

“When God Brings You to Your Knees” (Genesis 42:1-38)

Have you ever heard of a berkutchi? A berkutchi is an Asian man who trains eagles for hunting. The capture, taming, training, and keeping of eagles is highly ritualized. Most eagles, which have a life span of about 40 years, are caught when very young—either snatched from a nest or trapped in a baited net. Once captured, the eagle is hooded and placed in a cage with a perch that sways constantly so it cannot rest or sleep. For two or three days it is also deprived of food. During this time the berkutchi talks, sings, and chants to the eagle for hours on end. Finally, he begins to feed and stroke it. Slowly the weakened creature comes to rely on its master. When the berkutchi decides that their relationship has become strong enough, the training begins. Not all eagles can be trained, but those who take to life with a master display intense loyalty. While the training and breaking of the eagle may seem harsh, it is a picture of how over time God breaks our independent spirit to draw us close to Him.¹

God uses broken things: broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, and broken bread to give strength.² In Genesis 42, God is going to break Joseph’s brothers by awakening their sleeping consciences. They were a hard bunch. Years before, under the leadership of Simeon and Levi, they had deceived a village, slaughtered all the men, and taken the women and children captive in retaliation for one man’s violating their sister. Reuben, the oldest, had slept with his father’s concubine. Judah had two sons so wicked that the Lord took their lives. He himself had a fling with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, thinking her to be a prostitute. All of the brothers, except Benjamin, had sold Joseph into slavery and then crushed their father’s heart by deceiving him into thinking that his son was dead. Now it’s 22 years later. In the process of this story, their sleeping consciences awake. Their story shows us how *God uses severity and grace to awaken our consciences and bring us to repentance.*³

Scene 1 (42:1-5): The seven years of famine that Joseph predicted are now in full force (see 41:54-57). The famine has spread throughout the entire known world (41:57), including Joseph’s family in Canaan. Therefore, in 42:1-2 Moses writes, **“Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why are you staring at one another?’ 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.’”** For a while Jacob’s family was probably able to live on what they had in reserve. But the weather is not changing and the supplies are almost depleted. The situation is becoming serious. Jacob hears that there is grain in Egypt, so he starts talking it up with his sons. But every time he brings up the subject, none of his sons will look him in the eye. They just stare at one another. Reuben looks at Simeon, Simeon glances at Judah, and Judah’s eyes dart over to Levi. Jacob is getting frustrated.⁴ In a crisis situation his sons don’t seem to be doing anything.⁵

Why don’t Jacob’s sons want to go to Egypt? For one thing, the trip to Egypt was long (250-300 miles) and dangerous, and a round trip could consume six weeks’ time. Even after arriving in Egypt, the brothers couldn’t be certain of a friendly reception. As “foreigners” from Canaan, they would be very vulnerable and could even be arrested and enslaved. If that happened there would be no one to take care of their families and their aged father.⁶ Furthermore, the word **“Egypt”** went off like a bomb in their guilty consciences. The brothers could hear again the clink of the silver coins they received from the traders as they sold their brother into slavery. They could see him begging for his life as he was being dragged off. They remembered the terrible expression of horror on his face. When a trip to Egypt was mentioned, they dreaded the possibility of passing by a gang of slaves and perhaps seeing the hollow eyes of their brother. For 22 years these brothers had tried to silence their nagging consciences. But when God applied the pressure of famine, coupled with the word “Egypt,” the sleeping giants stirred. For these ten brothers, time didn’t erase their guilty consciences.

You can brush your sin under the rug and hope that enough years will take care of it, but one day, perhaps years later, God will apply some sort of pressure in your life and your conscience will stir. Maybe it will be a single word, spoken inadvertently by someone. “Egypt!” Your sin flashes as vividly in your mind as if it was yesterday.⁷ Far better to keep short accounts and deal with your sin now than later. Sin compounds with some serious interest! Better to pay up as quickly as possible.

