

Genesis 43, 44

Helps for Bible Study on the Book of Genesis

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The Second Meeting of Joseph and His Brothers

I. The trip to Egypt of the brothers, including Benjamin (Gen. 43)

A. Jacob permits Benjamin to accompany the brothers to Egypt (vss. 1-14)

1. It is Judah who takes the lead in persuading Jacob to let Benjamin go (vs. 3).

a. Evidently, Judah has the preeminence over his brothers (cf. also Gen. 44:14, 16, 18ff.). How is this to be explained?

1) Had God determined, eternally, to favor Judah above all his brother? In what way? Confer Gen. 49:8-10.

2) Ordinarily, the oldest boy in the family held the position of superiority. Now, Reuben, Simeon and Levi were older than Judah. How did these three disqualify themselves?

a) Regarding Reuben, confer Gen. 35:22 and 49: 3, 4

b) Regarding Simeon and Levi, confer Gen 34, especially vss 25, 30 and Gen 49:5-7.

b. Judah finally overcomes Jacob's reluctance to let Benjamin go, by promising to "be surety for him" (vs.9).

1) In other words, what does Judah promise, here?

2) Is Judah serious when he makes this promise? Confer Gen. 44:32-34.

2. Jacob's attitude as he sends Benjamin away (vss. 11-14).

a. What is Jacob's spiritual condition, as revealed by his attitude, in the grievous trial of having to bid farewell to the beloved Benjamin?

b. Does his remark in verse 14, "If I be bereaved, I am bereaved," which reminds one of Esther's "If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16), show Jacob to be a pessimist, at this time? This would mean spiritual doubt, weakness of faith.

c. Does the fact that Jacob both appeals to "God Almighty" (vs. 14) and sends a present (vs. 11) manifest an attitude similar to that expressed in the phrase, "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition?"

1) This would mean that Jacob supposes that his welfare depends partially on God and partially on himself.

2) Perhaps, Jacob's old trait reappears, that, namely, of attempting to help God along.

d. Or, are we to conclude from Jacob's mention of God's mercy in verse 14 that he serenely trusted in God with the confidence of faith?

1) Verse 11 calls the patriarch, "Israel," his name of victory-through-faith.

2) That Jacob advises the boys to carry a present to Joseph does not necessarily show a weak faith since faith does not produce carelessness but a diligent use of the best means.

B. The brothers' second appearance before Joseph (vss. 15-34).

1. Why did Joseph's invitation of the brothers to dinner trouble them?

2. Does the speech of Joseph's steward in verse 23 indicate that Joseph had instructed the steward and, perhaps, his entire household in the truth of the one God and His salvation?
3. Why did the Egyptians consider it an "abomination" to eat bread with the Hebrews (vs. 32)? Confer, also, Gen 46:34. What good purpose will this serve, when the Hebrews come to Egypt to live?
4. Is Joseph's special regard for Benjamin (vs 34) merely an expression of his special love for his full brother or is it also part of Joseph's deliberate testing of the other boys?
 - a. Remember that Joseph's main purpose in having Benjamin brought to Egypt was to test the brothers.
 - b. Once, the brothers reacted with hatred when they saw that Joseph was favored above them (cf. Gen. 37:3, 4).

II. The final trial of the brothers (Gen 44).

A. The Trial.

1. Joseph has a precious cup hidden in Benjamin's sack.
 - a. Not only valuable because of its material worth but because like a crystal-ball, it is (supposedly) used for "divining," that is, magically foretelling future events.
 - b. Are we to conclude from Joseph's command to the steward (vs. 5) that Joseph actually practiced such nonsense or even that he deceived the Egyptians into thinking that he did?
 - 1) That superstition was common among the Egyptians "which consisted in pouring clean water into a goblet and then looking into the water for representations of future events..." (Keil, Commentary of the Pentateuch, Vol 1)
 - 2) Calvin accuses Joseph of the sin of catering to the notions of pagan Egypt, by pretending that he could foretell the future by means of this magical bowl.
 - 3) However:
 - a) Joseph does not say that he does this. He only asks the brothers a question that impresses on them that this cup is valuable, a question which is in keeping with their idea of him as an Egyptian (vss. 4, 5 and 15).
 - b) This would be the only instance in the entire account of Joseph, in which Scripture portrays Joseph as committing sin.
 - c) When he explained to Pharaoh his ability to interpret dreams and predict the future, Joseph did not speak of inherent powers or magic but gave the glory to God (cf. Gen. 41: 16ff).
 - c. The steward, then, accuses the brothers of theft, which is all the more heinous because it is ingratitude for Joseph's kindness.
2. Joseph's intention with this trial.
 - a. The brothers will have an opportunity to abandon Benjamin in Egypt.
 - 1) Joseph demands only the punishment of the one in whose sack the cup is; the rest may return to Canaan.
 - 2) As once they sold Joseph into Egypt as a slave and, thus, got rid of the one beloved of their father, so, now, the brothers can rid themselves of Benjamin, whom Jacob loves.

- 3) The question as to their spiritual condition will be conclusively answered in this way.
 - b. Undoubtedly, Joseph is not indifferent but hopes that they will reveal themselves as changed and, in fact, desires to lead them, by this severe trial, to a purer godliness.
- B. The outcome of the trial.
1. The brothers pass the test.
 - a. They reject the opportunity of leaving Benjamin with the steward and going on themselves, and, instead, return to Joseph.
 - b. Through Judah, their spokesman, they acknowledge their worthiness of this affliction, even though they are innocent of this alleged crime, because of their “iniquity” (vs 16).
 - 1) They trace in all of this misery the chastising hand of God.
 - 2) Judah has in mind their iniquity in the matter of Joseph (cf. Gen. 42:21).
 - c. They refuse Joseph’s offer to let them all go safely except Benjamin (vs. 17).
 2. Judah’s intercession for Jacob and Benjamin.
 - a. Judah stands out, again, but not as if the others felt differently—all have changed.
 - b. Judah is motivated by love for his father and brother, even though the same occasion for jealous hatred of Benjamin exists that once did in regard to Joseph (cf. vss. 20, 27-31).
 - c. So far is Judah, reflecting the attitude of the others also, from desiring Benjamin’s harm that, on the contrary, he is willing to take Benjamin’s place as a slave in Egypt.
 - 1) It was this same Judah who once took the lead in selling Joseph into Egypt (cf. Gen 37:26, 27).
 - 2) May we find in Judah’s stirring offer to take Benjamin’s place and punishment, a type of the Surety-ship of Judah’s great Son, Jesus Christ?
 - d. At this conclusive evidence of the brothers’ godliness, that is, the love of the brother for God’s sake which is willing to lay down one’s own life for the brother, Joseph cannot hold back any longer.
 - 1) He has not been watching the brothers’ plight with unholy glee.
 - 2) He can hardly wait—and now he need not any longer—to soothe their souls, pour on them his love, and fellowship with them.

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