

The Test of a Lifetime

¹ Then he commanded the steward of his house, “Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack, ² and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain.” And he did as Joseph told him.

³ As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. ⁴ They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, “Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid evil for good?’ ⁵ Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this.’”

⁶ When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. ⁷ They said to him, “Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing! ⁸ Behold, the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord’s house? ⁹ Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord’s servants.” ¹⁰ He said, “Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent.” ¹¹ Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. ¹² And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. ¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, “What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?” ¹⁶ And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.” ¹⁷ But he said, “Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.” – Genesis 44:1-17 ESV



After a wonderful evening of feasting on fine food in the governor’s palace, the 11 brothers of Joseph prepared to return home to Canaan. Their trip had gone far better than they could have ever imagined. They had rescued Simeon from captivity, settled the matter of the missing grain payment, received a large financial gift from the governor, feasted in his home, and were now returning with full sacks of grain. On top of that, Judah was able to keep his promise to their father that he would bring back Benjamin unharmed.

But as they were busy making preparations to leave, Joseph was devising a scheme that would dramatically alter their plans. He was still testing his brothers' hearts to see if they had really changed or if they were the same self-serving siblings who had sold him into slavery all those years ago.

Joseph's strategy was aimed at exposing their loyalty to Benjamin, the youngest son of Jacob. Joseph must have assumed that, in his absence, Benjamin would have become the natural heir to the coveted position of the favored son. And Joseph appears anxious to discover whether his brothers still suffered from the same jealousy and resentment that had driven them to consider taking his life.

As he had done before, Joseph instructed his steward to put money in the bag of each of the brothers. Then he took an expensive silver drinking goblet and told the steward to place it in the bag of the youngest son, Benjamin. The faithful steward did as he was instructed, and the brothers loaded their donkeys and set off on their journey home. Their spirits must have been high as they set off, but the upbeat mood would quickly change when they saw a contingent of men rapidly approaching. Panic must have set in when the brothers saw that it was the governor's steward accompanied by what was likely a group of armed men from Joseph's private security force. This carefully designed ruse was meant to scare and intimidate the brothers, and the words spoken by the steward must have struck fear into the hearts of Reuben and his siblings. Joseph had given his steward very specific instructions.

"Chase after them and stop them. When you catch up with them, ask them, 'Why have you repaid my kindness with such evil? Why have you stolen my master's silver cup, which he uses to predict the future? What a wicked thing you have done!'" – Genesis 44:4-5 NLT

The brothers were indignant that the governor would accuse them of stealing. They professed their innocence and, in a moment of rashness, made an unwise vow to demonstrate their sincerity.

"If you find his cup with any one of us, let that man die. And all the rest of us, my lord, will be your slaves." – Genesis 44:9 NLT

Moses doesn't reveal which brother made this costly guarantee, but it was likely either Reuben or Judah. They appear to have been the two who acted as spokesmen for the group. But whoever made the statement would quickly live to regret it because when the steward ordered a search of their belongings, the silver cup was discovered in Benjamin's grain sack. According to Joseph's detailed instructions, the steward began the search with the oldest brother. Reuben's stomach must have dropped when he saw the money sitting in the mouth of his sack. It was all happening again. And as the steward worked his way down the line, the same scene took place. Each brother's sack was found to contain the money they had paid for the grain.

But it was Benjamin's sack that held the most shocking revelation: The very silver cup the brothers had vehemently denied having taken. This was when the real test began. The brothers had been so confident of their innocence that they had pledged to put to death the one among them who had stolen the cup. In addition, they vowed to offer themselves as slaves to the governor. But the governor's steward had wisely countered, "only the one who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go free" (Genesis 44:10 NLT).

This condition put the brothers in a very awkward position. Now that the cup had been found in Benjamin's possession, would they abandon him in order to save their own lives? The steward had clearly stated that only the guilty party would be held accountable. They would be free to leave and return to their father in Canaan, with their grain and the money that was found in their bags. That would have been quite a tempting offer.

But rather than abandon Benjamin, the brothers demonstrated their anguish over Benjamin's fate by tearing their robes and weeping. There was no way they were going to return home without their brother. They dreaded the thought of having to tell their father, yet again, that he had lost another son. So, they packed up their donkeys and returned with the steward to the governor's house.