After their father’s prodding, Joseph’s ten brothers **“went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, ‘I am afraid that harm may befall him’”** (42:3-4). It’s evident that Jacob is a man controlled not only by favoritism but also by fear. He had already lost his favorite wife. Then he lost his favorite son. Here he is determined to prevent the loss of Benjamin who is his final link to Rebekah. Interestingly, it appears that over the years, since the death of his eleventh son, Joseph, Jacob apparently has grown suspicious of his ten older sons regarding either the manner in which Joseph “died” or the relationship that the older sons have with Benjamin, Jacob’s youngest son. This suspicion manifests itself in 42:4, which records that Jacob does not send Benjamin with his brothers into Egypt to buy food for the family because he (Jacob) is **“afraid that harm might befall him.”** Of what is Jacob afraid? There is no reason for him necessarily to believe that Benjamin is in any greater danger from the Egyptians or from potential marauding bands along the journey than are any of the other of his sons. Thus, Jacob quite probably does not trust his older sons to treat Benjamin kindly. What gives solid support to the view that Jacob is suspicious of what his ten older sons might do is that he cannot be worried that Benjamin, as a young child, might accidentally be injured on the journey to Egypt since Benjamin is not a young child. Benjamin, in fact, is approximately 23 years of age at this time (cp. 35:18; 37:2; 41:46, 53, 54; 45:6). As a young adult, Benjamin should not have difficulty taking such a long journey—surviving around his ten older brothers, however, is a different matter.⁸

Our first scene concludes with this statement: **“So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also”** (42:5). As shocking as it might be, Ps 105:16 tells us that God Himself “called down a famine upon the earth” (NET).⁹ It is important to see what God is doing. For years, Jacob and the boys lived life without having to think about God. Life went on as normal. They got up, did their work, came home, and the next day started all over again. They were content in their routine. Their needs were met; life went on as it always had. But with this famine God gets their attention. It is easy to avoid God when we feel self-sufficient. It is easy to feel that you have no need of God’s touch when everything is running smoothly. These men were comfortable in their denial and their deceptions. As long as the status quo remained they would never change. So God provokes a crisis. This crisis would either harden them further or wake them up.¹⁰

God could have simply washed His hands of these brothers. He could have said, “Fine, forget it.” But that’s not what He did with the Israelites and that’s not what He does with you and me. God loves us too much to let us go without a fight. So, at times He exercises “tough love.” He brings a crisis into our life that forces us to address ultimate issues. It may be an unexpected diagnosis, a financial emergency, an overwhelming situation, or a family crisis. In these situations God is often seeking to awaken us out of our spiritual lethargy. God lovingly put Jacob and his family in the midst of a famine in order to draw them to Him.

Are you going through a tough time? Is life a struggle right now? Could it be that God is trying to get your attention? Could it be that He is trying to awaken you out of your spiritual slumber? Is it possible that God loves you so much and that He wants you to be His with such intensity that He will stop at nothing to turn your heart to Him?¹¹

Scene 2 (42:6-17): We now move from the home front to the brothers appearing before Joseph in Egypt. Moses writes, “**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**” (42:6). Back in 37:5-7, Joseph had two dreams and predicted that one day his entire family would bow before him. And here the prediction begins to come to pass.¹² What God says will ultimately come to pass and whatever God says in His Word, you can trust it. He is faithful to His promises (2 Cor 1:20). Today, if you are growing weary and impatient, know that God will fulfill His Word to you.

In 42:7ff, we come to the moment of truth: How would Joseph respond? He had had at least 20 years to consider what he would do if and when this moment presented itself. And now, here it was! You see the greatest test of Joseph’s life occurred not when he was laid low by injustice, but when he was given unlimited power over his wicked brothers. Would he use his God-given power to seek revenge against them? Or would he use it for the purpose of saving the nation Israel from famine? As Abraham Lincoln once said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”¹³ How are you using the authority God has given you? We all have some position of authority that God has entrusted to us (e.g., parent, discipler, supervisor, minister). Are you using your authority for selfish ends or for the glory of God?

