
Twice Tested

Genesis 43-44

Introduction Many people hated school, not because of the learning, but because of the testing. Regular quizzes and exams are the de rigueur of a good education. A good test exposes a familiarity with facts and a facility in applying them. It is an opportunity to remember and reason. Sometimes, testing is different. When I was coaching, I regularly tested players. We ran them through mental drills designed to test their ability to withstand relentless pressure. We put them through combination drills and small game competition that exposed skill weaknesses or unwillingness to play both sides of the ball. And sometimes, we tested to see whether individuals were developing as a team. Would small jealousies and jockeying for favor, starting positions and even public acclaim come to surface when loyalty to the cause of the team was paramount.

This is the sort of testing we often face from God through trials. This is the kind of testing Joseph will put his brothers through. It is intended, through trials and unexpected providences, to expose their hearts, what they truly believe and deeply want. The brothers are tested for jealousy and fidelity. Will they be jealous of Benjamin and the favor shown him? Will they allow him to be taken away, or will Judah keep his word and stand up from his brother?

Much of these chapters are a studied contrast to the chapter 42. Joseph greets them differently, treats them differently, the brothers respond differently. Joseph is tender, solicitous, and congenial. The brothers are humble, curious, hesitant, and surprised at their treatment.

But these two chapters are not about judgment. They are about how mercy transforms. Through Joseph, a severe mercy is extended and radical transformation takes place. But all this is aimed at reconciliation and restoration.

Reconciliation without righteousness is a sham. Joseph well knows that to be truly reunited with his brothers, they need to have dealt with their sins. He is a good position to expose their hearts and see if they have truly changed. These two chapters tell of these sons of Jacob being twice tested.

The Testing of their Jealousy**Chapter 43**

Their deep jealousy of Joseph had caused them to plan to kill him and eventually to sell him into slavery. This first test is designed to see if they will be jealous of another little brother's being favored.

Through the Preparation for the Journey (43:1-14)

The sovereign Lord is working to bring the boys back to Egypt.

The Difficult Struggle over Returning (v.1-7)

The sacks of grain that sustained them after the first journey are slowly disappearing. The famine is intensifying. A decision to return to Egypt for food is pressing on them. But Jacob and his sons are all aware that in order to return, the youngest, Benjamin, will have to go as well. Jacob does not want him to go. Benjamin has now taken Joseph's place in Jacob's idolatrous, self-centered heart.

The Noble Pledge for Safety (v.8-10)

Judah then stands to ensure the safety of Benjamin. He will bear the blame. He will pledge for the sake of the boy. There is also a sense of impatience with his father's self-focus and child-centeredness. In the time it finally took to get his dad to agree, they could have made the journey twice. So, this has not been a simple one-time conversation, but a long discussion as hunger looms near.

The Ample Provision under Mercy (v.11-14)

Jacob resigns himself to the inevitable. So he loads up his sons with expensive nuts and spices. He sends twice the amount of money. He prepares the sons to pay back the money that had been put in their bags on the last trip. He is reconciled to sending Benjamin, if necessary, to his death.

In the Summons before Joseph (43:15-25)

They load their provisions and head down to Egypt. They report to stand before Joseph.

Their Call to the House (v.15-17)

When Joseph sees that Benjamin has come, he sends his steward to prepare a feast. He plans it for his own home, not in the public places. Through the steward, he summons them to his home to meet with him in private.

Their Fear for the Motivation (v.18-22)

O, can you just smell their fear? They are both baffled and frightened. Among themselves they speculate that this Egyptian ruler is going to exact his revenge over the money. O, if they only knew who this was and the cause for true justice and revenge that could have lurked in his heart. So they go to the steward to try to explain what had happened and that they are prepared to make amends.

Their Assurances from the Steward (v.23)

But the steward has his instructions. He knows that they are heading, not toward something to fear but to a feast. The only slaughter today would be the beef for the table. He tells them not to be afraid. He then attributes the appearing of their money to the God he serves. Ah, the Egyptian lord who fears and serves Yahweh has instructed his household in the ways of the Lord and seems to have brought even this steward to faith in the God of the Bible.

Their Preparations for the Meal (v.24-25)

They seem to take him at his word. They settle in, taking care of their livestock. They wash and prepare themselves for a meal. What relief and joy when Simeon appears, unharmed. Things are really looking up. They are going to be dining with royalty.

With the Companionship around the Table (43:26-34)

The day wanes on and Joseph arrives home from his work.

The Assurances by his Greeting (v.26-28)

He meets with his guests and assures them in a kind and familial greeting. He inquires about their father. He is a kind and genial host. You can almost see them beginning to relax.

The Compassion for his Brother (v.29-30)

Then he sees Benjamin. Ah, his closest brother! He greets him and then seems to remember and addresses him as “son”. But, his heart is warmed to his brother. He has to hurry out to another room. There he weeps.

The Strangeness of his Setting (v.31-34)

When he returns, they prepare to serve the meal. In typical Egyptian fashion, Joseph does not sit with Hebrews. This was an abomination, partly because they are not Egyptian but also because they are shepherds. Shepherds were a dirty, low class of people, an abomination (Gen. 46:34) not worthy to sit at table with the highborn.

To their amazement, they are given a seating order. The place of honor and authority was given to the oldest according to his birthright. Around the table they went, according to age with the youngest Benjamin at the expected place. They cannot help but notice. But they don't know what to make of it. So they sit down and are ready to eat. The chargers of food are brought to Joseph's table. The portions are served onto the plates. They watch as 5 times the amount is taken to Benjamin. Ah, but there is no jealousy. There are no green eyes among them. All is quiet and well in their souls. They eat and drink and make merry with him. They are happy together. They are just glad for what they are receiving.

