# REPENTANCE BEFORE RECONCILIATION

**TEXT: GENESIS 44:1-34**

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. God was preparing to restore Jacob's family. God was preparing to remove them from the wickedness of Canaan.

2. And God wanted to give them perfect peace and rest, but all of this was impossible as long as there was unconfessed sin in their lives.

3. God worked on their guilty consciences, and God used fear to bring them to repentance. And reconciliation finally came (cf. 45:1).

4. But before there could be reconciliation, there had to be repentance.

5. Joseph was testing his brothers in order to get them to repent. He "spake roughly" to them (42:7); and he repeatedly accused them of being spies (42:9, 12, 14, etc.).

6. He put them all in prison for three days (42:17); and then he sent them back home, but he kept Simeon captive (42:24). Furthermore, Joseph insisted that they return with Benjamin, their youngest brother (42:15).

7. Then Joseph commanded his servants to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack (42:25).

8. When Joseph's brothers discovered the money in their sacks they were afraid, and said one to another, "What is this that God hath done unto us?" (42:28).

9. They went home and told their father Jacob that they had to return to Egypt with the youngest brother, Benjamin. But at first, Jacob would not give his permission (42:38).

10. When the famine was sore in the land, Jacob finally agreed to send Benjamin (43:11-13).

11. Joseph's brothers were being severely tested in order to get them to repent. When they were imprisoned by Joseph for three days, there were signs of remorse and sorrow, but not true repentance.

12. The brothers acknowledged their sin (42:21), but consciousness of sin and even confession of sin is often not enough.

13. Everything in Genesis chapters 42—44 is leading up to repentance and to the evidence of it. These chapters should be understood this way.

14. It is interesting to trace the fear of God throughout this story. Joseph told his brothers, "This do, and live; for I fear God" (42:18).

15. But his brothers did not fear God when they threw Joseph into a pit and then sat down to enjoy their meal.

16. They had no fear of God when they sold Joseph into slavery.

17. They had no fear of God when they went home and lied to their father; then they took Joseph's coat of many colors and dipped it in the blood of a dead goat; and then brought it to their father; and said, "This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no" (37:32).

18. They deceived their father into thinking that an evil beast had devoured Joseph and tore him into pieces.

19. Men who feared God would not do something that cruel to their brother and to their father.

20. But through the severe testing of Joseph, the fear of God gradually came over these deceitful and cruel men (cf. 42:28, 35; 43:18).

21. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Fear probes, searches, warns, purifies, and keeps the heart tender and true, sensitive to God's will, and ever shrinking from that which is evil. The fear of the Lord has two sides a shrinking from sin, and an intense desire to be true to God and it is because of these things that it is 'the beginning of wisdom'" (*Genesis*).

I. THE SET-UP

II. THE CONFRONTATION

III. THE PLEA

## I. THE SET-UP (44:1-13)

1. As Genesis 44 begins, Joseph's brothers are getting ready to return home with sacks of food. Everything Joseph did, he did in order to get his brothers to repent, but they still hadn't repented

2. But Joseph had a plan that would finally break them. Joseph's orders were to provide the men with as much corn as they could carry, to put every man's money into the mouth of his sack, and to put his silver divining cup in the mouth of the sack belonging to Benjamin (44:1, 2).

3. Divination was common in Egypt and all throughout the ancient Middle East. Joseph owned a silver divination cup as did all Egyptian nobility at that time. However, it is not clear that Joseph ever used this cup in divination.

4. Since Joseph was a godly man who was led by the Holy Spirit, it is unlikely that he practiced divination.

5. Later on, Joseph told his brothers that he did practice divination (44:15), but this was all part of the set-up, his plan to get them to repent. Just as Joseph knew his brothers weren't spies, but he accused them in order to get them to repent.

6. It is highly unlikely that Joseph practiced divination, because the Bible condemns it. Deuteronomy 18:10 says, "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch."