Just to make things interesting, Moses writes, “**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.’ But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him**” (42:7-8). Can you imagine this scene? Joseph, wearied by the stream of people in need, looks up and sees his brothers. He recognizes them in an instant. They are tan, weather-beaten, bearded Semite shepherds. And there are ten of them—all brothers! The older ones have grayed but are still recognizable by their profile, their walk, and of course, their Hebrew dialect.¹⁴ While Joseph recognizes his brothers, they don’t recognize him. How is this possible? Keep in mind, the last time the brothers had seen Joseph, he was a 17-year-old boy who was in a position of weakness, pleading for mercy as he was carried off into slavery by the Midianites, who had purchased him for 20 pieces of silver (37:2). On the other hand, the man in front of them is:

- Almost 40 years old (41:46, 53-54).
- The governor of all of Egypt.
- Clean-shaven, wearing the royal clothing of an Egyptian king.
- Confident, powerful, and speaking in the language of the Egyptians (42:23).

I suspect you have been to class reunions and had a hard time recognizing people you grew up with. Or maybe you have run into someone in the mall who recognizes you but you don’t recognize him because you are seeing him in a different setting than normal. The very same thing happened to Joseph’s brothers.

In 42:9-17, the storyline gets interesting: “**Joseph remembered¹⁵ 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.’ Then they said to him, ‘No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies.’ Yet he said to them, ‘No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!’ 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.’¹⁶ Joseph said to them, ‘It is as I said to you, you are spies; by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! 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.’ So he put them all together in prison for three days.”¹⁷**

Why did Joseph do this? Was it just a cruel act of vengeance—the product of 20 years of bitterness and resentment? No! The Bible is very clear that Joseph never indulged in any resentment against others who had injured him (see 45:5; 50:18-21). Joseph’s purpose in speaking harshly and accusing them of spying was not motivated by bitterness at all, but by a desire to covertly discover information regarding the health and well-being of his father, Jacob, and his younger brother, Benjamin. I also think Joseph (who had lived his life listening to God) realizes that this is an opportunity to accomplish God’s work in his brothers’ lives. Through a strategic, Spirit-led plan, God will use Joseph to:

1. Confront his brothers’ sin against him 20 years earlier.
2. Free his brothers from their guilt by guiding them into confession and repentance.
3. Reconcile the brothers to himself, Jacob, and ultimately to God.

What kind of energy does it take to bend a sapling? Not much. What about an oak? It takes a whole lot! Joseph is not playing games with his brothers. He is recreating the same situation. He’s putting pressure on them; he’s twisting them. Joseph was used in the lives of his brothers like no one else could have been.

I would also suggest that Joseph repeats with his brothers the exact scene that had happened to him 22 years earlier.¹⁸ In 37:2, Joseph brought his father a “bad report” about his brothers. In 37:14-17, Jacob sent Joseph on a mission to find out where his brothers were and what they were doing. When Joseph finds his brothers they are upset because they no doubt think he’s spying on them for the second time. Reading between the lines, it is likely that Joseph’s brothers accused him of being both “a spy” and “a nark!” Now in an unusual turn of events, Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies. No doubt he had protested that he wasn’t spying, just as they now protest. They would have answered him roughly and without any basis for their accusation, just as Joseph now answers them. They threw him into a pit, just as Joseph now throws them into the dungeon. The parallels between their treatment of Joseph and the treatment they are now receiving is a powerful stimulant to their sleeping consciences. Joseph is doing all of this in the hope that his brothers will wake up to the nature of their actions. He is hoping this treatment will make them “come clean.”

Joseph (Genesis 37)	Joseph’s brothers (Genesis 42)
Accused of spying (37:2, 14-17)	Accused of spying (42:9, 12, 14, 16)
Denied the accusation (implied)	Denied the accusation (42:10-11, 13)
Rough response (implied)	Rough response (42:12, 14)
Thrown into a pit (37:23-24)	Thrown into a prison (42:17)

Joseph’s brothers probably hadn’t given much thought to what it felt like to be a captive in a pit until Joseph put them in the dungeon. He may have put them there both to give them time to think as well as to buy some thinking time for himself. As Joseph thought through his original plan of keeping all but one in confinement, he realized that it might be more than his aged father could bear. So he changes his plan and decides to keep only one in confinement. But the effect of three days in the dungeon got his brothers’ attention. They began to think about their lives from a spiritual perspective. They thought about their own sin and the fact that sin has consequences. Before this they had shrugged off their sin as if there were no future reckoning with God. But now, sitting in prison for three days, they made the connection. Thorough repentance often takes time. It’s not always quick, easy, and over with.

