey for him in his chariot. It is a probable conjecture that his whole management of himself in this affair was by special direction from Heaven, that the purpose of God concerning Jacob and his family might be accomplished. When Joseph's brethren came, he knew them by many a satisfactory token, but they knew not him, little thinking to find him there, v. 8. He *remembered the dreams* (v. 9), but they had forgotten them. The laying up of God's oracles in our hearts will be of excellent use to us in all our conduct. Joseph had an eye to his dreams, which he knew to be divine, in his carriage towards his brethren, and aimed at the accomplishment of them and the bringing of his brethren to repentance for their former sins; and both these points were gained.

I. He showed himself very rigorous and harsh with them. The very manner of his speaking, considering the post he was in, was enough to frighten them; for *he spoke roughly to them*, v. 7. He charged them with bad designs against the government (v. 9), treated them as dangerous persons, saying, *You are spies*, and protesting *by the life of Pharaoh* that they were so, v. 16. Some make this an oath, others make it no more than a vehement asseveration, like that, *as thy soul liveth*; however it was more than yea, yea, and nay, nay, and therefore came of evil. Note, Bad words

are soon learned by converse with those that use them, but not so soon unlearned. Joseph, by being much at court, got the courtier's oath, *By the life of Pharaoh*, perhaps designing hereby to confirm his brethren in their belief that he was an Egyptian, and not an Israelite. They knew this was not the language of a son of Abraham. When Peter would prove himself no disciple of Christ, he cursed and swore. Now why was Joseph thus hard upon his brethren? We may be sure it was not from a spirit of revenge, that he might now trample upon those who had formerly trampled upon him; he was not a man of that temper. But,

1. It was to enrich his own dreams, and complete the accomplishment of them.

2. It was to bring them to repentance.

3. It was to get out of them an account of the state of their family, which he longed to know: they would have discovered him if he had asked as a friend, therefore he asks as a judge. Not seeing his brother Benjamin with them, perhaps he began to suspect that they had made away with him too, and therefore gives them occasion to speak of their father and brother. Note, God in his providence sometimes seems harsh with those he loves, and speaks roughly to those for whom yet he has great mercy in store.

II. They, hereupon, were very submissive. They spoke to him with all the respect imaginable: *Nay, my lord* (v. 10) — a great change since they said, *Behold, this dreamer comes*. They very modestly deny the charge: *We are no spies*. They tell him their business, that they came to buy food, a justifiable errand, and the same that many strangers came to Egypt upon at this time. They undertake to give a particular account of themselves and their family (v. 13), and this was what they wanted.

III. He clapped them all up in prison for three days, v. 17. Thus God deals with the souls he designs for special comfort and honour; he first humbles them, and terrifies them, and brings them under a spirit of bondage, and then binds up their wounds by the Spirit of adoption.

IV. He concluded with them, at last, that one of them should be left as a hostage, and the rest should go home and fetch Benjamin. It was a very encouraging word he said to them (v. 18): *I fear God*; as if he had said, “You may assure yourselves I will do you no wrong; I dare not, for I know that, high as I am, there is one higher than I.” Note, With those that fear

God we have reason to expect fair dealing. The fear of God will be a check upon those that are in power, to restrain them from abusing their power to oppression and tyranny. Those that have no one else to stand in awe of ought to stand in awe of their own consciences. See ^{<K65>}Nehemiah 5:15, *So did not I, because of the fear of God.*

~~<K2>~~ GENESIS 42:21-28

REFLECTIONS OF JOSEPH'S BRETHREN

Here is,

I. The penitent reflection Joseph's brethren made upon the wrong they had formerly done to him, v. 21. They talked the matter over in the Hebrew tongue, not suspecting that Joseph, whom they took for a native of Egypt, understood them, much less that he was the person they spoke of.

1. They remembered with regret the barbarous cruelty wherewith they persecuted him: *We are verily guilty concerning our brother.* We do not read that they said this during their three days' imprisonment; but now, when the matter had come to some issue and they saw themselves still embarrassed, now they began to relent. Perhaps Joseph's mention of *the fear of God* (v. 18) put them upon consideration and extorted this reflection. Now see here,

(1.) The office of conscience; it is a remembrancer, to bring to mind things long since said and done, to show us wherein we have erred, though it was long ago, as the reflection here mentioned was above twenty years after the sin was committed. As time will not wear out the guilt of sin, so it will not blot out the records of conscience; when the guilt of this sin of Joseph's brethren was fresh they made light of it, and sat down to eat bread; but now, long afterwards, their consciences reminded them of it.

(2.) The benefit of affliction; they often prove the happy and effectual means of awakening conscience, and bringing sin to our remembrance, ^{<K65>}Job 13:26.

(3.) The evil of guilt concerning our brethren; of all their sins, it was this that conscience now reproached them for. Whenever we think we have

wrong done us, we ought to remember the wrong we have done to others,
^{<702>}Ecclesiastes 7:21, 22.