7. The divining cup was like an Old Testament Ouija board. God hates Ouija boards, and God hates all divination. Deuteronomy 18:12 says these things are an abomination to God.

8. Joseph had no need to use a cup for divination because God had enabled him to have prophetic dreams, and to interpret the dreams of others. Joseph was led by God step by step without the use of a cup.

9. Joseph's divining cup was part of his test for his brothers. As part of his plan, he placed this small, but very valuable silver cup in Benjamin's grain sack.

10. Joseph deliberately planted evidence that would link them to a serious crime. The cup was part of his setup.

11. Joseph claimed he used the cup to divine in order to incite more fear in his brothers' hearts. They were already in awe of him (cf. 43:33), and now they were terrified at Joseph's ability to look into their sacks.

12. They started on their journey home at the break of day; but before they had gotten very far they were overtaken by Joseph's steward, and were rebuked for taking the silver divining-cup (44:3-6).

13. They were returning home happy, with sacks of food, and with Simeon free and Benjamin safe. Suddenly, however, their great happiness was destroyed, and once again fear possessed them.

14. Naturally, the brothers all protested their innocence. So sure were they of their innocence that they made an unwise oath, "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen" (44:9).

15. The steward would not agree to their suggestion. Instead he stated that he with whom the cup should be found must become his servant, the others being free to return home "blameless" (44:10).

16. The steward searched, and began at the eldest, and left at the youngest, "and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack" (44:12). The key in this set-up was not the cup. It was Benjamin (44:10-12).

17. "Then they rent their clothes…" (44:13). How could they get out of this predicament?

18. Joseph wanted to see what their reaction would be toward Benjamin when it was discovered that the silver cup was in his sack (44:1, 2).

19. Would the brothers sacrifice Benjamin for their own safety? Would they be willing to see him become an Egyptian slave, like the cruel way they sold Joseph into slavery?

20. If they had truly repented, then Benjamin would be safe.

21. But the brothers were changing. These were not the same cruel men who threw Joseph into a pit and then sold him for twenty pieces of silver. The fear of God was changing them.

22. "By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil" (Proverbs 16:6b).

23. Instead of going home to their father, and allowing Benjamin to go back with Joseph's steward, they decided to stay with Benjamin, and so they all returned to Egypt together.

## II. THE CONFRONTATION

1. Once again they found themselves in the house of Joseph, and "fell before him on the ground" (44:14).

2. Reading these chapters of Genesis, one wonders when one of the brothers would finally recall Joseph's dream (37:7, 8; 42:6; 43:28).

3. Years earlier, the brothers had said, "We shall see what will become of his dreams" (37:20), and now that Joseph's dreams were being fulfilled, they didn't realize it (44:14).

4. Joseph proceeded to ask them solemnly and severely what they had done, and whether they did not know that such a man as he could certainly divine (44:15). These questions added to their fear.

5. Judah's words in verse 16 are significant: "What shall we say unto my lord?... God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants…"

6. Judah did not refer to the guilt of Benjamin, but rather he speaks of "the iniquity of thy servants," as though they were all included in his sin.

7. Since neither Benjamin nor any of the other brothers were guilty of taking the cup, Judah is probably referring to the “iniquity” of the old days, which now, after twenty years, he is finally confessing – “God hath found out the iniquity.”

8. The sin was buried for many years, but the Bible says, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).

9. Joseph’s test was working. His brothers were convicted of their sin against Joseph and they attributed their current misfortune to God’s hand of justice.

10. Joseph had brought his brothers to the point where they were just about ready to break. God’s work must be thoroughly done. Soon they would be thoroughly submissive to the will of God.

11. The brothers were in a very tight spot. They had nowhere to turn; they could only cast themselves upon Joseph's mercy.

12. And the mercy of God – “God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants…” (44:16).

13. Earlier, Judah had said to Joseph’s steward, “We also will be my lord's bondmen” (44:9), but Joseph did not want that – “God forbid that I should do so…” (44:17).

