

## BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

### “The Testing Of Hearts - II”

Genesis 43:1-34

2003

#### Introduction

Ps 105:16 informs us that God himself called this particular famine down on the land of Egypt in the days of Joseph. In fact, the scripture repeatedly tells us that God not only uses trials and adversity in our lives – He often is the source of them.

The question is, “For what purpose?”

1. To turn us away from sin and back to God - Amos 4:6-8
2. To strengthen our character – Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4
3. To test and refine our faith - Isa 48:10; 1 Pet 1:6-7

“Adversity is like a knife: It either serves us or cuts us depending on whether we grab it by the handle or by the blade.”

#### I The Famine Persisted

- A. Jacob **ordered** his sons to get more food from Egypt [Verse 1-2]

Jacob delays taking action in sending his sons back to Egypt. They wanted to go, but they were prohibited by Jacob, who refused to let Benjamin leave his side (42:38). Not until their grain had virtually run out did Jacob face reality.

The sad truth is that if Jacob had gotten his way, he never would have been reunited with Joseph, his entire family would have died of starvation.

#### **Application:** Unanswered prayer

Undoubtedly, Jacob had repeatedly pled with God for relief from the famine. I imagine that Jacob may have even been angry and bitter towards God for not answering his prayers. But God knew what He was doing, and had something much better for Jacob than he could ever imagine.

Eph 3:20 “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine ...”

- B. Judah reminded Jacob of Joseph’s conditions [Verse 3-5]

1. We can not return without Benjamin

“You will not see my face unless your brother is with you.”

Gen 42:15, 20 “And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here ... But you

must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.”

C. Jacob **grumbled** against his sons [Verse 6-7]

“Why did you bring this trouble on me?”

“Why did you tell the man you had another brother?”

Jacob’s blaming attitude gives us insight into the fact that Jacob is no spiritual giant.

His response in crisis certainly isn’t an example of great spiritual leadership! His lack of leadership produced a vacuum that was going to be filled by his sons.

Jacob’s sons’ response:

1. They simply answered Joseph’s questions
2. How were they to know?

The information they gave to Joseph was in response to his very direct questioning. By complaining to his sons, Jacob was rebuking them for telling the truth – and this coming from a man whose nickname was “the deceiver.”

D. Judah guaranteed Benjamin’s return [Verse 8-10]

While Rueben had earlier offered his two sons as collateral for Benjamin (Gen 42:37), Judah offers himself if he fails to return Benjamin to his father.

This is the first good thing we find Judah doing in Genesis so far. Up until now, he was like his father, -- completely self-centered and self-absorbed:

1. It was Judah who had separated himself from his family to live with the Canaanites (Gen 38).
2. It was Judah who hung around with an ungodly man named Hirah (Gen 38)
3. It was Judah who was sexually immoral and slept with prostitutes
4. It was Judah who had sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, Tamar
5. It was Judah who proposed the sale of Joseph to the Midianites

But now, in Genesis 43, he appears to be a different man! He has changed!

He urged his father to stop thinking of himself and to act in the best interest of the entire family. While Jacob spoke only of “I,” “me,” and “my,” Judah thought in terms of “we,” “us,” and “our” (contrast 42:36,38 with 43:8).

He rebuked Jacob: “If you had not delayed us, we could have gone and returned twice!”

**Application:** Jesus Christ has become our guarantee

Mark 10:45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

“Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant (Heb 7:22).”

How did He do it? By laying his life down for his brothers (John 15:13).

## II Jacob Surrendered

The combination of the severe famine, the depletion of their food reserves, the threat of the brothers not to return to Egypt without Benjamin, and the assurances of Judah —finally convinced Jacob to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt.

A. He sent them with products from the land of Canaan [Verse 11]

1. Balm, honey, spices and nuts

Jacob's love language must have been gift-giving, because every time he is in a fix, he heads to Longs Drugs with a shopping list!

Prov 21:14 "A gift given in secret soothes anger, and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath."

