

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“The Cup Of Testing”

Genesis 44:1-34

2003

Introduction

There were four college sophomores who were taking Chemistry at college.

All good students, all good friends, all living together in off-campus housing. Unfortunately, the night before their final exam, rather than studying, they stayed out late partying and overslept the next morning -- missing their final exam.

Later that day, they found their professor and told him that they had gotten a flat tire – and didn't have a spare. As a result, they missed the final. They begged him to let them take the final the next day.

The professor thought it over and agreed. The guys were elated and relieved. They studied hard that night and went in the next day at the time the professor had told them. He placed them in separate rooms and handed each of them a test booklet, and told them to begin.

The first problem was worth five points -- an easy question about the chemical elements. "Yeah," they thought at the same time, each one in his separate room, "this is going to be easy."

Each finished the problem and then turned the page. On the second page was written: (For 95 points): “**Which tire?**”

Genesis 44 reveals Joseph's effort to discover the truth -- to find out whether his brothers were still the selfish, godless, wicked men who had sold him into slavery 20 years earlier – or had they changed? Had they repented of their sins or were they still telling the same old lies? In essence, he was asking, “**Which tire?**”

Joseph knew that real reconciliation could never occur with his brothers until they dealt honestly with their sinful past. For the last 20 years, the brothers had lied to each other, lied to their father, and lied to God. And now they were lying to Joseph.

But God, through His servant Joseph, was about to give them a final exam they would never forget!

I The Accusation

A. Joseph instructed his steward: [Verse 1-5]

1. To fill the men's sacks with food
2. To return their silver in the mouths of their sacks
3. To put Joseph's silver cup in Benjamin's sack

Why was Joseph doing this? You might think he was using his position of power to torment his brothers in revenge for their cruelty towards him; but

you would be wrong. He was being guided by the hand of God to test the hearts of his brothers in order to bring them to complete repentance.

4. To send them on their way

The brothers left Egypt with a big sigh of relief! They were off the hook! They had expected the worst – but were pleasantly surprised when they had been treated well, had their sacks full of grain, and Simeon was out of prison. Life was good again! Or at least it appeared that way.

5. To pursue them and accuse them of **stealing**

Shortly after they had left and were just beyond the city limits, Joseph sent his steward to pursue his brothers with careful instructions of what to do and say.

a. They rewarded evil for good

Prov 17:13 “If a man pays back evil for good, evil will never leave his house.”

b. They were caught by divination and had done a wicked thing

Divination = Nachash = “To whisper a magic spell or to prognosticate”

This cultic practice was well-known in Egypt and in the Far East in general. A cultist used such cups to predict future events by examining the reflection patterns in the water or in the arrangement of small particles of gold or silver they would place in it. They believed that the spirits who knew the future would act on the cup’s contents in such a way as to form these messages.

However, this cultic practice is clearly forbidden in the scriptures:

Lev 19:26 “Do not practice divination or sorcery.”

So how could Joseph, who was a follow of God, be guilty of using a cultic practice condemned by God?

Possible explanations:

1. Joseph actually used this cup for divination

- a. There was not yet any specific revelation from God that such a practice was forbidden. But I find it unlikely that a godly man like Joseph would have employed methods which God would later condemn.

2. Joseph only pretended to use this cup for divination.

Why would Joseph want his brothers to think that the cup was used for divination if it wasn’t?

- a. To maintain his carefully constructed disguise before his brothers as a true Egyptian.

b. To convince his brothers that he had access to supernatural knowledge.

Such a belief would serve to discourage them from attempting to conceal the truth from him since they were already convinced he had divine insight into everything.

He had already astonished them by seating his brothers at the table according to their age (Gen 43:33).

B. The brothers responded to the accusation: [Verse 6-9]

1. They responded with **surprise**

1. “Why would you say that?”

They were completely caught off guard by the steward’s accusations!

2. They responded with logic

a. “We already returned the silver”

They had a history of honesty with Joseph, brief as it might have been, by virtue of the fact that they had return the money they found in their sacks from their first journey to Egypt.

b. “Why would we steal your silver cup?”

If they would not keep money that was inadvertently placed in their sacks, why would they intentionally steal what belonged to Joseph?

The eighth commandment: Ex 20:15 “You shall not steal.”

Lev 19:11 “Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.”

3. They responded with an **oath**

a. “The one who stole it will die”

b. “The rest of us will be **slaves**”

The brothers were so confident they didn’t have the cup that they declared that the thief should be killed, and the rest should be taken as slaves.

It was a rash statement said in anger in an effort to register their dismay at what they considered to be a false accusation.

Application:

Ecc 5:2 “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God.”

James 1:19-20 “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

C. The steward recommended a more judicious sentence [Verse 10]

1. Whoever had it would become a **slave**

Ezek 18:20 “The soul who sins is the one who will die.”

II The Incriminating Evidence

- A. Each man lowered his sack [Verse 11]
- B. The steward **searched** each man's sack [Verse 12a]
1. Beginning with the oldest to youngest

A growing sense of dread must have swept over these men as they opened their sacks and discovered their silver in their sacks. But the steward didn't even mention the silver – he was looking for Joseph's cup!

Application:

How would you fair if God were to say lower your sack? Let me search your life for spiritual contraband.

Heb 4:13 “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

Num 32:23 “... you may be sure that your sin will find you out.”

- C. The cup was **found** in Benjamin's sack [Verse 12b]
- They were absolutely shocked and speechless! Their worst fears were realized!!