When they arrived, they found the indignant governor waiting for them, and he demanded an explanation for their actions.

"What have you done?" Joseph demanded. "Don't you know that a man like me can predict the future?" – Genesis 44:15 NLT

Joseph and his steward had agreed to bestow on the silver cup a special significance by claiming it was used by the governor to divine the future. It is unlikely that Joseph practiced divination. After all, it was God who had given Joseph the ability to interpret dreams, not a silver goblet. But by deeming the cup to have supernatural qualities, they had increased its value. The brothers were guilty of having stolen something of religious significance, which made the crime even more scandalous.

But Judah continued to declare their innocence, begging the governor to show them mercy.

"Oh, my lord, what can we say to you? How can we explain this? How can we prove our innocence? God is punishing us for our sins. My lord, we have all returned to be your slaves—all of us, not just our brother who had your cup in his sack." – Genesis 44:16 NLT

Not only had they returned, but they were willing to offer themselves as slaves. He and his brothers were pledging their lives as payment for Benjamin's guilt. It had been Judah who had convinced Jacob to let Benjamin return to Egypt with them, even taking full responsibility for his well-being. He had vowed to bring him back safe and sound, and now he was indicating that he and his brothers would rather be slaves in Egypt than abandon their brother.

But the governor refused Judah's offer, commanding the men to return to their father. Only the brother in whose sack the goblet was found would remain in Egypt as a slave. The rest were free to go. Once again, Joseph was testing the faithfulness and integrity of his brothers. Were they sincere or was their offer to join their brother as slaves a disingenuous ploy to win their brother's freedom? Joseph was determined to find out. So, he had Benjamin arrested and gave the remaining brothers his final and rather disconcerting instructions: "as for you, go up in peace to your father" (Genesis 44:17 ESV).

Would they do it? Could they do it? Joseph's reference to "peace" was meant to test his brothers. The Hebrew word is *שָׁלוֹם* (*šālôm*), and while it can mean "a state of tranquility and contentment," it can also refer to "wholeness" or "completeness." If they left, they would be returning without one of their own. There would be one of them missing. But could they go back to Jacob in "peace" knowing that they were "incomplete?" That was what Joseph aimed to find out.

Greater Love Has No Man

¹⁸ Then Judah went up to him and said, “Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself.

¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father, or a brother?’ ²⁰ And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother’s children, and his father loves him.’ ²¹ Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.’ ²² We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’ ²³ Then you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.’

²⁴ “When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. ²⁵ And when our father said, ‘Go again, buy us a little food,’ ²⁶ we said, ‘We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’ ²⁷ Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. ²⁸ One left me, and I said, “Surely he has been torn to pieces,” and I have never seen him since. ²⁹ If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.’

³⁰ “Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, ³¹ as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. ³² For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.’ ³³ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. ³⁴ For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.” – Genesis 44:18-34 ESV



The Egyptian governor has accused Benjamin, the youngest son of Jacob, of having stolen a valuable silver goblet. As his punishment, the boy will be forced to remain in Egypt as a slave while his 10 brothers return home to Canaan. Of course, the entire affair had been the brainchild of Joseph, who had ordered that the goblet be placed in Benjamin’s belongings before the brothers started their journey home. In a sense, Joseph had framed his own brother for the crime so that he might determine the true condition of his brothers’ hearts. He had absolved them of any guilt and given them the option of returning to Canaan without Benjamin. Now, it was time to see what his brothers would do. Had they changed? Or, to save their own skins, would they abandon Benjamin to a life of slavery just as they had done to him?

Judah was the first to speak up. He approached the Egyptian governor and begged him to reconsider. Judah explained that Benjamin was the youngest son of their father, Jacob, and that boy was near and dear to the old man's heart. When they had returned the first time and informed Jacob that the governor demanded that they bring Benjamin back to Egypt, Jacob had become distressed at the thought of losing another son. Judah explained, in a rather abbreviated form, that their father had lost another son and had never really gotten over the pain of his sudden and unexpected disappearance.

