

CHAPTER 42

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 42

This chapter relates how that Jacob having heard there was corn in Egypt, sent all his sons but Benjamin thither to buy corn, (^{<0401>}Genesis 42:1-5); and coming before Joseph, they bowed to him, and he knowing them, though they knew not him, spoke roughly to them, and charged them with being spies, (^{<0406>}Genesis 42:6-9); they in their defence urged that they were the sons of one man in Canaan, with whom their youngest brother was left, on which Joseph ordered them to send for him, to prove them true men, (^{<0420>}Genesis 42:10-16); and put them all into prison for three days, and then released them, and sent them away to fetch their brother, (^{<0427>}Genesis 42:17-20); this brought to mind their treatment of Joseph, and they confessed their guilt to each other, which Joseph heard, and greatly affected him, they supposing he understood them not, and before he dismissed them bound Simeon before their eyes, whom he retained till they returned, (^{<0422>}Genesis 42:21-24); then he ordered his servants to fill their sacks with corn, and put each man's money in his sack, which one of them on the road found, opening his sack for provender, filled them all with great surprise and fear, (^{<0425>}Genesis 42:25-28); upon their return to Jacob they related all that had befallen them, and particularly that the governor insisted on having Benjamin brought to him, (^{<0429>}Genesis 42:29-34); their sacks being opened, all their money was found in them, which greatly distressed them and Jacob also, who was very unwilling to let Benjamin go, though Reuben offered his two sons as pledges for him, and himself to be a surety, (^{<0435>}Genesis 42:35-38).

Ver. 1. *Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt*, etc.] That is, to be sold there, or otherwise it being there, unless it could be bought, would have been of no avail to foreigners; wherefore the Septuagint version is, that there was a sale ^{f1745} there, a sale of corn; the word has the signification of "breaking" ^{f1746} in it, because that bread corn is broke in the mill, or is broken from the heap when sold or distributed, or because when eaten it breaks the fast. Now Jacob had either seen persons passing by with corn, of whom he inquired from whence they had it, who replied, from

Egypt; or he understood by the report of others that corn was to be bought there; though some of the Jewish writers would have it, as Jarchi observes, that he saw it by the revelation of the Holy Spirit:

Jacob said unto, his sons, why do ye look one upon another? like persons in surprise, distress and despair, at their wits' end, not knowing what to do, what course to take, and which way to turn themselves, and scarce able to speak to one another, and consult with each other what was proper to be done; for it seems not so agreeable that they should be charged as idle persons, careless and unconcerned, indifferent and inactive; but rather, if the other sense is not acceptable, the meaning may be, "why do ye look?"^{f1747} here and there, in the land of Canaan, where it is to no purpose to look for corn; look where it is to be had.

Ver. 2. *And he said, behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt,* etc.] This explains what is meant by the phrase he saw, one sense being put for another:

get ye down thither; as fast as you can without delay; Egypt lay lower than Canaan, and therefore they are bid to go down, as when they went from thence to Canaan they are said to go up, (^{Q14525}Genesis 45:25);

and buy for us from thence, that we may live, and not die; which shows the famine was very pressing, since, unless they could buy corn from Egypt they could not live, but must die.

Ver. 3. *And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.*] They obeyed their father's orders, and immediately set out for Egypt; "ten" of them went down in a body together, all but Benjamin, so that it is easily reckoned who they were, and they are called not Jacob's sons, as they were; but Joseph's brethren, whom they had sold into Egypt, and to whom now they were going, though they knew it not, to buy corn of him in their necessity, and to whom they would be obliged to yield obeisance, as they did.

Ver. 4. *But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren,* etc.] Benjamin is called Joseph's brother, because he was so both by father and mother's side, as the rest were not; him Jacob kept with him, being the youngest and his darling, the only son he had with him of his beloved wife Rachel; and was very probably the more beloved by him since he had been bereft of Joseph; and it was not only to keep him company that he retained him at home, but for the reason following:

for he said, lest peradventure mischief befall him; as had to Joseph his brother, as he imagined; either that the journey would be too much for him, being young, or lest he should be seized with sickness on the road, or rather with death, as Aben Ezra interprets it according to the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan.

