

Bowed Down

The Providence of God and the Dreams of Joseph

- ¹ When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?"
- 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."
- ³ So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.
- ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him.
- ⁵ Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.
- ⁶ Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.
- ⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."
- ⁸ And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.
- ⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land."
- ¹⁰ They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food.
- ¹¹ We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies."
- ¹² He said to them, "No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see."

- ¹³ And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more."
- ¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you. You are spies.
- ¹⁵ By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here.
- 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."
- ¹⁷ And he put them all together in custody for three days.
- ¹⁸ On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God:
- ¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households,
- ²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so.
- 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."
- ²² And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood."
- ²³ They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them.
- ²⁴ Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.
- ²⁵ And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.
- ²⁶ Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed.

- ²⁷ And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack.
- ²⁸ He said to his brothers, "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?"
- ²⁹ When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying,
- ³⁰ "The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land.
- ³¹ But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we have never been spies.
- ³² We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.'
- ³³ Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way.
- ³⁴ Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.'"
- ³⁵ As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid.
- ³⁶ And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me."
- ³⁷ Then Reuben said to his father, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you."
- ³⁸ But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

Genesis 42:1-38

Providence

That tiny prognosticator of theological perplexity, the effervescent emerald, the chartreuse cricket called Jiminy famously chirped:

Like a bolt out of the blue
Fate steps in and sees you through
When you wish upon a star
Your dreams come true

Dreams. Those things you have that come to you in a vision. Those things Joseph that had the stars normally wished upon now bowing down and worshiping him. Those things that came upon him that he would have felt vindicated had they actually come true, because they left a dozen others in such a rage that they trampled him under their feet.

Fate. That irresistible force created by nothing and composed of nothing that somehow, someway makes all your dreams come true. We have talked about it before in

Genesis, along with its siblings: **Serendipity, Luck, Chance, Fortune, and Karma**. Princes and princesses each, running around our world like spoiled little brats telling everyone about their vast kingdom and how powerful their Royal Family is. But where is their king? Where is their queen? They have no mother or father. How did they get here? Where is the power?

The Greeks said that **Chaos** is the ultimate god, the first source who gave birth to the rest, but he is just like these. Some father he is. What is this Royal Family? As R.C. Sproul has said, “**Chance cannot do anything, because chance is not anything.**” Yet, this is what very smart people want to believe in, while ridiculing others who believe in a personal, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise, all-good God. Something or Nothing? Truly, when your theology emulates that of a cartoon cricket singing to a wooden little boy with a personality, the real world has become a fairy tale. If I’m lying, may my nose grow longer.

On the other hand, there is a fine young prince named **Providence**, and he runs around in a truly great kingdom, wielding great power, because his Father is the God of the Bible. **Providence is the means God uses to care for his**

creatures, especially his chosen ones. It comes from a word (Latin: *providentia*; Greek: *pronoia*) meaning to “take thought for” or “to look ahead.”¹ Today, we are going to see Providence working in great ways. As such, it should be a great encouragement to your faith.

However, and even more encouragingly, our story today is only the beginning of perhaps the longest section of the book of Genesis, and so the work of Providence, while being extraordinary here, will nevertheless remain incomplete. There is even more to come!

Today we are in Chapter 42 of Genesis. It is the first of three lengthy sections (42:1–38; 43:1–45:28; 46:1–47:12), each of which describe a journey to Egypt. These parallel three acts which came before this, which we have seen have made up Joseph’s career in Egypt thus far. (39:1–20; 39:21–40:23; 41:1–57). Thus, again, the providence we

¹ Easton’s Bible Dictionary has a good introductory paragraph on this. Providence is “used to denote God’s preserving and governing all things by means of second causes (Ps. 18:35; 63:8; Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). God’s providence extends to the natural world (Ps. 104:14; 135:5–7; Acts 14:17), the brute creation (Ps. 104:21–29; Matt. 6:26; 10:29), and the affairs of men (1 Chr. 16:31; Ps. 47:7; Prov. 21:1; Job 12:23; Dan. 2:21; 4:25), and of individuals (1 Sam. 2:6; Ps. 18:30; Luke 1:53; James 4:13–15). It extends also to the free actions of men (Ex. 12:36; 1 Sam. 24:9–15; Ps. 33:14, 15; Prov. 16:1; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1), and things sinful (2 Sam. 16:10; 24:1; Rom. 11:32; Acts 4:27, 28), as well as to their good actions (Phil. 2:13; 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:9, 10; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 5:22–25).” M. G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

see today will only continue to grow and cause our wonder to increase as each of these three sections drive home in increasing ways the magnificent power of God to do with people whatever he chooses, and in this case, to do for them good that they do not deserve.

