
GENESIS 42:1 Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?"

Jacob sends his ten sons to Egypt to buy corn, Gen 42:1-3; but refuses to permit Benjamin to go, Gen 42:4. They arrive in Egypt, and bow themselves before Joseph, Gen 42:5, Gen 42:6. He treats them roughly and calls them spies, Gen 42:7-10. They defend themselves and give an account of their family, Gen 42:11-13. He appears unmoved, and puts them all in prison for three days, Gen 42:14-17. On the third day he releases them on condition of their bringing Benjamin, Gen 42:18-20. Being convicted by their consciences, they reproach themselves with their cruelty to their brother Joseph, and consider themselves under the displeasure of God, Gen 42:21-23. Joseph is greatly affected, detains Simeon as a pledge for Benjamin, orders their sacks to be filled with corn, and the purchase money to be put in each man's sack, Gen 42:24, Gen 42:25. When one of them is going to give his ass provender he discovers his money in the mouth of his sack, at which they are greatly alarmed, Gen 42:26-28. They come to their father in Canaan, and relate what happened to them in their journey, Gen 42:29-34. On emptying their sacks, each man's money is found in his sack's mouth, which causes alarm both to them and their father, Gen 42:35. Jacob deplores the loss of Joseph and Simeon, and refuses to let Benjamin go, though Reuben offers his two sons as pledges for his safety, Gen 42:36-38.

Verse 1

Jacob saw that there was corn - That is, Jacob heard from the report of others that there was plenty in Egypt. The operations of one sense, in Hebrew, are often put for those of another. Before agriculture was properly known and practiced, famines were frequent; Canaan seems to have been peculiarly vexed by them. There was one in this land in the time of Abraham, Gen 12:10; another in the days of Isaac, Gen 26:1; and now a third in the time of Jacob. To this St. Stephen alludes, Act 7:11 : there was great affliction, and our fathers found no sustenance.

GENESIS 42:2 He said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there, and buy for us from there, so that we may live, and not die."

GENESIS 42:3 Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt.

GENESIS 42:4 But Jacob didn't send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers; for he said, "Lest perhaps harm happen to him."

GENESIS 42:5 The sons of Israel came to buy among those who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

GENESIS 42:6 Joseph was the governor over the land. It was he who sold to all the people of the land. Joseph's brothers came, and bowed themselves down to him with their faces to the earth.

Verse 6

Joseph was the governor - שלִיט shallit, an intendant, a protector, from שָׁלַט skalat, to be over as a protector; hence שְׁלֵטִים shelatim, shields, or arms for protection and defense, 2Sam 8:7; and שְׁלוֹטוֹן

shilton, power and authority, Ecc 8:4, Ecc 8:8; and hence the Arabic sultan, a lord, prince, or king, from salata, he obtained and exercised dominion, he ruled. Was it not from this very circumstance, Joseph being shallit, that all the Mohammedan governors of Egypt, etc., took the title of sultan? Bowed down themselves before him - Thus fulfilling the prophetic dream, Gen 37:7, Gen 37:8, which they had taken every precaution to render null and void. But there is neither might nor counsel against the Lord.

GENESIS 42:7 Joseph saw his brothers, and he recognised them, but acted like a stranger to them, and spoke roughly with them. He said to them, "Where did you come from?"

They said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food."

GENESIS 42:8 Joseph recognised his brothers, but they didn't recognise him.

GENESIS 42:9 Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed about them, and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land."

Verse 9

Ye are spies - מרגלים meraggelim attem, ye are footmen, trampers about, footpads, vagabonds, lying in wait for the property of others; persons who, under the pretense of wishing to buy corn, desire only to find out whether the land be so defenceless that the tribes to which ye belong (see Gen 42:11) may attack it successfully, drive out the inhabitants, and settle in it themselves; or, having plundered it, retire to their deserts. This is a frequent custom among the Arabs to the present day. Thus Joseph spake roughly to them merely to cover that warmth of affection which he felt towards them; and that being thus brought, apparently, into straits and dangerous circumstances, their consciences might be awakened to reflect on and abhor their own wickedness.

