

Genesis (2011) 42A

- The Old Testament prophets tell an intriguing story about Israel
 - They told of a day when Israel would behold their Messiah
 - But the people for whom He was sent would reject Him
 - They would persecute Him
 - They would betray Him
 - And they would put Him to death
 - Then for a time Israel would be judged by being set aside in God's program of salvation
 - And during this time of hardening, the Messiah's offer of the Kingdom would go out to Gentile peoples
 - And the Messiah would rule over their hearts, bringing blessing to a foreign people
 - And this blessing for Gentiles would become cause for provoking jealousy among those hardened Jews
 - But the story doesn't end there, for the Lord is faithful even when His people are faithless
 - And so one day to come, the Lord will bring great trial and stress upon the world
 - And in the midst of the trial and tribulation, the people of Israel will be stirred to call upon the very Messiah their fathers rejected
 - And that Messiah they assume to be dead and gone will return for them, bringing relief from the tribulation
- This is the story the Bible teaches about Israel and their Messiah, Jesus Christ
 - It's a story that has yet to play out entirely
 - The first act of this drama has come and gone
 - The second act is currently running its course, as we experience the Lord working with the Gentile church
 - But the world is still waiting for that third act to begin

- Did you know this storyline of Christ and Israel is pictured by the story of Joseph and His brothers?
 - Joseph has been persecuted and rejected by his brothers, who are the sons of Israel
 - He was sold into slavery and assumed to be dead (look at v.13)
 - Meanwhile, Joseph has risen to a position of power and blessing over a Gentile people
 - He has a Gentile bride and a Gentile following that call him lord
 - He is dispensing bread of life to all who call upon his name
 - And the people of the nations are streaming to Egypt to see this Joseph
- So like our world today, the story of Joseph has completed the second act
 - And now we're ready to study the third act in Chapter 42
 - The stress and trial of the worldwide famine is severe that even prosperous Jacob will be forced to seek support from Egypt
 - And in the process the Lord will be working in Joseph's brothers to bring about the good He has purposed

[Gen. 42:1](#) Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you staring at one another?"

[Gen. 42:2](#) He said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die."

[Gen. 42:3](#) Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt.

[Gen. 42:4](#) But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "I am afraid that harm may befall him."

[Gen. 42:5](#) So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.

- As the land withered and the crops died, Jacob and his family found themselves searching for options
 - Apparently, the brothers had become idle because the famine had left the ground unworkable and unprofitable

- Father Jacob finally chastises his sons for sitting on their hands while the family starved
 - He asks why do you sit around staring at one another doing nothing?
 - Sounds like something a father would say
- I wonder why the brothers haven't proposed this solution themselves?
 - Could it be that they had no desire to walk Joseph's footsteps?
 - Were they worried of how they would feel entering the country where they sent their brother so many years earlier?
 - Was their guilt playing on their judgment?
- Since the sons have no plan of their own, he gives them a plan
 - He says he's heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt
 - In fact, Jacob says that if they don't go to Egypt, the family is at risk of dying of starvation
 - The trial of the famine will be enough to put an end to Israel
- As I said in the introduction, the famine in our story is a picture of the coming stress the Lord will bring upon the whole world for the sake of Israel
 - This coming future time of stress is called by various names, but the most common name in the New Testament is Tribulation
 - Tribulation will be a period of unprecedented worldwide calamity
 - And the Lord has designed it to be so terrible for a good reason
 - It causes Israel to seek for a savior, someone who will bring them relief from persecution, war and trial
 - Jesus described this period to His disciples