Ver. 5. *And the sons of Israel came to buy [corn] among those that came,* etc.] Either among the Egyptians that came to buy, or among those who came from different countries, or rather particularly among the Canaanites, as the Targum of Jonathan; with these they might join upon the road, and go together in a body where the market for corn was:

for the famine was in the land of Canaan: which obliged the inhabitants of it as well as Jacob's family to seek for corn elsewhere, and confirms the sense of the preceding clause: this, though a very fruitful land, yet when God withheld a blessing from it, it became barren, as it had been before, (^{<0120>}Genesis 12:10 26:1), and was to try the faith of those good men to whom God had given it, and to wean their hearts from being set upon it, and to put them upon seeking a better country, as they did.

Ver. 6. *And Joseph [was] the governor over the land,* etc.] Not the land of Canaan last mentioned, but the land of Egypt; under Pharaoh, he had the chief and sole authority, and especially in the affair of the corn, and the disposal of that;

[and] he [it was] that sold to all the people of the land: of Egypt, and also to all that came out of other lands; not that he in person could do all this, but by those that acted under him:

and Joseph's brethren came; to Joseph to buy corn of him:

and bowed down themselves before him, [with] their faces to the earth; not only bowed the knee as the Egyptians did, but prostrated their whole bodies, stretching out their hands and feet, and touching the ground with their faces, as was the manner of the eastern countries, at least some of them; and so of Canaan; and thus did they submit themselves to him in the most humble manner, and thereby, though without their knowledge, fulfilled his dream of their sheaves making obeisance to his sheaf, (^{<0130>}Genesis 37:7).

Ver. 7. *And Joseph saw his brethren,* etc.] Among those that came to buy corn, and when they prostrated themselves before him:

and he knew them; some of them being at man's estate, and their beards grown when they sold him, and their habits and dress now being much the same it was then, and by them he knew the younger:

but made himself strange unto them; took no notice of them as his relations, but carried himself to them as he did to other foreigners, and yet more strangely:

and spake roughly unto them; or hard ^{f1748} things or words; put on a stern countenance, and spoke with a high tone and in a rough surly manner to them:

and he said unto them, whence come ye? who are ye? of what country are ye? what is your business here?

and they said, from the land of Canaan to buy food; which they could not get in Canaan, the famine being there so great.

Ver. 8. *And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.*] It being about twenty two years since they saw him, and then he was young, and his beard not grown, as now it was; and besides, he was clothed as a prince, and spoke the Egyptian language; and being in such great grandeur and splendour, and in such power and authority, and having such a retinue attending him, they never once thought of him, whom they supposed might be dead, having never heard of him all this time; or, however, it could not come into their minds, that he whom they sold for a slave could ever be governor of the land of Egypt.

Ver. 9. *And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them,* etc.] Their bowing and prostrating themselves before him brought to his remembrance his dreams of their sheaves making obeisance to his, and of the sun, moon, and eleven stars, doing the same to him, (⁽⁴⁰³⁰⁷⁾Genesis 37:7,9);

and said unto them, ye [are] spies; not believing they were, nor absolutely asserting that they were such; but this he said to try them, and what they would say for themselves, and in order to lead on to further discourse with them, and to get knowledge of his father and brother Benjamin, whether living or not: he dealt with them as a judge on the bench, when examining persons, whose charges have the nature of an interrogation, as this has: "ye [are] spies"; are ye not? surely ye must be, and unless you give a better account of yourselves, I must take you up as such:

to see the nakedness of the land ye are come: what parts of it are weakest, most defenceless, and less fortified, and most easy to break in at, and invade the land; and it was not without reason that the Egyptians might suspect the neighbouring nations round about them, being in distress, and hearing of corn in Egypt, of forming a design of coming upon them and taking away their corn by force, and might be the reason why foreigners that came to buy corn were brought before Joseph and examined by him.

