

# CHAPTER 44

Joseph, having entertained his brethren, dismissed them; but here we have them brought back in a greater fright than any they had been in yet. Observe,

**I.** What method he took both to humble them further and also to try their affection to his brother Benjamin, by which he would be able to judge of the sincerity of their repentance for what they had done against himself, of which he was desirous to be satisfied before he manifested his reconciliation to them. This he contrived to do by bringing Benjamin into distress (v. 1-17).

**II.** The good success of the experiment; he found them all heartily concerned, and Judah particularly, both for the safety of Benjamin and for the comfort of their aged father (v. 18, etc.).

## ~~44~~ GENESIS 44:1-17

### JOSEPH'S POLICY

Joseph heaps further kindnesses upon his brethren, fills their sacks, returns their money, and sends them away full of gladness; but he also exercises them with further trials. Our God thus humbles those whom he loves and loads with benefits. Joseph ordered his steward to put a fine silver cup which he had (and which, it is likely, was used at his table when they dined with him) into Benjamin's sack's mouth, that it might seem as if he had stolen it from the table, and put it here himself, after his corn was delivered to him. If Benjamin had stolen it, it had been the basest piece of dishonesty and ingratitude that could be and if Joseph, by ordering it to be there, had designed really to take advantage against him, it had been in him most horrid cruelty and oppression; but it proved, in the issue, that there was no harm done, nor any designed, on either side. Observe,

**I.** How the pretended criminals were pursued and arrested, on suspicion of having stolen a silver cup. The steward charged them with ingratitude — rewarding evil for good; and with folly, in taking away a cup of daily use, and which therefore would soon be missed, and diligent search made for it; for so it may be read: *Is not this it in which my lord drinketh* (as having

a particular fondness for it), *and for which he would search thoroughly?* v. 5. Or, “By which, leaving it carelessly at your table, he would make trial whether you were honest men or no.”

**II.** How they pleaded for themselves. They solemnly protested their innocence, and detestation of so base a thing (v. 7), urged it as an instance of their honesty that they had brought their money back (v. 8), and offered to submit to the severest punishment if they should be found guilty, v. 9, 10.

**III.** How the theft was fastened upon Benjamin. In his sack the cup was found to whom Joseph had been particularly kind. Benjamin, no doubt, was ready to deny, upon oath, the taking of the cup, and we may suppose him as little liable to suspicion as any of them; but it is in vain to confront such notorious evidence: the cup is found in his custody; they dare not arraign Joseph's justice, nor so much as suggest that perhaps he that had put their money in their sacks' mouths had put the cup there; but they throw themselves upon Joseph's mercy. And,

**IV.** Here is their humble submission, v. 16.

**1.** They acknowledge the righteousness of God: *God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants*, perhaps referring to the injury they had formerly done to Joseph, for which they thought God was now reckoning with them. Note, Even in those afflictions wherein we apprehend ourselves wronged by men yet we must own that God is righteous, and finds out our iniquity.

**2.** They surrender themselves prisoners to Joseph: *We are my lord's servants*. Now Joseph's dreams were accomplished to the utmost. Their bowing so often, and doing homage, might be looked upon but as a compliment, and no more than what other strangers did; but the construction they themselves, in their pride, had put upon his dreams was, *Shalt thou have dominion over us?* (<sup>Gen 37:8</sup>Genesis 37:8), and in this sense it is now at length fulfilled; they own themselves his vassals. Since they did invidiously so understand it, so it shall be fulfilled in them.

**V.** Joseph, with an air of justice, gives sentence that Benjamin only should be kept in bondage, and the rest should be dismissed; for why should any suffer but the guilty? Perhaps Joseph intended hereby to try Benjamin's temper, whether he could bear such a hardship as this with the calmness

and composure of mind that became a wise and good man: in short, whether he was indeed his own brother, in *spirit* as well as *blood*; for Joseph himself had been falsely accused, and had suffered hard things in consequence, and yet kept possession of his own soul. However, it is plain he intended hereby to try the affection of his brethren to Benjamin and to their father. If they had gone away contentedly, and left Benjamin in bonds, no doubt Joseph would soon have released and promoted him, and sent notice to Jacob, and would have left the rest of his brethren justly to suffer for their hard-heartedness; but they proved to be better to Benjamin than he feared. Note, We cannot judge what men are by what they have been formerly, nor what they will do by what they have done: age and experience may make men wiser and better. Those that had sold Joseph would not now abandon Benjamin. The worst may mend in time.

## GENESIS 44:18-34

### JUDAH'S APPEAL ON BEHALF OF BENJAMIN

We have here a most ingenious and pathetic speech which Judah made to Joseph on Benjamin's behalf, to obtain his discharge from the sentence passed upon him. Perhaps Judah was a better friend to Benjamin than the rest were, and more solicitous to bring him off; or he thought himself under greater obligations to attempt it than the rest, because he had passed his word to his father for his safe return; or the rest chose him for their spokesman, because he was a man of better sense, and better spirit, and had a greater command of language than any of them. His address, as it is here recorded, is so very natural and so expressive of his present feelings that we cannot but suppose Moses, who wrote it so long after, to have written it under the special direction of him that made man's mouth.