[Matt. 24:21](#) “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

[Matt. 24:22](#) “Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

- The nation of Israel are the elect, as Jesus calls them
 - And the times will be so stressful that had the Lord not provided a source of relief, even Israel would have been wiped out
 - And so it would be for Jacob and his sons were it not for Egypt and Joseph
- As Jacob sends his sons to buy grain in Egypt he holds one back
 - Benjamin isn't allowed to travel with his brothers
 - Jacob's reason is simple and revealing
 - Having lost Joseph, Jacob isn't about to lose the only other son of Rachel, his beloved wife
 - Jacob's decision shows us that he still hasn't overcome his tendency to show favoritism within his family
 - And that tendency is probably still creating some animosity within the sons
 - Jacob's decision to withhold Benjamin adds two important details to our picture of Israel in Tribulation
 - First, removing Benjamin reduced the number of the brothers to ten
 - And ten is an interesting number in scripture
 - It carries a meaning of testimony or witness
 - So the ten brothers will travel as a witness or testimony of God's work among His people
 - The movement of these men and their eventual encounter with Joseph is a testimony to the Lord's might and wisdom and sovereignty over the lives of His people

- Secondly, the removal of Benjamin from the family will literally make it impossible for the other brothers to be reconciled to Joseph
 - Without all the sons of Israel present at the same time, Joseph cannot reconcile with his family
 - But the absence of Benjamin will also become the tool Joseph uses to create the reconciliation
- And all of this will build into a stunning and perfect picture of the last days of tribulation...to be seen in Chapters 43-45
 - So the brothers join in the crowds flocking to Egypt to buy grain

[Gen. 42:6](#) Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

[Gen. 42:7](#) When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."

[Gen. 42:8](#) But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him.

- Now we entered into easily one of the most remarkable stories in all human history
 - I believe it is so remarkable because it foreshadows literally the most important and intriguing story that will ever occur in this age
 - The tables have been turned
 - Joseph is now in the position of ruling over his brothers, just as he dreamed
 - And as Joseph stands over his brothers, can we even imagine what thoughts must have flooded through his mind?
 - Which one of us wouldn't have been tempted to bring revenge upon these brothers in that moment?
 - Or perhaps the more generous among us might have simply revealed ourselves to the men without seeking even the least evidence of repentance
 - Why don't Joseph's brothers recognize their brother?

- After all, Joseph recognizes them, so shouldn't they recognize him?
- Well first, Joseph was much younger when they last saw one another
 - Joseph was only 16 while his brothers were older and wouldn't have changed as much in the intervening 20 years
 - Secondly, and more importantly, Joseph's appearance would have been highly altered by his position in Egypt
 - He would have been shaved bald
 - And he would have been wearing the traditional face and eye makeup of the ruling class of Egypt
 - And Joseph's brothers wouldn't have spent much time studying Joseph's features, since they were required to bow before him
 - Thirdly, Joseph would have been called by his title or his Egyptian name
 - No one would have called him Joseph
 - Finally, in v.23 we learn that Joseph spoke through an interpreter
 - Obviously, this obscured him even more to his brothers
 - So Joseph has the upper hand over his brothers , but he doesn't reveal himself in the moment
- Joseph wisely restrained himself and played his cards carefully
 - We can safely assume that Joseph would have liked to reconcile with his family
 - But what does reconciliation look like under these circumstances?
 - If Joseph revealed himself as he stood before them, ruler over Egypt, what kind of reaction could he have expected?

- We know his brothers would have expressed sorrow and would have bowed before Joseph
- But they had to do that, regardless of whether they truly felt any repentance or not
- And if they hadn't truly repented of their past hatred and rejection of Joseph, then any relationship they might have had going forward would have been meaningless
 - True loving relationship could only be possible if the sons demonstrated they were truly sorry for their past hatred and had changed their perspective on Joseph
 - So the only way Joseph can ever truly know his brothers' true feelings is to conceal his identity while devising some way to search their hearts concerning their shared past
- So Joseph will remain veiled and unrecognized
- And in the meantime, he will bring increasing pressure against the brothers until they confess their past sin
 - And what better way to force that outcome than to place another favored son of Jacob in the crosshairs
- Joseph notices that Benjamin is missing, and he must have quickly determined that Benjamin's absence was due to Jacob's favoritism for Rachel's children
 - This gives Joseph the opportunity he needed to test his brothers

Gen. 42:9 Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, "You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land."

Gen. 42:10 Then they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food.

Gen. 42:11 "We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies."

Gen. 42:12 Yet he said to them, "No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!"

Gen. 42:13 But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive."

Gen. 42:14 Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies;

Gen. 42:15 by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here!

