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## Genesis 44

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Genesis 44.

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### Topics.

- Joseph has his brother's sacks filled with money and his silver cup.
- the brothers are accused of repaying Joseph evil for good.
- It is from this cup that Joseph drinks, and by it he practices divination?
- The steward and finds Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack.
- The brothers in deep agony return to Joseph's house.
- Joseph says, "Benjamin will be his servant the others can go in peace."
- Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant.
- Judah pleads with Joseph to let them return with Benjamin.
- Judah tells Joseph that Jacob will die if they arrive without Benjamin.

**FOR INFORMATION:** concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

**The previous chapter:** in chapter forty-three Jacob told his sons to return to Egypt a second time to buy more grain. The brothers took Benjamin to Egypt and were brought into the Egyptian's governor's house (still unaware he was Joseph) and they bowed down to him. When Joseph saw Benjamin, he entered a private room to weep after which they all ate a feast in the same room, but at different tables.

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### GENESIS 44:1-2

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#### Joseph has His Brothers Sacks Filled with His Silver Cup.

- **Genesis 44:1-2:** Then he commanded the steward of his house, "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> and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him.

**The cup:** would have been a cup (or goblet) of great price. It was made of silver (perhaps with some gold trimmings) and most likely had elegant engravings of Egyptian symbols. It would have also been considered highly valuable because it was the personal cup the very powerful Egyptian governor drank from. It would be safe to suppose that he deliberately used this cup when he ate the feast with his brothers the previous day so that they would recognise it when it was found in Benjamin's sack.

**It is interesting to notice:** in this story of Joseph, from the very first moment he set eyes on his brothers nothing is random, Joseph knew exactly what he was saying, and why he was saying it and was fully conscious of what he was doing and why he was doing it. We see the enormous wisdom of Joseph's calculating mind, all that he has said to his brothers and done was for the following four purposes:

1. To discover if they were honest men.
2. To discover if they had treated Benjamin kindly.

3. To discover if they told the truth.
4. To have them bring his father and his family to him.

Joseph has his steward fill the all brother's sacks with food and with their money, and put his cup in Benjamins sack with his money. Since there were eleven households to feed, the brothers would have travelled to Egypt with enough donkeys, camels, wagons and servants to carry the needed amount of grain to feed all households for quite some time.

**Put my silver cup in the sack of the youngest:** (v2) following are two different reasons Joseph may have ordered this strange and mysterious action:

1. Joseph uses this as a test to see if his brother's affection was toward Rachel's other son by seeing whether they would give Benjamin up and leave Jacob's favourite son to be a slave to the governor of Egypt. Had they hated Benjamin as they had envied and hated Joseph and had no care for their father they would be found out and no doubt Joseph would have taken measures to deal with them accordingly.
2. So, he would have a just excuse for keeping Benjamin with him.

Joseph knew that after twenty years or so of being separated from his brothers he could not judge them, by what they had done in the past, so he puts into motioned a very well thought out plan that will clearly expose whether his brothers were speaking the truth to him or not.

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## GENESIS 44:3-4

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### The Brothers are Accused of Repaying Joseph Evil for Good.

- **Genesis 44:3-4:** As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. <sup>4</sup>They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good?'"

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After the steward had filled the men's sacks with food, put each man's money in their sacks and the silver cup in the Benjamins sack the brothers depart from Joseph. They get a little way out of the city when Joseph's steward is ordered to overtake them, and charge them with stealing the cup. Joseph would have sent a number of trained soldiers on horses with swords, spears and shields with his servant as it would be foolishness to send the steward alone to accuse eleven strong brothers (who, from his past experience had been fierce in nature) of such a horrendous crime, and then attempt to take Benjamin from them. Joseph had not only treated the brothers with kindness, but also put on a great feast which was a joyful occasion for them all as they ate and drank together. Now his steward is accusing them of foolishly rewarding Joseph's kindness with utter ingratitude, (as it would have appeared, had it been fact) by stealing the highly valued cup of silver that the Egyptian ruler drinks from. It is easy to imagine the dread, bewilderment and terror that would have fallen upon the brothers when the steward accompanied with a number of Egyptian warriors said to them, "Why have you repaid evil for good?"

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## GENESIS 44:5

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### From this Cup Joseph Drinks, and by it He Practices Divination?

- Genesis 44:5: Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this."