You may recall that he employed the same tactics when he was preparing to meet his brother Esau (Gen 33:10-16). But Jacob's gift-giving wasn't motivated by love or friendship. For Jacob it was simply a tool of diplomacy intended to soften the heart of the Egyptian leader.

B. He sent them with **double** the silver [Verse 12]

### Application:

Rom 13:8 "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."

Acts 24:16 "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."

C. He sent them with Benjamin [Verse 13]

D. He sent them with God's **blessing** [Verse 14]

1. He **appealed** to God's mercy

**Notice:** This isn't a prayer. It is more like a last resort when it should have been his first line of defense.

### Application:

Prayer and dependence on God should always be our first response to trouble and uncertainty in life. But it doesn't come naturally! It is a learned behavior that becomes a lifestyle by virtue of habitual practice.

Jer 17:5-8 "This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose

confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

2. He was pessimistic and fatalistic

“If I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”

**Bereaved** = Shakol = “To miscarry or to lose a child”

Est 4:16 “... if I perish, I perish.””

These aren't the words of a man of faith! They are the words of fatalism and despair.

### III Jacob's Sons Obeyed

A. They hurried down to Egypt [Verse 15a]

B. They **presented** themselves to Joseph [Verse 15b-17]

1. He had them taken to his house

2. He had an animal slaughtered for them

3. He invited them to a feast

#### Application:

This parallels the reception of the prodigal son in the Luke 15:11-32.

C. They were **frightened** [Verse 18]

**Frightened** = Yare' = “To be in dread”

In their fear they conclude that this Egyptian leader intends to do them harm.

1. “He wants to attack and overpower us”

2. “He wants to seize us as slaves”

3. “He wants to take our donkeys”

D. They **confessed** to Joseph's steward [Verse 19-25]

Finally!! The thick wall of sin's resistance is beginning to crumble!

I'm sure that this step of confession was very difficult and frightening for Joseph's brothers. But they knew that they had little choice but to confess if they wanted to remain free men rather than slaves.

#### Application:

Prov 28:13 “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

1. He comforted them

a. “Peace! Don't be afraid”

b. “Your God has given you treasure”

**Treasure** = Matmown = “A secret storehouse or hidden riches”

The steward had received their money. He just didn't tell them that he was also the one who also returned it. – as instructed by Joseph.

2. He brought Simeon out

This act was further proof that Joseph intended them good, not evil.

Gen 42:24 “He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.”

3. He took them into Joseph's house

He gave them water for their feet

He provided fodder for the donkeys

The brothers were expecting to be taken as slaves and have everything stolen, but instead, Joseph's servant treats the brothers with kindness and respect.

E. They prepared their gifts for Joseph [Verse 26]

1. They presented him with gifts

Jacob had hoped that the nuts and gifts would appease Joseph. But the truth was, Joseph didn't care about pistachio nuts and honey, he cared about people! He cared about his brother Benjamin, his father Jacob, and his brothers. From my reading of the text, Joseph didn't even acknowledge these gifts.

**Application:**

The brothers' attempt to win Joseph's favor with nuts and honey is a lot like our futile attempts to appease God. We try to make up for our sins, but ...

1. We don't realize how grievous our sin actually is.

2. We don't realize who we're dealing with.

3. We mistakenly think that we can reverse our sinful status before God with a bag of pistachio nuts (good works).

Eph 2:8-9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast.

2. They **bowed down** before him

**Bowed down** = Shachah = “To prostrate one's self in homage”

In fulfillment of Joseph's dreams 20 years earlier (Gen 37:5-11).

Gen 37:19-20 tells us that Joseph's brothers were adamant – they would never prostrate themselves before the likes of Joseph! Not in a million years!

**Application:**

People who adamantly refuse to bow the knee to Jesus Christ will one day find themselves prostrate before the Son of God.

Phil 2:9-11 “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

#### IV Joseph Blessed His Brothers

A. He **questioned** them about their father [Verse 27-28]

1. They bowed low to pay him honor

This is the third mention of the brothers bowing down before Joseph. This is a powerful example of God’s sovereignty over human intention and will.

