

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Joseph, deeply affected with the speech of Judah, could no longer conceal himself, but discovers himself to his brethren, Genesis 45:1-4. Excuses their conduct towards him, and attributes the whole to the providence of God, Genesis 45:5-8. Orders them to hasten to Canaan, and bring up their father and their own families, cattle, etc., because there were five years of the famine yet to come, Genesis 45:9-13. He embraces and converses with all his brethren, Genesis 45:14, Genesis 45:15. Pharaoh, hearing that Joseph's brethren were come to Egypt, and that Joseph had desired them to return to Canaan and bring back their families, not only confirms the order, but promises them the best part of the land of Egypt to dwell in; and provides them carriages to transport themselves and their households, Genesis 45:16-20. Joseph provides them with wagons according to the commandment of Pharaoh; and having given them various presents, sends them away with suitable advice, Genesis 45:21-24. They depart, arrive in Canaan, and announce the glad tidings to their father, who for a time believes not, but being assured of the truth of their relation, is greatly comforted, and resolves to visit Egypt, Genesis 45:25-28.

Verse 1

Joseph could not refrain himself - The word *hithappek* (hithappek) is very emphatic; it signifies to force one's self, to do something against nature, to do violence to one's self. Joseph could no longer constrain himself to act a feigned part - all the brother and the son rose up in him at once, and overpowered all his resolutions; he felt for his father, he realized his disappointment and agony; and he felt for his brethren, now at his feet submissive in distress; and, that he might give free and full scope to his feelings, and the most ample play of the workings of his affectionate heart, he ordered all his attendants to go out, while he made himself known to his brethren. The beauties of this chapter, says Dr. Dodd, are so striking, that it would be an indignity to the reader's judgment to point them out; all who can read and feel must be sensible of them, as there is perhaps nothing in sacred or profane history more highly wrought up, more interesting or affecting.

Verse 2

The Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard - It seems strange that Joseph should have wept so loud that his cries should be heard at some considerable distance, as we may suppose his dwelling was not very nigh to the palace! But this, says Sir John Chardin, is exactly the genius of the people of Asia - their sentiments of joy or grief are properly transports, and their transports are ungoverned, excessive, and truly outrageous. When any one returns from a long journey, or dies, his family burst into cries that may be heard twenty doors off; and this is renewed at different times, and continues many days, according to the vigor of the passion. Sometimes they cease all at once, and then begin as suddenly with a greater shrillness and loudness than one could easily imagine. This circumstance Sir John brings to illustrate the verse in question. See Harmer, vol. iii. p. 17. But the house of Pharaoh may certainly signify Pharaoh's servants, or any of the members of his household, such as those whom Joseph had desired to withdraw, and who might still be within hearing of his voice. After all, the words may only mean that the report was brought to Pharaoh's house. See Genesis 45:16.

Verse 3

I am Joseph - Mr. Pope supposed that the discovery of Ulysses to his son Telemachus bears some resemblance to Joseph's discovery of himself to his brethren. The passage may be seen in Homer, Odyss. I. xvi., ver. 186-218.

A few lines from Cowper's translation will show much of the spirit of the original, and also a considerable analogy between the two scenes: -

I am thy father, for whose sake thou lead'st
 A life of woe by violence oppress'd.
 So saying, he kiss'd his son; while from his cheeks
 Tears trickled, tears till then perforce restrain'd.
 Then threw Telemachus
 His arms around his father's neck, and wept.
 Pangs of soft sorrow, not to be suppress'd,
 Seized both. So they, their cheeks with big round drops of woe
 Bedewing, stood.

Verse 5

Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves - This discovers a truly noble mind: he not only forgives and forgets,

but he wishes even those who had wronged him to forget the injury they had done, that they might not suffer distress on the account; and with deep piety he attributes the whole to the providence of God; for, says he, God did send me before you to preserve life. On every word here a strong emphasis may be laid. It is not you, but God; it is not you that sold me, but God who sent me; Egypt and Canaan must both have perished, had not a merciful provision been made; you were to come down hither, and God sent me before you; death must have been the consequence of this famine, had not God sent me here to preserve life.

Verse 6

There shall neither be earing nor harvest - Earing has been supposed to mean collecting the ears of corn, which would confound it with harvest: the word, however, means ploughing or seed-time, from the Anglo-Saxon (erian), probably borrowed from the Latin *aro*, to plough, and plainly means that there should be no seed-time, and consequently no harvest; and why? Because there should be a total want of rain in other countries, and the Nile should not rise above twelve cubits in Egypt; See Clarke on Genesis 41:31 (note). But the expressions here must be qualified a little, as we find from Genesis 47:19, that the Egyptians came to Joseph to buy seed; and it is probable that even during this famine they sowed some of the ground, particularly on the borders of the river, from which a crop, though not an abundant one, might be produced. The passage, however, in the above chapter may refer to the last year of the famine, when they came to procure seed for the ensuing year.