Ver. 10. *And they said unto him, nay, my lord*, etc.] One in the name of the rest, or each in his turn, denying that they were spies, and addressing him with the greatest reverence and submission, calling him their lord, and thus further accomplishing his dreams:

but to buy food are thy servants come; that and no other was the errand they came upon.

Ver. 11. *We [are] all one man's sons*, etc.] Therefore not likely to be spies; it could hardly be thought that a single family should engage in such an affair; or that one man would, send his sons as spies, and especially all of them, it being a dangerous affair, and they being liable to be taken up and put to death; and as more families than one must be concerned in such an enterprise, it is reasonable to suppose, that if they had been spies they would have been of different families, and also not together, but in different parts of the kingdom, to observe the fittest place to enter in at and execute their design:

we [are] true [men]: that spoke truth when they said they came to buy corn; were honest, upright, and sincere in what they said, nor would they, nor durst they, tell a lie:

thy servants are no spies; this they expressed in the strongest terms, and with the fullest assurance they could, detesting the charge and character of being spies.

Ver. 12. *And he said unto them, nay*, etc.] This argument will not do, I am not to be put off with such words as these; if you can produce no better proof of your being honest men than this, or give no better account of yourselves, I must abide by it, that,

to see the nakedness of the land ye are come; this he urged in order to get a further account from them of their family and the state of it, which he was anxious to know.

Ver. 13. *And they said, thy servants [are] twelve brethren,* etc.] Or rather, “were twelve”, since one afterwards is said not to be:

the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; of Jacob, who dwelt there; this is said with the same view as before, to show the improbability of their being spies;

and, behold, the youngest [is] this day with our father: meaning Benjamin, whom Joseph was eager to hear of, and no doubt was glad to hear he was alive, and his father also, and that they were both together in the land of Canaan:

and one [is] not; is not in the land of the living, is dead; for so they thought Joseph was, who is the person intended, as appears from what both Reuben and Judah afterwards say, (^{f1422}Genesis 42:22 44:20); and yet he was before them, and was the person they were speaking to: this must be very striking and affecting to Joseph, who knew full well they meant himself.

Ver. 14. *And Joseph said unto them, that [is it] that I spake unto you, saying, ye [are] spies.*] This proves it, at least gives strong suspicion of it; since at first they seemed to speak of themselves, as if they were the only sons of one man and there were no more, now they speak of twelve, and make mention of one being at home with his father; but seeing he sent so many of them, why not all? why should one only be left at home?

Ver. 15. *Hereby ye shall be proved,* etc.] Whether spies, or not, namely, by producing their youngest brother, said to be at home with his father:

by the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither: the phrase, “by the life of Pharaoh”, seems to be the form of an oath, as it was common with many nations, especially with the Scythians, who used to swear by the royal throne ^{f1749}, and the Romans, in later times, by the life, health, and genius of their emperor; and this custom of swearing by the life of their king, or by his head, continued with the Egyptians, as Aben Ezra says, unto his times; though some take this to be a wish or prayer for the life of Pharaoh, and render it, “may Pharaoh live” ^{f1750}, or, at most, but a strong asseveration, that as dear as the life of Pharaoh was to him, so surely they should not stir from the place where they were, unless their youngest brother Benjamin was brought thither.

Ver. 16. *Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother,* etc.] He proposes that one of them might be sent by them to their father's house, and bring, Benjamin down to Egypt:

and ye shall be kept in prison; the rest of them till he came:

that your words may be proved, whether [there be any] truth in you; by this it would be seen whether they were men of truth and honesty or not; and should their brother be brought they would appear to be good men and true:

or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely ye [are] spies; should not their brother they spoke of be produced, it would be a plain case that they were not the honest men they pretended to be, nor did they come merely to buy corn, but had an ill intention.