What makes this dialogue so ironic is that the one to whom it was directed was already very familiar with the details of the story. Joseph knew exactly what Judah was including and all that he was leaving out. Understandably so, Judah expressed no ownership for the "disappearance" of Joseph. He shared nothing about the role he and his brothers played in selling their younger brother to Ishmaelite traders. To do so would have been an acknowledgment that they were all untrustworthy men. So, Judah sanitized the story, emphasizing the tragic loss of their brother while never divulging their involvement in it. He also failed to share how they deceived their own father, allowing him to believe that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

All Judah chose to share was the devastating impact the governor's decree had on their father. Not only had they returned without Simeon, but they had been forced to tell their aging father that he would never see Simeon again unless Benjamin returned to Egypt with them. And Jacob had found this news to be more than he could bear.

"As you know, my wife had two sons, and one of them went away and never returned. Doubtless he was torn to pieces by some wild animal. I have never seen him since. Now if you take his brother away from me, and any harm comes to him, you will send this grieving, white-haired man to his grave." – Genesis 44:27-29 NLT

Judah was pulling at the governor's heartstrings. He was desperately attempting to appeal to Zaphenath-paneah's emotions, hoping that this powerful Egyptian ruler might empathize with their plight and rescind his order.

But the next words to come out of Judah's mouth revealed to Joseph that his brother was serious about saving Benjamin's life. Judah painted a gut-wrenching image of their elderly and grief-stricken father waiting anxiously back in Canaan. But he also expressed his willingness to offer his own life as a substitute for Benjamin's. Judah told the governor how he had assured his father that he would take personal responsibility for the boy.

"My lord, I guaranteed to my father that I would take care of the boy. I told him, 'If I don't bring him back to you, I will bear the blame forever.'" – Genesis 44:32 NLT

And this is where Judah reveals the true nature of his heart. This very same man who had come up with the idea of selling Joseph to the Ishmaelite slave traders offered to trade his life for that of Benjamin.

“So please, my lord, let me stay here as a slave instead of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. For how can I return to my father if the boy is not with me? I couldn’t bear to see the anguish this would cause my father!” – Genesis 44:33-34 NLT

Judah was willing to forfeit his own freedom so that his younger brother could be set free and return to their father. Judah was not the same callous individual who had allowed jealousy and envy to cloud his thinking and drive him to betray his own brother. All those years ago, Judah had shown no love for Joseph, and he had exhibited no remorse for causing his father so much pain. But Judah was not that same man. He had grown up and was now willing to stand up and do the right thing. Judah’s sacrificial and selfless offer reflects the kind of love described and demonstrated by Jesus.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” – John 15:13 ESV

Judah was making a huge sacrifice. He had a family back home that was dependent upon his return. But he was willing to jeopardize his own wife and children to honor his father and protect the life of his brother. Judah was offering to redeem the life of Benjamin by substituting his life as payment for Benjamin’s debt. He would pay the penalty on behalf of Benjamin, allowing the boy to return to the embrace of his father. And it’s important to note that Jesus would come through the line of Judah. And years later, Jacob would bestow on Judah a very special blessing that would have future ramifications.

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. – Genesis 49:10 ESV*

*“Jacob will crown Judah with kingship because he demonstrates that he has become fit to rule according to God’s ideal of kingship that the king serves the people, not vice versa. Judah is transformed from one who sells his brother as a slave to one who is willing to be the slave for his brother. With that offer he exemplifies Israel’s ideal kingship.” – Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary**

God-Sent

¹ Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, “Make everyone go out from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. ¹⁰ You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.’ ¹² And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him. – Genesis 45:1-15 ESV



This chapter contains one of the most powerful illustrations of God’s sovereignty of God to be found in all the Scriptures. The story of Joseph’s life, when viewed from a human perspective, is one of tragedy and betrayal, coupled with moments of good fortune followed by bad luck. Joseph is portrayed as a young man who becomes the innocent victim of his brothers’ jealousy and hatred. The youngest of 12 sons, Joseph had been the apple of his father’s eye and was elevated to a position of honor among his brothers. But his favored status and penchant for sharing dreams that appeared to further enhance his superior status made him a social pariah among his older siblings. Their anger for him grew so intense, that they began to plot his death. But rather than simply snuffing Joseph out, they decided to cash in by selling him as a slave to Ishmaelite traders.