Joseph was not being cruel. God was using these events to awaken the conscience of his brothers. He was stripping away the pretense and exposing the horror within. The brothers needed to see, to feel, to understand their own wickedness. It is unfortunate but true that often we do not understand sin until we see the way it hurts God and destroys others.

In 42:18-20, Moses writes, **“Now Joseph said to them on the third day, ‘Do this and live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die.’ And they did so.”** Another shocking event takes place as Joseph uses the name of the Hebrew’s God (*Elohim*). Joseph gives his brothers a glimmer of hope when he tells them, **“I fear God.”** They would not have expected this from this seemingly harsh Egyptian prime minister. But there was enough hope of fair treatment in those words to keep them from despairing and to reveal some tenderness underneath the harsh exterior of this man. If he hadn’t been harsh, he wouldn’t have gotten their attention. If he hadn’t shown them a glimmer of grace, he would have crushed their spirits. God’s grace shines through in His compassion, which underlies His discipline.

In 42:21-24, Moses records this dramatic scene: **“Then they said to one another, ‘Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.’ Reuben answered them, saying, ‘Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood.’ They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. He turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.”** In 42:21-22, the brothers begin talking among themselves. Joseph’s brothers believed that this distress had rightfully come upon them. They were experiencing the grace of guilt—bloodguilt. They knew they were guilty and deserving of death. God’s ancient command to Noah rang in their consciences: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man” (9:6).¹⁹

What this conversation shows is something very significant. Twenty years had past, their lives had gone on but their past sin continued to haunt them. I suspect they had agreed to never talk about the incident. They certainly resolved many times to “move on” and to all appearances, they did. They seemed unaffected by the past. But it was like a paint job on a moldy wall—you can cover the problem but you don’t get rid of it.

Do you have a place in you that has stored all these memories? We try to bury them but they keep creeping back into our conscience.

- We try to forget the people we made fun of as kids.
- We try to forget the people we used for our own advantage.
- We try to hide the lies we told to people we loved.
- We try to forget the people in need that we ignored.
- We try to forget the things we did in secret that we knew were wrong.

But we can’t forget. Slowly these things eat away at our joy and our heart. We may work hard to be better people than we used to be but we cannot escape the fact that others are living with scars that we are responsible for. We cannot escape the fact that no matter how holy we try to pretend to be, there is a cancer called sin that is buried inside of us. We present ourselves as good and righteous while living in fear that someone will learn the truth. Yet, we are wicked people who have done horrible things, no matter how good we are at hiding these things. We know the truth. What we need is to be forgiven.

We have to see the wrongs of the past as sin. We need to expose our denials. We need to face the truth. And if you are unwilling to do so, God will pursue you. He will work to get your attention. He will haunt you with the past. He will pursue you with relentless determination. Not because He is cruel but because He loves you, and because He knows that until you recognize that you are sick you can never be made well.

At this point, Joseph's pent-up emotions simply had to come out, so he left the room and wept privately. This is the first of six such experiences. Joseph also wept when he saw his brother Benjamin (43:29-30), when he revealed himself to his brothers (45:2), when he met his father in Egypt (46:29), when his father died (50:1), and when he assured his brothers that they were truly forgiven (50:17). What makes a person weep is a good test of character.

The Scripture does not say why Joseph chooses to imprison Simeon rather than any of the other brothers. Perhaps the reason lies in the brothers' discussion of their guilt in having sold Joseph into slavery. In that discussion, Joseph learns for the first time that Reuben, the oldest son of the family, had kept the other brothers from killing him (Joseph). If Joseph had intended to imprison the oldest brother (i.e., Reuben), then he (Joseph) may have had a change of heart regarding Reuben when he (Joseph) learned of Reuben's role in rescuing him (Joseph). If this was Joseph's reasoning, then the next candidate in line for imprisonment would be the second eldest son, Simeon.²⁰ Simeon, being the second oldest, would have been responsible for their collective wickedness.²¹ Joseph chose to keep him as leverage and to see if they were willing to desert Simeon like they had him.

