

## Genesis 43-45 Joseph Reveals Himself

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### Overview

Chapters 43-45 are the second of the three cycles involved in bringing Jacob's family to Egypt. Again we see the themes we saw in ch. 43:

- Common chronological structure:
  - preparation,
  - interaction with Joseph,
  - an emphasis on his bounty to them,
  - return to Canaan (here interrupted by the final test, the hiding of Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack).

In the first and second cycles, this structure is chiasmic: brothers and Jacob, arrival/departure, audience with Joseph, imprisonment at the center.

- Joseph's family bows down to him: 43:26,28.
- Joseph's weeping: 43:30, 45:14, 15.

In this cycle, he reveals himself to them and invites them to bring Jacob and his family to Egypt.

### 43:1-14, Preparation with Jacob (compare 42:1-2)

**1,2, setting.**—The famine continues, and they have consumed the supplies they bought on their first trip. Now Jacob has a conversation with his sons about what to do.

**2b, Jacob.**—As before, Jacob is the one who takes the initiative and outlines specific action.

**3-5, Judah.**—The prominent brother in the first cycle was Reuben. It was he who led the discussion in 42:22, and who is prominent in the report to their father in 42:37 (with his incredible suggestion that Jacob should slay Reuben's sons if Benjamin didn't come home). In the second cycle, Reuben disappears from view, and Judah becomes prominent, both in Canaan and Egypt. He is emerging as the dominant son in the family.

The form of the condition that Judah reports to Jacob is not mentioned in ch. 42. It conforms to the brothers' report in 42:34 that if they brought Benjamin they could trade in the land (which in this case means buy grain, which means see Joseph). This is accurate but euphemistic; in fact, without Benjamin, the threat is that they will be imprisoned and executed (42:19).

The paragraph is chiasmic, with reports of Joseph's condition on the outside, and Judah's condition to his father on the inside. If Benjamin comes, we will go. If not, not. Judah prefers death by starvation to execution in Egypt.

**6, Jacob.**—Jacob wishes they had never revealed the presence of Benjamin. The use of the name "Israel" invites us to inquire how this particular statement is reflective of his more spiritual character. The point is probably to mark a shift in his attitude compared with the end of the previous chapter. Fleshly Jacob would rather see his family starve than send Benjamin. The man

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whom God has conquered is still apprehensive, but willing to explore the situation and reconsider, and ultimately trust in God (v.14).

**7-10, Judah and brothers.**—Israel’s question is addressed to the brothers as a whole, not just to Judah, so the reply comes from all of them, before Judah picks up the lead again.

v.7, The brothers point out that Joseph asked them explicitly about their father and brother. Two things to note about this quotation:

1. It teaches us something about how narration adapts and modifies speech. This is not reported in ch. 42, but they repeat the statement to Joseph in 44:19, so it must be an accurate recollection.
2. It further reveals Joseph’s deep compassion for his family. On recognizing his brothers, he immediately wanted news about his father and Benjamin.

9-10, Then Judah returns to his position of leadership. His argument has three points. The first two in particular show tremendous progress in Judah’s life

1. v.8, Another trip is essential for the survival of the family. Judah echoes his father’s words in 42:2, but adds a list of those affected.

He mentions those affected in ascending order of importance to himself, making his father more important than himself, and the third generation yet more important. This ordering shows great progress over his earlier history.

- a. His subordination of his own interests to Jacob shows great progress over the day when he was willing to lie to his father about Joseph’s fate, regardless of the impact on Jacob.
  - b. His subordination of his own interests to those of his offspring shows a very different Judah than we saw in ch. 38, where he treated his daughter-in-law so poorly.
2. v.9, Judah offers to be surety for Benjamin, bearing personal responsibility for the lad. Prov 6:1-5 warns against being surety for someone, not because it is morally wrong, but because it places the one who is surety in great personal jeopardy. Judah assumes this jeopardy. As his first statement subordinated his interests to his father, this one subordinates them to Benjamin. From someone who led the way in selling Joseph into slavery (37:26,27), he now commits himself to protecting Joseph’s full brother, even at risk to himself.

3. v.10, he points out that the delay is imposing unnecessary suffering on the family.

**11-14, Jacob/Israel.**—Israel instructs them to make such preparation as will ingratiate them to the Egyptian official, and then rests his case in God’s hands. This combination of diligent preparation and trust in God fully merits the name “Israel.”

Their preparation includes three items, each designated with the verb “take,” and each embodying a perception on Jacob’s part of what is required.

