

Genesis 44

God intends to save His people from a severe famine so He sets up Jacob's son, Joseph, as vizier over Egypt (41:40-44). But Jacob's other sons, motivated out of envy, had sold Joseph as a slave when he was 17 years old (37:28). Then they led Jacob to believe that Joseph was dead (37:29-36). It is now 23 years later (41:46, 53; 45:6), Joseph's brothers have come a second time to Egypt to buy more food but they still do not recognize Joseph. Joseph, however, does not trust his brothers. Therefore, he has been testing their resolve and their dedication to Benjamin, Joseph's only full-brother. This chapter, which includes the longest speech in the book of Genesis (44:18-34), sets the scene for Joseph to finally reveal his identity in the next chapter.

TRANSLATION - 44:1-13:

1 Then he commanded whom [was] over his house, saying, "Fill the sacks of the men with food, just as they will be able to carry and put silver of a man in the mouth of his sack. **2** And my cup, my silver cup, you put in the mouth of the sack of the youngest and the silver for his grain." And he did as the word of Joseph which he spoke.

3 In the morning, [the sun] shone, and the men were sent out, they and their donkeys.

4 These went out from the city. They went a short distance and Joseph said to the one over his house, "Arise. Pursue after the men and say to them, 'Why have you returned evil for good? **5** Is this not from which he will drink, my lord, in it, and to divine, he will divine in it? Have you all not done evil which you have done?'"

6 So he overtook them and spoke to them these words.

7 Then they said to him, "Why does my lord speak as these words? Anathema to your servants, to do as this thing! **8** Behold, the silver which we found in the mouth of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan! And how could we steal from the house of your lord silver or gold?! **9** Whom there is found with him your servants, even he will die and even we ourselves will be to my lord for servants."

10 And he said, "Even now, as your words, thus he whom there is found with him, let him be to me a servant and you all will be innocent."

11 So they hurried and emptied a man his sack to the ground and they opened a man his sack. **12** And he searched with the oldest, he began and with the youngest he finished and there was found the cup in the sack of Benjamin.

13 Then they tore their clothes and loaded a man on his donkey and they returned to the city.

WORDS:

This word for "cup" (verse 2) is an Egyptian word, used in this context (44:2, 12, 16-17) and several times in Exodus and finally in Jeremiah 35:5. "To shine" (verse 3; 44 times) is related to the word "light" (120 times); they are spelled the same. "To go a short distance" (verse 4) is one word, used 59 times. "To return" comes from the same word-family as "peace" or "wholeness." The verb means "to complete, finish, make whole, restore, repay." The verb is only used here in Genesis. "To divine" (verse 5) was used back in 30:27. See comments there. It is related to the word "snake." The verb is used 11 times; "snake" or "serpent," 31 times. Other than 30:27, it is only used in Genesis in this context: 40:5, 15. "To overtake" (verse 6) is used 50 times. "Anathema" (verse 7) is an exclamation, found first at 18:25 but otherwise used only here in Genesis (44:7, 17). It is found 21 times in the OT and suggests the exclamation: "Far be it! Never!" "To steal" (verse 8; 40 times) is related to the word "thief, kidnapper" (17 times); thirteen times used in Ezekiel. "Innocent" (verse 10) means "blameless, innocent," found 43 times.

"To search" (verse 12) is used 23 times. The only other time the verb is used in Genesis is in 31:35 when, under similar conditions, Laban searched the tent of Rachel (Joseph's mom),

for his stolen idols. “He began” is a verb that generally means “to defile, pollute” but can, as here, mean “to begin.” “To tear” (verse 13) is found 63 times. “Clothing” (31 times) is a general term. “To load” is only used 7 times in the OT, only here in Genesis.