In 42:25-28, our story continues: **“Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And thus it was done for them. So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there. As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. Then he said to his brothers, ‘My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack.’ And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling²² to one another, saying, ‘What is this that God has done to us?’”** Why did Joseph do this? No doubt to test his brothers to see if they could still be bought off with money. Joseph wanted to know if they would do to Simeon what they did to him. I also think Joseph did this as a demonstration of grace. His motive was love. I doubt that he knew it would scare them as it did. The brothers panicked because they figured that when they returned for more grain they would be accused of stealing this money on the first trip. Interestingly, Joseph's brothers have never mentioned God until now (cf. 42:18). It was Joseph's kindness in returning the money, which caused them to be afraid and to exclaim, **“What is this that God has done to us?”** God used a combination of fear and grace to get their attention and bring them to their knees.

In 42:29-34, Jacob's sons shared with their father what had happened. In 42:35-38, our story closes: **“Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed.”** At this point, the brothers realize that all of their money has been returned. This must have been a sick feeling. **“Their father Jacob said to them, ‘You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me.’ Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, ‘You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you.’ But Jacob said, ‘My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.’”** Reuben may be sincerely trying to console his father, Jacob, but he has a strange way of doing it. Reuben offers Jacob the opportunity to have his bereavement increased by the death of two of his grandsons (Reuben's children) if Jacob becomes bereaved of his own youngest son, Benjamin. Sort of a “three-for-the-price-of-one arrangement.”²³

While we can certainly sympathize with Jacob's emotions, he did not respond in a godly fashion. On the contrary, he responded in three inappropriate ways:

1. ***Jacob responded with blame: “You deprived me of my children!”*** (42:36) He did not accept responsibility for his favoritism or partiality. He did not acknowledge that he was a pathetic spiritual leader. Rather, he played the blame game. We have the tendency to do this as well. We blame our parents, spouse, children, boss, and church. We don’t accept responsibility for our actions. Yet, this does absolutely no good! We would be further along to own our sin.

2. ***Jacob responded with pessimism: “All these things are against me!”*** (42:36) While this is a valid statement from a human point of view, from God’s perspective everything that was happening was working for Jacob’s good and not for his harm (Rom 8:28). Some believers are like Jacob—very pessimistic and very negative. We tend to think we are the only ones that have any problems. We then magnify our problems until they seem insurmountable. The result is that all we do is complain and act miserable. But as followers of Jesus, we must learn to trust Him and cling to Him during times of adversity.

3. ***Jacob responded with fear: “My son shall not go down with you”*** (42:38). Jacob’s concern was legitimate, but not to the point of being paralyzed by fear. Jacob knew that he had to send Benjamin. He is merely postponing the inevitable. In doing so he paid a high price for his fear.
 - He delayed sending his sons back to Egypt for more supplies.
 - He prolonged the imprisonment of his son, Simeon.
 - He delayed the miraculous and joyful reunion with his son, Joseph.

Here is a study in contrasts: While adversity drew Joseph closer to God, for Jacob it seemed to destroy his faith. Joseph (the son) learned from Jacob (the father) and did not follow in his example.

A boy’s toy boat went out of reach on a pond one day and started floating away. A man at the side of the pond started throwing rocks at the boat and the boy became horrified at what might happen. But then he realized that the rocks were going over the boat and making ripples that finally pushed the boat back to shore and into the boy’s hands. Many times, when we stray away from God, it appears that he is throwing rocks at us. But He is really using the ripples to bring us back home.²⁴ Jacob thought God was throwing rocks *at* him, but in reality God was only throwing rocks *around* him in order to make some ripples that would bring his family back together.

I wonder what wonderful blessings we might be delaying in our lives because we live in fear rather than faith in God. So, how do you overcome fear?

- Confess your fears to God.
- Mediate on God’s past faithfulness.
- Memorize and believe in God’s promises (Rom 4:20-21).
- Remember that God is always with you (Isa 41:10).

In 2003, Pastor Kevin took our youth on a short-term missions trip to Honduras. He brought me home a two-foot machete. I keep this machete on top of my bookshelf in my home office. I don’t want my kids playing with this tool. Machetes are dangerous. Yet, machetes have a purpose. They are normally used to cut through thick vegetation. Adversity is like a machete: it either serves us or cuts us, depending on whether we grab it by the handle or by the blade. How will you handle your adversity? Will you allow your adversity to serve you or cut you?