- *Take of the best fruits of the land:* A present for the man, including balm, honey, spices, myrrh, (pistachio) nuts, and almonds. Compare the cargo on the caravan with which Joseph was originally sent to Egypt: spices, balm, and myrrh (37:25). Now he is to be the

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recipient of a gift that includes these things, and more, while his brothers are virtual prisoners, under his power, in a caravan going to Egypt!

These are all wild items, foraged from the land, which might be expected to be found in meager quantities even in time of famine. Matthew Henry: “Honey and spice will never make up the want of bread-corn. The famine was sore in Canaan, and yet they had balm and myrrh, &c. We may live well enough upon plain food without dainties; but we cannot live upon dainties without plain food. Let us thank God that that which is most needful and useful is generally most cheap and common.”

In sending such a gift, Jacob is following the same instinct that led him 33 years earlier (32:13ff) in sending a gift to pacify Esau. The principle is attested in Proverbs:

- Proverbs 21:14 A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.
- Proverbs 18:16 A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.
- Proverbs 19:6 Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man *is* a friend to him that giveth gifts.

Though the gift can be abused and become a bribe, it has its legitimate use in showing deference and respect for the recipient, and it is in this spirit that Jacob sends gifts to Esau and Joseph (and later, Abigail to David, 1 Sam 25:27).

- *Take double money*: the order of the words is different than in v.15. Probably here we should understand “more money, besides what was returned to you,” the two amounts together adding up to the “double money” of v.15.

The insight here is that the best way to deal with a compromising circumstance is to be open and forthright. They should not try to hide the fact that their money was returned, or try to profit from the circumstance, but should rather take the initiative to clear up the discrepancy. Matthew Henry: “Honesty obliges us to make restitution, not only of that which comes to us by our own fault, but of that which comes to us by the mistakes of others.”

- *Take also your brother*: Jacob must acknowledge the inescapability of complying with Joseph’s demand, if the survival of the whole family is to be assured. In doing so, he relaxes his earlier declaration, 42:38, “My son shall not go down with you.”

Some fathers would stick by their first decision, particularly in a discussion with their sons. Jacob is willing to listen to reason, even from those whose rank is below his. In this, he shows himself a wise man:

- Proverbs 1:5 A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:
- Proverbs 9:9 Give *instruction* to a wise *man*, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just *man*, and he will increase in learning.

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- Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel *is* wise.

14, To this thorough preparation, Jacob adds his prayer and expression of trust in God. The most diligent preparation in the world is useless if we do not trust in the Lord.

- “God Almighty” is once again *El Shaddai*, the name that emphasizes God’s exercise of his sovereign power in caring for his children in times of distress. Recall Delitzsch’s definition: “El Shaddai is the God who so constrains natures that it does his will, and so subdues it that it bows to and serves grace.”
  - It was with this name that Isaac sent Jacob away from his paternal home on his way to Padanaram in 28:3. This God appeared to him at Bethel and faithfully brought him back to a reunion with Esau and with Isaac that he would have thought impossible when he left.
  - Now in another time of great family crisis, when once again he despairs of ever seeing his dearest ones alive again, he commends his sons to the care of that same God who so faithfully sustained him in his earlier time of family crisis.
- “If I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”
  - The statement is a general acknowledgment of his submission to God. Compare Esther’s declaration (4:16), “If I perish, I perish,” which is syntactically identical, and may well be inspired by her memory of Jacob’s resignation at this point. The ultimate example is our Lord’s prayer in the garden (Luke 22:42), “not my will, but thine, be done.” He is saying that if God is pleased to bring sorrow upon him, he is willing to bear it. His objective is not promoting his own comfort, but submitting to the Lord and allowing him to rule.
  - Such a standard seems depressing, but we must remember how each of these stories turns out. Through his obedience, Jacob receives back not only Benjamin and Simeon, but Joseph as well, whom he has given up for dead. Esther delivers her people. The Lord Jesus rises from the dead and brings many sons to glory. The point of such absolute submission to the will of God is not to wallow in sorrow and self-pity, but to give God room to demonstrate his power in love (the essence of El Shaddai). This is in fact our Savior’s promise (Mark 8:35): “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”

### **15, Journey to Egypt (42:3-5)**

The brothers obey their father’s instruction explicitly: they take the present, and the money, and Benjamin, and make their way back to Egypt.

### **43:16-44:2, First Interaction with Joseph (Bounty) (42:6-16)**

Joseph’s treatment of his brothers on their second visit to Egypt has two features.

1. It is as generous and kind as his former treatment was brusque.
2. It sets them up for the test in 44:3-13.

### **15-17 Setting**

They “stand before him” (15) but apparently do not have opportunity to speak directly to him or present their gift. We imagine people queueing up in a reception area to deal with Joseph at the office where he sold grain to foreigners.