Verse 8

He hath made me a father to Pharaoh - It has already been conjectured that father was a name of office in Egypt, and that father of Pharaoh might among them signify the same as prime minister or the king's minister does among us. Calmet has remarked that among the Phoenicians, Persians, Arabians, and Romans, the title of father was given to certain officers of state. The Roman emperors gave the name of father to the prefects of the Praetorium, as appears by the letters of Constantine to Ablavius. The caliphs gave the same name to their prime ministers. In Judges 17:10, Micah says to the young Levite, Dwell with me, and be unto me a Father and a priest. And Diodorus Siculus remarks that the teachers and counsellors of the kings of Egypt were chosen out of the priesthood.

Verse 10

Thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen - Probably this district had been allotted to Joseph by the king of Egypt, else we can scarcely think he could have promised it so positively, without first obtaining Pharaoh's consent. Goshen was the most easterly province of Lower Egypt, not far from the Arabian Gulf, lying next to Canaan, (for Jacob went directly thither when he came into Egypt), from whence it is supposed to have been about fourscore miles distant, though Hebron was distant from the Egyptian capital about three hundred miles. At Goshen Jacob stayed till Joseph visited him, Genesis 46:28. It is also called the land of Rameses, Genesis 47:11, from a city of that name, which was the metropolis of the country. Josephus, *Antiq.*, 1. ii., c. 4, makes Heliopolis, the city of Joseph's father-in-law, the place of the Israelites' residence. As גֶּשֶׁם (*geshem*) signifies rain in Hebrew, St. Jerome and some others have supposed that גֶּשְׁעֵן (*Goshen*) comes from the same root, and that the land in question was called thus because it had rain, which was not the case with Egypt in general; and as it was on the confines of the Arabian Gulf, it is very probable that it was watered from heaven, and it might be owing to this circumstance that it was peculiarly fertile, for it is stated to be the best of the land of Egypt. See Genesis 47:6, Genesis 47:11. See also Calmet and Dodd.

Verse 12

That it is my mouth that speaketh unto you - The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel renders the place thus: - "Your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my own mouth that speaketh with you, in the language of the house of the sanctuary." Undoubtedly Joseph laid considerable stress on his speaking with them in the Hebrew tongue, without the assistance of an interpreter, as in the case mentioned Genesis 42:23.

Verse 14

He fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck - Among the Asiatics kissing the beard, the neck, and the shoulders, is in use to the present day; and probably falling on the neck signifies no more than kissing the neck or shoulders, with the arms around.

Verse 20

Regard not your stuff - Literally, Let not your eye spare your instruments or vessels. כֵּלֵיכֶם (*keleychem*), a general term, in which may be included household furniture, agricultural utensils, or implements of any description. They were not to delay nor encumber themselves with articles which could be readily found in Egypt, and were not worth so long a carriage.

Verse 21

Joseph gave them wagons - אָגאַלֹת (agaloth), from אָגַל (agal), which, though not used as a verb in the Hebrew Bible, evidently means to turn round, roll round, be circular, etc., and hence very properly applied to wheel carriages. It appears from this that such vehicles were very early in use, and that the road from Egypt to Canaan must have been very open and much frequented, else such carriages could not have passed by it.

Verse 22

Changes of raiment - It is a common custom with all the Asiatic sovereigns to give both garments and money to ambassadors and persons of distinction, whom they particularly wish to honor. Hence they keep in their wardrobes several hundred changes of raiment, ready made up for presents of this kind. That such were given by way of reward and honor, see Judges 14:12, Judges 14:19; Revelation 6:11. At the close of a feast the Hindoos, among other presents to the guests, commonly give new garments. A Hindoo garment is merely a piece of cloth, requiring no work of the tailor - Ward.

Verse 23

Meat for his father by the way - מֶזֶן (mazon), from זָן (zan), to prepare, provide, etc. Hence prepared meat, some made-up dish, delicacies, confectionaries, etc. As the word is used, 2 Chronicles 16:14, for aromatic preparations, it may be restrained in its meaning to something of that kind here. In Asiatic countries they have several curious methods of preserving flesh by potting, by which it may be kept for any reasonable length of time sweet and wholesome. Some delicacy, similar to the savory food which Isaac loved, may be here intended; and this was sent to Jacob in consideration of his age, and to testify the respect of his son. Of other kinds of meat he could need none, as he had large herds, and could kill a lamb, kid, sheep, or goat, whenever he pleased.