God wants to show you grace in your adversity. He also wants to show you grace when you repent of your sin. He will use whatever means He can to get your attention. Will you respond to Him today?

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Notes

¹ Preaching Today Citation: Stephen Kinzer, “A Hunter Whose Weapon Is Also His Friend,” *New York Times* (11/4/99).

² Preaching Today Citation: Vance Havner, *Leadership*, Vol. 4, no. 1.

³ Steven J. Cole, “When your Conscience says “Ow!”” (Genesis 42:1-28):

http://www.fcfonline.org/site/search_methods.asp?search=1&search_method=advanced&sermon_book=Genesis.

⁴ Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988 [2002 ed.]), 651.

⁵ Davis writes, “There are two major sections in the Book of Gen where Joseph is seen to interact with his brothers: chapters 37 and 42–50. The former section takes place in the land of Canaan, the latter in the land of Egypt.

Interestingly, at the beginning of each of the major sections, the author records a bad report about some or all of the ten sons not born to Rachel, suggesting that they exhibit a less-than-exemplary character (37:2; 42:1). Here, in 42:1, Jacob questions why his sons are doing nothing about securing food to provide for the family in a time of famine.”

Barry C. Davis, *Genesis* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Biblical Seminary unpublished class Notes, 2003).

⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Authentic: Genesis 25-50* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1997), 107-108.

⁷ Cole, “When your Conscience says “Ow!””

⁸ Davis, *Genesis*.

⁹ Wiersbe writes, “What Jacob and his sons didn’t know was that the sovereign God was at work making sure the ten brothers went to Egypt and bowed down before Joseph. In the accomplishing of His divine purposes, God can use a famine, a kidnapping (2 Kings 5:2-3), a royal beauty contest (Est. 2), a sudden death (Ezek. 24:15ff.), a dream (Dan. 2), a plague (Joel 1), and even a government census (Luke 2:1-7). “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him” (Ps. 115:3). Wiersbe, *Be Authentic*, 108.

¹⁰ God not only uses trials and adversity in our lives...sometimes He is the source of them. The question is, “For what purpose?” Three purposes come to mind: (1) To turn us away from sin and back to God (Amos 4:6-8). (2) To strengthen our character (Jas 1:2-4). (3) To test and refine our faith (1 Pet 1:6-7).

¹¹ Revised from Bruce Goettsche, “God’s Methods for Changing Hearts” (Genesis 42:1-38):

<http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/013000.html>.

¹² There is no record of Jacob bowing down before him.

¹³ Bob Hallman, “The Testing Of Hearts” (Genesis 42:1-38):

<http://www3.calvarychapel.com/kauai/teachings/genesis.html>.

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 494. See also Gene A. Getz, *Joseph: Finding God’s Strength in Times of Trial* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1983), 117.

¹⁵ The word “remembered” (*zakar*) recalls momentous events in Genesis when God brought about salvation (8:1; 9:15-16; 19:29; 30:22; cf. also 40:14, 23). Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 776.

¹⁶ Now why would they say all these things? First of all, they are trying to be honest. Second, they are pleading that it is absurd to think they are spies. What spy would travel with his brothers and in a group of ten! A good spy wants to blend in, be inconspicuous.

¹⁷ Joseph’s brothers taste for three days what Joseph had tasted for 13 years! Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 547.

¹⁸ Walton raises the question: “Did the brothers accuse Joseph of being a spy (cf. 37:2)?” John H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 678.

¹⁹ Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing*, 496.

²⁰ Davis, *Genesis*. See also Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 261.

²¹ There’s a good chance that it was Simeon who had been the ringleader in throwing Joseph into the pit where his intention was to kill him. He had been the leader in the slaughter of the Shechemites. In Jacob’s final words to his sons, he refers only to Simeon’s violence and anger (49:5-7). By putting Simeon in prison, Joseph would prevent his wrongly influencing the others on the return journey and would also hope that the time in prison would break his hardened heart.

²² The word translated “trembling” (*charad*) is the same word used of Isaac’s trembling when he discovered that he had been deceived in the matter of Esau’s birthright (27:33). It means “to tremble with terror.”

²³ Davis, *Genesis*.

²⁴ Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), Electronic Ed.