When he sees them arrive, he looks especially for Benjamin’s presence, since he had previously told them that this would determine the reception he gives them (42:19). When he recognizes Benjamin (16), he gives instructions concerning them to his steward. The reunion with Benjamin calls for a sumptuous feast: “Slay” (16) indicates that they will eat meat, and the need to instruct the steward explicitly presumes that ordinarily Joseph would not eat meat at his noon meal. This will be a special feast to honor his guests. Thus instructed, the steward whisks them away to Joseph’s house (17)

### **18-25, Dealing with the Mysterious Money**

**18, Their Fear.**—Joseph intends a feast, but to the brothers, who expected only to receive Simeon and buy grain and then return home, the diversion to Joseph’s house is troubling (18).

We can speculate why this is:

- On the previous trip, they had been imprisoned for three days (42:17).
- Potiphar at least had a dungeon on his own estate (40:3). Perhaps Joseph’s house was similarly equipped, and that was where they had been imprisoned previously. This would be supported by the fact that when they arrive at Joseph’s house, Simeon immediately appears, as though that is where he was being confined.
- So this may not be the first time they have seen Joseph’s house, and they naturally assume that they are being once again incarcerated.

Their increasingly sensitive consciences try to divine a reason for what they assume is their impending imprisonment (18). It must be the money they found in their sacks. After their departure, the Egyptians must have discovered that they had taken it with them, and they are now going to be called to task for theft.

**19-22, Their Defense to the Steward.**—They offer their defense to the only person accessible to them, the steward. They point out that they have brought back the money, in addition to more money to buy more food, and disclaim all responsibility for the mysterious appearance of the funds.

**23-24, The Steward’s Response.**—The steward’s response encourages them in both word and deed.

23, Verbally, he offers fourfold encouragement to them.

1. He tells them that they do not owe him anything. “I had your money.” Your bill is paid in full.
2. He returns Simeon to them.
3. Most strikingly, he comforts them in the name of “the God of your father.” He has learned from Joseph of the God whom Joseph and his family follow, and encourages them in the name of this god.

4. His reassurance “Peace *be* to you, fear not” is remarkable. Such comforting words nowhere else come on the lips of men, but of the Lord (to Gideon, Judg 6:23) and his angels (Dan 10:19), anticipating our Lord’s amplification of them in John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

24, he performs hospitable actions to them. He does not cast them into prison, but brings them water to wash their feet, and feeds their donkeys. Comforting words are much more effective when joined with comforting actions. James 2:16 warns against uttering such words without backing them up with action.

**25 Preparing the Present.**—Thus comforted and encouraged, they unpack the gift they have prepared and arrange it so that they can present it as impressively as possible to Joseph.

### **26-30, Conversation with Joseph**

When Joseph arrives, they present the gift, and repeatedly bow down (26, 28), fulfilling once again the prophecy of his early dreams.

His focus is not on the gift they have brought, but on news of the family. He had originally questioned them about Jacob and Benjamin (v.7), and these are now at the center of his thoughts.

**27, Is your father well?**—His first concern is with his father.

**29, He lifted up his eyes.**—The expression usually indicates that what is seen is of particular importance (cf. 13:10, Lot regarding the plain of Sodom; 18:2, when Abraham’s three visitors arrived; 37:25, the brothers spying the approaching caravan). He takes special notice of Benjamin, then, overcome with emotion, he withdraws into his chamber to weep.

### **43:31-44:2, The Meal**

Joseph then entertains his guests royally. Several features attract our attention. The net effect is to probe their attitude toward Benjamin, the youngest brother, and see if they will betray him as they did Joseph.

**32, by himself ... by themselves ... by themselves.**—The diners sat in three groups. Joseph was separated from his court because of his exalted position, but his brothers were separated from the others because of their race.

This arrangement serves the purpose of making obvious how Joseph sends more food to Benjamin than to the rest. But the motive indicated for seating the brothers by themselves gives us important insight into God’s broader purpose in sending the nation into Egypt. Waltke:

“Herein lies a clue to the rationale for the Egyptian sojourn. Whereas the Canaanites are willing to integrate and absorb the sons of Israel, the Egyptians hold them in contempt. Judah’s intermarriage with the Canaanites in Genesis 38 shows the danger that syncretistic Canaanites present to the embryonic family. The Egyptian segregated culture guarantees that the embryonic nation can develop into a great nation within their borders.” The Canaanite threat took the form of contamination; “The Egyptian threat will take the form of tyranny.”