These callous and hate-filled men took their brother's multicolored robe, ripped it in pieces, and then led their father to believe that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. They showed no remorse or regret for their actions. And, in time, they went on with their lives, erasing any memory of Joseph from their minds.

But while Joseph had been abandoned by his brothers, he was not forsaken by God. His entire life is an ongoing illustration of God's sovereign and providential care. Though he ended up being sold as a slave to a wealthy and influential Egyptian, Joseph's fate was God-ordained, a point Moses makes quite clear.

The Lord was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. Potiphar noticed this and realized that **the Lord was with Joseph**, giving him success in everything he did. – Genesis 39:2-3 NLT

Yet, it didn't take long before Joseph's good fortune took a dramatically dark turn. Having spurned the sexual advances of his master's wife, Joseph was wrongly accused of rape and thrown into prison. But even in that grim and unexpected environment, God protected and prospered Joseph.

But **the Lord was with Joseph** in the prison and showed him his faithful love. And **the Lord made Joseph a favorite** with the prison warden. ²² Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison. ²³ The warden had no more worries, because Joseph took care of everything. **The Lord was with him and caused everything he did to succeed.** – Genesis 39:21-23 NLT

From the pit to the palace to the prison, Joseph enjoyed the providential protection of God. And along the way, God revealed Himself to Joseph by giving him the ability to interpret dreams. This special skill proved quite useful, allowing Joseph to make connections with two fellow prisoners, one of whom would play an important role in Joseph's release from prison.

But two years would pass before Joseph received an order to appear in Pharaoh's court. He was ushered into the royal palace and into the throne room where he was asked to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. This was yet another divinely ordained moment in which the sovereign will of God was clearly at play. Pharaoh's dreams had not been arbitrary or coincidental. They had been a part of God's carefully orchestrated plan.

Joseph responded, "Both of Pharaoh's dreams mean the same thing. **God is telling Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do.**" – Genesis 41:25 NLT

And Joseph had recognized that the dreams and their meanings had been the handiwork of God.

"As for having two similar dreams, it means that these events have been decreed by God, and **he will soon make them happen.**" – Genesis 41:32 NLT

And they did happen. But not before Joseph was installed as the second-most-powerful man in all of Egypt. He was given authority to prepare the nation for the seven years of famine that God had ordained. And Joseph's new position allowed him to implement a strategy to gather enough grain during the seven years of plenty so that the nation of Egypt could successfully survive the coming famine. And when the famine came, its impact was felt far beyond the borders of Egypt, all the way into Canaan, where Jacob and his sons still lived.

It had been the famine that forced Jacob to send his sons to Egypt in search of food. And it was in Egypt that his sons encountered their long-lost but unrecognizable brother. And the last few chapters have revealed the story of their dramatic and often tension-filled reunion.

But as Joseph stood looking down on his brothers and heard Judah share his heartfelt desire to serve as Benjamin's substitute, he couldn't hold back his emotions any longer. He fled from the room and having regained his composure, returned to reveal his true identity. But, more than that, Joseph was ready to let his brothers know the true nature of all the events surrounding his life. And what he had to share left them staring back in shock and awe. The Egyptian governor was their brother.

This news must have stunned the brothers and increased the level of their anxiety and fear. Now, not only were they accused of stealing the governor's silver goblet, the governor was actually the boy they had sold into slavery. Things were going from bad to worse. Their minds were racing as they considered the full import of this shocking news. If the governor truly was their long-lost brother, he might use his royal power to pay his brothers back for their crime against him. But Joseph's unexpected announcement left them staring back in silence.

...his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. – Genesis 45:3 NLT

But sensing their fear and trepidation, Joseph invited them to draw closer, then attempted to assuage their growing anxiety.

"I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives." – Genesis 45:4-5 NLT

Joseph reveals a strong understanding of the concept of divine sovereignty. He had fully grasped the significance of all the events surrounding his life and determined them to be the work of God. Yes, they had made the decision to sell him as a slave, but it had been preordained by God. Joseph was fully convinced that it had been God who sent him to Egypt, not his brothers. They had simply been tools in the sovereign hands of God. This does not dissolve them of guilt or responsibility. Each of them had participated in the crime against their brother willfully and deliberately. God had not forced them to do so. But He had used their envy-fueled actions to accomplish His divine will. And the most ironic part of it all is that God

would use their act of selfishness to bring about their ultimate preservation. Joseph repeatedly stressed this point.