**He practices divination:** the word divination comes from the Hebrew word (*nachash*) it literally means to hiss, (i.e. whisper a magic spell). Generally, it can refer to the following three things:

- 1 An enchanter (i.e., charmer and fascinator); one who predicts future things; a diviner (i.e., a psychic, mystic or spiritualist); a soothsayer (i.e., a fortune-teller and clairvoyant) or to one who prophesies (i.e., has visions and revelations of future things and forewarns or foretells them).
- 2 To determine by lot, a magical scroll or by an oracle (i.e., prophecy, vision or prediction) something that brings a reward of some kind.
- 3 To learn diligently and by observation or by experience.

The expression, "he practices divination," carries the idea of seeking knowledge by supernatural means and the methods or practice of attempting to foretell the future or discovering the unknown through omens, oracles, or supernatural powers or premonition (meaning, a feeling of foreboding about something that is going to happen). Obviously, Joseph did not practise the art of divination in an occult sense, but he was clearly inspired by God to interpret dreams that did predict future events and because of this the Egyptians (not Joseph himself) credited him as being a man that practiced divination.

It is mentioned here to enhance the Egyptians value of the cup. Joseph does say later to the brothers, "Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?" (v15), but in this context he is saying it, not because he actually does, but to keep up the pretense of being the Egyptian governor.

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## GENESIS 44:6-9

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### **The Brothers tell Joseph they would Not Steal, for they would Die.**

- **Genesis 44:6-9:** When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. <sup>7</sup>They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing! <sup>8</sup>Behold, the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? <sup>9</sup>Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord's servants."

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The steward's words must have come upon them like a thunderbolt and one of their most predominant feelings must have been a humiliating sense of frustration being accused of such a wicked crime when they knew they are innocent, but had no way of proving it. They appeal to the steward's logic saying, they returned the money that they found in their sacks the first time they came to Egypt which they could have kept since no one had made any claim to it so why would they now steal his masters most valuable cup. Later, when they do enter Joseph's house Judah is the speaker (v14), but at this stage they were probably all so shocked and stunned by the accusation that they all spoke at different moments proclaiming their innocence.

After proclaiming their innocence, they invite the steward to search their sacks. They were so confident he would not find the cup in any of the sacks that they boldly say, "Whoever's sack the cup is found in shall die, and that they will all be servants of the Egyptians governor." (v9). This confident statement could be considered to be a very rash statement, since they had on their earlier trip found money in their sacks not knowing how it got there, but the statement was made because they were all conscious of their own innocence and wanted to strongly express it and did not suspect any one of them would have stolen Joseph's cup.

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## GENESIS 44:10-12

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### **The Steward Finds Joseph's Cup in Benjamins Sack.**

- **Genesis 44:10-12:** He said, "Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent." <sup>11</sup>Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. <sup>12</sup>And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

The steward statement, "Let it be as you say," is not quite correct, since he only desires to take Benjamin captive and let all the others go as innocent men, whereas they basically said if one of them was found with the cup he should be put to death and they would remain slaves to the Egyptian governor. The steward (and no doubt the men with him) began the search starting from the oldest to the youngest. The steward would have known their different ages by the order in which they were placed at Joseph's table when they dined with him. The search began at Reuben and finished at Benjamin. The steward may have used this method for the following two reasons:

1. To prevent any suspicion that he already knew which sack the cup was in which would have certainly appeared suspicious if he had gone directly to Benjamin's sack.
2. To keep them in some level of bewilderment and fear as long as possible since all ten sacks would have been searched before they got to Benjamin sack.

Every, sack was examined, and to the shock of all the brothers, especially Benjamin, the cup was found in his sack (were the steward had put it).

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## GENESIS 44:13

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### The Brothers in Deep Agony Return to Joseph's House.

- **Genesis 44:13:** Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

Tearing their garments signifies deep sorrow that is destitute of hope. All brothers returned to the house of the governor in an indescribable agony of mind and deep dread.

The steward took no notice of the money in the sacks nor is there any mention of it. Though it is not mentioned it is most likely Joseph at some time had told them that he would return their money since they had been honest in returning the previous money, they found in their sacks the first time they bought grain in Egypt.

- Joseph replied, "Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money." (Gen. 43:23).

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## GENESIS 44:14-15

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### Benjamin will be His Servant the Others Can Go in Peace.

- **Genesis 44:14-15:** When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. <sup>15</sup>Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?"

They arrive at the governor's house in an indescribable agony of mind throwing themselves at his feet. This is no longer a bending of the head or bowing of the body, but the posture of deepest humiliation. Joseph said to them, "What deed is this you have done? Does not mean he did not know since it was on the orders of Joseph the Steward put the cup in the brother's sacks, but he has to keep up the pretence, it also implies that what they had done was not only grossly wicked, but also showed extreme disrespect and ungratefulness that words can scarcely express how bad a sin it was, against themselves, against the governor of Egypt and against God.

**Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?** (v15) this does not mean that Joseph actually practises divination, he is simply saying this to keep up the pretence of being the Egyptian governor and to present to the brothers a reason that his steward pursued after them with the knowledge they had stolen his cup. Speaking to them under the Egyptian name Zaphnathpaaneah (meaning a revealer of secrets) that Pharaoh had given him they would have no reason to doubt that he might have discovered his cup in their sacks by using divination to search out the whereabouts of the silver cup. For further information concerning divination, see the notes following the title, "Divination (by experience in KJV)," following (v3-5) (above).

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## GENESIS 44:16

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### God has Found Out the Guilt of Your Servants?

- **Genesis 44:16:** And Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found."

Judah's two questions, "What shall we say?" and "What shall we speak?" mean, if not one of us knows how the cup got into Benjamin's sack what can we possibly say to clear ourselves? They could not acknowledge any guilt in stealing the cup since they were not guilty of taking it and yet they could not deny the fact that the cup had been found in Benjamin's sack. Nor could they accuse the Egyptians of putting it in the sack, even if this was what they may have suspected, and therefore they were at an utter loss of what they could possibly say to clear themselves since they had no proof of anything. Judah fully aware of these dilemmas and that the man he stood before had the power to grant them freedom or condemn them to slavery and have Benjamin put to death humbly and respectfully pleads for mercy.

**God has found out the guilt of your servants:** (v16) the expression, "the guilt of your servants," can refer to the following sins, firstly the sin of stealing the cup and secondly, the sin of selling Joseph as a slave and then telling their father the blatant and cruel lie that a wild animal had torn Joseph to pieces (v28), since, the expression could embrace both of these we will look at each one separately.

1. The guilt of stealing the cup: though the cup was found only in Benjamin's sack Judah speaks of himself and the rest of the brothers as all being guilty of the crime, perhaps because the money though not mentioned was also found in all the sacks.
2. The guilt of selling Joseph as a slave: Judah's statement, "God has found out the guilt of your servants," could mean, God has brought to their conscience and remembrance and was now pursuing them and punishing them for it, their wicked crime of selling Joseph some twenty years ago to the Ishmaelite's as a slave and lying to their father about it by telling him Joseph had been torn by wild animals

Both the steward and the brothers are unknowingly fulfilling Joseph dream more completely now than ever before. This is because previously by bowing down to the earth to him, it could be thought that they were doing no more than what every other man who came to buy corn would do when he entered the presence of a man of such royal standing, power and authority. But here, the brothers offer themselves to be his servants and for him to be their lord to have authority and dominion over them, perfectly fulfilling Joseph's following dream.

- Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. <sup>6</sup>He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: <sup>7</sup>Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." <sup>8</sup>His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" (Gen. 37:5-7).



**The Man in whose Hand the Cup was Found shall be My Servant.**

- **Genesis 44:17:** But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father."

Some twenty years ago the brothers had sold Joseph as a slave to the Ishmaelite's and now after many years of maturing into adulthood they do not want to abandon Benjamin. However, Joseph has no desire to keep them as his servants so he allows them to return to their father in peace while he keeps Benjamin in custody.

**NOTE:** Joseph's behaviour should not be viewed in separate or isolated parts, but as a whole. When his actions are viewed in the context of the whole story it becomes clear that he has had a well-thought out plan from when he first saw his brothers. Though some of his actions do at certain times appear harsh they were designed to bring his family to Egypt to the land of Goshen to save and protect them through the remaining years of famine that God by dreams had shown him would come to the land and be extremely severe. To understand Joseph's behaviour and actions the story must be read in the light of him being:

- A man of great wisdom and intellect whose only motivation was to do whatever was needed to bring about the best outcome for everyone once his secret scheme reaches its final end.
- A man whose actions stem from a heart that is devoid of hatred, malice, bitterness and any sense of revenge.
- A man that had complete control over his feelings and who did what was necessary no matter how painful to bring about the final happy end of his schemes, plans and purposes.

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**GENESIS 44:18-29**

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**Judah Pleads with Joseph to Let them Return with Benjamin.**

- **Genesis 44:18-29:** Then Judah went up to him and said, "O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. <sup>19</sup>My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?' <sup>20</sup>And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' <sup>21</sup>Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' <sup>22</sup>We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' <sup>23</sup>Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.' <sup>24</sup>"When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. <sup>25</sup>And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' <sup>26</sup>we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' <sup>27</sup>Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. <sup>28</sup>One left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces, and I have never seen him since. <sup>29</sup>If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.'