GENESIS 42:10 They said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food.

GENESIS 42:11 We are all one man's sons; we are honest men. Your servants are not spies."

Verse 11

We are all one man's sons - We do not belong to different tribes, and it is not likely that one family would make a hostile attempt upon a whole kingdom. This seems to be the very ground that Joseph took, viz., that they were persons belonging to different tribes. Against this particularly they set up their defense, asserting that they all belonged to one family; and it is on the proof of this that Joseph puts them, Gen 42:15, in obliging them to leave one as a hostage, and insisting on their bringing their remaining brother; so that he took exactly the same precautions to detect them as if he had had no acquaintance with them, and had every reason to be suspicious.

GENESIS 42:12 He said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land!"

GENESIS 42:13 They said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more."

Verse 13

One is not - An elliptical sentence, One is not alive.

GENESIS 42:14 Joseph said to them, "It is like I told you, saying, 'You are spies!'

GENESIS 42:15 By this you shall be tested. By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go out from here, unless your youngest brother comes here.

Verse 15

By the life of Pharaoh - *פרעה חי* chey Pharaoh, Pharaoh liveth. As if he had said, As surely as the king of Egypt lives, so surely shall ye not go hence unless your brother come hither. Here therefore is no oath; it is just what they themselves make it in their report to their father, Gen 43:3 : the man did solemnly protest unto us; and our translators should not have put it in the form of an oath, especially as the original not only will bear another version, but is absolutely repugnant to this in our sense of the word.

GENESIS 42:16 Send one of you, and let him get your brother, and you shall be bound, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you, or else by the life of Pharaoh surely you are spies."

GENESIS 42:17 He put them all together into custody for three days.

GENESIS 42:18 Joseph said to them the third day, "Do this, and live, for I fear God.

Verse 18

I fear God - *את האלהים אני ירא* eth haelohim ani yare, literally translated the passage runs thus, I also fear the gods; but the emphatic *ה* ha is probably added by Joseph, both here and in his conversation with Pharaoh, the more particularly to point out the eminence and perfection of the Supreme Being as contradistinguished from the gods of Egypt. He seems to say to his brethren, I am a worshipper of the true God, and ye have nothing to fear.

GENESIS 42:19 If you are honest men, then let one of your brothers be bound in your prison; but you go, carry grain for the famine of your houses.

GENESIS 42:20 Bring your youngest brother to me; so will your words be verified, and you won't die." They did so.

GENESIS 42:21 They said one to another, "We are certainly guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us, and we wouldn't listen. Therefore this distress has come upon us."

Verse 21

We are verily guilty - How finely are the office and influence of conscience exemplified in these words! It was about twenty-two years since they had sold their brother, and probably their conscience had been lulled asleep to the present hour. God combines and brings about those favorable circumstances which produce attention and reflection, and give weight to the expostulations of conscience. How necessary to hear its voice in time, for here it may be the instrument of salvation; but if not heard in this world, it must be heard in the next; and there, in association with the unquenchable fire, it will be the never-dying worm. Reader, has not thy sin as yet found thee out? Pray to God to take away the veil from thy heart, and give thee that deep sense of guilt which shall oblige thee to flee for refuge to the hope which is set before thee in the Gospel of Christ.

GENESIS 42:22 Reuben answered them, saying, "Didn't I tell you, saying, 'Don't sin against the child,' and you wouldn't listen? Therefore also, behold, his blood is required."

GENESIS 42:23 They didn't know that Joseph understood them; for there was an interpreter between them.

Verse 23

For he spake unto them by an interpreter - Either there was a very great difference between the two languages as then spoken, or Joseph, to prevent all suspicion, might affect to be ignorant of both. We have many evidences in this book that the Egyptians, Hebrews, Canaanites, and Syrians, could understand each other in a general way, though there are also proofs that there was a considerable difference between their dialects.