The story today has **six scenes**. The first and last have **Jacob** as the main character. The second and fifth talk about the **journey** to and from Egypt and Canaan that he sends his sons on. The third and fourth are the middle scenes of the story. They describe a **first and second audience of a group of men with Joseph** the Prince (vs. 6--*shallit*, this word does not mean “prince” per se, but describes a ruler or governor) of Egypt.

- A. Jacob sends his sons to Egypt (42:1-4)
- B. Sons travel to Egypt (42:5)
- C. 1st meeting with Joseph (42:6-17)
- C¹. 2nd meeting with Joseph (42:18-24)
- B¹. Sons travel to Canaan (42:25-28)
- A¹. Sons report to Jacob (42:29-38)

As we go through these scenes one by one, our focus will be on Providence at every turn.

First Scene: Providence through Nature

The God of the Bible is all-powerful. He is the Creator of all things. In Genesis 1 we saw time and again his mighty power over nature. He moved the waters; he brought the day land; he seeded the Garden; he created the birds and the animals, the fish and the creeping things; and he made man in his own image. There is nothing in all this world that can thwart God's power or his plan. If he decides to do something, then it shall be done.

Previously, we saw that **Pharaoh had two dreams**. These dreams predicted a great famine would come about over all the earth. Joseph told the Pharaoh, “**God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do**” (**Gen 41:28**). The doubling of the dreams he said mean, “**That the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about**” (**Gen 41:32**). The famine in the land has been caused by God. But God has **brought it about through Providence**. Providence is the secondary cause(s) of a thing. God is the primary cause. Providence is the tool in God's hand. We do not know exactly how he brings such things to pass (**Job 38:31**), be it through heavenly beings controlling weather under his authority (**Rev 16**) or through purely natural

laws that somehow obey his command (Jer 5:22?), or through a combination of both (that is my position), but we know that however he does it, it has come to pass.

So there was a great and terrible famine in all the world, and the whole world was coming to Joseph in Egypt to be fed, for word had gotten out that somehow, the mighty Egyptian empire had foreseen this devastation and was prepared with food. Now our story begins, “When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, ‘Why do you look at one another?’” (Gen 42:1). It is a funny way to begin the story. It makes his eleven sons look like buffoons. Here they are starving to death, and all they can do is stare at one another in bewilderment, even though they knew that Egypt had grain for sale.

“Egypt!” they might have exclaimed. “Better to die in misery than go down to that God forsaken place. Canaan is the land of promise, not Egypt.” But as Matthew Henry writes, “Thus Providence orders it, that one place should be a succour and supply to another; for we are all brethren.”²

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged*

So Jacob call them together and says, “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” (2). How can the promises come true if they are all dead? In this way, not only will Providence supply the needs of Jacob, God will also use it to move Jacob and his family down to Egypt. God wants them in Egypt, not in Canaan. God is using a famine to move a nation. *That* is Providence.

“So the ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt” (3). Ten? I thought there were eleven sons remaining with Jacob? There are, “But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him” (4). As this scene concludes, we can see that it isn’t going to be so easy to get them all down there, for Jacob isn’t in on God’s plan. Christ hasn’t told him what he wants in this instance. So Jacob remains behind with his now favored and last son of Rachel.

When I think about God’s providence over famine here, it makes me think of the audacious claims made by Christians about the weather. So often we hear them say

in One Volume (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 83.

that when such a such a thing occurs, it is because God is angry and is judging people for their sins through the weather. Certainly, there are times when this happens in the Bible. But other times that isn't the case at all. Remember Job's family which was all killed in a storm? It was the evil counselors who said it happened because he had sinned. In reality, God was testing Job's faith in the furnace of suffering. It had to do with God, not Job. And here, in our story, is there a word about anyone doing anything wrong to deserve a famine? No. But we do know that God is behind it for his purposes, purposes that most of the time no one but himself is privy to, and that is God's prerogative. The secret things belong to the LORD.

