

CHAPTER 44

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 44

This chapter relates the policy of Joseph in making an experiment of his brethren's regard and affection for Benjamin; he ordered his steward to put every man's money into his sack, and his silver cup in Benjamin's, and when they were got out of the city, to follow after them, and charge them with the theft, as he did; and having searched their sacks, as they desired he would, found the cup with Benjamin, which threw them into the utmost distress, and obliged them to return to Joseph, (^{<0441>}Genesis 44:1-14); who charged them with their ill behaviour towards him; they acknowledge it, and propose to be his servants; but he orders them to depart to their father, retaining Benjamin in servitude, (^{<0445>}Genesis 44:15-17); upon which Judah addressed him in a very polite and affectionate manner, and relates the whole story, both of what passed between Joseph and them, concerning Benjamin, the first time they were in Egypt, and between their father and them upon the same subject, when he directed them to go a second time thither to buy corn, and how he became a surety to his father for him, and therefore proposed to be his bondman now, not being able to see his father's face without Benjamin, (^{<0448>}Genesis 44:18-34).

Ver. 1. *And he commanded the steward of his house*, etc.] Whom the Targum of Jonathan again calls Manasseh, the eldest son of Joseph:

saying, fill the men's sacks [with] food, as much as they can carry; this he ordered out of his great affection for them, and that his father and his family might have sufficient supply in this time of famine:

and put every man's money in his sack's mouth; not that which had been put into their sacks the first time, for the steward acknowledged his receipt of it, but what they had paid for their present corn, they were about to carry away.

Ver. 2. *And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest*, etc.] Benjamin; this he ordered to be done, partly to put him in apparent danger, and try how his brethren would behave towards him in such circumstances, and thereby know how they stood affected to him; and

partly that he might have an excuse for retaining him with him. This cup was valuable both for the matter of it, being of silver, and for the use of it, being what Joseph himself drank out of: and by the word used to express it, it seems to have been a large embossed cup, a kind of goblet, for it has the signification of a little hill. Jarchi says it was a long cup, which they called “mederno”. The Septuagint render it by “condy”, which is said to be a Persian word, and a kind of an Attalic cup, that held ten cotylae^{f1778}, or four or five quarts, and weighed ninety ounces; but a cup so large seems to be too large to drink out of:

and his corn money; what he had paid for his corn:

and he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken; put every man’s money in the mouth of his sack, and his silver cup with the corn money into Benjamin’s sack.

Ver. 3. *As soon as the morning was light*, etc.] When it was break of day, before the sun rose:

the men were sent away, they and their asses; the men being refreshed with food, and their asses having provender given them, and saddled and loaded, they were handsomely and honourably dismissed.

Ver. 4. *[And] when they were gone out of the city, [and] not [yet] far off*, etc.] Which perhaps was Tanis, the Zoan of the Scriptures; (see ³³⁰⁴Ezekiel 30:14), margin;

Joseph said unto his steward, up, follow after the men; who no doubt was ready provided with men and horses, to go out and pursue when Joseph should give the orders, he being privy to Joseph’s intentions, and with whom the scheme was concerted, and the secret was. Joseph appears to have been up very early this morning, and had observed the exact time of his brethren’s departure, and guessed whereabouts they might be when he sent his steward, and others after them; for it can hardly be thought he was sent alone after eleven men, and to charge them with a theft, and bring them back again:

and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them, wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good? in taking away the silver cup, when they had been so kindly and bountifully entertained. This he was to represent as base ingratitude, as it would have appeared, had it been fact. In much such manner was Esop used by the inhabitants of Delphos; they, being

displeased with him, put a sacred cup or vial into his bags, which he, being ignorant of, went on his way towards Phocis; and they ran after him, and seized him, and charged him with sacrilege ^{f1779}.

Ver. 5. [*Is not this [it], in which my lord drinketh*, etc.] Which was for his own particular use, and so the more ungrateful in them to take it,

