

## Gen 44 – Joseph tests his brothers.

THEME: Joseph sends his brothers home; Judah volunteers to take Benjamin's place.

Again, we have a wonderful and dramatic chapter before us. Joseph has something else up his sleeve when he sends his brothers away with the grain. He tests his brothers relative to their relationship and their affection to Benjamin and their father. Remember, they had sold him into slavery. Have they changed? Will they be willing to let Benjamin go into slavery to save themselves? He needs to satisfy his mind in this regard before he makes himself known to them. The test he uses here would give him absolute proof that his brothers would not repeat the episode that he had experienced at their hands.

Judah acts as the spokesman for the group, and he is brought into a wonderful picture here. He is willing to take the place of Benjamin, and his eloquent defense of Benjamin is one of the most moving passages in the Bible.

***Gen 44:1-5 And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. Also put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his grain money." So, he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. As soon as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. When they had gone out of the city, and were not yet far off, Joseph said to his steward, "Get up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? Is not this the one from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination? You have done evil in so doing.' "***

Joseph sends them away, and the brothers start out, thinking everything is all right. They have no idea of the cup in the sack of Benjamin. But the steward of Joseph's house comes after them with specific instructions. When the brothers get out a little way, they are overtaken. Here comes a whole troop after them, and they are accused of taking the cup belonging to Joseph. – McGee

Later God's people were forbidden to practice divination ([Deu 18:10-12](#)). But even at this early date, it is unlikely that Joseph practiced the Egyptian forms of fortune-telling. His intuition and foresight came from the Lord, but perhaps by using the cup as a prop, he wished to confirm in his brother's minds that he was an Egyptian. - Believers Bible Commentary

*Discussion: Why do you think Joseph singled out Benjamin?*

***Gen 44:6-7 So he overtook them, and he spoke to them these same words. And they said to him, "Why does my lord say these words? Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing.***

Note that the steward says that Joseph uses this cup for "divining." Remember that Joseph was a prophet, and he was able to foretell the future. We know that is so because he interpreted the dreams of the baker, the butler, and of Pharaoh. He may have used this cup, or maybe that was part of the ruse that he used. We must understand that his gift of prophecy was a gift that God had given him, and this was before there was any written revelation. We are not to get a cup and look at tea leaves, nor are we to watch the horoscope—that is all absolute nonsense. It reveals the sad spiritual condition of people today when they turn to that sort of thing. Joseph had a gift. It was not in the cup. His gift was from God.

***Gen 44:8-10 Look, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? With whomever of***

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***your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." And he said, "Now also let it be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and you shall be blameless."***

Déjà vu – Didn't Jacob make a rash vow when confronted about stolen foreign gods when accused by Laban? Are the sons repeating the sins of their father? How have we repeated the sins of our fathers? Or what are we doing to ensure our kids don't repeat our sins?

*Discussion: Why does Joseph make this decision only to keep the guilty one as opposed to all of them?*

***Gen 44:11-13 Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. So, he searched. He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city.***

They were so sure that none of them had the cup. Then they speedily took down every man his sack to the ground and opened every man his sack. They "rent" or tore their clothes as a gesture of extreme distress. They all turned around to go back. They are not going home without Benjamin; you may be sure of that. Here they fall on the ground before Joseph again. This time it is in dismay and in agony— McGee.

***Gen 44:14-15 So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there; and they fell before him on the ground. And Joseph said to them, "What deed is this you have done? Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?"***

Judah comes to the front, and the nobility of this man really stands out now. Remember it is from the tribe of Judah that the Savior is to come. This man makes one of the finest speeches ever recorded. He makes a full confession that it is because of their sin that this has come upon them. – McGee

*Discussion: Joseph again knows the truth. Why does he continue putting them through the ringer?*

***Gen 44:16-17 Then Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord's slaves, both we and he also with whom the cup was found." But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave. And as for you, go up in peace to your father."***

Joseph wants to test them now regarding their love for their brother. He says that Benjamin is the guilty one; so, it is Benjamin who must stay. They had sold him into slavery; now he says, "Just leave Benjamin here, and he can be my slave. He is the guilty one. The rest of you can go home." Now listen to Judah— McGee

*Discussion: What is different about the brother's response the second time they are accused by Joseph (compare Genesis 42:10-11)?*

***Gen 44:18-24 Then Judah came near to him and said: "O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you are even like***

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*Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, who is young; his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' And we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' But you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.' "So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord.*

*Gen 44:25-29 And our father said, 'Go back and buy us a little food.' But we said, 'We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn to pieces"; and I have not seen him since. But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.'*

Judah here in this statement is recounting what has happened and the feelings of their father. Actually, the father had been deceived, and Joseph can see that now. He now knows exactly what the brothers told their father had happened to him so long ago. I believe that this is the first time any one of them has said that much. They had said previously that he “was not,” meaning that he was dead.

We can see something else. Jacob is growing in grace, but he hasn't arrived. Instead of trusting the Lord, he is leaning on this boy Benjamin. If anything had happened to Benjamin, it would have killed him—he would have gone down into his grave, sorrowing.

There are Christians today who reveal a very wonderful faith in God at the time when death comes to a loved one. Others collapse when this happens. I don't care how much you love a member of your family, friend, if you both are children of God, you know you are going to see each other again someday. The one walking by faith is not going to collapse at a time like that. Therefore, we can recognize that Jacob has not yet arrived. Although he is growing in grace, he still does not have a complete trust in God. – McGee

*Discussion: In chapter 45, we will learn Joseph's general reaction to Judah's speech. How do you think Joseph reacted specifically upon hearing Jacob's words in verses 27-29?*

*Gen 44:30-34 "Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, it will happen, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die. So, your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave. For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.' Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?"*

Again, Judah is the spokesman for the group, and any one of them would have offered himself. Joseph tests his brothers, and they all pass the test. Rather than to see Benjamin go into slavery, they are willing to take his place.

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My friend, later in history there came One in the line of Judah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who bore the penalty for the guilty. "... God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom\_5:8). Christ took the place of the guilty. - McGee

Judah stood near Joseph and gave a detailed review of Benjamin's involvement—how Joseph had demanded the presence of the youngest son, how their father, still grieving over the loss of one son, had protested Benjamin's going to Egypt and how Judah had offered himself as surety for Benjamin's safety. Judah said that their father would die if the brothers went back without Benjamin, so he offered to stay in Egypt and serve as a slave in the place of Benjamin.

What a change had been worked in Judah! In chapter 37 he ruthlessly sold Joseph for profit, without concern for his father's heartbreak. In chapter 38 he was involved in deception and immorality. But God was working in his heart, so that in chapter 43 he became surety for Benjamin. Now in chapter 44 he pours out his heart in intercession before Joseph, offering himself as a slave so as not to bring upon his father the crushing sorrow of losing Benjamin. From selling his own brother into slavery to becoming a slave in his brother's stead; from callousness toward his father to sacrificial concern for his well-being—this is the progress of the grace of God in the life of Judah! – Believers Bible Commentary

*Discussion: Sir Walter Scott (19th-century Scottish novelist) described Judah's plea as "the most complete pattern of genuine natural eloquence extant in any language."*

- *What do you find commendable about the character of Judah?*
- *What do we learn about intercession from Judah's pleadings?*