

• *The story turns – facing up to the past*

Joseph was perhaps wondering whether he would ever see Jacob or his brothers again. His new life made him forget ‘*all his father’s house*’^{□1}. God deals powerfully and sovereignly with His people. He had trained and led Joseph for many years. Now the story turns to the way in which Jacob and the brothers of Joseph were confronted with their past. They were a weak and fallible people. Jacob had in days gone by been crafty and selfish. This weakness in his life had largely been dealt with by God. But he still is prone to these sins.

□1 41:51

• *A family full of weaknesses*

The children of Jacob are also full of weaknesses. We have seen Dinah’s foolishness, and the violence of Jacob’s sons. We have seen the immorality of Reuben and the brothers’ jealousy of Joseph and Benjamin.

• *God, once again uses troubles to establish his purposes – drought in Canaan*

Jacob and his family felt the effects of the drought in Canaan and soon Joseph’s brothers come to Egypt in search of food^{□1}. Just as God had used troubles in Joseph’s life, so He was now using distresses in the life of Jacob’s family. Jacob was unwilling to send Benjamin because he was making a favourite of Benjamin just as he had once made a favourite of Joseph^{□2}. The ten brothers arrived and were presented to Joseph. They bowed down before him – and so fulfilled the dream that Joseph had had over twenty years before^{□3}. It must have been a deeply moving day when Joseph recognized them^{□4}.

□1 42:1-3

□2 42:4

□3 42:5-6

□4 42:7

• *Joseph refuses the opportunity to take revenge*

How should Joseph treat them? He could have treated them with **revenge**. He had the power and the opportunity to put them into a dungeon for ten years just as he had been enslaved and imprisoned for many years. He could have gloated, lording it over them, ridiculing them, making them feel guilty. He did none of those things.

1. He treated his brothers with restraint.

1. **He treated them with restraint.** He was not in a hurry to say who he was. He wanted to help them but helping others often involves a sense of timing. One has to wait until the time is right in helping them. There is no value in ‘casting one’s pearls before swine’^{□1}. So at first Joseph does not reveal himself but treats them as foreigners and acts roughly towards them^{□2}. It is not the way he feels but it is the way he acts. He knows them but they do not know him^{□3}. God is often the same in His treatment of us. For His own reasons God often seems to treat us with roughness but it is not the way He feels. The rough treatment we get is for His own purposes but we can be sure He has a heart of love.

□1 Matt 7:6

□2 42:7

□3 42:8

• *Acts roughly but feels love*

2. He wants them to face themselves and their own story

2. **He wants them to face themselves and their own story.** He treats them roughly until they start to give an account of themselves. He knows that God has a purpose for the whole family of Jacob, and remembers the revelations he had about them many years previously^{□1}. He falsely accuses them^{□2}. He had experienced false accusation from Potiphar’s wife. Now they experience false accusation from him. They begin to tell their story. They have come to get food^{□3}. They are twelve brothers, they say^{□4}. Twenty years have gone by since they got rid of Joseph but they still have him on their minds. They do not speak of eleven brothers but of twelve! They have not forgotten

□1 42:9

□2 42:9

□3 42:10

□4 42:11

• *They have not forgotten Joseph*

• *Joseph continues to accuse them and gets them to search their hearts*

• *He tests their attitudes*

• *Guilt admitted*

• *They sense God's judgement*

• *A place of honesty and repentance – ready for blessing*

what they did to Joseph. When you do something wicked you might keep it secret for twenty years but it will still haunt you. You are not able to forget it; the guilt of it stays with you for decades. Under further pressure they mention Benjamin and Joseph⁵. So Joseph now knows that Benjamin is alive. They have not got rid of Benjamin as they had got rid of him. After their wickedness towards him they had been restrained from going any further. He continues to accuse them and gets them to search their hearts. He now wants to find out their attitude towards Benjamin and threatens them with imprisonment until Benjamin is brought to him⁶. He puts them in prison⁷. They had sold him into captivity; now he lets them experience captivity. He keeps them together. He is wanting to bring his entire family to repentance. He wants each man to admit his guilt not only to himself but also to one another. Then he makes some suggestions which will test their attitudes to each other⁸. How will they feel if one of them suffers but the others are released? That is what happened to Joseph himself. One of the twelve – Joseph – had suffered but the others had an easier time. He wants them to think about that. How will they feel if he demands to see Benjamin? Benjamin, Rachel's second son, is now Jacob's favourite, a replacement for Joseph. Will they want to get rid of him? Will they be glad to have Benjamin in prison while they escape?

At last he brings them to admit their guilt. 'Truly we are guilty,' they say¹. They admit it to each other ('They said each man to his brother...'). They admit their terrible lack of compassion. ('We saw his distress ... we would not listen...').

They admit their sense of being under God's judgement ('Therefore this distress has come upon us').



God works in our lives to bring us to honesty and to repentance. It generally takes a certain amount of pressure before we will truly admit that we are the way we are. When we start telling the truth to ourselves, God is ready to bless us.

5 42:12-14

6 42:15-16
7 42:18

8 42:19-20

1 42:21

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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