and whereby indeed he divineth? according to our version and others, Joseph is here represented by his steward as a diviner or soothsayer, and so he might be thought to be by the Egyptians, from being such an exact interpreter of dreams, foretelling things to come, and that he made his divinations by the silver cup; and we are told that the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, used to fill basins with water, in which they put plates of silver and precious stones, marked with certain characters, and pronouncing certain words, called to the devil, who uttered a voice in the water like an hissing, and returned answers to the things inquired about ^{f1780}: a like practice is used by the Africans now ^{f1781}; which method Andronicus took to know who would be his successor, but was reckoned among the most infamous and scandalous parts of the magic art ^{f1782} wherefore, as Joseph never practised any thing of this kind, so neither would he dissemble, or make as if he did; though it must be owned that the Arabs ^{f1783} in Egypt at this day pretend to consult with the cup and divine by it: but the words will bear another version and sense, for it may signify to tempt, to try, to make an experiment, and by experience to know a thing, as in (⁰³²⁷Genesis 30:27); and so the Arabic version, “and indeed he hath tried you by it”: so Aben Ezra interprets it of his trying of them by it, whether they were thieves or not, whether they were a parcel of light fingered filching fellows: the cup, he pretends, was set before them, and he turned himself another way, either Joseph or the steward, and they took the opportunity of carrying it off; or else, as others think, he tried them by drinking in it very freely and liberally, what sort of men they were, how they would behave themselves in their cups, when truth is commonly spoke, the wit being out when the wine is in: but of these two senses the former is to be preferred; though it seems best of all to understand this not of the cup as the instrument by which he tried, searched, and inquired into things, but as the object searched after and inquired of; for the word signifies to inquire, and make a strict observation of things, and thereby make shrewd guesses and conjectures, as in (¹²²³1 Kings 20:33); and so the sense is, either according to R. Jonah ^{f1784}, that his master would diligently inquire of the soothsayers concerning it, in order to find out who took it

away, and so Ben Melech; for the words may be rendered, “for which he certainly makes”, or has made, or will make “divination”, which agrees with (⁻⁰⁴⁴⁵Genesis 44:15); for if the cup was gone, how could he make divination with it? it must be for it; or indeed they might well conclude themselves, that as such a thing would soon be missed, diligent inquiry would be made after it, and it would be at once conjectured that it was taken away, not by any of the household, but by those strangers that had dined with Joseph; and a man of his sagacity and penetration would soon find it out, and therefore it was madness and folly to do such an action, and think to get off clear:

ye have done evil in so doing: both a mad and foolish action, and a base, wicked, and ungrateful one, as well as what was infamous and scandalous; for nothing was reckoned more so than for a guest at a prince’s table to carry away a cup, or anything of that kind, with him: so Claudius the Roman emperor, a guest of his, the day before, having taken away a golden cup, as was supposed, ordered an earthen one to be put in its place ^{f1785}, which was a putting him to public shame and reproach: Dioxippus the Athenian, being at table with Alexander the great, a golden cup was taken away privately, by some that envied him; and the hint being given as if he had done it, all eyes were turned on him as the thief, which he could not bear, but went out, and wrote a letter to the king, and then killed himself ^{f1786}.

Ver. 6. *And he overtook them*, etc.] Their asses being laden with corn could not travel very fast, and he and his attendants being mounted on swift horses:

and he spake unto them these same words; that Joseph had ordered him to say, and so what follows particularly, (⁻⁰⁴⁴⁰Genesis 44:10).

Ver. 7. *And they said unto him, wherefore saith my lord these words?* etc.] One of them, in the name of the rest, perhaps Judah, made answer, as astonished at the charge laid against them, suggesting that there was not the least foundation for it, and were quite surprised to hear anything of this kind alleged against them:

God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing; expressing the utmost detestation of such a fact, as being what they could never be guilty of.

Ver. 8. *Behold, the money which we found in our sacks mouths;* etc.] Upon their return from Egypt, the first time they went thither for corn:

we brought again unto thee out of the land of Canaan; which was a full proof of their honesty: they might have kept it until it was called for and demanded of them, but of themselves they brought it with them, as being money not their own; and they did not wait to be examined about it when they came to Egypt again, but of their own accord related the story of it, and offered the money to this same man the steward they were now speaking to, which he could not deny: yea, they brought it to him out of the land of Canaan, a foreign country at a considerable distance, and out of the jurisdiction of Egypt, and where they were not liable to be called to an account for it:

how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold? that is, vessels of silver or vessels of gold, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan; it could not be reasonably thought they would, for if they would not retain the governor's money when in their own land and out of his reach, much less would they steal anything out his house, which they might conclude would soon be missed, and they easily apprehended and committed to prison, and suffer for it.

Ver. 9. *With whomsoever of thy servants it be found,* etc.] The silver cup:

both let him die; which was rashly said, since they might have thought the cup might be put in one of their sacks unknown to them, as their money had been before; and besides, death was a punishment too severe for such a crime, and therefore is by the steward himself moderated; but this they said the more strongly to express their innocence:

and we also will be my lord's bondmen; his servants, as long as they lived: this was likewise carrying the matter too far, and exceeding all bounds of justice, which could only require satisfaction of the offender.