**33, firstborn ... youngest ... marveled.**—Joseph designates a place for each one according to his birth order. This is not information that the brothers would have had any reason to share with

him; he remembers it from his youth, but they are amazed when they find themselves arranged in this way.

**34, Benjamin's mess.**—As the food is served, it is apparently brought first to Joseph, who then directs the servers to individual guests. He makes an obvious distinction between Benjamin's serving and that sent to the others. The point is not to reflect his fondness for his brother, but to test their reaction. The root of their original sin in selling him into Egypt was their jealousy over the favored position in which his father had placed him. He is about to test their love for Benjamin. By ordering them in order of birth, then favoring the youngest, he is giving them an opportunity to show any jealousy that might exist.

**They drank and were merry.**—Lit., “were drunken.” From the brothers' perspective, it was a rip-roaring good party. Joseph is still testing them, lowering their inhibitions through alcohol to discern their true feelings toward Benjamin, and thus to detect whether they have repented of their treatment of himself. One wonders how long the party went on; no one will have been good for anything the rest of the day.

### **44:1-13, Arrest (42:17)**

We have first Joseph's preparation for the test, then the interaction between the steward and the brothers.

**1-5, Preparation.**—Joseph prepares the test, first by planting his cup in Benjamin's bag, then by sending the men on their way as early as possible, and finally by sending his steward after them immediately.

- As before (42:25), Joseph provides the grain for free, and returns their money. The steward is instructed to be generous, “as much as they can carry.” But in addition, he has his silver cup, which no doubt was prominent at the party, placed in Benjamin's sack.

Joseph is setting up a situation in which it will seem inescapable to all the brothers that Benjamin, carried away in the hilarity of the evening before, has stolen the cup. Years before, they betrayed a brother who had done nothing wrong, other than enjoy the preference of his father. Will they now defend a preferred brother who, they think, has actually offended?

Calvin notes in passing, “It may seem wonderful that, considering his great opulence, Joseph had not rather drunk out of a golden cup. ... This conduct must be attributed to the moderation of the man, who, in the midst of universal license, yet was contented with a plain and decent, rather than with a magnificent style of living. ... It is ... probable, that Joseph was sparing in domestic splendor, for the sake of avoiding envy. For unless he had been prudently on his guard, a contention would have arisen between him and the courtiers, resulting from a spirit of emulation.” Joseph's moderation is an example to us, not to abuse the prosperity that God grants us in this world (1 Cor 7:31).

- The early departure gives plenty of time in the course of the day for the examination that Joseph has prepared. In addition, it puts the men off balance, for they will no doubt be hung over after the previous day's party. Joseph is doing all he can to discern their true inner nature in the test that is underway.  
No doubt the brothers are congratulating themselves on their good fortune. The previously harsh Egyptian has treated them kindly. They have Simeon, Benjamin, and sacks heavy with

grain, and they are on their way home. They can hardly expect that the most difficult part of their journey lies before them.

- The steward is sent soon after to be sure that he can challenge them before they have had a chance to discover the money and the cup themselves. One aspect of his script is puzzling: the claim that Joseph uses the missing cup for divination. The practice is absolutely forbidden in the law (Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10), and it is unlikely that Joseph, who repeatedly gives God the credit for revealing things to him, would actually use such a mechanism. We must understand that it is part of his disguise. It has at least two purposes.
  - By representing himself as having access to hidden knowledge, he encourages them to make a clean confession.
  - By adapting a pagan stance, he is probing to see the degree to which they will acknowledge their responsibility to the Lord. It's one thing to speak of the Lord to someone who says, "I fear God," and whose steward refers to "your god and the god of your fathers." It's another to acknowledge him to someone who claims to be a pagan magician.

Verse 16 suggests that it had just this effect, when Judah confesses, "God has found out the iniquity of thy servants."

**6, steward.**—He delivers this message.

**7-9, brothers.**—They are naturally shocked at the accusation. They respond with a protest and a proposal.

- Protest: We have already showed our honesty in returning the money from the first trip. Why would we steal something now?
- Proposal: If such an outrageous charge should actually be true, the perpetrator should die, and we will all become servants. This shows a much greater degree of solidarity among the brothers than they showed in earlier chapters. They realize that they must stick together.

**10, Steward.**—He accepts two principles in their suggestion: servitude, and the distinction between the guilty and the others. But he will not retain them all. Only the guilty will stay; the others are free to go. This is no doubt part of Joseph's instruction to him, to tempt the brothers with the possibility of saving their own skins by abandoning Benjamin.

**11-13, The Search.**—The steward proceeds in the same order as the men had been seated the day before. We can imagine two conflicting emotions as the search proceeds.

