

### 13. The End of the Beginning

**Biblical material:** Gen. 41:41–50:26.

#### Quotes

- Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous. *Confucius*
- Only the curious will learn and only the resolute overcome the obstacles to learning. The quest quotient has always excited me more than the intelligence quotient. *Eugene S. Wilson*
- Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence. *Abigail Adams*
- Much learning does not teach understanding. *Heraclitus*
- The wisest mind has something yet to learn. *George Santayana*

#### Questions

What do we learn from Joseph's experience? How could things have been different? Do we see here not just family rivalries but the continuing portrayal of the issues in the great controversy? Is it true that God made this happen so he could prepare things for Jacob's family in Egypt? How are these issues still relevant today? How does God look in all of this?

#### Discussion/Comment

Here is a painful learning experience—both for Joseph and his brothers. Notice how they react when they are imprisoned by Joseph, and then forced to leave one of their number behind as a hostage before returning with Benjamin. They immediately see this as a punishment for the way they treated Joseph. Certainly a case of multiple guilty consciences!

They argue among themselves, and Joseph understands them, and turns aside to weep. But he does not reveal himself at this time. Why not? Hopefully not because he wants to see them suffer, but because he wants to see more evidence of who they have become.

The return of their payment by Joseph is not greeted with delight, but with concern. Immediately they worry, "What has God done to us?"

Jacob too is shown to have some measure of responsibility. After all, it was he who accepted the proposal to take both Leah's and Rachel's slavegirl as "wives," and through whom he had these sons who now bring such grief. The competitive spirit has caused deep divisions in the family—much healing is needed. But for the moment all Jacob sees is disaster—and now he is faced with the loss of his beloved Benjamin, son of his favorite Rachel.

On their return to Egypt with Benjamin, over Jacob's protests, the brothers are terrified and suspicious of Joseph's actions. They expect to be arrested or attacked at any moment. They explain about the repayment of their silver. Joseph gives the credit to God. Then there is the surprise about being seated in exact order of age. The whole situation was surely very disturbing!

The "stolen" cup in Benjamin's sack was for the brothers the ultimate disaster. Their worst fears come true. Judah's speech reveals the change in heart that they have had, developed over the years. They simply cannot return without Benjamin, because that would kill their father. How far they have come from their lie about Joseph that half-killed Jacob so many years before!

Joseph can stand it no longer, and he has all the evidence he needs. In that emotive scene, he reveals his identity, comforts his brothers, and heals the pain of years. Notice his comment that God sent him on ahead to preserve a remnant and to save their lives.

And in such a human comment to his brothers as they set out to go home and bring Isaac back to Egypt, Joseph tells them, “and don’t quarrel on the way!”

God even encourages the rather doubtful and feeble Jacob on the way, as another example of divine compassion and grace.

As a footnote—notice how deep-seated the brothers’ guilt really was. Even after all the reconciliation, all the restoration, the clear proof of Joseph’s forgiveness to them, they worry after Jacob dies. What is Joseph still holds a grudge, they wonder, and will pay them back! So they are still asking forgiveness, and still offering themselves as slaves. But just like God when we come to him, just like the Father welcoming the prodigal home, there is no discussion of slavery or the need for punishment or appeasement, but simply the loving acceptance back into the family.

After the blessings, and descriptions of his sons by Jacob, the story comes to an end. *Genesis begins with the beautiful garden of life in Eden, and ends with a coffin in Egypt.*

The controversy continues...

### **Ellen White Comments**

They [Joseph’s brothers] sold Joseph as a slave, and they were fearful that God designed to punish them by suffering them to become slaves. {1BC 1098}

Joseph gladly forgave his brethren, and sent them away abundantly provided with provisions, and carriages, and everything necessary for the removal of their father’s family, and their own, to Egypt. Joseph gave his brother Benjamin more valuable presents than to his other brethren. As he sent them away he charged them, “See that ye fall not out by the way.” He was afraid that they might enter into a dispute, and charge upon one another the cause of their guilt in regard to their cruel treatment of himself. With joy they returned to their father, and told him, saying, “Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob’s heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

Jacob’s sons then made their humiliating confessions to their father, of their wicked treatment of Joseph, and entreated his forgiveness. Jacob did not suspect his sons were guilty of such cruelty. But he saw that God had overruled it all for good, and he forgave and blessed his erring sons. He commenced his journey with gladness of heart, and when he came to Beersheba he offered grateful sacrifices, and entreated God to bless him, and make known to him if he was pleased with their moving into Egypt. Jacob wanted an evidence from God that he would go with them. “And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father. Fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt, and I will also surely bring thee up again; and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.”

The meeting of Joseph and his father was very affecting. Joseph left his chariot, and ran to meet his father on foot, and embraced him, and and they wept over each other. Jacob then expressed his willingness to die, since he had again seen his son Joseph, for whom he had so long mourned as dead. {1SP 151-3}

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