

JOSEPH TESTS HIS BROTHERS' LOYALTY **(Genesis 44:1-34)**

Joseph had administered three tests for his brothers to help them reconcile with him and, more importantly, with God. The first test focused on honesty, the second on jealousy. Now Joseph would test his brothers' loyalty. Under pressure, would they abandon their brother Benjamin to a life of slavery in Egypt as they had Joseph twenty years earlier? Or would they, like seasoned soldiers, follow through with a no-man-left-behind commitment? This band of brothers did, indeed, prove to be loyal under pressure. Our loyalty to others goes hand in hand with our loyalty to God. Genesis 44 presents this test of loyalty in three movements—desperation, confession, and intercession.

Desperation—life's tests undermine self-confidence (44:1-13).

When we depend on our own strength and wisdom to get us through life, we fall short of God's perfect plan. Sometimes God brings us to a place of desperation so that He can open our eyes to our need for Him. As Joseph's brothers discovered, life's tests undermine our self-confidence and force us to depend on God.

Joseph instructed his steward to put his brothers' silver back in their sacks of grain and to put his silver cup in Benjamin's sack (44:1-2).

Having treated his brothers with rich hospitality, Joseph instructed his steward to fill their sacks with an abundance of grain. He also ordered that each brother's silver be placed back in the sacks. In addition, Joseph arranged to have his own silver cup placed in Benjamin's sack of grain. Joseph was setting a trap in order to test his brothers' loyalty.

After the brothers left, Joseph sent his steward to arrest them for repaying good with evil (44:3-5).

Joseph's brothers began their journey back to Canaan, no doubt deeply relieved that everything had gone so well. They were anxious to put Egypt behind them. But they didn't get far before Joseph sent his steward to stop them and accuse them of thievery. Joseph instructed his steward to ask them, "Why have you repaid good with evil?" Later Joseph would testify that, though these brothers had meant evil by selling him into slavery, God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20). The steward was to reveal the hidden silver cup and, by implication, an act of evil. He was to state that the governor drank from this cup and used it for divination. The Egyptians, like other ancient peoples, participated in various magical practices in order to attempt to tell the future. Joseph, as a follower of the true God, did not need to practice divination. This statement simply set the tone for the accusation.

When the steward stopped the brothers they claimed innocence and offered to become slaves if the silver cup was in their possession (44:6-10).

Joseph's steward dutifully obeyed his master's orders. After hearing these accusations, Joseph's brothers denied the charges. They pointed out how foolish it would have been for them to return the silver from their first trip to Egypt only to steal from the Egyptian governor on their second trip. So confident were they of their innocence that they offered themselves as slaves should the stolen items be found in their possession. In fact, whoever among them was responsible would be put to death. The steward simply demanded that the sole perpetrator be forced into slavery while the other brothers could return home.

When the steward discovered the silver cup in Benjamin's sack the brothers expressed deep grief and returned to the city together (44:11-13).

Each of the brothers eagerly lowered his sack of grain for inspection. The steward inspected the sacks, beginning with the oldest brother and ending with Benjamin. Suspense was mounting. Although no mention is made of the silver in each brother's sack, the presence of their silver must have caused them great concern. But when the steward found the governor's silver cup in Benjamin's sack these brothers found themselves in a desperate situation. They tore their clothes in grief, in the same way their father had torn his clothes upon learning about Joseph's presumed death so many years earlier (Genesis 37:34). But to their credit, Joseph's brothers didn't abandon Benjamin. They returned together to face Egypt's governor. Their desperate situation would lead them to confession and a greater dependence on God.

**Confession—reconciliation
demands self-examination (44:14-17).**

Joseph's brothers, unbeknownst to them, were moving in the direction of reconciliation. But first they would have to acknowledge their sinful crime. Self-examination and confession always precede reconciliation.

When his brothers bowed before him, Joseph claimed to have special power to discern hidden truth (44:14-15).

Joseph was waiting at his house for his brothers to return. These brothers "fell before him to the ground," once again fulfilling Joseph's predictive dreams. Joseph then asked them what they'd done, implying the foolishness of stealing from him. After all, he stated, "Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?" Joseph never actually claimed to have engaged in pagan divination, but hinted that a man in his position would possess such skills. In fact, Joseph had received revelation from the true and living God on more than one occasion. He was a prophet who actually possessed a greater ability to discern hidden truth, an ability granted by God.

Speaking for the rest of his brothers, Judah confessed that God had uncovered their sin and he offered themselves to Joseph as slaves (44:16).

Judah now served as the spokesman for his brothers, having taken responsibility for Benjamin's safety. He couldn't deny the presence of the silver cup in Benjamin's sack. So he asked, "How can we justify ourselves?" How could they set the matter straight? At this point Judah, speaking for himself and his brothers, declared, "God has found your servants' iniquity." Although these brothers had been innocent of the recent accusations regarding the silver cup, they knew that they were guilty of a greater crime (Genesis 42:21). They had sold their brother Joseph into slavery. Their confession at this moment may have reached back to that sinister event. Judah declared that he and his brothers would share with Benjamin in his sentence. They would all serve as Joseph's slaves.

Joseph expressed his intention to enslave only Benjamin and to let the other brothers return home (44:17).

Having set the trap, Joseph now tightened the rope. He refused to enslave all of these brothers. Instead, he would enslave only the guilty brother, Benjamin. The rest were free to return home to their father. In their moment of desperation these brothers had come to a place of confession. But would their confession lead to reconciliation, a reconciliation that would hinge on their loyalty?

**Intercession—loyalty
requires self-sacrifice (44:18-34).**

Joseph's brothers would indeed prove to be loyal to Benjamin, and their loyalty would presumably involve great self-sacrifice. Judah offered himself as a slave in Benjamin's place.

Judah approached Joseph and rehearsed the events that had led them to their current plight (44:18-24).

Judah continued to represent his brothers, now approaching Joseph more intimately and intently. He begged Joseph to listen patiently to his plea. Judah then rehearsed the events of the past year—their first trip to Egypt, Joseph's questions about their father and family, Joseph's demand that they bring Benjamin to Egypt and their report of these events to their father Jacob.

Judah explained to Joseph that he had guaranteed to protect Benjamin and return him safely to his father (44:25-32).

Having again run out of food, Jacob had ordered his sons to return to Egypt. But Joseph's brothers refused to leave Canaan without Benjamin. Jacob protested, pointing out that Joseph had been killed by wild animals and that Benjamin was the only

remaining son of Rachel. Jacob could not bear to lose Benjamin—his gray head would go to the grave in misery! Judah pleaded with Joseph, saying that his father's life was bound up with Benjamin. If Benjamin didn't return home, Jacob would die of grief. Judah had guaranteed Benjamin's protection.

Judah offered to remain in Egypt as a slave if Joseph would free Benjamin (44:33-34).

At this point Judah made the most selfless, sacrificial decision of his life. He would take Benjamin's place as a slave. Judah could not bear to see his father grieve again over the loss of a son. He was ready to spend the rest of his life as a slave if Benjamin could be set free. What a change from the day in which Judah had originated the idea of selling Joseph into slavery (Genesis 37:26-27). Desperation and confession had led Judah, along with his brothers, to intercession. Soon, these twelve brothers would together experience reconciliation. Joseph's brothers had passed the tests of honesty, jealousy, and loyalty. They would discover that loyalty to others goes hand in hand with loyalty to God.