**I.** A great deal of unaffected art, and unstudied unforced rhetoric, there is in this speech.

**1.** He addresses himself to Joseph with a great deal of respect and deference, calls him his *lord*, himself and his brethren his *servants*, begs his patient hearing, and ascribes sovereign authority to him: "*Thou art even as Pharaoh*, one whose favour we desire and whose wrath we dread as we do Pharaoh's." Religion does not destroy good manners, and it is

prudence to speak respectfully to those at whose mercy we lie: titles of honour to those that are entitled to them are not flattering titles.

**2.** He represented Benjamin as one well worthy of his compassionate consideration (v. 20); he was *a little one*, compared with the rest of them; the youngest, not acquainted with the world, nor ever inured to hardship, having always been brought up tenderly with his father. It made the case the more pitiable that he alone was left of his mother, and his brother was dead, namely, *Joseph*. Little did Judah think what a tender point he touched upon now. Judah knew that Joseph was sold, and therefore had reason enough to think that he was alive; at least he could not be sure that he was dead: but they had made their father believe he was dead; and now they had told that lie so long that they had forgotten the truth, and begun to believe the lie themselves.

**3.** He urged it very closely that Joseph had himself constrained them to bring Benjamin with them, had expressed a desire to see him (v. 21), and had forbidden them his presence unless they brought Benjamin with them (v. 23, 26), all which intimated that he designed him some kindness; and must he be brought with so much difficulty to the preferment of a perpetual slavery? Was he not brought to Egypt, in obedience, purely in obedience, to the command of Joseph? and would he not show him some mercy? Some observe that Jacob's sons, in reasoning with their father, had said, *We will not go down unless Benjamin go with us* (<sup>(1485)</sup>Genesis 43:5); but that when Judah comes to relate the story he expresses it more decently: *"We cannot go down with any expectation to speed well."* Indecent words spoken in haste to our superiors should be recalled and amended.

**4.** The great argument he insisted upon was the insupportable grief it would be to his aged father if Benjamin should be left behind in servitude: *His father loveth him*, v. 20. This they had pleaded against Joseph's insisting on his coming down (v. 22): *"If he should leave his father, his father would die; much more if now he be left behind, never more to return to him."* This the old man, of whom they spoke, had pleaded against his going down: *If mischief befall him, you shall bring down my gray hairs*, that crown of glory, *with sorrow to the grave*, v. 29. This therefore Judah presses with a great deal of earnestness: *"His life is bound up in the lad's life* (v. 30); when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will faint away, and die immediately (v. 31), or will abandon himself to such a degree of

sorrow as will, in a few days, make an end of him.” And, *lastly*, Judah pleads that, for his part, he could not bear to see this: *Let me not see the evil that shall come on my father*, v. 34. Note, It is the duty of children to be very tender of their parents' comfort, and to be afraid of every thing that may be an occasion of grief to them. Thus the love that descended first must again ascend, and something must be done towards a recompense for their care.

**5.** Judah, in honour to the justice of Joseph's sentence, and to show his sincerity in this plea, offers himself to become a bondsman instead of Benjamin, v. 33. Thus the law would be satisfied; Joseph would be no loser (for we may suppose Judah a more able-bodied man than Benjamin, and fitter for service); and Jacob would better bear the loss of him than of Benjamin. Now, so far was he from grieving at his father's particular fondness for Benjamin, that he was himself willing to be a bondman to indulge it.

Now, had Joseph been, as Judah supposed him, an utter stranger to the family, yet even common humanity could not but be wrought upon by such powerful reasonings as these; for nothing could be said more moving, more tender; it was enough to melt a heart of stone. But to Joseph, who was nearer akin to Benjamin than Judah himself was, and who, at this time, felt a greater affection both for him and his aged father than Judah did, nothing could be more pleasingly nor more happily said. Neither Jacob nor Benjamin needed an intercessor with Joseph; for he himself loved them.

**II.** Upon the whole matter let us take notice,

**1.** How prudently Judah suppressed all mention of the crime that was charged upon Benjamin. Had he said any thing by way of acknowledgment of it, he would have reflected on Benjamin's honesty, and seemed too forward to suspect that; had he said any thing by way of denial of it, he would have reflected on Joseph's justice, and the sentence he had passed: therefore he wholly waives that head, and appeals to Joseph's pity. Compare with this that of Job, in humbling himself before God (<sup>395</sup>Job 9:15), *Though I were righteous, yet would I not answer; I would not argue, but petition; I would make supplication to my Judge.*

**2.** What good reason dying Jacob had to say, *Judah, thou art he whom they brethren shall praise* (<sup>498</sup>Genesis 49:8), for he excelled them all in

boldness, wisdom, eloquence, and especially tenderness for their father and family.

**3.** Judah's faithful adherence to Benjamin, now in his distress, was recompensed long after by the constant adherence of the tribe of Benjamin to the tribe of Judah, when all the other ten tribes deserted it.

**4.** How fitly does the apostle, when he is discoursing of the mediation of Christ, observe, that *our Lord sprang out of Judah* (<sup>3074</sup>Hebrews 7:14); for, like his father Judah, he not only *made intercession for the transgressors*, but he became a surety for them, as it follows there (v. 22), testifying therein a very tender concern both for his father and for his brethren.