Ver. 17. *And he put them all together into ward three days.*] In order to consult together, and agree who should be sent to fetch their brother; and which it seems probable in this length of time they could not agree upon, no one caring to be the bringer of such evil tidings to their father.

Ver. 18. *And Joseph said unto them the third day,* etc.] His heart yearning towards them, though he put on such an appearance; finding they could not come to an agreement among themselves who should go on the errand, he thought fit to recede from his former order, and to give them another:

this do, and live: meaning what he was about to say to them, which if they punctually observed and performed, it would be the means of saving their lives:

[for] I fear God; and therefore would not do either an unjust or cruel thing. This might have given them an him who he was: but there being among the Gentiles, in all nations, some few that feared God, they took no further notice of it than this, that they might expect just and equitable dealings by him; since, though he was in such an high place, he knew and owned there was one higher than he, to whom he was accountable.

Ver. 19. *If ye [be] true [men],* etc.] As you say you are:

let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison; agree among yourselves which of you (for one of you must) remain in prison where you are: and the rest being set at liberty,

go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses; Joseph, though he dealt with them after this manner to get what knowledge he could of his family, and to get sight of his brother, yet was concerned for the good of them and theirs, lest they should be in extreme want through the famine, and that they might have a speedy supply of corn, was not willing to detain them any longer.

Ver. 20. *But bring your youngest brother unto me*, etc.] Upon their return for more corn:

so shall your words be verified; that they were true men, and had no ill design upon the land, but were come only to buy corn:

and ye shall not die; as spies, which they were otherwise threatened with; and as it is customary in all nations to put such to death when found out:

and they did so; they left one of their brethren behind; they carried corn to their houses or families in Canaan, and brought their brother Benjamin with them when they returned to Egypt.

Ver. 21. *And they said one to another*, etc.] Before they went out of the prison, at least while in the presence of Joseph:

we [are] verily guilty concerning our brother; meaning Joseph, whom they had sold for a slave, and who they supposed was dead through grief and hard servitude; and now being in trouble themselves, it brings to mind the sin they had been guilty of, which, though committed twenty two years ago, was still fresh in their memories, and lay heavy on their consciences; for length of time neither makes sin less, nor the conscience lighter, when it is revived and charged home upon it, and which was aggravated particularly by the following circumstance:

in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; when in the utmost agony, with trembling limbs, and quivering lips, and floods of tears, as they stripped him of his coat, he most earnestly and importunately requested of them they would not put him into the pit, and leave him there; and in the same manner entreated them they would not put him into the hands of strangers, but restore him alive to his father; but they turned a deaf ear to all his cries and entreaties, and hardened themselves against him:

therefore is this distress come upon us; the same measure that was measured by them to him, was now measured to them again, and they were dealt with according to “lex talionis”: they cast Joseph into a pit, and now they were committed to a prison; they would not attend to his cries and tears, and the anguish of his soul did not move their pity, and now he is inexorable to them, and will not at least appear to have any compassion on them, or show pity to them; and perhaps their being dealt with in this similar way brought to their remembrance what they had done.

Ver. 22. *And Reuben answered them*, etc.] Being the eldest, and who had been most concerned for the life of Joseph, and most tender and careful of him:

saying, spake I not unto you, saying, do not sin against the child, and ye would not hear? it seems by this that Reuben endeavoured to dissuade his brethren from selling Joseph, when they first proposed it, to which they would not attend; since it is certain they did hearken to him as not to kill him directly, as they first consulted, and they hearkened to him to cast him into a pit, where he did not intend he should continue, but till he had an opportunity of taking him out, and returning him to his father: but it seems probable that Reuben was with them when they first spied the Ishmaelites, and proposed to sell Joseph to them, which he objected to, and entreated they would not do it; and perhaps he went out from them, and took a circuit, with a view to get to the pit and take Joseph out, but before he got thither his brethren had taken him out, and sold him: or this may refer to the general advice he always gave them, to do nothing that might endanger the life of Joseph, or be the means of his death, which selling him for a slave he supposed had been:

therefore, behold, also, his blood is required; the Targum of Jonathan adds, “of us”; they were accessory to his death, and guilty of it; for Reuben supposed he was dead, and now they must suffer for it, as a just retaliation, being threatened with death unless they could clear themselves.

