

### The Final Test for Joseph's Brothers

#### Genesis 44:1-17

Genesis 44:1-17 - *"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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> As soon as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. <sup>4</sup> 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? <sup>5</sup> Is not this the one from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination? You have done evil in so doing.'"*

*<sup>6</sup> So he overtook them, and he spoke to them these same words. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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? <sup>9</sup> With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves."*

*<sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. <sup>12</sup> So he searched. He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. <sup>13</sup> Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city.*

*<sup>14</sup> So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there; and they fell before him on the ground. <sup>15</sup> 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?"*

*<sup>16</sup> 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."*

*<sup>17</sup> 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."*

#### Background Notes

In Genesis 43 Joseph's brothers returned to Egypt. This time Joseph did not treat them roughly - in fact, he wined and dined them, and he spoke kindly to them. This was part of Joseph's strategy to see if his brothers had changed in their attitude and character. When his brothers had sold Joseph into slavery more than twenty years before this time, they were jealous, cruel and hateful men.

In chapter 44 Joseph gave his brothers a final test that involved their youngest brother, Benjamin. As the only sons of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, Benjamin was Joseph's only full brother, and Benjamin had taken Joseph's place as Jacob's

favorite son. If the brothers had not changed, they would have been jealous, and perhaps would mistreat Benjamin as they had mistreated Joseph.

Up to this point, the brothers had passed Joseph's tests. They didn't appear to be jealous when Joseph gave Benjamin five times as much food in chapter 43. In chapter 44, however, the test was more severe. Joseph designed this test so it appeared that Benjamin was guilty of stealing - but the other brothers would be free to go home. Would they blame Benjamin? Would they betray and abandon him, as they had betrayed and abandoned Joseph? Or would they stand by Benjamin and defend him, even though it might mean imprisonment or slavery for all of them?

The good news is that the brothers passed the test! When they were faced with Benjamin's arrest, they tore their clothes as sign of grief and sorrow, and they all returned with Benjamin to face Joseph and defend their brother together.

What was this "cup of divination" that Joseph used as part of the test? Did Joseph actually practice "divination" - an occult practice that was forbidden by God when the Law was given at the time of Moses? (See Deuteronomy 18.) No, I don't think Joseph was involved in occult practices. This cup was part of the "Egyptian image" that Joseph was using to hide his true identity. Joseph never says he actually practiced divination. In verse 15 he mentioned the cup in question form, "*Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?*" The implication is that even without the use of the silver cup, Joseph would have known who had stolen it. This statement implied that he had powers that were given to him by God.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Reconciliation and fellowship are not possible when there is self-righteousness.

Joseph longed to be reconciled to his brothers and have fellowship with them. "*So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there; and they fell before him on the ground*" (v14). Joseph was waiting to see if **all** the brothers came back when the steward arrested Benjamin. He yearned to see all of his brothers come back so they could be reconciled.

However, before that time could come, he wanted to be sure that his brothers didn't have a self-righteous attitude. Notice what they said to Joseph's steward: "*Why does my lord say these words? Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing. 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?*" (v7-8).

There was a hint of self-righteousness attitude in that speech. "We're righteous men! We would never do such a disgraceful thing!" Oh, really? How untrue! These were the men who had massacred and plundered the entire town of Shechem (Genesis 34). These were the men who had sold their young brother, Joseph, into slavery (Genesis 37).

These brothers had to be brought down from their pedestal of pretended righteousness. Why? Because reconciliation and fellowship are not possible when there is a self-righteous attitude.

This is true in our relationship with God. Reconciliation and fellowship with God are not possible when we are self-righteous. No amount of good works and self-proclaimed righteousness can gain reconciliation and fellowship with God for us. Until the brothers acknowledged their terrible sin of rejecting and betraying Joseph, there could be no reconciliation and fellowship with Joseph.

In the same way, until we step down from our pedestal of thinking we're "pretty good" as people go, and acknowledge our sin of rejecting Christ, there can be no reconciliation and fellowship with God. Reconciliation and fellowship are not possible when there is a self-righteous attitude.

## **2. Reconciliation and fellowship are not possible when there is a guilty conscience.**

Before there could be reconciliation and fellowship between Joseph and his brothers, they not only had to stop proclaiming their righteousness, but they also had to deal with their guilt. Already their guilty consciences had been awakened. Do you recall what they said to one another in Genesis 42:21, when they were undergoing Joseph's rough treatment in prison? *"They said to one another, "We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us."*

Judah spoke for the group. *"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" (v16).*

All self-righteousness was gone at that point. The brothers had come to the end of their rope. They not only acknowledged their guilt, but **God** was brought into the picture. They acknowledged their guilt and sin before **God**. When Judah said, *"God has found out the iniquity of your servants,"* he wasn't speaking about the missing cup. They were innocent of that accusation. He was referring primarily to their sin of betraying Joseph.

Once Joseph saw that his brothers didn't blame Benjamin, that they hadn't forsaken him, that they were willing to share whatever penalty he had to suffer, and that they acknowledged that they had sinned before God, the way was paved for the removal of the guilty conscience and for reconciliation and fellowship!

Reconciliation and fellowship with God are not possible when we have a guilty conscience. However, if we acknowledge our guilt, and confess our sin before God, and own up to the fact that we have sinned against Him, then - and only then - the way is open for reconciliation and fellowship with God. When there is reconciliation and fellowship with God, the guilty conscience is removed. What a blessed state - no more guilty conscience!

Although I am thinking primarily of non-Christians, there's a lesson here for the believer as well. Do you have a guilty conscience about something? Is there some sin that you've been hiding - maybe for years? If you have a guilty conscience about something, don't expect to have happy fellowship with the Lord. However, as 1 John 1:9 says, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Remember, reconciliation and fellowship are not possible when we have a guilty conscience.

## **Practical Application**

### **Have we failed the test of the master's cup?**

What was "the test of the master's cup"? This was the supreme test for the brothers. Would they blame Benjamin and justify themselves? Would they forsake Benjamin to save their own lives? The brothers passed the test of the master's cup. They didn't forsake Benjamin.

What about us? 1 John 3:16-17 says, *"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"*

We may have passed many tests in the school of God, but what about the test of the master's cup? This is a test at the deepest level. Have we forsaken a brother or sister so we can continue to "look good" before the world, or to save our reputation? Have we ignored a brother or sister who is in need, to keep our possessions for ourselves?

Recently we observed a Christian ministry fail this test. This nation-wide ministry would not stand behind some of its local leaders who took a biblical position on homosexuality - the position that we should love and reach out to homosexual people with the love of Christ, while also recognizing that the Word of God teaches that the practice of homosexuality is sin. The ministry would not stand with these Christians and their biblical position, because they didn't want to risk a "negative public image." The ministry walked the fence of political correctness, and turned its back on their brothers and sisters in Christ. I believe they failed the test of the master's cup.

What about us? Have we failed the test of the master's cup?