Second Scene: Providence through Foreshadowing

The second scene is so small, a mere **one verse**, that many outlines do not include it as its own section. I will because I see it as the parallel to the return voyage back to Canaan. It tells us, “**Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan**” (5). The verse tells, but does not describe, Joseph's ten sons traveling from Israel to Egypt. Given that

it took the generation of Moses **40 years** to make the journey, you might think it a long way. In reality, the distance from Hebron to modern Cairo is a mere 260 miles. That's about the distance between Ft. Morgan to Grand Junction, as the crow flies. Would it really take you forty years to do that? (God had confused them and would not let them enter, it was not that it was far away).

The route was called **the King's Highway** and it lead right along the Mediterranean Sea. Ten strong warriors like Jacob's sons could have done it in a week or two if they were desperate. The thing I want to focus on here is something I mentioned a moment ago. They are going down **to Egypt**. This will be the place where almost every event from this point on through the first half of Exodus takes place. Why? Because in this **Providence, God is moving the sons of Jacob to Egypt** in a way of foreshadowing to us his mighty Sovereignty hundreds of years later over a different Pharaoh. This journey foreshadows the need for another journey out of Egypt: the Exodus. Perhaps that is why Genesis will tell us about this same journey two more times.

In thinking about this, consider **God's providence over**

the places where men live, especially because so many people get so tied up in knots over just this point. How do I know God's will for my life? How can I be sure he wants me to live here or there? How will I ever choose? Well, God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place" (Acts 17:26). I think he has it under control.

God had graciously given Abram the promise of the land of Canaan. He had even allowed him to live there during his own life, though not without hardship. The same went for Isaac. Much of Jacob's life, too, was spent in Canaan. But in God's providence, he would not let Israel stay in the Promised Land, and so God moved them out, for his reasons in his timing. Jacob wasn't worried at all about where he would live. Why then should you?

Third Scene: Providence through Irony

Now that Jacob's sons have arrived in Egypt, we arrive at the first of the two middle scenes of the story. Here, I want to focus on God's providence through, of all things, irony. What is irony? Well, it isn't an Italian sea side village, nor is it a fifth generation appliance for getting

wrinkles out of clothes (Iron A, Iron B, Iron C, Iron D, Iron E).

In a Greek tragedy, it is a literary technique by which the full significance of a character's words or actions are clear to the audience or reader although unknown to the character(s). In this case, the sons of Jacob are going to get a whole lot of what's coming to them, while they have absolutely no idea why or what is happening. What is coming to them is not at the hands of Karma (for karma has no hands, remember). It is going to come at the hands of Joseph, and through Joseph, God will teach the sons some serious life lessons. Again, that is Providence.

It begins by telling us that Joseph was “governor over the land [of Egypt]. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land” (42:6). This sets up the most ironic and important sentence in the entire chapter. “And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground” (6). Why would this be ironic?

The answer occurs to us when we remember that long ago Joseph had a couple of very important dreams. “Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your

sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf” (Gen 37:7). His brothers knew exactly what he was driving at and answered, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” (Gen 37:8). Now, here we are many years later and lo and behold, Joseph is the ruler of Egypt and his brothers are bowing themselves before him.

This also explain why this is perhaps a top three verse in terms of importance in all of the Joseph narrative. Because it not only shows God’s providence, but also his sovereignty: his foreknowledge, his power, his faithfulness, his goodness, his glory. God has just now, but *without any of them even realizing it*—not even Joseph—fulfilled Joseph’s dreams from long ago. Here the dream of Joseph is unfolding before our eyes, and none of them can even see it, even though they are the actors of the story. *That* is irony. How glorious that God got to have a good laugh here for just a moment, as the only one in on the joke. Until Joseph saw his brothers...

“Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them” (7). This is a second piece of irony and it takes place on three levels. First, after recognizing them he “treated them like

strangers.” The NAS says, “disguised (*nakar*) himself” This word was used back when the sons dipped and disguised Joseph’s coat in blood and had their father “examine” (*nakar*) it to see if it was Joseph’s. Now Joseph is returning the favor.

Second, he spoke roughly to them. This is also returning the favor for the way they spoke towards him on dreadful day twenty years earlier, though his speech was not the same as theirs. He asked, “Where do you come from?” (42:7). He knows where they come from, but he is now testing them. “From the land of Canaan, to buy food” (7). Again, it tells us he recognized his brothers, but adds they did not recognize him (8). It was then that Joseph remembered his dreams (9). His time in Egypt had made him forget it all (41:51), but now he remembers it all.

At that moment, perhaps recalling the event that started this whole incredible journey he had been through, the third wave comes, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land” (9). Three times he will call them spies. Back when he was a boy, he had given his brothers a bad report to their father (37:2). Walton asks, “Had he spied on them?” The irony of this section is

delicious.

As for Joseph's behavior here, the text does not tell us if it approves or disapproves. As I read over the commentaries I found the natural tendency is to approve of the actions of Joseph, saying thing like **he is just testing them, to see whether they are as heartless now as they were twenty years earlier.**³ My own feeling is that, while justified in one sense, he probably had mixed motives in his actions: some good, some evil. I know I would have. Here I am ruler of the Egypt and my brothers who had left me for dead are now bowing before me? Time for a little payback. Joseph is human, not the God-man.

Their answer brings **a third irony**. “**They said to him, “No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies” (10-11).** Perhaps they had never been spies (one wonders about Levi and Simeon's actions). But they are **far from honest men**. They have been lying to their father about this very man for the past twenty years! This scene shows an increasingly pathetic group of men.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 406.

But it is not finished yet. After Joseph repeats that they are spies come to plot a war or something (12), they reply again, “We, your servants ...” (take note, that they are acknowledging their fealty to him again) “... are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more” (13). Here, they tell mostly the truth. The only questionable statement is that Joseph is no more. They didn’t say he is dead, not exactly. But the irony here, of course, is that they are talking to Joseph and don’t know it. They have admitted exactly who they are, confirming any lingering doubt that Joseph may have had.

Joseph continues with his own ruse, but now with a greater purpose in mind. “It is as I said to you. You are spies. By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here” (15). The plan is well conceived. Joseph wants to see his only brother from the same mother again. But they don’t know that. In fact, this really does serve as a test for them. More irony.

The plan of Joseph is not complete, however, until he says, “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. And he put them all together in custody for three days” (16-17). Concluding this completely ironic meeting, Joseph now **throws his brothers into the pit**, just as they had done to him, but still they don’t know why. Not only this, but they were put in custody “**for three days.**” This was the amount of time between the dream of the cupbearer and baker and the fulfillment. Whose fate will befall them? The death of the baker, or the glory of the cupbearer?

Fourth Scene: Providence through Mercy

We now begin to make our way out of the story. It begins with a second meeting between Joseph and his brothers. Taking them out of the prison-pit, he puts it to them, “**On the third day Joseph said to them, ‘Do this and you will live, for I fear God’**” (42:18). Do you see the Gospel here, friend? **Feeding those who are hungry** (for this is what it means to “fear God” (Job 29:12-13; Prov 31:20, 30)? More than that, *Living ... on the third day*? It is a choice Joseph puts before his brothers. Satisfaction rather than starvation, resurrection rather than death. They can

be the cupbearer. But of course it also profoundly foreshadows the glories of Jesus Christ who fed the masses and lived again on the third day. Here, then, we are going to see God's providence work through *the mercy* of Joseph, the type of Christ.

“If you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die” (19-20). The test actually continues the irony. Now, only *one brother* will have to be put into the pit ... just as they did to Joseph so many years ago.

