

GENESIS

Lesson 61

Genesis 44:1-34 A Silver Cup in a Sack

¹ 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. ² 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.

³ As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. ⁴ 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? ⁵ Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.'"

⁶ When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. ⁷ But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! ⁸ 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? ⁹ If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves."

¹⁰ "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."

¹¹ Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. ¹² Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

¹⁴ Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. ¹⁵ 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?"

¹⁶ "What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."

¹⁷ 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."

¹⁸ Then Judah went up to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' ²⁰ 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.'

²¹ "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.' ²² And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.' ²³ But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' ²⁴ When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

²⁵ "Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.' ²⁶ But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'

²⁷ "Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. ²⁸ One of them went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces." And I have not seen him since. ²⁹ 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.'

³⁰ "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, ³¹ 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. ³² 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!'

³³ "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. ³⁴ 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 on my father."

Genesis 44:1-34 [NIV]

In the previous lesson, we read that Joseph hosted his brothers—who still do not know it is him—to a great meal. At that meal, while presenting him with gifts, they all bowed down to the ground before him. This fulfilled Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:7.

We deduce from the current lesson that they all remained in Joseph's house overnight, i.e., in verse 3 above: "As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys." What they do not know is that, once again, Joseph is testing them by having his steward "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."

But then, Joseph, unlike the last time, also tells his steward to "put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain." We might ask, what is Joseph up to with this second command about his personal cup being put in Benjamin's sack? I believe that it is a test to see just how much his brothers love Benjamin and their father. As well, Benjamin is Joseph's only true brother; the others are half-brothers, and by putting Joseph's silver cup in Benjamin's grain, his test will keep Benjamin with him while the others return to Jacob. It is also possible that he knew that if he kept Benjamin in Egypt, it would result in getting his father to come to Egypt as well.

His test is also interesting in terms of how it played out. When Joseph sent his steward after them, notice that when they all denied having the cup, the steward, beginning in verse 11, searched each sack in their birth order—from the oldest to the youngest—just as he had done when they were seated before Joseph for the noon meal. The knowledge of their birth order by a stranger would definitely have increased the tension. How could the steward know this unless by divine intervention, or perhaps divination?

In verse 5, we also see a reference to Joseph's cup being used for divination—not that Joseph actually used divination, but it was one of the cup's purposes. We need to understand that in those days, hundreds of gods were worshipped, along with the practice of black arts, magic, and so on. One of the most frequent of these dark arts was divination—a practice that would have been well known to everyone in that day.

Divination was practiced to determine a variety of things, including the prophecy of future events and how they would play out. Diviners, in some cases, were looking for omens, or meanings, of symbols, and divination was used to discover hidden things. This, in particular, would have rung true with Joseph's brothers. It would have been their only logical explanation of how the Egyptians knew not only their birth order, but that the stolen item—Joseph's cup, in this case—was among their possessions. Now we can better understand Joseph's comment to them when they returned under house arrest for apparently stealing his cup. (Genesis 44:15)

Joseph tells them that, in response to their admittance of guilt, he will not enslave all of them—just the one who had the silver cup, i.e., Benjamin. The rest would be allowed to return home. Judah immediately begins to plea for mercy from Joseph for Judah's father, Jacob, who will die in anguish if Judah doesn't bring Benjamin back with him. We can infer in Judah's plea the empathy and compassion that he has for the pain that Jacob would suffer if Benjamin doesn't return with him. In turn, Joseph can see the regret and repentance in his brothers, from their torn clothes when they learned that Benjamin would become a slave of Joseph's steward. (Genesis 44:13)

In the next lesson, we will examine Joseph's response and the homecoming of Jacob and his family.

Have a great week everyone!

In Christ,

Wes