2. Reuben alone remembered, with comfort, that he had been an advocate for his brother, and had done what he could to prevent the mischief they did him (v. 22): *Spoke I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child?*
Note,

(1.) It is an aggravation of any sin that it was committed against admonitions.

(2.) When we come to share with others in their calamities, it will be a comfort to us if we have the testimony of our consciences for us that we did not share with them in their iniquities, but, in our places, witnessed against them. This shall be our rejoicing in the day of evil, and shall take out the sting.

II. Joseph's tenderness towards them upon this occasion. He retired from them to weep, v. 24. Though his reason directed that he should still carry himself as a stranger to them, because they were not as yet humbled enough, yet natural affection could not but work, for he was a man of a tender spirit. This represents the tender mercies of our God towards repenting sinners. See ^{<803>}Jeremiah 31:20, *Since I spoke against him I do earnestly remember him still.* See ^{<706>}Judges 10:16.

III. The imprisonment of Simeon, v. 24. He chose him for the hostage probably because he remembered him to have been his most bitter enemy, or because he observed him now to be least humbled and concerned; he bound him *before their eyes* to affect them all; or perhaps it is intimated that, though he bound him with some severity before them, yet afterwards, when they were gone, he took off his bonds.

IV. The dismissal of the rest of them. They came for corn, and corn they had; and not only so, but every man had his money restored in his sack's mouth. Thus Christ, our Joseph, gives out supplies without money and without price. Therefore the poor are invited to buy, ^{<807>}Revelation 3:17, 18. This put them into great consternation (v. 28): *Their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done to us?*

1. It was really a merciful event; for I hope they had no wrong done to them when they had their money given them back, but a kindness; yet they were thus terrified by it. Note,

(1.) Guilty consciences are apt to take good providences in a bad sense, and to put wrong constructions even upon those things that make for them. They flee when none pursues.

(2.) Wealth sometimes brings as much care along with it as want does, and more too. If they had been robbed of their money, they could not have been worse frightened than they were now when they found their money in their sacks. Thus he whose ground brought forth plentifully said, *What shall I do?* ^{<427>}Luke 12:17.

2. Yet in their circumstances it was very amazing. They knew that the Egyptians abhorred a Hebrew (ch 43:32), and therefore, since they could not expect to receive any kindness from them, they concluded that this was done with a design to pick a quarrel with them, and the rather because the man, the lord of the land, had charged them as spies. Their own consciences also were awake, and their sins set in order before them; and this put them into confusion. Note,

(1.) When men's spirits are sinking every thing helps to sink them.

(2.) When the events of Providence concerning us are surprising it is good to enquire what it is that God has done and is doing with us, and to consider the operation of his hands.

^{<429>}GENESIS 42:29-38

THE REPORT MADE TO JACOB

Here is,

1. The report which Jacob's sons made to their father of the great distress they had been in in Egypt; how they had been suspected, and threatened, and obliged to leave Simeon a prisoner there, till they should bring Benjamin with them thither. Who would have thought of this when they left home? When we go abroad we should consider how many sad accidents, that we little think of, may befall us before we return home. *We*

know not what a day may bring forth; we ought therefore to be always ready for the worst.

2. The deep impression this made upon the good man. The very bundles of money which Joseph returned, in kindness to his father, frightened him (v. 35); for he concluded it was done with some mischievous design, or perhaps suspected his own sons to have committed some offence, and so to have run themselves into a *praemunire* — a penalty, which is intimated in what he says (v. 36): *Me have you bereaved*. He seems to lay the fault upon them; knowing their characters, he feared they had provoked the Egyptians, and perhaps forcibly, or fraudulently, brought home their money. Jacob is here much out of temper.

(1.) He has very melancholy apprehensions concerning the present state of his family: *Joseph is not, and Simeon is not*; whereas Joseph was in honour and Simeon in the way to it. Note, We often perplex ourselves with our own mistakes, even in matters of fact. True griefs may arise from false intelligence and suppositions, ¹¹³2 Samuel 13:31. Jacob gives up Joseph for gone, and Simeon and Benjamin as being in danger; and he concludes, *All these things are against me*. It proved otherwise, that all these were for him, were working together for his good and the good of his family: yet here he thinks them all against him. Note, Through our ignorance and mistake, and the weakness of our faith, we often apprehend that to be against us which is really for us. We are afflicted in body, estate, name, and relations; and we think all these things are against us, whereas these are really working for us the weight of glory.

(2.) He is at present resolved that Benjamin shall not go down. Reuben will undertake to bring him back in safety (v. 37), not so much as putting in, *If the Lord will*, nor expecting the common disasters of travellers; but he foolishly bids Jacob slay his two sons (which, it is likely, he was very proud of) if he brought him not back; as if the death of two grandsons could satisfy Jacob for the death of a son. No, Jacob's present thoughts are, *My son shall not go down with you*. He plainly intimates a distrust of them, remembering that he never saw Joseph since he had been with them; therefore, “Benjamin shall not go with you, by the way in which you go, for *you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave*.” Note, It is bad with a family when children conduct themselves so ill that their parents know not how to trust them.