Judah was fully aware that he was talking to a man who was like Pharaoh himself in power and authority to set free or to condemn, so he humbly appeals to the mercy of the Egyptian governor he is standing before. He does not use flattering words to appeal to the pride of the governor of Egypt according to his high royal rank and his great authority and power to win his favour, but rather appeals to his feelings and emotions of

compassion with a simple statement of the facts based on a father's love for his son that he no doubt hopes will have an effect on the heart of the governor. From this it appears that Judah intuitively felt that the governor of Egypt was a man with a similar father's compassion toward his own sons as he had and as he knew Jacob had for Benjamin. Judah being a wise man appeals to Joseph's compassion. Even if Joseph had been an utter stranger to the family as Judah supposed him to be, he could not help, but be emotionally affected by Judah's very powerful emotional reasoning's. Judah explains to the governor all that happened the first time they came down to Egypt to buy corn and puts him in mind of all things that had taken place between them at that time. Ponder Joseph's emotions when he heard the following words of Judah:

- We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age (v20).
- The son of our father's mother's children is no more, and only the younger one is left, and his father loves him. (v20).
- If the boy leaves his father, his father would die. (v22).
- Our father's wife bore him two sons (v27) one is left and the other has been torn to pieces (v28) if you take this one and harm happens to him you will bring our father down to Sheol in great sorrow. (v29).

This emotionally charged speech of Judah's would have touched the heart of Joseph in every way, since it shows that the brothers truly cared for Benjamin, and for their father and were willing to do all that was in their power to protect them both from physical and emotional sorrow and harm. Both Joseph and Benjamin were born to Rachel the true wife of Jacob and the woman he loved (Gen. 29:20). Leah was imposed upon him and Bilhah and Zilpah were servants of Rachel and Leah who acted as concubines.

**The boy cannot leave his father:** (v22) meaning if Benjamin did leave his father his father would die with great grief fearing some evil had befallen him as he had been led to believe it happened to Joseph. Judah had pledged himself for the safety of Benjamin to his father and was therefore willing to surrender himself as a slave for life so that Benjamin may go home with his brothers, who are permitted to leave in peace. Ponder for a moment the emotion and tears that would have been welling up within Joseph when he saw that Judah was prepared to sacrifice home, family, and birthright, rather than see his aged father die of a broken heart.

**NOTE:** here we read that Judah intercedes for Benjamin and was willing to sacrifice everything to fulfil his father's will and in the book of Hebrews we read that Christ sprang out of the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14) and he made intercession for his family and willingly sacrificed all to fulfil his Father's will.

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## GENESIS 44:30-34

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### Judah tells Joseph, Jacob will Die if they Arrive without Benjamin.

- **Genesis 44:30-34:** "Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, <sup>31</sup>as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. <sup>32</sup>For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.' <sup>33</sup>Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. <sup>34</sup>For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father."

Judah continues pleading his highly charged emotional case with Joseph saying should he return to Canaan with the rest of his brothers and Benjamin is not with them his father would go to his grave in great grief



and sorrow because his life is so bound up in Benjamin's life. This means that Jacob is so closely united to Benjamin in affection that he cannot live without him. To motivate Joseph even more to release Benjamin Judah tells him that he has pledged himself as a surety for Benjamin to his father and should Benjamin be detained, he would bear the blame before his father forever. (Gen. 43:9). Such a promise is no light matter as it would be an enormously grievous pain for Judah to stand the rest of his life in his father's presence as one guilty of such a grievous thing and as one that had brought such deep pain to his father. Judah's original motivation to make such a promise to his father and take upon himself such a great responsibility would have stemmed from the fact that he at that time was fully aware that for him and his brothers to have any success upon their arrival in Egypt, they must return with Benjamin as the Egyptian ruler had said, otherwise, instead of buying corn they would be cast into the prisons of Egypt or even worse. But he may also have been motivated by conscience concerning the wicked way he had treated Joseph and now desired to do all he could do to make things right (as much as was now humanly possible) by doing all he could to protect Benjamin Joseph's full brother. (Joseph and Benjamin were the only two sons born to Rachel who Jacob loved), and of course because he loved his father and had over the last twenty years seen how deeply they had all hurt him by their lie that Joseph had been torn by wild animals. Judah's appeal to Judah demonstrates to Joseph the brother's attachment and care toward to Benjamin and their father. Throughout the whole narrative this is all that Joseph sought. He never aimed at exercising any type of revenge upon his brothers. As soon as he has obtained proof that they had the right heart attitude toward Benjamin and his father he conceals himself no longer. (The exciting revealing of Joseph to his brothers is recorded in the following chapter)

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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