III The Admission Of Guilt

- A. They **tore** their clothes [Verse 13a]
- Tearing clothes* = “This was an act of mourning -- an expression of deep sorrow”
- Gen 37:29 “When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes.”
- B. They returned to the city [Verse 13b]
- Notice: If they had acted in self-interest, they would have condemned Benjamin as a thief, deserted him, and fled from Egypt as quickly as possible. They could return to their father just as they had done so long ago and break his heart with the news that his other son was “no more.”
- But something new was taking place. These were not the same men that had abandoned Joseph 20 years earlier to the Midianites (Genesis 37:18ff.). They didn't run off! They didn't abandon the brother, Benjamin.
- “If Benjamin was in trouble, they were all in trouble.”**
- “If he had to return to Egypt, they would all return to Egypt. No one would be left behind!
- C. They **threw** themselves before Joseph [Verse 14-15]
- Joseph was undoubtedly thrilled to see that all the brothers had returned. After all, only Benjamin was found to have the cup. The others were free to go. So just the fact that all 11 had returned was a positive sigh that the brothers were markedly different in their attitude than they had been with Joseph 20 years earlier – and they prostrated themselves before Joseph.
- They are no longer seeking justice – they are asking for mercy.

Application:

Prov 28:13 “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

D. They resigned themselves to **destiny** [Verse 16-17]

1. “How can we prove our innocence?”
2. “God has uncovered our **guilt**.”

Guilt = `avon = “Iniquity or sin”

Gen 42:21 “They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us.”

“God had uncovered their guilt”

What is Judah talking about? Guilt for what?

We know that the brothers did not take the cup. We also know that the brothers *know* they did not take the cup. So, why was Judah confessing to something they hadn't done?

I don't think Judah was confessing to stealing the cup . . he was confessing to the guilt in regard to Joseph. Notice that Judah says "God has uncovered our guilt". Judah saw this event as God's way of judging them for their sin against Joseph. So, Judah was confessing their past sin! No more excuses. No more rationalizations. No grammatical loopholes. He has come to the end of himself and finally decided to come clean: **They were guilty!**

Application:

Ps 38:1-4 “LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.”

3. “We are your **slaves**”

Judah insisted that they would stick by Benjamin. It was one for all and all for one! Even if it meant being slaves together in Egypt for the rest of their lives. It was a fitting punishment for men who, years earlier, had sold their brother into Egypt.

- a. But Joseph only wanted Benjamin

IV The Substitutionary Offer

A. Judah **appealed** to Joseph [Verse 18]

Judah once again assumed the role of spiritual leadership among his brothers.

I think it was in large part due to Judah's leadership here in Genesis 44 that he eventually was blessed by Jacob in Genesis 49:8-10 as the son through whom the Messiah would one day come.

B. Judah recounted the events [Verse 19-29]

Judah proceeded tell Joseph the whole story from beginning to end.

C. Judah explained the consequences [Verse 30-32]

1. He communicated to Joseph that Jacob would die

20 years before, Joseph's brothers showed a callous disregard for their father, Jacob, when they reported Joseph's "death" (Genesis 37:31-33).

Now Judah shows great concern for the feelings and welfare of their father -- more evidence of a changed heart.

2. He would be held personally responsible

"I will bear the blame all my life"

Gen 43:8-10 "I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life."

D. Judah offered himself as a substitute for Benjamin [Verse 33-34]

1. He volunteered to take Benjamin's place as a slave

20 years ago, these brothers didn't care about Joseph. They sold him for 20 pieces of silver. But now Judah (who was innocent) is willing to lay down his life for Benjamin.

And by doing so, his life became a foreshadowing of the ultimate substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ – the God/man who was without sin.

Application: Men who were willing to lay down their lives for others:

- a. Moses was willing to offer himself for the salvation of Israel (Ex 32:31-32).
- b. Paul wished that he could be cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his fellow Jews – if it would mean their salvation (Rom 9:3-4).
- c. Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." 1 Peter 3:18
- d. 1 John 3:17 "And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

2. He petitioned Joseph for Benjamin's return

"Let the boy return with his brothers"

3. He pled for mercy for the sake of Jacob

He would prefer to remain a slave in Egypt than to be free in Canaan and witness the pain and suffering of his father, Jacob.

Conclusion:

What was Joseph's ultimate objective? Reconciliation with his brothers – on a vertical level with God and on a horizontal level with man.

Do we see a genuine change in the brothers of Joseph? Absolutely!!

1. They didn't resent it when Benjamin was given a larger portion (Gen 43:34).
2. They trusted each other and didn't accuse one another of wrong when accused of stealing the silver cup (Genesis 44:9).
3. They stuck together when the silver cup was found. They didn't abandon Benjamin when he was about to be enslaved in Egypt (Genesis 44:13).
4. They completely humbled themselves for the sake of Benjamin (44:14).
5. They knew their predicament was the result of their sin against Joseph (44:16).
6. They offered themselves as slaves to Egypt together with Benjamin (44:16).
7. They showed genuine concern for how this would affect their father (44:29-31).
8. Judah is willing to be made a substitutionary sacrifice for his brother out of love for Benjamin and his father, Jacob (Genesis 44:33).

But the work of God is far from complete. In the next few weeks, we'll discover how this broken family is once again made whole by the power of God and how 12 sinful brothers can be raised up by the power of God to lead the 12 tribes of Israel.

Final application

1. Seeker

Joseph loved his brothers. He loved them enough to urge them to repentance. Joseph knew that only in repentance would his brothers find reconciliation with God. So he refused to compromise. He refused to let up until they were at the point of repentance.

Rom 3:23 "... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Rom 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Are you ready for God's final exam? It will consist of a single question:
What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?

2. Believers

Maybe you are struggling with similar concerns as the characters in the story?

Jacob: Living in fear of what "might" happen in the future?

Joseph: Living with an unreconciled offense against you?

The brothers: Living with guilt over unconfessed sin?

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