

The Use of Power – Joseph Tests his Brothers

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I. The first visit of the brothers to Egypt

- A. The pressure of global famine: a 'natural' catastrophe?
- B. A life or death choice for Jacob: he sends his sons to Egypt but refuses to allow Benjamin to go with them.
- C. Joseph sees his dream come true – his brothers bow the first time.
- D. The complex issues facing Joseph:
 - 1. He accuses his brothers of spying: are they "honest men"?
 - 2. Joseph determines: "that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you... that your words might be verified" (42.16, 20).
- E. Joseph commands they bring Benjamin next time.
- F. The pressure of conscience and the beginning of repentance: "In truth we are guilty..." (42.21).
 - 1. Reuben: "Surely we are being punished because of our brother... so now there comes a reckoning for blood".
- G. Joseph's weeping and its significance: the dimensions of forgiveness.
- H. Joseph takes Simeon as prisoner and sends the others home.

- I. On the journey, they find their money returned in their sacks. The recognition that God is involved: “What is this that God has done to us” 42.28
- J. Jacob’s reaction: “You have deprived me of my children” 42.36.
- K. Reuben’s irrational offer: “Kill my two sons if...”.

II. The second visit of the brothers to Egypt.

- A. Jacob resists Benjamin going.
 - 1. Judah’s plea: “I will be a pledge for the boy... If I do not bring him back I shall bear the blame for ever”.
- B. A meal with Joseph.
 - 1. The brothers bow for the second time
 - 2. Joseph weeps when he sees Benjamin
 - 3. The seating arrangement according to age
 - 4. Favouritism shown to Benjamin?
- C. Joseph now commands that the grain payment be returned in the brothers’ sacks and his special silver cup placed in Benjamin’s sack.
 - 1. The discovery of the silver cup.
 - 2. The decision that faced the brothers – they choose to return to the city.
- D. Facing the judgment of Joseph.
 - 1. The brothers bow the third time.
 - 2. Judah’s plea: he begs to be allowed to take Benjamin’s place as Joseph’s slave so that Benjamin can go back to his father.
- E. The climax:

1. Joseph, weeping, reveals his identity to his repentant brothers and they are reconciled. “Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. For God sent me before you to preserve life”.
2. “After that his brothers talked with him”
3. Jacob learns Joseph is alive and “his heart became numb because he did not believe them”.

III. Israel comes to Egypt.

- A. The meeting of Jacob with Joseph.
- B. Arrangements with Pharaoh for family accommodation and work in Egypt.
- C. Jacob meets Pharaoh: “Few and evil have been the days of my life”.
- D. Jacob prepares for death. Jacob blesses Joseph’s sons and his own sons; he dies and is buried in Abraham’s tomb in Canaan.

IV. Complete forgiveness?

- A. The lingering doubt about Joseph’s attitude now that Jacob was dead: “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back.” A double plea for forgiveness from Jacob?
- B. Joseph’s final tears and the brothers’ final bow.

“Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good that many people be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones. Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” 50.19-21

V. The final expression of Joseph’s faith:

“God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here”.

VI. There is more to come:

“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeing a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city.” Hebrews 11.13-16.

Questions

1. Why did Joseph not reveal himself to them at once when their conscience started to accuse them?
2. Do you think that Jacob knew deep down what had happened?
3. What does Judah's argument to Jacob (about why Benjamin should be allowed to go to Egypt) reveal about Judah?
4. Why did Joseph not reveal himself to the brothers immediately when he saw Benjamin? What is the significance of his weeping?
5. What issue did Joseph force his brothers to consider by putting his cup in Benjamin's sack?
6. What did Judah say in his plea to Joseph that triggered Joseph's self-disclosure?
7. What does this story teach us about the nature of repentance and its relationship to forgiveness?