*“It was God who sent me here ahead of you **to preserve your lives.**”* – Genesis 45:5 NLT

*“God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and **to preserve many survivors.**”* – Genesis 45:7 NLT

The famine was only into its second year and Joseph knew that things were going to get far worse. So, he begged his brothers to return to Canaan with an invitation for Jacob to join him in the land of Egypt. They were to tell their father all that had happened and deliver the good news that his favorite son was alive and well. The son whom Jacob had given up as dead, God had elevated to a place of power and prominence.

“God has made me master over all the land of Egypt.” – Genesis 45:9 NLT

Joseph had gone from wearing a multicolored robe to the garments of a king. He had been elevated from the status of the favorite son of Jacob to the favored officer in Pharaoh’s court. All according to the sovereign will of God. And Joseph was convinced that he was the key to the survival of the house of Jacob, which is why he ordered his brothers to return home and bring the entire clan of Jacob back to Egypt.

“Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly.” – Genesis 45:13 NLT

God had sent Joseph ahead to prepare the way. Now, Joseph sent for Jacob to preserve a nation – all according to God’s plan.

All According to Plan

¹⁶ When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. ¹⁷ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, ¹⁸ and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.' ¹⁹ And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. ²⁰ Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

²¹ The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. ²² To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes. ²³ To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. ²⁴ Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the way."

²⁵ So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. ²⁶ And they told him, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸ And Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die." – Genesis 45:16-28 ESV



It didn't take long before the news that Joseph had been reunited with his family began to spread like wildfire throughout the royal compound. Soon, even Pharaoh himself had been informed that Joseph had brothers from whom he had long been separated. This news pleased Pharaoh and he determined to show his love and respect for Joseph by making the generous offer of gifts and land to his family. Pharaoh suggested that Joseph's brothers return home and bring back the rest of their clan, including their aged father, Jacob. He even underwrote the cost of their trip and equipped them with wagons, pack animals, and enough supplies to sustain them all the way to Canaan and back. And he promised that, upon their return, he would give them "the best of all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:20 ESV) in which to live.

Joseph, pleased with Pharaoh's kind and gracious offer, convinced his brothers to return home and bring their families to Egypt. He knew that, according to Pharaoh's dreams, there were at least five more years of famine remaining, and his clan's only chance of survival lay in Egypt. So,

Joseph ordered all the supplies Pharaoh had suggested and then he showered his brothers with additional gifts. He gave each of his brothers a set of new clothes, but to Benjamin “he gave five changes of clothes and 300 pieces of silver” (Genesis 45:22 NLT).

Benjamin and Joseph were both the sons of Rachel and, therefore, they shared a close bond. Joseph’s affection for his younger brother had been amplified by their long separation. And now that they had been reunited, he showed favoritism to Benjamin, much like his father had done to him. But because of his wealth, Joseph was able to bless his brother with far more than a single multicolored robe. He gave him a virtual wardrobe of expensive garments and rewarded him with 300 pieces of silver, a king’s ransom that would set Benjamin up for life.

And while Moses doesn’t reveal the reaction of Joseph’s brothers to this obvious act of favoritism, it is quite easy to speculate that it didn’t escape their notice. But it’s unlikely that it produced the same degree of jealousy that had driven them to sell Joseph into slavery. No, this time, they were grateful to be alive, reunited with their brother, and enjoying the favor of Pharaoh, one of the most powerful men in the world.

But Joseph seemed to know that his brothers had not completely changed. As he distributed his gifts among them, he warned them, “Don’t quarrel about all this along the way!” (Genesis 45:24 NLT). Over the course of the long journey back to Canaan, he knew that his brothers would have ample time to think about the inequity of the gifts they had received. Not only had Joseph given Benjamin more garments and a large sum of money, but he had also sent his father “ten male donkeys loaded with the finest products of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other supplies he would need on his journey” (Genesis 45:23 NLT).

