

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 44

44:1-2 *Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: "Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man's silver in the mouth of his sack. Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain." And he did as Joseph said.* (NIV)

Testing the Brothers

This was to be another test in order to determine if it really was Benjamin. If the others made no attempt to rescue him, Joseph could conclude it was an imposter.

44:3-5 *As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.'"* (NIV)

Reflection

Joseph once again places them in a position of reflection on the past and the evil they had committed. Each year at Passover the people of God reflect on their past bloodguiltiness when they take the cup of wine.

Divination

There is no indication that Joseph would be involved in the practices of the Egyptian magicians. A more realistic understanding of this verse is offered by one Jewish tradition: the cup was used to test people's honesty and discover whether they could be trusted or not. This was the reason Joseph pretended to inhale from the cup the knowledge of how the brothers should be seated. It was a setup to make the cup look desirable for stealing.

44:6-15 *When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house? If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die [a reaction similar to Jacob's upon the report of Joseph's death (37:34)]; and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." "Very well, then," he said, "let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame." Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city. Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him [the fourth time]. Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"* (NIV)

If Jewish tradition is accurate about Joseph pretending to inhale knowledge from his cup (43:33), this statement was made in order to convince his brothers he could discover other things about them. At this point Joseph may have been planning further steps to bring them to admit publicly the sin they had committed against him, possibly pretending to divine that they were guilty of a criminal offense against their missing brother.

44:16 "What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied [Judah is the chief spokesman because he promised Jacob that he would be totally responsible for Benjamin]. **"What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt** [the guilt regarding what they had done to Joseph years earlier, not concerning the stealing of the cup]. **We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."** (NIV)

Forgiveness

Once there is an awareness of guilt from sin, there is a need to have the conscience cleansed. That can only be done by the forgiveness made possible by the Savior (HEB 9:14), at which time we are bought by blood and become slaves of the Savior. The brothers have at last come to this point and offer themselves as slaves to Joseph.

44:17-24 But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace." Then Judah went up to him and said: "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' And we answered, 'We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.' (NIV)

An Assumption

The brothers did not know what had become of Joseph after they sold him, and for 22 years Jacob had not received any correspondence from him. They assumed Joseph was dead.

44:21-24 "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.' And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.' But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said. (NIV)

44:25-26 so when our father told us to go again and buy food, we answered, "We cannot go down; for without our youngest brother we cannot enter the man's presence; but if our brother is with us, we will go." (REB)

44:27-28 "Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife [Jacob did not say "one of my wives"] **bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces." And I have not seen him since.** (NIV)

Recollection

In 42:38, Jacob is recorded as saying only that "his [Benjamin's] brother is dead." It seems that Judah was recalling Jacob's reaction when the brothers had brought home Joseph's blood-stained robe after they had sold him into slavery.

44:29-34 If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.' "So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!' "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father." (NIV)

Judah's Sincerity

Judah's plea proved beyond doubt that the young man with them was no imposter, but actually Joseph's brother, Benjamin.