- Growing relief as the cup is not found. By the time he gets to Benjamin, they are almost certain to be off free.
- Growing confusion as each brother's money is found. No mention is made of the money, but it must have put them further off balance.

**13, The Outcome.**—The steward has already offered to release all but the one with whom the cup is found. Their reaction at this point is the first part of their response to the test. They could have left him to his fate and made their way home. But by now they care enough about their aged father that they will not abandon Benjamin as they abandoned Joseph. They all return to the city with Benjamin.



Calvin asks, “If the sons of Jacob had been easily induced to betray the safety of Benjamin, what would Joseph himself have done?” There could be no easy way out. But the God who directed Joseph to conduct this test has also been working in the hearts of the brothers. We must believe that he has showed Joseph that the time is right to mount the final test. Here is an example of 1 Cor 10:13, that God “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.”

## **44:14-45:24, Second Interaction with Joseph: Unveiling (42:18-25)**

### **14, Return**

Joseph has been waiting at home for the outcome. His other business can wait. He must know the outcome of this test that he has placed upon his brothers.

For their part, once again they prostrate themselves before him. The verb here simply describes their physical posture, and is not the verb for “do obeisance” that described Joseph’s dreams in 37:7, 9, 10 and their earlier action in 42:6 and 43:26, 28. The difference may be significant in showing their state of mind. Earlier, their prostration was a deliberate action based on what social custom required of them. Now they are emotionally decimated, and their prostration is a complete submission to him.

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He challenges them with the thought that sin cannot be hidden. He cannot invoke God’s knowledge without “blowing his cover,” but the closest parallel appropriate to someone in the position he is assuming is divination, and so he invokes this. He wants to hear what they have to say about their earlier treatment of him.

“What deed *is* this that ye have done?” This is the most elaborated form of a recurring refrain throughout Genesis. (See notes on 3:13 for discussion of the difference between two forms: a) *mah asita*, which is unmarked (either request for information or calling to account) (elsewhere only Num 23:11; Josh 7:19; 1 Sam 13:11; Jer 2:23) and b) *mah zot asita*, which is marked for calling to account (elsewhere only Exo 14:11; Judg 2:2; 8:1 modified; 2 Sam 12:21 modified; Jonah 1:10). (In support of the earlier note, observe that the related form *mah asiti*, which necessarily is a request for information, never has *zot* or other intervention.) All the cases in Genesis appear to be calling to account rather than genuine requests for information, as the first form can be in 1 Sam 13:11; Josh 7:19.)

- 3:13, God to Eve in the garden (b)
- 4:10, God to Cain after he killed Abel (a)
- 12:18, Pharaoh to Abram after lying about Sarai (b)
- 20:9, Abimelech to Abraham after he lied about Sarah (a)
- 26:10, Abimelech to Abraham the second time (b)
- 29:25, Jacob to Laban after he is deceived concerning his bride (b)
- 31:26, Laban to Jacob after he stole away. (a)

Joseph's statement is the last in this series, and invites us to reflect on it. This phrase is clearly distinctive to Genesis; it occurs 8 times there, and only nine times among other books, where only Judges (2x) has more than a single instance. We can draw the following lessons from it.

- People are accountable for their actions.
- This accountability is initially imposed by God, but then echoed in men as his image-bearers. The urge to ask, "What have you done," is at the heart of the moral sensibility that lies at the base of Rom 2.
- Most of the challenges here are put to the covenant people by those outside the community (in Joseph's case, ostensibly). The world expects more of those who claim to represent the Lord. Compare the requirement of the elder that he "have a good report of them which are without," 1 Tim 3:7.

### 16 Judah

Judah is clearly the leader of the brothers by this time, perhaps because he has the most to lose if Benjamin is retained. Things to note in his reply.

- The solidarity of the brothers: "How shall we clear ourselves?" "The iniquity of thy servants." "We are my lord's servants." The evidence seems inescapable that Benjamin has stolen the cup, yet there is no thought of abandoning Benjamin and trying to get away with their own skins. Judah is the only one who has made himself surety for Benjamin; the others could have fled, but they do not.
- Their sense of guilt. Judah does not try to protest innocence or challenge the obvious fact of the cup's being in Benjamin's bag. There are at least two reasons:
  - Such a protest seems hopeless. The fact of the cup is inescapable.
  - "God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants." Judah is repeating the insight from the earlier episode (42:21-22), but now the cause is explicit: not passive verbs ("this distress is come upon us," "his blood is required") but active ("God hath found out").
- There is an element of humble witness in his reply. Joseph had ascribed his knowledge of their guilt to divination; Judah replies, "God hath found out . . ." He has risen spiritually to the level of Joseph before Pharaoh in 41:15,16: when Pharaoh attributed to Joseph the ability to interpret dreams, Joseph protested that the ability really belonged to God.