At this, the brothers convene a little meeting, in front of Joseph, but in their own tongue so that he won't understand them. “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’” (21). This fascinating verse shows the beginning of the changes that will come upon these men for finally repenting of their sin. The first step of repentance is to admit guilt. You

can't repent if you haven't to be sorry for. In this and the next verse they will also recognize that punishment is due for their sins, they confess their hard-heartedness, and their bloodguilt.⁴

The **second** thing about this verse is that it shows us more of the painful horror that Joseph underwent. His **very soul was in distress**. He begged them to stop. They wouldn't listen. This is the horror they all had to live with for these many years. One had to live with the physical consequences of having evil done to him. The others had to live with the spiritual and psychological consequences of sin upon sin upon sin, all in the name of not repenting. Which is worse? Just now, I think the brothers are starting to find out that theirs is far worse.

This leads to the **third** thing in the verse, they have come to a conclusion about the situation. Their conclusion is that all of this is happening to them because of what they did to Joseph. Here, the irony of the previous verses comes crashing down, for they are seeing all of this in front of the very man they think is dead. And yet, please notice that the

⁴ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 678.

text never actually says that they are right in their conclusion, at least not from the narrator's (God's) point of view. This is simply how they see it. They may be right. Of course, God also may be doing something much bigger here than any of them would ever be able to see, even at the end of the Genesis itself.

Reuben, the oldest, the one who stood up for Joseph previously but was ignored (they were only persuaded to spare Joseph's life by Judah),⁵ “**Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy?**” (22). Here Joseph may learn for the first time that Reuben actually tried to save him. If so, imagine how he would have felt about his oldest brother. Perhaps this served to soften him even more. “**But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood**” (22). This statement takes us all the way back to Noah where three times in one verse God says, “**I will require**” the life and the lifeblood for someone who sheds another man's blood (**Gen 9:5**). It might can be read in light of **Exodus 31:16** which equates kidnapping with murder.

⁵ **Going Deeper:** Walton (NIVAC, 679) notes that in this and what follows, as Reuben and Judah again emerge as the two voices in the stories, we can begin to see Judah asserting himself/itself as the Tribe of Leadership. For who is Reuben? But Judah becomes largest and, indeed, Messianic, in the rest of the Bible.

Of course, more irony is staring us in the face: **Joseph isn't actually dead**. The next verse makes it even more ironic, “**They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them**” (23). If Reuben isn't talking about kidnapping, but murder, then he actually doesn't know what he is talking about. How quick we are to make judgments on things we know nothing about.

Seeing as he understood what they were saying, knew that they were his brothers, knew exactly what they had done to him, knew that they were now starting to feel guilty and even repent of their great sin, **how must Joseph have felt?** Many people might feel nothing, having been so hardened by the sins committed against them that they would actually relish the just retribution. Long hardened hatred does that to a person. Think about a situation in your own life where perhaps that was you, or where at least you wished it was.

This is **not** how Joseph, who feared God, reacted. Instead, like our Lord Jesus in the shortest verse in our Bibles, **Joseph wept** (24). This is true humanity, weeping over the misery of others caused by their own sins.

Weeping rather than seeking revenge. Weeping as Jesus did as he looked over Jerusalem and wept over the Pharisees who were so hard hearted they had killed God's prophets and were about to kill him.

Joseph had to turn away, because how as losing control. We will see much more weeping from Joseph in chapters to come (see [43:30](#); [45:2](#); [46:29](#)), so much so it almost seems a little embarrassing, but not with all that Joseph had been through. For now, he regains his composure and speaks last words to them. Then, he takes [Simeon](#) from them and bound him before their eyes ([24](#)). Simeon will be the one to get the treatment in the pit. But why Simeon?

This is all [speculation](#), but it could be that because of what Reuben said, Joseph realizes he wasn't in on the plot to kill him. It could be a kind of equal payback (Joseph wants Rachel's second son Benjamin, so he takes Leah's second son Simeon). It could be that Simeon was least liked and most likely to be left behind. If they hated Simeon that bad, it would make the test all the harder. Perhaps they wouldn't return to get him, perhaps they would leave him as they left Joseph. Perhaps it is all of these. Perhaps it is none of them. But clearly, we have here a parallel with

Joseph being put into the pit. Yet, if they will obey Joseph and bring back Benjamin, they will all be saved. Mercy is set before them. What will they do?