[Gen. 42:16](#) "Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies."

[Gen. 42:17](#) So he put them all together in prison for three days.

- Joseph begins by remembering the Lord's vision concerning ruling over the family
 - What a great example of God's sovereignty
 - The brothers' decision to place Joseph in Egypt was intended to stop him from ruling over the family as patriarch
 - And by that decision, the brothers made possible the fulfillment of the dream
 - We might ask what would have happened had the brothers never taken that step, but asking that question misses the very point
 - The point is that no matter what the brothers did, God's will was going to be served
 - One way or another, the Lord gets His way, and even when His enemies strive against Him, they only succeed in confirming God's plan
 - Just as when Satan indwelt Judas in an attempt to stop Jesus from ruling, yet by his actions Satan assured that Jesus would conquer him in the end
 - So now Joseph sees God's purpose in this meeting as he remembers the dream
 - Joseph understood that the dream was a sign from God that Joseph would have the birthright in the family
 - This told Joseph he would be the patriarch and leader over the family of Israel
 - Joseph never forgot that dream, but perhaps he hadn't given it much thought lately, what with running Egypt and all...
 - Now the memory of the dream returns to hit him in the face, and he sees the truth of it all over again

- Joseph is going to be reconciled with his brothers
 - He is going to rule over them, not as the prime minister of Egypt, but as their brother and patriarch
 - So Joseph begins to enact a plan to bring about the repentance of his brothers through a testing of their hearts
- So Joseph accuses the men of being spies, intent on learning about Egypt's weaknesses
 - This was a plausible claim
 - The Egyptians and Canaanites fought numerous battles, with each conquering the other at various times in history
 - During this period, the Egyptians were the stronger, having conquered Canaan
 - But each side feared the other
 - So when Joseph hears that his brothers identify themselves as Canaanites, it gives him an opportunity to make his accusation
 - Joseph's accusation immediately causes fear among the brothers, because they know such an accusation is punishable by death
 - They defend themselves by claiming to be a separate tribe
 - They are not Canaanites but instead they are a single family living in the land
 - They tell Joseph they have a father and another brother
 - But one brother has died, referring to Joseph
 - They are still lying concerning Joseph, both to Joseph and probably to themselves
 - That doesn't look like true repentance
 - So the plan moves forward
 - Joseph repeats his accusation and then tells the brothers that he will test their claims by demanding to see the younger brother
 - If they can produce a younger brother, then they will have validated their claims

- Joseph tells them that one must return to retrieve the remaining brother or else the charge of spying will stand
- And then to ramp up the pressure even more, Joseph puts all the men in prison for three days
 - I wonder if Joseph wanted his brothers to experience a little of what he experienced because of their sin
 - More likely, Joseph is simply just increasing the fear of him among his brothers in pursuit of repentance
- So while the brothers sit in prison, they have no idea when or even if they will be released
 - Their own imaginations produced a far worse punishment than anything Joseph could have said
 - For three days they languished
- Is Joseph being cruel?
 - Some in the world today might consider Joseph's harsh treatment of his brothers as unfair and unkind
 - But that mindset is simply evidence of a culture that has lost an understanding of discipline and consequences for sin
 - It's a good thing when the Lord visits our sins back upon us as a means of producing repentance and a resolve to stop sinning
 - The question is will we accept the Lord's chastisement and learn from it, or will we take steps to reduce the pain and buffer the trial?
 - Our culture works very hard to remove any pain or inconvenience associated with sin
 - There's always a pill or excuse or exception or special case for everyone and every circumstance where sin has caused a problem
 - Therefore, where is there a place for repentance and spiritual growth?
 - Christ will do the same with those He is intent on bringing to repentance

- They say there are no atheists in foxholes, and regardless of whether that is true or not, the sense is correct
- God often brings repentance in the midst of trials and difficulties, because when we reach the end of ourselves, we are better prepared to hear from the Spirit

Rom. 2:4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

- This is Joseph's desire with his brothers
- Next week we watch Joseph advance his plan further, leading his brothers to an eventual reconciliation under the right conditions