

### Joseph Gave His Brothers a Final Test

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why Joseph gave his brothers a variety of tests to prepare them for the time when he would reveal to them that he was Joseph. This was to help them understand how God had worked when he told them, in Genesis 45:7, “And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” In this topic, we will see that Joseph gave them one final test.

Genesis 44:1-5 says, “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. 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. As soon as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. 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? *Is* not this *the one* from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination? You have done evil in so doing.’”” By the things Joseph did to test his brothers, Joseph was probably also teaching his steward several important lessons.

Genesis 43:34 said, “Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin’s serving was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.” The last part of this verse indicates that the brothers spent a period of time with Joseph. Joseph was doing two things by spending this period of time with them. He was keeping them there so they would not leave until the next morning. He was also giving the steward time to prepare their sacks for this final test. We see the instructions Joseph gave the steward. He was to fill the sacks with as much grain as the sacks would hold. Then, he was to put the money of each man at the very top of his sack. However, he was to add one additional thing in the sack of Benjamin. The steward was to put the silver cup of Joseph in the top of the bag of the youngest brother along with his grain money.

Early the next morning, as soon as it started to get light, the men were sent away, along with their donkeys that carried their sacks of grain. While they went out of the city, Joseph gave instructions to his steward. Joseph told the steward that once the men were out of the city and had gone a short distance from the city, he was to go after them and catch up with them. Once he caught up with the brothers, he was to ask them, “Why have you repaid evil for good? *Is* not this the one from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination? You have done evil in so doing.” Joseph knew that those questions would really make the brothers think. The second question made it clear that the silver cup of the governor was no longer in his house. Since the brothers were the only people who had been in the house overnight, the fact the cup was missing meant

one of them had taken the silver cup. That would give the steward the opportunity to check each of the sacks.

Genesis 44:6-9 says, “So he overtook them, and he spoke to them these same words. 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. 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? With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves.’” The steward quickly caught up with the brothers and spoke to them the words he had been told to tell them. These verses show how the brothers answered the steward when they heard these words.

The steward accused the brothers of stealing the silver cup of the governor. The brothers were shocked to be accused of such an action. In fact, their first words were, “Why does my lord say these words?” This is almost like saying, “How could you even imagine we would do such a thing? That would be the last thing we would think of doing.” Then, the brothers went on to explain why they felt that way. They reminded the steward that they had brought back the money they had found in their sacks when they arrived in Canaan. That certainly showed they were honest men. Then, they asked a second question, “How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord’s house?” The brothers probably could not understand why they had originally been accused of being spies. As a result, it was probably difficult for them to understand why they would even be accused of stealing silver or gold from the governor. They had tried to be honest in all they had done when they came to Egypt for food. They certainly could not understand the various things that had happened to them.

That is why they gave the answer they gave to the steward. First, they said, “With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die.” The brothers certainly could not imagine that the silver cup would be found in the bag of Benjamin because this answer was actually like a death sentence for the one in whose sack the cup would be found. Of course, the steward knew the cup would be found in the bag of Benjamin because that is where he had placed the cup. The second thing the brothers said also meant they would suffer if their suggestion was carried out by the governor. They said the rest of the brothers would become the slaves of the governor if the cup was found in the sack of any of the brothers.

We go on to read what the steward answered to the brothers in Genesis 44:10-16, which says, “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.’” Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. So he searched. He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city. So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, and he *was* still there; and they fell before him on the ground. 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?’ 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.’” Here, we see that the steward suggested a much easier penalty than the brothers had suggested. He said that the one in whose sack the cup was found would become a slave, but the rest of the brothers would be blameless, which meant they could return to their own homes.

The brothers quickly took the bags of grain off of their donkeys. Each of the brothers opened his sack. Then, the steward started checking each bag. Since Joseph had set the brothers in order from the oldest to the youngest at the table, the steward knew their birth order. That was shown by his search. The steward began with the oldest brother and finished the search with the youngest brother. The steward found the cup in Benjamin’s sack, exactly as he knew he would since he was the one who had placed the cup in that sack. However, the brothers had no idea that was what would happen. They did not expect the steward to find that cup in the bag of Benjamin. Of course, Benjamin did not think it was possible that it would be found in his sack, since he had never touched the silver cup of the governor. Suddenly, the steward brought the cup out of the sack of Benjamin. The brothers were filled with so much shock that they tore their clothes. That was a common sign of sorrow and mourning. Then, they loaded their sacks back on their donkeys and they all returned to the city.

When they reached the city, Judah and his brothers immediately went to the house where the governor lived. Joseph was still at his house as he had waited for them to return. The brothers saw the governor and immediately fell before him so they were on the ground. The brothers did not know how the cup got into the sack of Benjamin, but they knew they were in great trouble. Joseph immediately asked them two questions. First, he said, “What deed is this you have done?” The brothers did not know how to answer this question because they had not done anything wrong. None of them had touched the cup, but the steward had found the cup in the bag of Benjamin. Second, he said, “Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?” The word translated “divination” means that Joseph was saying that *he was able to know secret things that others did not know*. Of course, the reason he knew this secret information was due to the fact the steward had followed his instructions.

Then, Judah began to speak for the brothers. He began by asking three questions, “What shall we say to my lord?” “What shall we speak?” “Or how shall we clear ourselves?” Judah made it clear that they did not know what to say. They had no way to explain how the cup was found in the bag of Benjamin. Judah made it clear that he could not think of any way to prove their innocence of the charge because the steward had found the silver cup. God had found out about their sin and had shown that information to the governor. Judah said that since they could not understand how this had happened, there was nothing they could say, because the steward had found the evidence he was seeking when he checked their bags.

All Judah could say was that since the evidence proved the charge, he and the rest of the brothers must become the slaves of the governor. That included the brother in whose bag the silver cup was found. Judah had said earlier that the one who had the silver cup could die and the rest would be slaves. Now, he changed that to the fact that all would be slaves. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain how Judah and the brothers must have felt as they returned to house of the governor, since the evidence showed that Benjamin was guilty. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain how people feel when the evidence says they are guilty.