

Judah had sought to satisfy his father that he could be trusted with Benjamin. Jacob could well see that his family could not survive otherwise. So he had reluctantly allowed his beloved son go with the brothers back to Egypt for food. Joseph, watching for them, had seen Benjamin when he had arrived. He had treated the brothers as honored guests. When he showed Benjamin preferential treatment it must have reminded them how their father had favored Joseph. The test was cutting in more than one way. Would they hate Benjamin and abandon him as they had Joseph? Would they experience additional pangs of guilt? Even remorse? And they had to have realized Jacob was older and possibly wouldn't survive another jolt like losing Benjamin. As far as they were concerned his fate and theirs' was out of their hands. What would a harsh Egyptian official care about an old Hebrew patriarch living in Canaan? The test was exquisite. Joseph felt he had to try the state of his brothers' hearts before revealing himself to them. If their attitude and actions demonstrated they were repentant and humbled he could freely reveal himself in mercy and grace. If not, more chastening might be needed to restore. Or he would have no alternative but to righteously judge them and punish them accordingly. His heart was toward them, toward their hearts. Restoration not retribution. How Joseph reflected the heart of God. Really it was the heart of the Lord Jesus in His rejection and suffering at the hands of His brethren.

This pattern of suffering and subsequent elevation, then exaltation with grace to bless, and authority to judge, is found repeatedly though scripture. It records stories, histories of various godly men (and women), their lives shaped by wisdom and foreknowledge of God. Histories shaped to portray the moral glories and essential glories of His SON holy, separate, undefiled.

*Hebrews 7:26 For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;*

For instance Stephen, while witnessing to the Jews, saw Christ the rejected King, standing in glory waiting for Israel to repent, see Acts 7. That was a major turning point in the history of God with mankind. God suspended His exclusive dealing with Israel, His earthly people. He took up with a heavenly people, the Church (the Assembly) drawn out from all the Gentile nations and Israel. At the center of this crisis Stephen, seeking one last time to reach Israel's heart, referred to Joseph winning his brethren's repentance. They couldn't miss the application, how could they ignore the plea? The story of Joseph's unjust suffering and subsequent glorification cut their hearts like a knife. In response, Stephen was stoned, his own face shining as he beheld the Man in glory.

The history of God's working with the children of men is all about separation of His faithful chosen from the world. Sometimes it is voluntary upon request, sometimes with a little forceful persuasion. Enoch was translated, Noah was called into the ark, Abram was called out from his people.

Joseph was rejected by his brethren, as again was Moses, and later David only to be exalted in due time after rejection and suffering. This pattern was only fully realized in the life, rejection, death and resurrection and subsequent exaltation of Jesus Christ. The pattern that is the heart of God.

God is in the business of bringing lost souls to Himself and restoring straying sheep to Himself for blessing. The Lord Jesus used the expression "bring forth fruits meet for repentance" when referring to gaging the spiritual state of a soul. Repentance opens the way for forgiveness. And it also opens the way to fellowship one with another, for walking and communing together. So once Joseph saw heartfelt feelings expressed that were indicating their repentance he was free to reveal himself to them. What a shock! Joseph ALIVE!?! Ruler?!? All powerful?!? Their brother?! The one they hated without a cause? All of the emotions must have coursed through their hearts. Fear, shame, wonder, deeper soul searching, ... love? And eventually, as the enormity of what was taking place began to sink in, they would have had some deeper feelings toward God and His mercy and grace. Surely it would have taken weeks, months, years to comprehend it all. And they even had a relapse into fear of retribution after Jacob died, which Joseph faithfully patiently allayed, Genesis 50. We are still entering into the boundless treasures of His love, and will for eternity.

Judah's selfless appeal to the "Egyptian" on behalf of his father is especially touching. He had held little regard to Jacob's feelings when they set about disposing of Joseph out in the pasture lands of Dothan. But they probably all had been deeply shocked and appalled at their father Jacob's deep reaction to their report of Joseph's disappearance, and to their contrived "evidence" of his apparent violent death. Reuben had indeed intervened to preserve him in a pit. Judah had suggested selling him as a slave, thus avoiding murder and making a little cash in the bargain. Like Jacob? Like Judas Iscariot, Matthew 26:14-16; 27:3-9. Heartless, all of them! We doubt that Joseph even knew of the deceptive story they had told Jacob until the "Egyptian ruler" heard it in Judah's appeal. And the brothers, when talking to the "Egyptian" had certainly avoided implicating themselves in a murder plot. And they didn't know what had really happened to him after they had left him in the pit calling out to them in his distress. He had simply disappeared after the caravan had passed. How did Joseph contain his anger upon this fresh reminder of their acts of hatred against him? Somehow, by the grace of God, he did. But the years had softened them and Joseph's probing had exposed some long hidden guilt. The misfortunes then trying them had awakened long submerged consciences so they felt they deserved them. They did. But not the blessing that then broke upon them. God's grace! God's blessings.

By Ronald Canner, February 9, 2011