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He wants to make explicit whether they will abandon Benjamin, and offers to send them back "in peace unto your father."

**Your father.**—This reference is to remind them of the impact this will have on the old man. Do they now love him more than themselves?

**"in peace"**.—Literally *le\$alom* "to peace." The usual expression is "in peace" *be\$alom*. There does seem to be a regular distinction between them. *Le\$alom* describes the state that awaits them at their destination, while *be\$alom* describes their state along the way.

- Noteworthy instances of *be\$alom*

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- This is the only form used in discussions of death (e.g., “he went to his fathers in peace”). The destination is not attractive, but at least the passing can be peaceful. Gen 15:15; 2 Chr 34:28
- The term is particularly appropriate in Jud 8:9, promising non-peaceful actions after a return “in peace”
- The (few) other instances of *le\$alom* all reflect a focus on the destination.
  - Exod 4:18: Moses wants to see how his brethren are doing, and Jethro expresses hope that when Moses reaches them, all will be well.
  - Jud 18:6, Micah’s priest encourages the men of Dan that they will find success in seeking a new home
  - 1 Sam 1:17, Eli encourages Hannah that she will receive what she has asked of the Lord
  - 1 Sam 20:42, Jonathan to David, whom he expects will become King (vv. 14-15)
  - 1 Sam 25:35, David to Abigail after assuring her that he will not destroy her house as he had planned
  - 2 Kings 5:19, Elisha to Naaman, who has asked that the Lord pardon him when he accompanies his master to worship in the house of Rimmon; Elisha is assuring him that God will not punish him for this.

Thus Joseph is not offering them safe conduct (*pace* Leupold), but is explicitly drawing their attention to what awaits them at home. “Go back home to your father, to a peaceful life with him.” Of course, Joseph knows that such a peaceful life will be impossible with Benjamin gone, but he is probing to see if his brothers recognize this.

### **18-34 Judah**

Judah’s response is one of the most touching and elegant pieces in all of Scripture, on a par with Ruth’s protestation of her love for Naomi. For me personally, no passage affects me personally more profoundly. I am moved to tears every time I read it, and Joseph’s response. It makes clear how thoroughly the Lord has reformed Judah’s character, and fully satisfies Joseph’s inquiry. Anyone who ever has a question about whether God can change a child, or a spouse, or a friend, or even oneself, can take encouragement from the history of Judah.

Judah’s speech makes three points to Joseph: the impact of Benjamin’s detention on his father, Judah’s own obligation as surety, and Judah’s personal concern for his father’s well-being.

1. He develops the impact on his father in three cycles (19-20, 21-22, 23-29), culminating in a summary (30-31).
  - a. Each of the cycles reminds Joseph that it was his idea to bring Benjamin, and in increasingly intense terms describes what Benjamin means to Jacob
    - i. 20 “his father loveth him”
    - ii. 22 “if he should leave his father, his father would die”
    - iii. 27-29, Jacob’s extended protest.

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Judah shows no bitterness over Jacob's preference for Rachel (27 "my wife") or her sons. It's clear from his descriptions that Benjamin enjoys the favored place in the family. V.19 "his brother is dead" almost suggests that they are not his brothers, or sons of his father. Yet Judah is not bitter or vengeful.

- b. The summary predicts that if they return home "to their father" without Benjamin, they will not return "to peace," but in fact will deliver a devastating blow to Jacob.
2. 32-33, he tells Joseph that he has taken personal responsibility for Benjamin. Now Benjamin has (apparently) committed a grave sin, but Judah will not shirk his responsibility. He offers to bear what he believes is Benjamin's sin in his place. Here we begin to see a glimmer of the Messiah in the loins of Judah. Alter: "Twenty-two years earlier, Judah engineered the selling of Joseph into slavery; now he is prepared to offer himself as a slave so that the other son of Rachel can be set free."
3. v.34 is the most touching: Judah personally cannot bear to see the pain that the loss of Benjamin would cause to his father. His love for his father completely outweighs any sense of jealousy or bitterness that he might have. He is no longer one who could unjustly sell a favored son into slavery and then baldly lie to his father about it. Now he really, personally cares for what will become of Jacob. Alter again: "Twenty-two years earlier, he stood with his brothers and silently watched when the bloodied tunic they had brought to Jacob sent their father into a fit of anguish; now he is willing to do anything in order not to have to see his father suffer that way again."