Every day of the journey they would see those 20 donkeys bearing the gifts that Joseph had given to their father and be reminded that all they had received was a single change of clothing. And to make matters worse, their younger brother could go five days in a row without wearing the same outfit, and he probably had several pack animals just to carry his hoard of cash.

So, Joseph reminded them not to fall back into their old habit of jealousy and bitter infighting. They had been blessed by God and enjoying the outpouring of His providential provision. They had much for which to be grateful and, upon their return, they would find themselves living in a rich and fertile land, free from the effects of the famine and under the protection of Pharaoh himself.

“The picture of Joseph is a picture of restoration—not just the restoration of the good fortune of Jacob, but, as a picture, the restoration of the blessing that was promised through the seed of Jacob. This picture is also a blueprint for the hope that lies for the people of Israel at the end of the Pentateuch. They are to go into the land and enjoy it as God’s good gift (Deuteronomy 30:5).” – John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*

Joseph was fully convinced that this was all part of God’s sovereign plan. He had already told his brothers, “It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives” (Genesis 45:5 NLT). His destiny had been preordained by God and there had been a divine purpose behind every facet of his life, from his sale into slavery and his ultimate imprisonment to his rise to power in Pharaoh’s court. His entire life had been set apart by God for a specific purpose: To preserve and protect the seed of Jacob.

“God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.” – Genesis 45:7-8 NLT

So, his brothers made the long journey home and delivered the exciting news to their father: “Joseph is still alive!” (Genesis 45:26 NLT). And this unexpected announcement left Jacob in a state of shock. After all these years, the son whom he had long thought dead was alive and well and living in Egypt. Buoyed by the sight of the caravan loaded with gifts and grain, Jacob came to his senses and embraced the reality of the too-good-to-be-true news. His son Joseph really was alive, and he was going to have the joy of seeing him again before he died.

But the real point of the story is not the coming reunion of Jacob with Joseph. No, Moses wanted his readers to understand the remarkable nature of God’s sovereign will and how the Almighty used the life of one man to prepare the way for an entire nation. As Israelites, they would have been familiar with the story of Joseph, but Moses wanted to remind them that their very existence as a people was the result of one man’s life. Long before any of them existed, Joseph had been born, favored, betrayed, sold, enslaved, accused, imprisoned, released, rewarded, and elevated to a place of power and prominence. And every peak and valley of his roller-coaster life had been the sovereign handiwork of Yahweh. The very fact that Jacob and his family ended up living in Egypt had been ordained by God and made possible by the life of Joseph. And Moses wanted his Israelite audience to know that Jacob’s journey to Egypt had been predicted and preordained by God.

Long before Jacob had been born, his grandfather, Abraham, had received a promise from God.

Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” – Genesis 15:13-16 ESV

The first phase of the promise was about to be fulfilled. As a result of Pharaoh’s generosity and Joseph’s ingenuity, Jacob and his family would find themselves living in “a land that is not theirs.” Their relocation was part of God’s plan. And it would be in this foreign that a relatively small family, just 70 in number, would grow to be a mighty nation, the chosen people of God. In

His divine wisdom, the Almighty had chosen to fulfill His promise to Abraham by sending a small and insignificant clan to a foreign land where they would be able to grow in number until the time came for them to inherit the land God had given them for their inheritance.

Little Is Much When God Is In It

¹ So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ² And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” ³ Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. ⁴ I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.”

⁵ Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶ They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, ⁷ his sons, and his sons’ sons with him, his daughters, and his sons’ daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

⁸ Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons. Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, ⁹ and the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ¹⁰ The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. ¹¹ The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. ¹² The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. ¹³ The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Yob, and Shimron. ¹⁴ The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. ¹⁵ These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three.

¹⁶ The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. ¹⁷ The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, with Serah their sister. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. ¹⁸ These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons.

¹⁹ The sons of Rachel, Jacob’s wife: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰ And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera the priest of On, bore to him. ²¹ And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. ²² These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all.

²³ The son of Dan: Hushim. ²⁴ The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. ²⁵ These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all.