14. What Joseph required was that the man in whose sack the cup had been found should be his servant. The rest of them could go “up in peace” to their father (44:17).

15. Joseph’s brothers were tested on the outskirts of the city. Joseph’s steward was willing to take Benjamin, and let the rest of them go.

16. They passed that test when they decided to stay with Benjamin.

17. Now it seems as though Joseph was still testing them. Would they leave now and go home? Would they abandon Benjamin?

18. The brothers really had no idea if Benjamin was guilty, though it looked that way. Now they were being tested to see if they could

forgive Benjamin, who they thought had brought them all of this trouble.

19. Were they willing to sacrifice Benjamin for their own safety?

20. But Judah expressed their change of heart when he said he would rather stay in Egypt as a bondman (slave) than go back and see his father die of a broken heart because of the loss of Benjamin (44:33).

## III. THE PLEA (44:18-34)

1. Judah courteously asked permission to speak to Joseph. Keil and Delitzsch said his "words are those of a heart which makes its owner eloquent, words subdued by wise moderation and overmastering grief, but manly and bold from a deeply-stirred feeling of duty, enhanced by the consciousness of his former guilt" (*Genesis*).

2. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Then Judah drew near and interceded on behalf of his brethren, and in the course of these verses we have one of the most exquisite pieces of literature in the whole world. We observe in the first place the deference and humility with which Judah approaches Joseph – another striking fact, in view of those early dreams. We also observe the beautiful simplicity with which he tells the story of his father and the child of his old age – his youngest one who alone is left of his mother, his brother being dead. The pathos of the recital is also deeply touching and almost perfect as he goes on to show how the old man, bereaved of his two favorite sons, will be brought down to his grave in sorrow. Then the appeal closes with the heroic offer to become a bondman in the place of Benjamin, to sacrifice himself on behalf of his brother" (*Genesis*).

3. "For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father" (44:34).

4. These words prove that Judah was a changed man, and Joseph could not refrain himself from crying (45:1). And everyone heard him cry (45:2).

5. Judah's name means "Praise" (29:35), but for most of his life he did not live up to his name.

6. He was involved in selling Joseph into slavery (37:26). He chose a pagan Canaanite woman to be his wife (38:2).

7. Not to mention the shameful situation with Tamar, his daughter-in-law (38:15-26).

8. But we see here in Genesis 43 and 44 that there had been a remarkable change in Judah. "He comes to the front in these emergencies with great force of character, and the whole tone of his exquisite appeal on behalf of Benjamin shows that he is now living up to his name" (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis*).

9. All the brothers had changed, and the conditions for reconciliation had been met: Conscience had been awakened, sin had been confessed, repentance had been made, and a new life had been evidenced (Theodore Epp).

10. Judah's appeal to Joseph was the crowning proof that they were now repentant and disciplined. And we read later on that Judah's transformation wasn't just a "flash in the pan" (cf. 49:8-10).

11. Because God's work had been accomplished in the lives of the brothers, Joseph was now free to reveal to them his true identity (45:1).

**<u>CONCLUSION</u>:**

Joseph's brothers were far from God, and Joseph knew this better than anyone. Drastic measures had to be taken to bring them to repentance.

Francis Thompson (1859–1907) was an English poet, who moved to London to become a writer, but wound up becoming a homeless opium addict.

After living out in the streets for years, people finally discovered his poetry and some magazine editors published a book of his

poems.

Despite his success in his last years, a lifetime of extreme poverty, ill-health, and opium addiction took a heavy toll on Thompson, and he died from tuberculosis at the age of 47.

Thompson's most famous poem is entitled, "The Hound of Heaven." Thompson believed that the Hound that wouldn't stop chasing him was God, who draws sinners to Himself even as they ignore Him.

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;*

*I fled Him, down the arches of the years;*

*I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways*

*Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears*

*I hid from Him, and under running laughter.*

*Up vistaed hopes I sped;*

*And shot, precipitated,*

*Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,*

*From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.*