Ver. 10. *And he said, now also [let] it [be] according unto your words,* etc.] Not according to the full extent of their words, but according to a part of them; that he only should be a servant that was found guilty; so moderating the punishment which they had fixed, and were willing to submit to, and therefore could not object to what he next proposes:

he with whom it is found shall be my servant; speaking in the name of Joseph, whom he represented, and who had directed him what to say:

and ye shall be blameless; acquitted of the charge, and pronounced innocent, and let go free.

Ver. 11. *Then they speedily took down every man his sack to the ground*, etc.] To be opened and examined, and this they did in all haste, as having a clear conscience, and being confident that nothing could be found upon them, and desirous of having the affair issued as soon as possible, that the steward might have full satisfaction, and they proceed on in their journey:

and opened every man his sack; showing neither reluctance nor fear, being conscious of their innocence.

Ver. 12. *And he searched*, etc.] To the bottom of them, not content to look into the mouth of them being opened, but rummaged them, and searched deeply into them to find the cup, which was the thing charged upon them he was solicitous to find; as for the money in the sack's mouth he took no notice of that, nor is there any mention of it:

[and] began at the oldest; at Reuben, as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it: the steward might know their different ages in course, by the order in which they were placed at Joseph's table when they dined with him:

and left off at the youngest; at Benjamin, he ended his scrutiny with him; this method he took partly to hold them in fear as long as he could, and partly to prevent any suspicion of design, which might have been entertained had he went directly to Benjamin's sack:

and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack; where the steward himself had put it, and as it is usually said, they that hide can find.

Ver. 13. *Then they rent their clothes*, etc.] In token of sorrow and distress, being at their wits' end, like distracted persons, not knowing what to do: this was usually done in the eastern countries when any evil befell, as did Jacob, (⁴⁰⁵³⁴Genesis 37:34); and as the Egyptians themselves did when mourning for their dead, as Diodorus Siculus^{f1787} relates:

and laded every man his ass; put their sacks of corn on their asses again, having tied them up:

and returned to the city; to the metropolis, as Jarchi, which was either Tanis, that is, Zoan, or, as others think, Memphis: hither they returned to see how it would go with Benjamin, to plead his cause and get him released, that he might go with them, they being afraid to see their father's

face without him; otherwise, could they have been content to have gone without him, they might have proceeded on in their journey, (see ^{<0447>}Genesis 44:17).

Ver. 14. *And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house*, etc.] Judah is particularly mentioned because he was the principal spokesman, and was chiefly concerned for the safety of Benjamin, being his surety:

for he [was] yet there; Joseph was yet at his own house, was not as yet gone to the granaries, to look after the affairs of the corn, and the sale and distribution of it, but was waiting for the return of his brethren, which he expected quickly:

and they fell before him on the ground; not only in a way of reverence, again fulfilling his dream, but as persons in the utmost distress and affliction, throwing themselves at his feet for mercy.

Ver. 15. *And Joseph said unto them, what deed is this ye have done?* etc.] An action so wicked, base, and ungrateful, attended with such aggravated circumstances, that it can scarcely be said how bad a one it is, and may be well wondered at, that men who had received such favours could ever be guilty of; this he said, putting on a stern countenance, and seemingly in great anger and wrath:

wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine? either that he could divine himself, though not by the cup, of which here no mention is made, but in some other way used by the Egyptians; or that he had diviners with him, as Aben Ezra, with whom he could consult, to find out the person that took the cup; or surely they must needs think that such a man as he, who had such great knowledge of things, natural and political, and whose name was Zaphnathpaaneah, a revealer of secrets, would be able to search into and find out an affair of this kind; (see Gill on ^{<0445>}Genesis 41:45"); and they might well conclude, that a man so sagacious and penetrating would easily conjecture who were the persons that took away his cup, even the strangers that had dined with him so lately, and therefore could never expect to go off with it.

Ver. 16. *And Judah said, what shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak?* etc.] Signifying that they were nonplussed, confounded, knew not what to say; they could not acknowledge guilt, for they were not conscious of any, and yet could not deny the fact, the cup being found on one of them; and though they might have a suspicion of fraud, yet were afraid to

speaking out what they suspected, and therefore were at the utmost loss to express themselves:

or how shall we clear ourselves? to assert their innocence signified nothing, here was full proof against them, at least against their brother Benjamin:

God hath found the iniquity of thy servants; brought it to their remembrance, fastened the guilt of it on their consciences, and in his providence was bringing them to just punishment for it; meaning not the iniquity of taking away the cup, which they were not conscious of, but some other iniquity of theirs they had heretofore been guilty of, and now God was contending with them for it; particularly the iniquity of selling Joseph; this was brought to their minds before, when in distress, and now again, (see ^{<1421>}Genesis 42:21):

behold, we [are] my lord's servants, both we, and [he] also with whom the cup is found; hereby fulfilling his dream more manifestly than ever; for, by bowing down to the earth to him, they might be thought to do no other than what all did, that came to buy corn of him; but here they own themselves to be his servants, and him to be lord over them, and to have dominion over them all, and them to be his slaves and bondmen.

