GENESIS

Chapter 44

*A Silver Cup in a Sack*

**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: “Please, my lord, let your servant 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 upon my father.”**

**44:2** *youngest*. Benjamin. (TLSB)

**44:4** *the city.* Identity unknown, though Memphis (about 13 miles south of modern Cairo) and Zoan (in the eastern delta region) have been suggested. (CSB)

*steward*. He had Joseph’s authority to arrest the brothers. (TLSB)

**44:5** *divination.* See v. 15; see also note on 30:27. (CSB)

Just as Joseph presented himself as an Egyptian in his speech, clothing, and manners, he also presented himself as if he were a fortune-teller. This was a pretense, used as the reason Joseph and his servant knew about the “theft.” Divination was later forbidden in the Law (Lv 19:26; Dt 18:10). Old Babylonian tablets and Egyptian statues show that oil for divination was dripped into a cup of water. The pattern of the oil in the cup could then be interpreted. (TLSB)

**44:7** *my lord*. They addressed the steward so, because he held Joseph’s authority. (TLSB)

**44:8** *your lord’s house?* The steward was still subject to Joseph. (TLSB)

**44:9** *If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die.* Years earlier, Jacob had given Laban a similar rash response (see 31:32 and note). (CSB)

**44:10** The steward softened the penalty contained in the brothers’ proposal. (CSB)

The steward could speak of Joseph’s servant as his own because the steward bore Joseph’s authority. (TLSB)

**44:12** *beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest.* For a similar building up of suspense see 31:33. (CSB)

**44:13** *tore their clothes.* A sign of distress and grief (see 37:29). (CSB)

Gesture of grief or great distress. (TLSB)

**44:14** *Judah*. Now the leader of the brothers. (TLSB)

*threw themselves to the ground before him.* Further fulfillment of Joseph’s dreams in 37:7, 9 (see 42:6; 43:26, 28). (CSB)

Total obeisance. (TLSB)

**44:16** *God has uncovered your servants’ guilt.* Like Joseph’s steward (see note on 43:23), Judah spoke better than he knew—or perhaps his words had a double meaning (see 42:21). (CSB)

Though innocent of this charge, Judah knew that before God, he and his brothers were guilty. The threat of slavery reminded them of their sin of selling Joseph. (TLSB)

*my lord’s servants*. Judah insisted that all would accept punishment, but Joseph refused, keeping the test focused on Benjamin (v 17). (TLSB)

**44:18** *Judah … said.* See note on 43:3. *lord … servant.* See note on 42:10. (CSB)

*you are equal to Pharaoh.* Words more flattering than true (see 41:40, 43). (CSB)

**44:20** *father loves him*. Jacob loved Benjamin more than his other children. (TLSB)

**44:29** *in evil*. In the greatest grief and sadness. (TLSB)

*Sheol*. Here, “death.” (TLSB)

**44:30** *whose life is closely bound up with the boy’s life.* The Hebrew underlying this clause is later used of Jonathan’s becoming “one in spirit with David” (1Sa 18:1). (CSB)

The father loves him as if he were his own soul. (TLSB)

**44:33** *in place of the boy.* Judah’s willingness to be a substitute for Benjamin sought to make amends for his role in selling Joseph (see 37:26–27). (CSB)

Judah offered himself, proving a new and right spirit (Ps 51:10–12). (TLSB)

**44:34** *Do not let me see the misery.* Judah remembers an earlier scene (37:34–35). (CSB)

**44:34** *fear* … *the evil*. Judah could not stand to see the misery that would afflict his father. Luther: “[Joseph] cannot contain himself any longer after he sees that their heart is sincere, that their prayer is steadfast, and that the love of Judah and his brothers for Benjamin is not feigned but is joined with true penitence. For this is an example not only of prayer but of true and very great penitence” (AE 7:376). (TLSB)

**Ch 44** Joseph prepares a final test to determine whether his brothers will allow Benjamin to be enslaved and bring further grief to their father. Their refusal to leave Benjamin behind, and Judah’s sacrificial offer of himself to spare both brother and father, show that their hearts have genuinely changed. Like Joseph, God often tests what is in our hearts. He reminds us to humbly acknowledge and take responsibility for our sin. When Judah mediates with his father and with Joseph, and shows himself willing to be enslaved in place of his brother, this prefigures the saving work of his descendant, Jesus, who gave Himself as mediator, ransom, and sacrifice for the world. • Jesus, You gave Yourself for us and made known the Father’s loving heart. Turn us from sin, selfishness, and alienation to live for You, as You have died for us. Amen. (TLLSB)