Ver. 23. *And they knew not that Joseph understood [them]*, etc.] For what is above related they spoke in his presence and hearing; but speaking to one another in the Hebrew language, and he being an Egyptian, as they took him to be, they did not imagine that he could understand them, and therefore were not at all upon their guard in what they said: and what confirmed them in this was,

for he spake unto them by an interpreter; which he the rather chose to do, that they might have no suspicion of him; and which shows, that though there was a likeness between the Hebrew language and the Egyptian in many things, yet in some they differed, and the difference was such that there was need of an interpreter, where the parties did not understand both languages: this interpreter between Joseph and his brethren, according to the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem, was Manasseh, the eldest son of Joseph, and so Jarchi; which is very improbable, he being but a child at this time, if not an infant; (see ^(CHSD)Genesis 41:50,51).

Ver. 24. *And he turned himself about from them, and wept*, etc.] Hearing his brethren confess their sin and guilt to one another in selling him, and Reuben's affectionate concern for him, it wrought so much upon his affections, being naturally of a tender spirit, that he could no longer act the part he had, and keep up the sternness and severity of his countenance; wherefore he turned his face from them, that they might not discern it, and his back upon them, and went into another room: and after he had given vent to his passion, and composed himself,

and returned to them again, and communed with them; upon the same subject, of going with their corn to Canaan, and bringing their youngest brother with them upon their return, and promising moreover, for their encouragement, a free traffic in the land of Egypt, (^(CHSD)Genesis 42:34):

and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes; who perhaps was the most cruel and hardhearted among them; and it appears from the affair of Shechem, that he was a man of a fierce and bloody disposition. According to Jarchi, it was he that said to Levi, on sight of Joseph, behold this dreamer cometh; and that it was he that cast him into the pit; and, as the Targum says, advised to kill him: and perhaps Joseph might pitch upon him as the hostage, not only because he had used him more evilly than the rest, but because he might observe he was less concerned, and not so much humbled now for the evil he had done as the rest were; as also he might choose to detain him, as being not so much in his father's affection, because of the affair of Shechem, and so be a less affliction to him than if it was another; and besides, he might fear that being of a perverse and boisterous disposition, he would vehemently oppose the sending of Benjamin into Egypt, which Joseph was so very desirous of: and he bound him in their presence to terrify them, and let them know what they must expect if they did not obey his orders, and the more to humble

them for the sin they had been guilty of, and was now upon their minds; though perhaps, as Jarchi observes, when they were gone he let him out, and gave him food and drink; or however might give him some liberty, and use him with mildness and gentleness.

Ver. 25. *Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn*, etc.] Which was as much as they came for:

and to restore every man's money into his sack; the money paid by each for his quantity of corn delivered to him, not into the person's hands, but to be put into his sack privately, and unknown to him;

and to give them provision for the way; sufficient both for themselves and for their cattle, that they might carry the whole of what corn they bought to their families:

and thus did he unto them; that is, not Joseph, but his steward or deputy, or however the servant that he gave the above order to.

Ver. 26. *And they laded their asses with the corn*, etc.] Cattle very fit to carry burdens, and no doubt they had each of them one at least:

and departed thence; from the place where Joseph was, and from the land of Egypt.

Ver. 27. *And as one of them opened his sack*, etc.] According to the Targum of Jonathan and Jarchi, this was Levi; but Aben Ezra thinks it is more likely to be Reuben the firstborn, who was one, that is, the first of them:

to give his ass provender in the inn; at which they lay very probably the first night of their journey; a good man regards the life of his beast, and takes care of that as well as of himself, and generally in the first place:

he espied his money; the money which he paid for his corn:

for, behold, it [was] in his sack's mouth; just as he opened it.