### **45:1-14 Joseph makes himself known**

**1-3, Revelation.**—Joseph is now fully satisfied that God's work in the hearts of his brothers is complete. Note three aspects of his revelation:

- His assessment is not coldly rational; he is overwhelmed by Judah's touching responsibility for Benjamin and love for his father, and he "could not refrain himself" any longer.
- Before he reveals himself to his brothers, though, he excludes the Egyptians. He must speak of their act toward him years before, and will not dishonor them in the eyes of the Egyptians. Matthew Henry: "When Joseph would put on love he puts off state." This precaution is a good example for us when dealing with personal matters, not to include anyone who is not necessary to the discussion.
  - Matt 18:15, our Lord instructs us that in correcting an erring brother we must begin with him alone.
  - Prov 25:9, 10, "Debate thy cause with thy neighbour *himself*; and discover not a secret to another: 10 Lest he that heareth *it* put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away."
  - Prov 11:13, "A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter."
- His first concern (v.3) is for his father's welfare. They have told him as an official report, but he longs to hear it as one brother from another. This shows the concern of his heart, but it must also have encouraged them to know that they now have in common a deep love for their

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father. So it is with believers: whatever differences there may be among us appear much less if the objective of each of us is to glorify, not ourselves, but God.

**3a I am Joseph.**—Up until now he has spoken in Egyptian, through an interpreter, and if they have known his name at all, it is as Zaphnath Paaneah (41:45). Now all of a sudden they hear Hebrew words coming from his lips, and on them the name of one they thought long dead.

**3a-8, comfort.**—The brothers are (understandably) overwhelmed at this revelation. “Troubled” is too mild; the verb suggests that they were terrified. Joseph endeavors to comfort them in three ways.

- 4a, he urges them to draw near, that he might embrace them (14,15).
- 4c, he repeats his name, this time adding, “your brother.”
- 5-8, most extensively, he reminds them of God’s sovereignty in the whole affair.

Consider this last item in more detail.

*5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves.*—He wishes to guard against two possibilities.

- “Grieved” refers to the sense of guilt that each of them might have over their action decades before.
- “Angry with yourselves” reflects on the possibility of finger-pointing among themselves, much as Reuben did on the first visit (42:22, which Joseph heard and understood, v.23).

He comforts them and calms any tendency to recrimination by making a careful distinction between what they did and what God did.

*Sold ... send.*—The distinction between these two verbs is key to what follows. They did “sell” him (as v.4 also acknowledges), but they did not “send” him.

- “Sell” focuses on their objective, which was not to get him to Egypt, but just to get rid of him (and enrich themselves in the process).
- “Send” implies that the purpose was to get him to Egypt. This was only circumstantial for them, but central in God’s purpose. Thus he can say in v.8 that they didn’t send him there.

What was God’s greater purpose in moving him to Egypt? He says three times that God sent him, and each time he adds another purpose, starting with the broadest and most general and focusing down each time to a smaller group. If they recognize God’s purpose, they will not destroy themselves with guilt or recriminations.

- 5, “to preserve life.” The focus here is not on their lives alone, but on life in general. God in his grace toward his creatures provided Joseph as a way to mitigate the effect of the famine. Joseph here recognizes the divine purpose behind a secular job. Paul shows the same sense of priority in Titus 3:14 (“let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses”).
- 7, to save their lives and thus “preserve you a posterity in the earth.” Now he traces God’s purposes of grace down to the chosen family. Joseph treasures the promises that God made through Abraham, and he recognizes that the family must be saved through this

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time of famine if those promises are to be realized. So his focus has shrunk from all whom he fed, down to Jacob's family.

- 8, to exalt Joseph himself. The focus finally comes to rest on Joseph and his position as “a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.” Now that he has focused God's blessing down to himself, he shows how his authority spreads out, starting with Pharaoh, then his house, and then all Egypt. Joseph has learned the truth of Rom 8:28.

Calvin: “the right course of events is never so disturbed by the depravity and wickedness of men, but that God can direct them to a good end.” Compare the NT teaching concerning God's purpose behind the death of Christ:

- Acts 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:
- Acts 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

*Calvin has an excellent discussion on the implications of this passage.*

- *He observes that it makes clear how “God holds the government of the whole world, and that nothing is done but by his will and authority.”*
- *He recognizes that this teaching may lead “unbridled tongues” to “cry out immediately, either that God is the author of sin, or that wicked men are not to be accused of crime, seeing they fulfill the counsel of God.”*
- *The correct answer to this is Rom 9:20, not a specious distinction between the will and the permission of God.*

**9-13 invitation to Jacob.**—Now that he and his brothers are reconciled, Joseph's first desire is to reestablish contact with his father. He urges them to return quickly and bring his father with them.