²⁶ All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob’s sons’ wives, were sixty-six persons in all. ²⁷ And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy. – Genesis 46:1-27 ESV



As Jacob and his family began their journey from Canaan to Egypt, it must have been a bitter-sweet moment for this aging patriarch. While he must have been ecstatic at the thought of seeing his long-lost son, Joseph, it could not have been easy for him to leave behind the land that had been promised by God to his father and grandfather. The land of Canaan was supposed to be his inheritance and that of his children. But it had been devastated by a famine and

was no longer capable of sustaining Jacob's growing family. He really had no other choice but to leave Canaan behind and accept Pharaoh's generous, yet unexpected, offer. So, motivated by the promise of good land and the prospect of being reunited with Joseph, Jacob and his family set out.

But Jacob made one last stop before crossing the southern border of Canaan and entering the wilderness of the Negev. He instructed his son to lead the caravan to Beersheba, a region that held special significance to Jacob and his family. It was there that Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, had purchased a well from Abimelech, for the prices of seven yew lambs. The name Beersheba means "well of seven," and it was there that "Abraham planted a tamarisk tree...and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God" (Genesis 21:33 ESV).

Years later, Isaac, Jacob's father, would return to Beersheba and receive a vision from God, telling him, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake" (Genesis 26:24 ESV). And Isaac "built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord" (Genesis 26:25 ESV).



Jacob returned to this familiar spot, likely in the hopes of receiving a word from God that might confirm his relocation to Egypt. Jacob was understandably reluctant to leave the land that God had promised to give him as an inheritance. What would happen in his absence? Would they ever return? Would the promise every be fulfilled? This was a watershed moment for Jacob, and he sought assurances from God. And God did not disappoint.

After offering sacrifices to God on one of the altars that his grandfather or father had constructed, Jacob went to sleep. And during his sleep, God visited him in a dream and delivered a much-needed word of assurance.

“I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.” – Genesis 46:3-4 ESV

Jacob had the permission he had been seeking. God had sensed Jacob’s reticence and provided him with divine permission to relocate his family to Egypt. And not only did Jacob have permission to go, but he was given the assurance of God’s presence as he did so. Then God upped the ante by reconfirming his promise to turn the clan of Jacob into a mighty nation. This was familiar refrain that had been heard for three generations but had yet to happen. God had told Abraham:

“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” – Genesis 12:2 ESV

And God had informed Abraham how this transformation would take place.

*“Know for certain that **your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs** and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward **they shall come out with great possessions.**” – Genesis 15:13-14 ESV*

Even when Abraham was 99 years old and still fatherless, God had reconfirmed his promise to make of him a great nation.

“I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.” – Genesis 17:6 ESV

And as Abraham anxiously waited for a son, God continued to reiterate His promise.

“Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.” – Genesis 18:18 ESV

Now, years later, Jacob and his family were on their way to the very land where God had said the offspring of Abraham would “sojourn.” This trip had been God-ordained and had been part of the divine plan all along, just as Joseph’s betrayal by his brothers and the famine had been.

Having received confirmation from God, Jacob and his family continued their journey. And Moses uses verses 8-25 to give a detailed description of all the “sons” of Jacob. This list contains all the male descendants who had been born to Jacob while he lived in the land of Canaan. And while the list seems lengthy, it all adds up to a far-from-impressive number.

All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob’s sons’ wives, were sixty-six persons in all. – Genesis 46:26 ESV

Riding in the wagons that Pharaoh had provided and eating the provisions he had sent, this little ragtag band of Israelites made their way to Egypt. They were small in number and facing an uncertain future in a foreign land where they would be in the minority and little more than aliens. But that had always been their lot. At no time in Canaan had Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob enjoyed the benefit of overwhelming numbers or superior strength. They had always been outsiders, living in a land that was occupied by others. They owned little land, occupied no cities, and garnered little respect. And now they were moving to a country where nothing was familiar and their hopes of inheriting the land of Canaan was a quickly fading memory.

Even if you add in Joseph, his wife, and two sons, the total number of Jacob's family was a mere 70 individuals. But God was not fazed by this seemingly insignificant and insufficient head count. As the creation account revealed, God is fully capable of creating something from nothing. And the entrance of 70 people into the land of Canaan was about to prove true the words of the old hymn, "Little Is Much When God Is In It."