The Testing of their Fidelity**Chapter 44**

Jealousy had ridden the hearts of these men into selling their brother. Along with that had been a deep loss of loyalty and fidelity. They failed to fear God, to understand their responsibility to their family and hard heartedly dishonored and wounded their father. Will they, given the right circumstances, do so again?

By the Accusation against the Brothers**(44:1-17)**

So Joseph builds upon the testing device he has already used.

The Framing of Benjamin**(v.1-2)**

Joseph tells his steward to prepare the brother's sacks of grain, loading them down with as much as they can possibly carry. Then he is to return their money bags, one in each sack of grain. In Benjamin's sack, he is to put his prized personal serving cup.

The Confrontation by the Steward**(v.3-13)**

As the morning dawns, the brothers all load up and begin to head out. You can well imagine their joy at being reunited, their wonder at the dinner and all of them together headed home to father. But they have not ridden far out of town when chasing hard behind them, up gallops the Egyptian lord's steward.

Standing there he feigns anger. Trembling, he charges them with returning the Egyptian lord's good favor with the evil of stealing his prized and personal silver cup. This cup is said to be how he practices divination. He is now giving the brothers a pagan explanation for how he knew their birth order and the favored status of Benjamin. He is not only accusing them of theft of a valuable silver cup, but also of religious apostasy in that they are taking his magic talisman.

Ah, they are shocked. Listen, the shifting winds of Egypt are buffeting them terribly. First accused as spies, imprisoned, a hostage taken and then sent home with a dire warning for their return. Then, when they return, ready to make full amends, with Benjamin in tow they are treated to a special dinner where the Egyptian seems to know more than he should. Now, they are accused of what would be unthinkable. Why would they steal a single gold or silver trinket when they had come, not only with money and spices to buy what they needed now, but also to reimburse what had somehow found its way into their bags on the last trip?

Then, with their usual foolish overstatement (and aren't we, under the same sort of duress, prone to the same sort of response) they say that this is so impossible and so unthinkable that the steward can search all their belongings. If he finds the cup in anyone's belongings, then that one can be put to death and all the rest will return to be slaves.

The steward responds with better reasoned justice. If it is found, then that one will be accused, bound and brought to servitude and the rest will be innocent. What an evocative sentence. They cannot help but remember a day long ago when one of them, innocent of any wrong, was bound and sent to Egypt. So the search begins. You can almost feel the drama rising. The steward is no

fool. He knows exactly where it is and that it will be found. To help his master press home the test, he starts with the eldest and works his way down. Sack after sack is opened with the what! The bag of money is in the sacks as before. Now, instead of growing relief there has to be growing consternation until Benjamin's sack is opened and behold, there is the cup.

Every one of them is grieved. They tear their clothes. They load their donkeys. They do not abandon Benjamin to his fate. They all head back to the city. That, I am sure, was a long and silent and dreadful ride.

The Accusation by Joseph (v.14-17)

Joseph is awaiting them in his house. They come in before him and throw themselves at his feet. They cannot understand what is happening. They have no way to clear themselves. But this is not Joseph's supposed divination, this is God exposing the guilt of the brothers. They understand that. Further, they are willing to submit, all of them to that.

But no, Joseph will have none of that. He is going to release all but Benjamin. What will they do? Will they look to their own escape and leave a brother behind to be enslaved just as long ago they sent a brother into slavery? Will they forsake their word, their obligation, their family loyalty and heavenly fidelity? Will they be willing to wound their father once again?

In other words, are these brothers truly repentant? Are they jealous of Benjamin – here is a convenient way to be rid of him. Are they loyal to God – here is a convenient way out of their dilemma. Or are they committed in their hearts to obedience to God in such a way that they will stand up for Benjamin and seek a way to return him home and not wound their father again?

In The Appeal from Judah (44:18-34)

Ah, Judah has given his word to his father. Now he will make his appeal to the Egyptian lord. In a stunning reversal of heroes, Judah now stands to become the center of the story.

The Love for His Father (v.18-29)

These two paragraphs are a rehearsal of what has happened. They are the events of these two chapters through Judah's eyes. These now are repentant, God-fearing, father loving, brother defending eyes. The point of this familiar narrative is to highlight their loyalty and love for their father. It matters to them that he is old, infirm and vulnerable. It matters to them that he loves Benjamin fiercely. It matters to them that they have brought much grief in what they did to their other brother. It matters to them that this will kill their aged father. There is no jealousy here. There is no disloyalty here.

The Substitution for his Brother (v.30-34)

O, the great gospel heart of the Bible shines in Judah's words. He will take his brother's place. He will be a substitute. For the sake of his father and the safety of his little brother, he will take his place in punishment. He will fulfill his covenant. He will keep his word. He will leave the place of position and

prosperity. He will become a servant in Egypt. He will, if necessary, give his life for the life of his brother.

So here is Judah, the tribe from which the kings of Israel and the great Ruler and Redeemer will come. As a shadow of the greater to come, he takes the place of the accused, fulfills the justice required all for the good of little brother and the love of his father.

O, see our Redeemer – see Him standing in our place. See Him bearing our punishment. See Him willing to come to the world and die in our place. See Him dying and raised again, all for the good of little brothers and the love of His father. See Him one day gathering all the Benjamin's who have trusted His Name and bowed to His rule around Him bringing them safely home.

Soli Deo Gloria – Amen.