GENESIS 42:24 He turned himself away from them, and wept. Then he returned to them, and spoke to them, and took Simeon from among them, and bound him before their eyes.

Verse 24

Took - Simeon and bound him before their eyes - This was retaliation, if, as the rabbins suppose, it was Simeon who bound Joseph, and put him into the pit. A recollection of this circumstance must exceedingly deepen the sense he had of his guilt.

GENESIS 42:25 Then Joseph gave a command to fill their bags with grain, and to restore each man's money into his sack, and to give them food for the way. So it was done to them.

Verse 25

Commanded to fill their sacks - כליהם keleyhem, their vessels; probably large woolen bags, or baskets lined with leather, which, as Sir John Chardin says, are still in use through all Asia, and are called tambellet; they are covered with leather, the better to resist the wet, and to prevent dirt and sand from mixing with the grain. These vessels, of whatever sort, must have been different from those called שק sak in the twenty-seventh and following verses, which was probably only a small sack or bag, in which each had reserved a sufficiency of corn for his ass during the journey; the larger vessels or bags serving to hold the wheat or rice they had brought, and their own packages. The reader will at once see that the English word sack is plainly derived from the Hebrew.

GENESIS 42:26 They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed from there.

Verse 26

They laded their asses - Amounting, no doubt, to several scores, if not hundreds, else they could not have brought a sufficiency of corn for the support of so large a family as that of Jacob.

GENESIS 42:27 As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey food in the lodging place, he saw his money. Behold, it was in the mouth of his sack.

Verse 27

One of them opened his sack - From Gen 42:35 we learn that each of the ten brethren on emptying his sack when he returned found his money in it; can we suppose that this was not discovered by them all before? It seems not; and the reason was probably this: the money was put in the mouth of the sack of one only, in the sacks of the others it was placed at or near to the bottom; hence only one discovered it on the road, the rest found it when they came to empty their sacks at their father's house.

In the inn - במלון bammalon, from לן lan, to lodge, stay, remain, etc. The place at which they stopped to bait or rest themselves and their asses. Our word inn gives us a false idea here; there were no such places of entertainment at that time in the desert over which they had to pass, nor are there any to the present day. Travellers generally endeavor to reach a well, where they fill their girbahs, or leather bottles, with fresh water, and having clogged their camels, asses, etc., permit them to crop any little verdure there may be in the place, keeping watch over them by turns. This is all we are to understand by the malon or inn in the text, for even caravansaries were not then in use, which are generally no more than four walls perfectly exposed, the place being open at the top.

GENESIS 42:28 He said to his brothers, "My money is restored! Behold, it is in my sack!" Their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling one to another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

Verse 28

Their heart failed them - ויצא לבם valyetse libbam, their heart went out. This refers to that spasmodic affection which is felt in the breast at any sudden alarm or fright. Among the common people in our own country we find an expression exactly similar, "My heart was ready to leap out at my mouth," used on similar occasions.

What is this that God hath done unto us? - Their guilty consciences, now thoroughly awakened, were in continual alarms; they felt that they deserved God's curse, and every occurrence served to confirm and increase their suspicions.

GENESIS 42:29 They came to Jacob their father, to the land of Canaan, and told him all that had happened to them, saying,

GENESIS 42:30 "The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly with us, and took us for spies of the country.

GENESIS 42:31 We said to him, 'We are honest men. We are no spies.

GENESIS 42:32 We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.'

GENESIS 42:33 The man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your houses, and go your way.

GENESIS 42:34 Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I will know that you are not spies, but that you are honest men. So I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.'"

GENESIS 42:35 As they emptied their sacks, behold, each man's bundle of money was in his sack. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid.

Verse 35

As they emptied their sacks - See Clarke on Gen 42:27 (note).