Verse 24

See that ye fall not out by the way - This prudent caution was given by Joseph, to prevent his brethren from accusing each other for having sold him; and to prevent them from envying Benjamin, for the superior favor shown him by his brother. It is strange, but so it is, that children of the same parents are apt to envy each other, fall out, and contend; and therefore the exhortation in this verse must be always seasonable in a large family. But a rational, religious education will, under God, prevent every thing of this sort.

Verse 26

Jacob's heart fainted - Probably the good news so overpowered him as to cast him into a swoon. He believed them not - he thought it was too good news to be true; and though it occasioned his swooning, yet on his recovery he could not fully credit it. See a similar case, Luke 24:41 (note).

Verse 27

When he saw the wagons - the spirit of Jacob - revived - The wagons were additional evidences of the truth of what he had heard from his sons; and the consequence was, that he was restored to fresh vigor, he seemed as if he had gained new life, וַתְּחַיֵּהוּ (vattechi), and he lived; revixit, says the Vulgate, he lived afresh. The Septuagint translate the original word by ἐκτίθημι , which signifies the blowing and stirring up of almost extinguished embers that had been buried under the ashes, which word St. Paul uses, 2 Timothy 1:6, for stirring up the gift of God. The passage at once shows the debilitated state of the venerable patriarch, and the wonderful effect the news of Joseph's preservation and glory had upon his mind.

Verse 28

It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive - It was not the state of dignity to which Joseph had arisen that particularly affected Jacob, it was the consideration that he was still alive. It was this that caused him to exclaim רַב (rab); â€œmuch! multiplied! my son is yet alive! I will go and see him before I die.â€œ None can realize this scene; the words, the circumstances, all refer to indescribable feelings.

1. In Joseph's conduct to his brethren there are several things for which it is difficult to account. It is strange, knowing how much his father loved him, that he never took an opportunity, many of which must have offered, to acquaint him that he was alive; and that self-interest did not dictate the propriety of this to him is at first view surprising, as his father would undoubtedly have paid his ransom, and restored him to liberty: but a little reflection will show that prudence dictated secrecy. His brethren, jealous and envious in the extreme, would soon have found out other methods of destroying his life, had they again got him into their power. Therefore for his personal safety, he chose rather to be a bond-slave in Egypt than to risk his life by returning home. On this ground it is evident that he could not with any safety have discovered the place of his residence.

2. His carriage to his brethren, previously to his making himself known, appears inexcusably harsh, if not vindictive; but when the men are considered, it will appear sufficiently evident that no other means would have

been adequate to awaken their torpid consciences, and bring them to a due sense of their guilt. A desperate disease requires a desperate remedy. The event justified all that he did, and God appears to have been the director of the whole.

3. His conduct in requiring Benjamin to be as it were torn away from the bleeding heart of an aged, desolate father, in whose affection he himself had long lived, is the most difficult to be satisfactorily accounted for. Unless the Spirit of prophecy had assured him that this experiment would terminate in the most favorable manner, his conduct in making it cannot well be vindicated. To such prophetic intimation this conduct has been attributed by learned men; and we may say that this consideration, if it does not untie the knot, at least cuts it. Perhaps it is best to say that in all these things Joseph acted as he was directed by a providence, under the influence of which he might have been led to do many things which he had not previously designed. The issue proves that the hand of God's wisdom and goodness directed, regulated, and governed every circumstance, and the result was glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and good will among men.

4. This chapter, which contains the unravelling of the plot, and wonderfully illustrates the mysteries of these particular providences, is one of the most interesting in the whole account: the speech of Joseph to his brethren, Genesis 45:1-13, is inferior only to that of Judah in the preceding chapter. He saw that his brethren were confounded at his presence, that they were struck with his present power, and that they keenly remembered and deeply deplored their own guilt. It was necessary to comfort them, lest their hearts should have been overwhelmed with overmuch sorrow. How delicate and finely wrought is the apology he makes for them! The whole heart of the affectionate brother is at once seen in it - art is confounded and swallowed up by nature - "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves - it was not you that sent me hither, but God." What he says also concerning his father shows the warmest feelings of a benevolent and filial heart. Indeed, the whole chapter is a master-piece of composition; and it is the more impressive because it is evidently a simple relation of facts just as they occurred; for no attempt is made to heighten the effect by rhetorical coloring or philosophical reflections; it is all simple, sheer nature, from beginning to end. It is a history that has no fellow, crowded with incidents as probable as they are true; where every passion is called into action, where every one acts up to his own character, and where nothing is out of time, or extravagant in degree. Had not the history of Joseph formed a part of the sacred Scriptures, it would have been published in all the living languages of man, and read throughout the universe! But it contains the things of God, and to all such the carnal mind is enmity.