Ver. 28. *And he said unto his brethren, my money is restored*, etc.] The money paid for the corn is returned:

and, lo, [it is] even in my sack; this put them all upon opening their sacks, where every man found his money, though not expressed, (see ^{<OR>}Genesis 43:21):

and their heart failed [them]; through surprise and fear; or “went out”^{f1751} front them, as it were, they were ready to faint and swoon away:

and they were afraid; their consciences being awakened, and loaded with the guilt of their former sins, they were afraid that more evil was coming upon them for them; and that this was a scheme laid to entrap them, and that they should be pursued and seized, and fetched back, and charged with a fraud and trick, as going off with their corn without paying for it:

saying one to another, what [is] this [that] God hath done unto us? for whoever was the instrument, they concluded the overruling hand of divine Providence was in it, for the further chastisement and correction of them for their iniquity: instead of being thus frightened and distressed, it is very much it did not give them suspicion of Joseph, that he was the person they had been conversing with, and that he had done this in kindness to them; but their minds were so pressed with the guilt of their sin, that they were possessed of nothing but fears and dreadful apprehensions of things, and put the worst construction upon them they could, as men in such circumstances usually do, even fear where no fear is, or no occasion for it.

Ver. 29. *And they came unto Jacob their father, unto the land of Canaan,* etc.] Without being pursued and fetched back, or retarded in their journey as they might fear:

and told him all that befell unto them; chiefly what befell them while in Egypt:

saying, as follows.

Ver. 30. *The man, [who is] the lord of the land,* etc.] Of Egypt; not the king, but the deputy governor of it, whose authority under Pharaoh was very great, and reached to the whole land, and all political affairs, and especially what related to the corn, and the sale of it; he, say they,

spake roughly to us; gave them hard words, and stern looks, and used them in a very rough manner, (see ^{<14>}Genesis 42:7);

and took us for spies of the country; laid such a charge against them, and treated them as such; or “gave” them^{f1752}, committed them to prison as such.

Ver. 31. *And we said unto him, we [are] true [men],* etc.] Honest, upright men, not given to treacherous and treasonable practices, either in the

country where they lived, or any other; they came to Egypt with no ill design upon the country, only to buy corn for the relief of their families in necessity:

we are no spies; or never were ^{f1753}: they had never been guilty of such practices, and never charged with anything of that kind; they denied the charge, and detested the character.

Ver. 32. *We [be] twelve brethren, sons of our father*, etc.] All brethren by the father's side, though not by the mother's, and by one father; they had been twelve, and were so now, though they knew it not, supposing that one was dead, as is next observed:

one [is] not; is not alive, but dead; the Targum of Jonathan is,

“what is become of one we know not”

and the youngest [is] this day with our father in the land of Canaan; (see ^{<0423>}Genesis 42:13).

Ver. 33. *And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, hereby shall I know that you [are] true [men]*, etc.] This will be a proof and demonstration of it:

leave one of your brethren [here] with me; as an hostage; they do not say “bound in the prison”, (^{<0429>}Genesis 42:19), as Joseph did, because they would not grieve their father, at least would not tell him of it at once, lest it should too much affect him:

and take [food for] the famine of your household, and be gone; that is, corn for the relief of their families, being distressed with a famine.

Ver. 34. *And, bring your youngest brother unto me*, etc.] Their brother Benjamin:

then shall I know that you [are] no spies, but [that] you [are] true [men]; he knew they were no spies now, but true, honest, upright men, with respect to any designs upon the country; but then he should own and acknowledge them to be such, having such plain proof that what they said was true:

[so] will I deliver your brother; their brother Simeon, who was left bound; though this circumstance they also here studiously conceal from their father:

and ye shall traffic in the land; not only for corn, but for any other commodity Egypt furnished its neighbours with.