B. He acknowledged his brother, Benjamin [Verse 29-30]

1. He pronounced a **blessing** on him

2. He was deeply moved and **wept** over him

Why does the text tell us about Joseph’s weeping?

Simply because God wanted us to know Joseph’s true motivation for the tests and hardships he imposed on his brothers.

He was motivated, not by vengeance, but by love!

#### **Illustration:** Jesus weeping over Jerusalem

Luke 19:41-44 “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

C. He ordered the meal served [Verse 31-33]

1. He ate separately from his brothers

Why did Joseph eat separately from his brothers?

Because at the time, Egypt was one of the most racist nations on earth. The Egyptians believed that they had come from the gods, and that all other peoples were inferior. As a result, there was absolutely no social mixing or intermarriage with foreigners in the Egypt of Joseph’s day.

Even Joseph, though second in command to Pharaoh himself, was not permitted to eat with Egyptians because of his Jewish ancestry.

#### **Insight:** Hidden in this text is the wisdom of God!

God will eventually bring Jacob’s entire family into Egypt where they will be isolated from the surrounding nations for 400 years. During that time they will multiply into several million people.

Now if God had allowed them to remain in Canaan, they would have intermarried with the Canaanites and become ethically, morally and spiritually corrupt. So by placing them in Egypt, God was providing them with built-in accountability and protection from spiritual adultery.

2. He had them seated in **chronological** order [Verse 34a]

a. They were astonished

Why should Joseph's brothers be "astonished" when they were seated in chronological by a host who (presumably) was entirely ignorant of their birth order? The reason *why* they were astonished was because the chance factor of a stranger seating them in exact birth order was approximately 1 in 40 million. They immediately knew this was more than coincidence!

**Application:**

It reminds me of the chance probability factor of one man fulfilling just eight Messianic prophecies. Using the law of compound probabilities, it has been estimated that the chances were 10 to the 17<sup>th</sup> power (10 followed by 17 zeros).

God used these astronomical odds to provide convincing evidence that Jesus Christ is the Son of God – the promised deliverer!

3. He gave Benjamin a greater portion of food [Verse 34b]

Why does Benjamin get a portion five times greater?

1. Joseph wanted to bless his brother Benjamin – his only full brother

2. Joseph wanted to test the hearts of his half-brothers:

a. Would they react with jealousy and hatred as they had with Joseph when Jacob favored him so many years earlier?

b. Had they really changed?

Yes! But the transformation was not yet complete.

a. They **feasted** and drank freely with him

The best that these men were hoping for was the release of Simeon, the safe return of Benjamin and to return to Canaan with a supply of grain.

Instead, they were brought into Joseph's own home, cared for, and given a meal fit for a king.

Next week, we'll discover that these small blessings were just the beginning of the good things God had planned for their lives!

1 Cor 2:9 "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

**Conclusion**

What can we learn from this Genesis chapter 43?

1. God can use adversity to move us geographically

Acts 17:26-27 “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”

2. God can use adversity to change us morally

Consider Joseph’s brothers:

- a. The same brothers who once callously ignored the cries of Joseph now have expressed regret and remorse for what they did to their brother.
- b. The same brothers who lied to their father about Joseph’s death and broke his heart are now doing everything they can to reassure Jacob and protect him.
- c. The same brothers who used to act with deception and treachery are now seeking to act honorably in returning money that they knew wasn’t theirs.
- d. The same brothers who hated the children of Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin) are now promising to protect Benjamin with their life.
- e. The same brothers who had once abandoned Joseph now returned to rescue their brother, Simeon.

3. God can use adversity to transform us spiritually

God has no intention of leaving us in the condition he found us. He wants change us for the better. Paul tells us in Rom 8:29-30 that God’s plan is to conform us to the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ!

But no change is painless! It hurts! Sometimes we end up grabbing the knife by the blade instead of by the handle.

But we also have confidence in His promise in Jer 29:11 when God said, “ know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Because of this, we can confidently say with James, “[We] consider it pure joy whenever [we] face trials of many kinds, because [we] know that the testing of [our] faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that [we] may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4

James 1:12 “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”

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