The message is chiasitic.

- It (13b) as it begins, with a command for them to hasten and get his father. Joseph does not at all cede the unique relation that he has with his father, and that they have learned to accept. Note two expressions that he uses in v.9:

*My father.*—Not “our father.” Jacob is in a special sense his father. The brothers are only the messengers.

*Thy son Joseph.*—Does the order mean anything? Contrast “Joseph your brother” in 45:4.

Cases where the proper noun comes first are much more common: 400x in the OT (71 in Genesis), vs. 87 (15) where the common noun comes first (testing for *ab*, *ax*, *ben*).

Leading with the name (as in 45:4) appears to be the unmarked order. Leading with the relation places it into prominence. The one in whose name they are to speak to Jacob is not Joseph, who happens to be one of his sons, but the son *par excellence*.

- 9b, like 12-13, emphasize the identity of the speaker and his exalted position. Joseph wants his father to be assured that he is indeed who he says he is. He mentions “my brother

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Benjamin” explicitly in v.12 (with the common noun first, emphasizing his unique relation to Benjamin) because he knows that Jacob has a special affection for Benjamin and will give special attention to his testimony with regard to Joseph’s identity and state.

- 10-11 tell why Jacob is to come: so that he and his family may survive the ongoing famine. Note the repetition of the three categories in 10 and 11: Jacob, his household (children and grandchildren), and other property (all that thou hast).

9 Haste ye,

and go up to my father,

and say unto him,

Thus saith thy son Joseph,

God hath made me lord of all Egypt:

come down unto me,

tarry not:

10 And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen,

and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast:

11 And there will I nourish thee;

for yet there are five years of famine;

lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

12 And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin,

that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you.

13 And ye shall tell my father

of all my glory in Egypt,

and of all that ye have seen;

and ye shall haste

and bring down my father hither.

**14-15, Tearful greetings.**—Only after Joseph explains God’s sovereign purpose, and charges them to bring Jacob down, do the walls come down completely. He greets Benjamin first, but then all of them, and finally they feel free to speak with him as brothers together.

### **16-24 Preparations for the trip**

Joseph’s status within the Egyptian administration is such that Pharaoh enthusiastically supports his plan with travel support and the promise of shelter when they arrive (16-20). Joseph follows Pharaoh’s commandment (21-23), giving gifts to them all to show the richness of the land to which he was inviting them, but especially to Benjamin.

**24 see that ye fall not out.**—This final exhortation is a warning not to enter into recriminations with one another over the family’s past history, as Reuben did in 42:22 and as Joseph warned against in 45:5. It might seem unlikely to us that at this point when all is well and Joseph has forgiven his brothers, they should fall to quarreling, but he is an astute observer of human nature, and recognizes that when things seem most secure we are most liable to stumble (1 Cor 10:12). Our Savior warned against this attitude on the part of his disciples with the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23-35), and in the petition in the Lord’s prayer that asks, “forgive

us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Compare Eph 4:32, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

### **45:25, Return Trip from Egypt (42:26-28)**

Their return is uneventful.

### **45:26-28, Report to Jacob (42:29-38)**

Note the two sides of Jacob, marked with the shift in his name.

- 26, Jacob is marked with weakness and unbelief.
- 28, Israel is marked with belief and resolve

The transition between the two is marked by an experience like death and resurrection.

- 26, Jacob’s heart fainted.—Lit, “was numb” or “stopped.” Alter thinks that he had a slight heart attack, that his heart stopped momentarily. He knows his sons are not models of trustworthiness. The report about Joseph is absolutely incredible. Are they playing a cruel hoax on him?
- 27, the spirit of Jacob their father revived.—What persuades him that they are speaking the truth is the sight of the wagons, distinctively Egyptian vehicles that he would not expect his sons to have. At this point, he recovers from his attack. Compare
  - Judg 15:19, Samson, overcome with thirst, drinks of the water that God provides, and “his spirit returned, and he lived.”
  - 1 Sam 30:12, when David’s men feed the starving Egyptian, “his spirit returned to him”
  - Isa 57:15 God revives the spirit of those who are fallen. This is the closest parallel.

**28 I will go and see him.**—Jacob’s life has been marked with dire predictions about going down to the grave:

- 37:35, when he is told that Joseph is dead, “For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.”
- 42:38, concerning the need for Benjamin to go into Egypt: “if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

Now he has hope. His prospect is not to “go down into the grave,” but to “go and see [Joseph].”