Fifth Scene: Providence through Human Manipulation (and Sin)

The fifth scene parallels the second. Now the sons of Jacob will **return to the land of Canaan**. But this scene is longer than its parallel. “Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man’s money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them” (25). The ambiguity of this action lead me to explain here that now we are going to see God’s providence through human manipulation and perhaps even sin.

We could have done this earlier, though in all of the instances it isn’t 100% clear that Joseph has at least some bad motives. What is he doing here? Well, his brothers have paid for their food. In return, they have filled their huge bags with enough grain to last a while in this horrible famine. But now, Joseph is giving their money back to them, *unbeknownst* to them. Why?

It could be that he is simply being kind. They are his

brothers after all. How can he take from them after all God has done to provide for him, after all he has heard about their own repentance, after this amazing encounter where his very dream has been fulfilled? It could be more irony. They were plenty happy to exchange Joseph for money, so why not replace their money in the grain? Or, perhaps it is something else. That is how the brothers take it anyway.

“Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. He said to his brothers, ‘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?’” (26-28). Why would getting a free meal be so frightening to them? Because it was a free meal! This powerful lord could, if he wished, hunt them down like dogs for **stealing the grain**. Joseph made them appear as thieves. What he has done here is also insure that his brothers would return with Benjamin. Was it the best of plans? Was it the purest of motives? Was it the kindest of ways to treat his brothers? Weigh the return of all that

money, money that they now have to spend on other things with the dread of possible death and decide for yourself.

As for me, I see the hand of providence working even more. Whether Joseph sinned or not, he certainly manipulated the situation to his own advantage, and has still not told his brothers anything about the truth. It is difficult to see how this is totally sinless. But it is not difficult to see that God will use this to bring about his own plan, using the means of human agency, intervention, secrets, threats, kindnesses, and tests all to his advantage. For God is doing something to them, but none of them know exactly what it is yet. Only God could ever do something like that, and it ought to drive you to worship him for it.

Sixth Scene: Providence through Hurt and Obstinacy

The long trip home was surely **made longer by this fear of the wrath of Egypt** coming down on them. But arrive home to Jacob their father they did (Yoda, I am not). This brings us to a lengthy scene where Jacob returns to the forefront. They recount the story to their father. “**When**

they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, ‘The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we have never been spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.’ Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, ‘By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land’” (42:29-34).

Then the money resurfaces. “As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid” (35). Now Jacob is afraid too. He said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me” (36). What a pitiable condition poor old Jacob is in at this

moment. All his schemes, all his lies, all his hard work, all his love, all his courage, all his battles with God have lead him to this moment. It is all coming undone.

Again Reuben speaks up, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you” (37). You see, Reuben and Jacob both know that they have to return, and soon, otherwise Pharaoh will hunt them down as thieves. So he tries to lessen the blow by offering his own sons as a sacrifice. It sounds great, but is there a price for the love of a child? Can one really replace the other?

Not in Jacob’s mind. “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol” (42: 38). Thus the chapter ends, leaving us in a cliff hanger, like the last episode of the season. Jacob has chosen to stay in the land of famine and fight all of Egypt rather than lose his son. It appears as if we have finally found **the one thing** that can thwart God’s providence: the bereaving hurt and obstinacy of a wounded old man.

Is that what you think? Sometimes, does your own

pain get so much of you that you believe now God finally won't work? That is what suffering makes people feel like. Certainly, Joseph had to have had his moments over those twenty years of thinking just that. Now Simeon gets to. And Jacob. And all the brothers. God is against them. He will not be here for them to do them good. It is all over.

But then, out of the ashes of despair, a phoenix of hope arises in our hearts. We realize that life **on the third day** comes *after the suffering*. There is nothing that can thwart God's Providence. And his plans for his people are to do them eternal good, even though the moment might say the opposite. Christ has suffered the pains betrayal felt by Joseph, the weight of sin felt by his brothers, the horror of loss felt by Jacob. And he has overcome, living now in eternal resurrected glory after his sufferings which made his perfect. Look to Christ in your lowest moment, and be certain in that face that God knows exactly what he is doing, even in your sorrow and obstinacy.