Ver. 17. *And he said, God forbid that I should do so,* etc.] This would be doing an unjust thing, Joseph suggests, should he take them all for bondmen, for the offence of one:

[but] the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; not die, as they had supposed, but become his servant:

and as for you, get ye up in peace unto your father; they had leave, yea, an order to return to their father in the land of Canaan, with their corn and cattle, in peace and plenty; there being no charge against them, nor would any hurt or damage come to them: this Joseph said to try their affection to their brother Benjamin, and see whether they would leave him to distress, and then he should know better how to conduct both towards him and them.

Ver. 18. *Then Judah came near unto him,* etc.] Being the spokesman of his brethren, and the surety of Benjamin: he plucked up a spirit, put on courage, and drew nearer to the governor, and with much freedom and boldness, and in a very polite manner, addressed him:

and said, O my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears; not admit him to private audience, or suffer him to whisper something to him, but give him the hearing of a few words he had to say to him:

and let not thine anger burn against thy servant; do not be displeased with his boldness, and the freedom he takes, but hear him patiently:

for thou [art] even as Pharaoh; next, if not equal in power and authority with him; could exercise justice or show mercy, punish or release from punishment, at his pleasure; and having leave granted him, he began his speech, and made the following narrative.

Ver. 19. *My lord asked his servants,* etc.] The first time they came down to Egypt to buy corn; he puts him in mind of what passed between them at that time:

saying, have ye a father or a brother? which question followed upon their saying that they were the sons of one man, (^{<0421>}Genesis 42:11 43:7).

Ver. 20. *And we said unto my lord, we have a father,* etc.] Yet living in the land of Canaan:

an old man; being one hundred and thirty years of age, (^{<0470>}Genesis 47:9);

and a child of his old age; who was born when he was near an hundred years of age: and

a little one; not in stature, but in age, being the youngest son, and much younger than they: so they represented him, on that account, and because he was tenderly brought up with his father, and not inured to business and hardship, and so unfit to travel:

and his brother is dead; meaning Joseph: so they thought him to be, having not heard of him for twenty two years or more, and they had so often said he was dead, or suggested as much, that they at length believed he was:

and he alone is left of his mother; the only child left of his mother Rachel:

and his father loveth him; being his youngest son, and the only child of his beloved Rachel, and therefore most dear unto him.

Ver. 21. *And thou saidst unto thy servants, bring him down unto me,* etc.] Judah does not relate the reason of his order, which was to give proof that

they were no spies, but as if Joseph designed to show favour to Benjamin, as undoubtedly he did:

that I may set mine eyes upon him; not barely see him, as Aben Ezra interprets it, though that would be, and was, very desirable by him, and agreeable to him; but he desired to set his eyes upon him, not only for his own pleasure, but for the good of Benjamin, as the Targum of Jonathan adds; he intimated that he should receive him kindly, show favour unto him, and use him well: the Septuagint version is, “and I will take care of him”: Joseph’s brethren had told him, that Benjamin was at home with their father, who they suggested was afraid to let him go with them, lest evil should befall him; wherefore to encourage him to let him go with them, Joseph promised to take care of him, that no hurt should be done to him, but he should be provided with everything that was proper and necessary; and this Judah improves into an argument with the governor in favour of Benjamin, that since he desired his coming, in order to show him a kindness, he hoped he would not detain him, and make a slave of him.

Ver. 22. *And we said unto my lord, the lad cannot leave his father*, etc.] That is, his father will not be willing to part with him:

for [if] he should leave his father, [his father] would die; with grief and trouble, fearing some evil was befallen him, and he should see him no more.

Ver. 23. *And thou saidst unto thy servants*, etc.] In answer to the representation of things made by them, and notwithstanding that:

except your youngest brother come down with you, you shall see my face no more; which though not before related in the discourse, which passed between Joseph and his brethren, in express terms, yet might be justly inferred from what he said; nay, might be expressed in so many words, though not recorded, and as it seems plainly it was, as appears from (^{ORIG}Genesis 43:3).

Ver. 24. *And it came to pass, when we came unto thy servant my father*, etc.] In the land of Canaan:

we told him the words of my lord; what he had said to them, particularly respecting Benjamin.