GRAMMAR:

“To divine, he will divine” (verses 5, 15) is the Hebrew emphatic form, the infinitive absolute followed by the imperfect form of the same verb.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

There is scant evidence of the practice of using cups for divination in Egypt. Other cultures would pour oil into water, called oleomancy, and then “predict” the future based on patterns among the swirls. The process of pouring water into oil, to divine the future, is called hydromancy. Using other liquids is lecanomancy. It is easy to see how this lends itself to charlatany. The ancients also “read” the entrails of animals as well as the movement of the heavenly bodies. Jehovah God, rather, chose to communicate in words through His prophets. We do not know what city is referenced in the context.

COMMENTS:

Joseph is fulfilling his ruse as he instructs his steward to stuff his brother’s sacks with food (again) and put their money (both payments) back into their sack. But, he also instructs the steward to put Joseph’s silver cup in the sack of “the youngest,” the cup Joseph is said to use for divination. The steward did just as Joseph told him, already knowing who was the youngest brother (43:33). We are not sure just how much of Joseph’s plans was known by the steward but he does fulfill the command of his master.

At daybreak, the brothers set out on their journey home, to their father, with their money, and both brothers, Simeon and Benjamin. Just outside the city, not far into their travel, Joseph instructed the steward to overtake the brothers and challenge them, why they would “repay” evil for good? Why would they “balance the scales” of goodness with their evil, their thievery? The steward is to find the cup (which he knows is in the sack of Benjamin), and then challenge the brothers that Joseph uses that cup for divination. They have done “evil” (vs 5) against Joseph. The steward did just as Joseph instructed. To steal was an offense, to steal sacred objects was even worse (31:30ff; Judges 18:17ff).

In verse 7, the brothers push back. They use a strong exclamation: “May it never be!” as the steward has alleged. The fact is, they brought *back* the money from the first trip, which the steward already acknowledged he put in their sacks. Why would they steal silver (a word used 20 times in the story about Joseph) or gold from Joseph’s house? They give no indication they are thieves. But then, they make a regretful ultimatum: “With whomever you find the cup, let him die,” echoing the words (again, uttered in ignorance) of their father, against their mother when she stole her father’s idols (31:32). Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver (37:28). Now, they can’t pay enough silver to get themselves out of trouble!

In verse 10, the steward lowers the expectation. Rather than killing the guilty person, he will be the slave of Joseph. The rest will be innocent and can return to Jacob. So, each of the 11 brothers hurried to empty his sack and show that he was innocent. The steward began with the oldest and, increasing the suspense of the reader, moves to the youngest. Of course, the brothers are not in suspense because they are absolutely sure that the cup is not among them! Moses, writing the text, draws out the suspense in the sentence referring to the find... he puts “Benjamin” at the end of the sentence: “the cup was found in the sack of Benjamin.”

But the, the steward finds the cup in the sack of the youngest brother (vs 12)! Immediately, just as Jacob had torn his clothes when he learned of Joseph’s “death” (37:34), all the brothers, in solidarity, tore their garments, loaded their donkeys and returned to the city. This specific phrase for tearing the garment is found two other times, in Joshua 7:6 and also... in Genesis 37:34. In that text, Jacob tore his clothes at the thought of Joseph’s death; here, the brothers tear their clothes at the anticipation of Benjamin’s slavery.

Highlight in the text the number of times the phrase “the men” is contrasted with the reference to Joseph as “the man.”

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - The sons set out for home, with everything they had come for. Certainly, the discovery of the silver cup in Benjamin’s sack was unexpected and a tragedy for them. Joseph, on the other hand, has set up his final test to see if his brothers love Benjamin as they should.

Contemporaries of Moses - The law of Moses will condemn the practice of divination (Lev. 11:26; Deut. 18:10).

Later Hebrew writers - God will say through the prophet Amos that He reveals His will to His prophets (Amos 3:7), in words which are understandable. This is a clear distinction from other ANE religions.

NT writers - The NT will also affirm that God reveals His will in words, to prophets, to be shared with others (1 Cor. 2:10-14; Eph. 3:3-5; 4:14-15).

TRANSLATION - 44:14-17:

14 Then Judah came and his brothers into the house of Joseph and he [was] still there and they fell on their face to the ground. **15** Then Joseph said to them, “Why this thing which you all have done? Did you all not know that to divine, a man could divine like me?”