Ver. 35. *And it came to pass, as they emptied their sacks,* etc.] Both those in which were the corn they had bought, and those in which were their provender for their cattle, and provision for themselves:

that, behold, every man's bundle of money [was] in his sack; the same purse, and the same pieces of money, gold or silver, they had paid to the steward:

and when [both] they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid; the Targum of Jonathan adds,

“because of Simeon, whom they had left there;”

fearing that they should be charged with theft or fraud, and that Simeon would be put to death; they had opened their sacks before, and found their money in them, but put it up again as it was, in order to open them in their father's presence, from whom they thought proper to conceal this circumstance, lest he should blame them for not returning to the governor with their money upon the first notice of it, when they had travelled but one day's journey; wherefore they make no mention of it in the account of things that befell them, and express their surprise and fear upon finding it when they opened their sacks, as if they had known, nothing of it before; though it may be their fears were renewed and increased by what Jacob might observe to them, as the consequence of it, which they had not so thoroughly considered before.

Ver. 36. *And Jacob their father said unto them, me have ye bereaved [of my children],* etc.] Which looks as if Jacob suspected that they had either sold or slain Joseph, and had done one or the other by Simeon:

Joseph [is] not, and Simeon [is] not: neither of them were with him, and both were given up by him as dead, or, as the Targum of Jonathan paraphrases it,

“of Joseph ye have said an evil beast hath devoured him; and Simeon, ye say, the king of the country hath bound him;”

as for Joseph he knew not but he was dead, he feared he was; and as for Simeon, he being in the hands of so rough a man as they had represented the lord of the land to be, and especially as his release depended upon

sending Benjamin, which he was determined at present not to do; he was reckoned by him as a lost or dead man:

and ye will take Benjamin [away]; they were desirous of it, and what their design was he could not tell; he seems to have a strong suspicion that it was not good:

all these things are against me; against his will, his peace, and comfort, and happiness, though they were all working and would work as they did for his good, and for the good of his family, for the preservation of it during the seven years of famine; or are “upon me”^{f1754}, as heavy burdens, too heavy for him to bear, ready to sink him down to the earth.

Ver. 37. *And Reuben spoke unto his father*, etc.] Being the eldest son, it most property lay upon him to make answer to his father in the name of his brethren, and to offer a word of comfort to him:

saying, slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee; meaning not Simeon, who was in Egypt, but Benjamin, whom it was proposed to take thither, and whom Jacob was very loath to part with; and to persuade him to it Reuben offers to him, and gives him leave to slay his two sons, or rather two of his sons^{f1755}, since he had four, (~~0489~~Genesis 46:9); if he did not bring Benjamin again to him: this was a strange proposal, for what were two sons of his to his own son, so exceedingly beloved by him? besides, to lose his own son, and to have two of his grandchildren slain, would have been an increase of his sorrow and grief, instead of being an alleviation of it; but Reuben’s meaning was, not that his children should be slain, but this he says, to show that he would be as careful and solicitous for the return of Benjamin as if the life of two sons of his lay at stake, and was so confident of it that he could risk the life of them upon it, who were as dear to him as one Benjamin was to his father:

deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again; he undertook to be responsible for him.

Ver. 38. *And he said, my son shall not go down with you*, etc.] He gives a peremptory denial; this was his then present resolution and determination:

for his brother is dead; meaning Joseph, Benjamin’s own brother by father and mother’s side; him he supposed to be dead, such circumstances being related and produced, which made it highly probable, and he had not heard anything of him for twenty two years:

and he is left alone; Benjamin being the only surviving child of his dearly beloved Rachel, as he thought:

if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go; that is, to Egypt, whether by thieves and robbers, or by the fatigue of the journey, or by any means whatever, so that he loses his life. All the Targums interpret this mischief of death:

then shall ye bring down my gray heirs with sorrow to the grave; the sense is, should this be the case he should never lift up his head, or have any more comfort in this world, but should pass his time with continual sorrow until his gray head was laid in the grave, or till he came to the state of the dead.