

• *A day of reckoning for Joseph's brothers*

God allows Joseph to suffer

• *God is certainly not cruel but he has his own purposes*

• *The brothers experience something of what they did to Joseph*

• *Everything seems to be working against them*

• *It seems as if they are thieves*

• *First moves towards repentance*

Joseph's brothers have come a long way in a short space of time. For twenty years they have refused to admit to themselves or to any one else what they did to Joseph. Now they are admitting it to their own hearts and to one another. Reuben reminds them of how they had refused to listen to a word of restraint^{□1}. They know they are being brought to face themselves in a day of 'reckoning'^{□2}.

Joseph is not enjoying any of this! **It is exactly parallel to what happens whenever God allows us to suffer.** It is not because He is powerless. And it is not because He is cruel. He knows about what is happening. He could stop it but He does not. He does not enjoy our sufferings. But He knows about them and allows them to continue for the moment for His own purposes. Joseph has his own purposes to bring repentance and restoration and provision for his entire family. He has to do what he is doing. But he is not enjoying it. He goes out and weeps with grief and emotion at what is happening to his brothers^{□1}.

He goes back and carries on doing what he has to do. He takes one of them, Simeon, and lets them see him being bound^{□1}. **It gives them a sample of the kind of thing they did to Joseph.** They are sent away with food and with their money returned to them^{□2} and they leave.^{□3}

Then as they are travelling back they discover the returned money^{□1}. They are utterly dismayed. Their very lives depend on the food they hope to get from Joseph and yet God seems to be blocking any hope of Joseph's having any goodwill towards them^{□2}. Everything seems to be working against them. **It is the same experience that Joseph had.** Joseph could have said 'If only my father had not sent me to find my brothers, if only they had not moved away to Dothan, if only Reuben had not been absent when the Ishmaelite traders came by...'. God seemed to be working against Joseph. Now God seems to be working against the brothers, and there is nothing they can do about it.

Then they get back home and tell the whole story to Jacob^{□1}. And just as it had brought back the past to the ten brothers so it brings back the past to Jacob. What will Jacob do? Will he continue to show favouritism to Benjamin as he did to Joseph? As they unpack their sacks they discover all their money has been returned^{□2}. They have got all of their grain without paying anything! It seems as if they are thieves, and they will be unable to defend themselves. **Again, it is a repetition of the experience of Joseph.** Joseph had been accused by Potiphar's wife and had been unable to defend himself.

It leads to accusation and blame. Jacob says '*You have taken two of my children and now you want to take Benjamin!*'^{□1}. Reuben makes a generous offer^{□2}; it is the first sign of willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of someone else. For the first time one of the brothers is willing to act with kindness and concern for Jacob. It is the first indication of distress at what has happened and a willingness to make amends. **Joseph is having some success in bringing his brothers to repentance.**

□1 42:22

□2 42:22

□1 42:23-24a

□1 42:24b

□2 42:25

□3 42:26

□1 42:27

□2 42:28

□1 42:29-34

□2 42:35

□1 42:36

□2 42:37

• Joseph is acting in faith and patience

But Jacob has not come to the point of abandoning his discrimination in favour of the children of Rachel. He will let Simeon perish rather than release Benjamin^{□1}. However God knows how to increase the pressure on us and drive us into a corner. The famine continues^{□2} and Jacob and his family are soon at the end of their resources again. **Joseph is acting in faith and patience.** He expects the famine to continue and believes that the sheer pressure of circumstances will bring his brothers back to him again. Soon the food in Jacob's family has come to an end^{□3} and Jacob wants them to go back to Egypt. He is desperate in wanting to hold on to Benjamin but Judah points out that there will be no help from Egypt unless Benjamin goes with them^{□4}.

□1 42:38
 □2 43:1
 □3 43:2
 □4 43:3-5

• Jacob challenged to let go of Benjamin – his most precious son

Jacob is in a fix. He loves Benjamin with a love that is almost idolatrous. All his life he had loved Rachel very deeply and her two children Joseph and Benjamin. Now Benjamin was the last of the three that were left to him. He was exceedingly precious to Jacob. **He is being asked to trust the most precious thing he has to God.**

• Criticism and blame

It again leads to accusation and blame. This time Jacob criticizes them for telling the truth^{□1}. They try to defend themselves before him^{□2}. It is the same atmosphere of criticism and mutual accusation that was present years ago, when the brothers were jealous of Joseph.

□1 43:6
 □2 43:7

• Signs of progress

Yet there are signs that the brothers are coming to a new love and graciousness towards each other. Jacob is not willing to surrender Benjamin but now Judah offers to take responsibility for Benjamin^{□1}. While they are arguing they are delaying^{□2} and the food supplies are running out.

□1 43:8-9
 □2 43:10

• Once again Jacob is forced to a high level of trust and dependence on God

Jacob has to give in^{□1}. **Once again he is forced to a high level of trust and dependence on God.** 'If this is the way it must be....' He has no choice. 'May El Shaddai grant you compassion'; it is the name for God which has the sense 'The God who is Almighty to rescue' and is used in desperate situations (see Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 35:11). 'If I am bereaved, I am bereaved,' says Jacob.

□1 43:11-14

• Joseph brings his entire family to face themselves

Joseph is taking the time and trouble to bring his entire family to face themselves. Jacob must come to terms with his favouritism and discrimination. The brothers must ask themselves whether they are to continue covering up their sin and treating their father and each other with cruelty and selfishness.



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