Ver. 25. *And our father said*, etc.] After some time, when the corn was almost consumed they had bought in Egypt:

go again, [and] buy us a little food; that may suffice till the famine is over; (see ^{<040>}Genesis 43:1).

Ver. 26. *And we said, we cannot go down*, etc.] With any safety to their persons, which would be in danger, or with any profit to their families, since their end in going down to buy corn would not be answered:

if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down; let it be agreed to, that Benjamin go along with us, to Egypt, and then no difficulty will be made of it:

for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother [be] with us; the face of the great man, the governor of Egypt; for that this phrase, "the man", is not used diminutively, but as expressive of grandeur, is clear, or otherwise it would never have been made use of in his presence, and in such a submissive and polite speech as this of Judah's.

Ver. 27. *And thy servant my father said unto us*, etc.] When thus pressed to let Benjamin go with them:

ye know that my wife bare me two [sons]; Rachel, by whom he had Joseph and Benjamin, and whom he calls his wife, she being his only lawful wife; Leah was imposed upon him, (^{<020>}Genesis 29:20-30); and the other two were concubines, (^{<030>}Genesis 30:4,9).

Ver. 28. *And the one went out from, me*, etc.] Being sent by him to see how his brethren did, who were feeding his flocks at Shechem, and he had never returned to him to that day:

and I said, surely he is torn in pieces; by some wild beast; this he said on sight of his coat, being shown him all bloody:

and I saw him not since; now twenty two years ago; for though Joseph was not such a great way off his father, especially if he was at Memphis, as some think; yet what through his confinement as a servant in Potiphar's house, and then for some years in prison, and through the multiplicity of business when advanced in Pharaoh's court, he had no leisure and opportunity of visiting his father; and especially so it was ordered by the providence of God that he should not, that he might be made known at the most proper time for the glory of God, and the good of his family.

Ver. 29. *And if ye take this also from me*, etc.] His son Benjamin, as he perhaps suspected they had taken Joseph, and made away with him:

and mischief befall him; either in Egypt, or on the road, going or returning, any ill accident, especially death, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan, or what may issue in it:

ye shall bring my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave; it would be the means of his death, and while he lived he should be full of sorrow and grief; (see ^{<0428>}Genesis 42:38).

Ver. 30. *Now therefore, when I come to thy servant my father*, etc.] That is, should he return to him in the land of Canaan with the rest of his brethren:

and the lad [be] not with us; his brother Benjamin, so called here, and in the following verses, though thirty years of age and upwards, (see ^{<0438>}Genesis 43:8);

seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; he is as closely united to him in affection, and is as dear to him as his own soul; quite wrapped up in him, and cannot live without him; should he die, he must die too; (see ^{<0981>}1 Samuel 18:1); so it follows:

Ver. 31. *It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad [is] not [with us], that he will die*, etc.] As soon as ever he sees us, without asking any question and observes that Benjamin is missing he will conclude at once that he is dead, which will so seize his spirits, that he will expire immediately:

and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant, our father, with sorrow to the grave; as he said would be the case, (^{<0449>}Genesis 44:29); and which would be very afflicting to his sons to be the cause of it, and could not be thought of without the utmost uneasiness and distress.

Ver. 32. *For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father*, etc.] Which is another argument used for the release of Benjamin, though he should be detained for him, which he offers to be:

saying, if I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame unto my father for ever; (see Gill on "^{<0449>}Genesis 43:9").

Ver. 33. *Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord,* etc.] Being, as Jarchi observes preferable to Benjamin for strength, for war, and for service: in this Judah was a type of Christ, from whose tribe he sprung, who became the surety of God's Benjamins, his children who are beloved by him, and as dear to him as his right hand, and put himself in their legal place and stead, and became sin and a curse for them, that they might go free, as Judah desired his brother Benjamin might, as follows:

and let the lad go up with his brethren; from Egypt to Canaan's land, to their father there.

Ver. 34. *For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad [be] not with me?* etc.] Signifying that he must abide in Egypt, and chose to do it, and could not go up to the land of Canaan any more or see his father's face without Benjamin along with him, to whom he was a surety for him:

lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father; see him die, or live a life of sorrow worse than death: this he could not bear, and chose rather to be a slave in Egypt, than to be the spectator of such an affecting scene. By this speech of Judah, Joseph plainly saw the great affection which his brethren, especially Judah, had for his father and his brother Benjamin, as well as the sense they had of their evil in selling him, which lay uppermost on their minds, and for which they thought themselves brought into all this trouble; wherefore he could no longer conceal himself from them, but makes himself known unto them, which is the principal subject of the following chapter.