16 So Judah said to him, “What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? Or what can we justify ourselves? God has found the wickedness of your servants! Behold, we [are] servants of my lord, even we ourselves even whom there was found the cup in his hand.”

17 But he said, “Anathema to me this thing, the man whom was found the cup in his hand, that one will be to me a servant and you all, go up in peace to your father.”

WORDS:

“To justify” (verse 16) is the verb (used 41 times) related to the adjective “righteous” (used 206 times), the word “righteousness” (159 times) and “equity” (123 times). Clearly, this word family is important to the biblical story.

COMMENTS:

Beginning with verse 14, Moses informs us that Judah is going to take the lead. He was the one who, seeing the Ishmaelite traders (37:25), first made the suggestion to sell Joseph into slavery (37:27). Of course, it was Judah who pressured Jacob into sending Benjamin with them as they returned to Egypt and gave himself as a guarantee that he would bring Benjamin back (43:8-10). The brothers enter Joseph’s house; he is still there, not yet beginning his day of work. They fall to the ground before him (verse 14), with little defense before the vizier. Once again, they are fulfilling Joseph’s dreams (37:5-7, 9-10; 42:6, 9; 43:26, 28). They have bowed before Joseph four times!

Joseph challenges them that he could practice divination (verse 15). Perhaps he had a second cup (?) but the brothers have *his* cup! We do not know if Joseph actually used the cup for divination or if this was just a part of his ruse. The evidence is scarce relative to the Egyptians practicing this type of divination. If he did, he do not know if he did so, believing that God worked through the action or if gods were working through the action. There is much we do not know about such a practice in Egypt or in Joseph’s own religious life. However, Joseph does use the silver cup to find out information!

Judah offers his first speech in defense in verse 16. The atmosphere feels like that of a tribunal! He says they are speechless. He does not know how they might prove themselves righteous, justify themselves. They know they are innocent but the evidence is clear: the cup was in Benjamin’s sack! Of course, the cup does not come into the dialogue again since it was only part of the ruse. Judah, and his brothers, again express conviction in retribution (42:21), that God is repaying them for their “wickedness,” the word Cain used of his behavior (4:13).

So, Judah offers himself and all his brothers as servants of Joseph, the vizier of Egypt, absolutely fulfilling Joseph's dreams! It is remarkable that Joseph still plays an important role in the consciences of the brothers! After all these years, they are still troubled by their treatment of him, by his pleas from the pit, which they ignored (42:21).

But Joseph wants to finally test their loyalty to his full-brother, Benjamin. Does their hatred, jealousy, animosity toward Joseph carry over to Benjamin? Will they take the opportunity to leave Benjamin as a slave in Egypt? They had not cared how Joseph's "death" would impact their father; will they care how Benjamin's "slavery" will impact him? Just where is the brother's allegiance? He uses the word "anathema" as the brothers had done (vs 7): "May it never be!" The guilty one, Benjamin, will remain behind as a servant. The other brothers can go free, back to their father, in peace - if they can live peaceably with themselves. Can they? They did it before...

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - The behavior of the brothers toward Joseph decades before still serves a large role in their thinking. They believe the events are unfolding as a result of God avenging against them their treatment of Joseph. Moses never suggests such a thing. But, we do know that it is Joseph who is manipulating the brothers, not as a means of vengeance, but testing their loyalty to his brother.

Contemporaries of Moses - The principle of retribution says that God will punish evil. That principle is true. Moses will teach this very principle in Numbers 32:23. Yet, humans have pushed the principle farther than the Bible will allow, believing that *any time* one suffers, it is because they have sinned.

Later Hebrew writers - On one hand, Ecclesiastes 11:1 (and other texts) teach that God will punish evil. On the other hand, Job (cf. 1:1, 8) clearly teaches us that *all* suffering is not the result of sin.

NT writers - Once again, passages like Galatians 6:7 teach that God will punish evil. Yet, the man born blind did not suffer his disability because of his sins nor his parents' but so that Jesus could reveal His divinity to His disciples (John 9:3).