GENESIS 42:36 Jacob, their father, said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children! Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin away. All these things are against me."

Verse 36

All these things are against me - עליו היו כלנה alai hayu cullanah; literally, All these things are upon me. Not badly translated by the Vulgate, In me haec omnia mala reciderunt, "All these evils fall back upon me." They lie upon me as heavy loads, hastening my death; they are more than I can bear.

GENESIS 42:37 Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons, if I don't bring him to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him to you again."

Verse 37

Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee - What a strange proposal made by a son to his father, concerning his grandchildren! But they show the honesty and affection of Reuben's heart; he felt deeply for his father's distress, and was determined to risk and hazard every thing in order to relieve and comfort him. There is scarcely a transaction in which Reuben is concerned that does not serve to set his character in an amiable point of view, except the single instance mentioned Gen 35:22 (note), and which for the sake of decency and piety we should wish to understand as the Targumists have explained it. See the notes.

GENESIS 42:38 He said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he only is left. If harm happens to him along the way in which you go, then you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

Verse 38

He is left alone - That is, Benjamin is the only remaining son of Rachel; for he supposed Joseph, who was the other son, to be dead.

Shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow - Here he keeps up the idea of the oppressive burden mentioned Gen 42:36, to which every occurrence was adding an additional weight, so that he felt it impossible to support it any longer.

The following observations of Dr. Dodd on this verse are very appropriate and judicious: "Nothing can be more tender and picturesque than the words of the venerable patriarch. Full of affection for his beloved Rachel, he cannot think of parting with Benjamin, the only remaining pledge of that love, now Joseph, as he supposes, is no more. We seem to behold the gray-headed, venerable father pleading with his sons, the beloved Benjamin standing by his side, impatient sorrow in their countenances, and in his all the bleeding anxiety of paternal love. It will be difficult to find in any author, ancient or modern, a more exquisite picture."

1. There is one doctrine relative to the economy of Divine Providence little heeded among men; I mean the doctrine of restitution. When a man has done wrong to his neighbor, though, on his repentance, and faith in our Lord Jesus, God forgives him his sin, yet he requires him to make restitution to the person injured, if it lie in the compass of his power. If he do not, God will take care to exact it in the course of his providence. Such respect has he for the dictates of infinite justice that nothing of this kind shall pass unnoticed. Several instances of this have already occurred in this history, and we shall see several more. No man should expect mercy at the hand of God who, having wronged his neighbor, refuses, when he has it in his power, to make restitution. Were he to weep tears of blood, both the justice and mercy of God would shut out his prayer, if he made not his neighbor amends for the injury he may have done him. The mercy of God, through the blood of the cross, can alone pardon his guilt; but no dishonest man can expect this; and he is a dishonest man

who illegally holds the property of another in his hand. The unnatural brethren who sold their brother are now about to be captivated themselves; and the binder himself is bound in his turn: and though a kind Providence permits not the evil to fall upon them, yet, while apprehending it, they feel all its reality, conscience supplying the lack of prison, jailer, and bonds.

2. The ways of Providence are often to us dark and perplexed, so that we are ready to imagine that good can never result from what appears to us to be directly contrary to our interest; and we are often tempted to think that those very providential dealings of God, which have for their object our present and eternal welfare, are rather proofs of his displeasure, or evidences of his vindictive judgment. All these things are against me, said poor desponding Jacob; whereas, instead of being against him, all these things were for him; and by all these means was the merciful God working for the preservation of himself and his family, and the fulfillment of his ancient promise, that the posterity of Abraham should be as the stars of heaven for multitude. How strange is it that our faith, after so many evidences of his goodness, should still be so weak; and that our opinion of him should be so imperfect, that we can never trust in him but while he is under our own eye! If we see him producing good, we can believe that he is doing so, and this is all. If we believe not, he abides faithful; but our unbelief must make our own way extremely perplexing and difficult.