

Joseph and the testing of his brothers

The purpose of Jacob's sending the brothers' to Egypt is ***so that the covenant people might live.***

(Gen 42:2) And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die."

(Gen 42:18) On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God:

(Gen 43:8) And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones.

Indeed this is God's purpose also.

(Gen 45:5) And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

(Gen 45:7) And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.

(Gen 50:20) As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

The narrative begins with Joseph **remembering** his dreams.¹ In other words Joseph realises that what is transpiring is a divinely orchestrated process designed to keep the covenant people alive.

(Gen 42:9) And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them and he said to them ...

It is this knowledge that motivates Joseph to commence his actions in Genesis 42-44.

Before the covenant people come to live in Egypt, they must be **renewed** through acknowledging and grieving over their sin.

The way by which this acknowledgement and grieving will occur is by ***means of their being tested in such a way as to draw out their guilt before God.***

The beginning of the narrative in Genesis 42-44 describes the chapters as ***a testing.***

(Gen 42:16) Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies."

¹ Remembering is usually used of God in Genesis and commences a divine saving action in relation to the covenant people c.f. the following:

(Gen 8:1) But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.

(Gen 9:15-16) I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh ...

(Gen 19:29) So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

(Gen 30:22) Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.

Joseph is **a wise ruler** conducting **a deliberate and necessary testing** of his brothers **in order to work their renewal** as the covenant people **through the exposure of their guilt and remorse before God**.

The testing is not information-finding so much as a process to work repentance.

(Gen 42:9) Joseph said "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land."
The brothers experience false testimony as they had given to Jacob and as Joseph had experienced in Egypt. This raises fear and a sense of vulnerability.

(Gen 42:17) Joseph put them all together in custody for three days.
The brothers are bound and placed in prison even as they had bound Joseph (in the Ancient world there was little difference between captivity and slavery).

(Gen 42:19-20) ... let one of your brothers remain confined ... and bring your youngest brother to me.
The matter of brining Benjamin is to allow the brothers to be tested. Joseph is designing a test to see whether they will give up the favoured son when he is separated from his father, in their power and for their own gain to do so.

(Gen 42:21) Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us."
The testing is achieving its purpose – the brothers acknowledge their trouble is the result of God's knowledge of their actions.

(Gen 42:28) "My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!" At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"
Further increasing their fear In light of their perception of God's judgement.

(Gen 43:18) And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house.
The brothers are being caused to have their fear increased at every turn in order that when 'the test' arrives it will create a greater crisis.

(Gen 43:34) Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs.
Benjamin's favoured status is highlighted before the brothers.

(Gen 44:12) And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.
Will the brothers' abandon the favoured son to Egypt for their own gain? They will not!

The test has effectively exposed their guilt before God. They have been made fearful and vulnerable but they are the covenant people who will live and so accordingly the test has worked their repentance which along with Joseph's wisdom, forgiveness and acknowledgement of God's sovereignty has resulted in the spiritual reconstitution of the covenant people who will live in Egypt.