TRANSLATION - 44:18-34:

18 But Judah approached him and said, "O my lord, let speak, please, your servant a word in his ears, my lord, and do not flare your nostrils at your servant because as you [are], like Pharaoh. **19** My lord asked his servants, saying, "Is there to you a father or brother?" **20** And we said to my lord, 'There is to us an elderly father and a lad, old age, little and his brother died and he is left himself alone and his mother and his father loves him.' **21** And you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me and I will put my eyes on him.' **22** And we said to my lord, 'The lad is not able to leave his father and if he will leave his father then he will die.' **23** Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother will come down with you, you will not again see my face.'

24 "Then it was that we went up to your servant, my father, and announced to him the words of my lord. **25** And our father said, 'Return. Buy for us a little food.' **26** Then we said, 'We are not able to go down unless our youngest brother [is] with us and we will go down because we are not able to see the face of the man if our youngest brother is not with us.' **27** Then your servant, my father, said to us, 'You know that two my wife bore to me **28** And one went out from me,' and he said, 'Surely to be savaged he was savaged and I have not seen him here. **29** Then if you take even this one from with me, then there will happen an accident, then you all will bring my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.' **30** But now, when I came to your servant, my father, and the lad is not with us, then his soul is bound to his soul. **31** And it will be when he sees that there is not the young lad that he will die and your servants will bring down the old age of your servant, our father, in sorrow, to Sheol. **32** Because your servant pledged the young lad with

my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I am sinning against my father all the days.'

33 "Even now, let your servant remain, please, in place of the young lad, a servant to my lord and the young lad, let him go up with his brothers. **34** Because how will I go up to my father and the lad is not with me lest I shall see with evil which will be found with my father?"

WORDS:

"To flare the nostrils" (verse 18) is a literal translation, which carries the idea of getting angry. "To be left" (verse 20; 106 times) means to "be left over, remain." "Evil" (verse 29, 34) we have seen since Genesis 2:9. The word is used 36 times in Genesis. "Sheol" was first used by Jacob in 37:35; see comments there. Here, the fact that Judah uses it, without explanation, before Joseph, believed to be an Egyptian, suggests that Judah expected the Egyptian to understand what he meant by "Sheol." "Soul" (verse 30, 31) was first seen back in 1:20-21, 24. It is used 757 times. "Sorrow" (verse 31) is in the same sentence structure as "evil" in the prior verse, which shows that's how Judah intended "evil" to be understood. It means "grief, sorrow, agony" and is used 14 times.

GRAMMAR:

"To be savaged he was savaged" (verse 28) is the Hebrew emphatic form, the infinitive absolute followed by the imperfect form of the same verb.

COMMENTS:

In Judah's speech, highlight the number of times he refers to Joseph as "lord," the frequency he refers to himself and his brothers as "servants," as well as references to Jacob, his father. First, Judah recognizes the social distance between him and Joseph. He asks the "lord" not to be angry (literally, not to flare his nostrils) at his servant. Joseph, he acknowledges, has the authority of the Pharaoh behind him.

He then begins repeating, rehearsing, the events and the conversations the brothers ("the men") have had with Joseph ("the man"). Joseph asked if they had a brother (actually, he did not specifically ask that; rather, the brothers volunteered that information: 42:13). They responded that they had a brother, a young lad. This is a term of endearment; it does not reflect his age as he was only a few years younger than Joseph. Judah states (vs 20) that the brother of the youngest (who would be Joseph himself) is "dead." This shows that the brothers, although they sold him into slavery, expected he was dead by now. Judah acknowledges that Benjamin is "alone left" of his mother; so the two were full siblings and "his father loves him." This does not inherently mean that Benjamin had taken Joseph's place as Jacob's favorite, as many scholars infer. Judah is not drawing a contrast between Jacob's feelings for Benjamin versus his feelings for the other boys. He simply states a fact.

Next, Judah reminds Joseph that the vizier had commanded Benjamin to be brought to Egypt so he could "set his eyes" on him. The brothers tried to discourage that plan because they knew Benjamin could not leave Jacob for Jacob would die (vs 22). But, Judah again reminds Joseph, the vizier had said if Benjamin did not come with them the second time, they would not see his face. Next, Judah rehearses what transpired between the brothers and Jacob at the beginning of chapter 43:1-15. At verse 27, Judah informs Joseph of part of a conversation which we do not have in chapter 43. Jacob reminded the boys that Rachel gave him two sons and one went out from him, referring to Joseph. Jacob thought, "Surely he is torn to pieces." Literally, "to be savaged, he was savaged." Again, just because Jacob referred to Rachel as "my wife," does not mean he did not consider Leah his wife by this point, as scholars infer. The two sons under consideration, Joseph and Benjamin, were the only sons, by Rachel. Jacob had not seen Joseph since he left that fateful day. This is the first time Joseph has heard what happened between the boys and Jacob after they sold Joseph into slavery and the first time he has learned of his father's response. So, Judah reminds Joseph that Jacob said if he is bereaved of Benjamin too, he will mourn into the land of the dead.

Thus, Judah says in verse 30 that if he were to return to his father, Jacob, without Benjamin, he would die because Jacob's soul is bound tightly to Benjamin's soul. We are sure that made Joseph's heart swell with thankfulness. Judah does not want to have a part in making Jacob, his father, mourn until he dies (vs 31). Then Judah informs Joseph that he has guaranteed himself to his father for the sake of Benjamin (cf. 43:9). If he does not bring Benjamin back to his father alive, he will bear his sin (literally) before his father the rest of his life.

In bringing the monologue to a close in verse 33, Judah begs, "Please!" He offers himself to stay, as a servant, to be a slave to his lord, Joseph, and allow the young lad, Benjamin to return to their father. For a man to offer himself as a slave in place of another, as Judah does here, is not seen elsewhere in the OT. Not only was Judah willing to place himself into slavery for his brother, but he was also willing to leave his own children (46:12) in the process! This was a greater sacrifice than Reuben's offer of killing his sons if he did not return Benjamin (42:37). What happened between Judah being willing to sell his brother for money (37:27) and now, being willing to offer himself as a slave instead of his brother? The incident with his daughter-in-law, Tamar (chapter 38) in which he acknowledges that her righteousness was greater than his (38:26).

If Judah returns empty-handed (vs 34), he would see evil overtake his father. The last word in the sentence, the last word in the chapter, is "my father." This illustrates how the impact of this whole event on Jacob is uppermost in Judah's and the brothers' minds.

If we were reading the text for the first time, our hearts would break at Judah's impassioned speech, as tears well up into our eyes, as we slowly turn to see what Joseph's response will be...

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Judah, again, is the hero of this whole encounter, offering himself in the place of Benjamin. We believe this is the reason God chose Judah's family to be the forerunners of the royal dynasty (49:9-10) and King Jesus (Matt. 1:1; Rev. 5:5). This is the longest speech in Genesis, given with passion and earnestness.

Contemporaries of Moses - Moses, himself, will offer himself to be punished, *in the place* of Israel when they made the golden calf (Exo. 32:30-33). God informed Moses on that occasion that "whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book." Mankind needs a Savior to stand in his place who himself *has not* sinned against God.

Later Hebrew writers - The affection Jacob has for Benjamin (their "souls" are bound together) reflects the affection King David and Jonathan had for each other (1 Sam. 18:1). The prophet Isaiah, in the famous text of Isaiah 53, describes one who will be punished for the sins of others, who will bear the iniquity of others.

NT writers - Jesus, of course, is the One without sin (2 Cor. 5:21) who was punished for the sins of mankind (Matt. 1:21). Paul desired to be punished on behalf of Israel (Rom. 9:3-5), which would be theologically impossible. Yet, it illustrates how greatly Paul loved his people, Israel. Christians are called to lay down their lives for their brethren (1 John 3:16; John 13:34-35).