

“...let the lad go...”

Christians can be subjected to many trials and tribulations. Sometimes, when we think certain trials are all over and we try to relax, yet another trial emerges, suddenly and more furiously. We are caught by surprise and have to ‘catch up’ with God, to maintain our spiritual balance.

Is this not exactly what happened to king David? He was strolling on his rooftop in the evening, relaxing between wars. He looked down and saw a beautiful woman and desired her. This led him eventually to lose his kingdom to his son; the woman’s husband was deliberately put into a place of battle where David knew he would be killed, and the subsequent child also died. It all came from David taking his eye off the battlefield. He was attacked not by a direct enemy in mortal combat, but by Satan, who made him feel as if trials were over with for a while. Then, like a cobra, he struck and the venom entered David’s soul. The same fate has come to many faithful pastors in the past, even today! It is Satan’s way of ruining a local church.

Do not relax between attacks! The enemy waits for just such a moment, and then sinks his vile fangs into us, sometimes even without us knowing. We are called to be soldiers, ready for battle even in-between battles. There can be no relaxation, only a spare moment of rest and peace in the Lord. Even at rest, never take your eyes off Christ, or forget your vigilance.

Joseph’s brothers were afraid the first time they left Egypt. Now, they were to be utterly devastated. They thought they had compensated for the first problem, even though they had done nothing wrong. Now, they knew the great pontiff of all Egypt would not tolerate a second error, and were ready to give in to any punishment he might give them. The situation arose out of nowhere, and it caught them by surprise.

As Believers it is wise to always expect trouble to hit us, but to live in peace with God, so that when we are hit by Satan’s wickedness, we will be ready to stand firmly if not to fight back. We are soldiers, warriors, not couch-heroes!

As I write this study I must remind myself of this truth, for I have experienced even this week, what I am now talking about. I should never be surprised if I am attacked. Nor should I forget that God will, and does, provide rest at times. Even then, I must be ready, for Satan will never sleep and is busy at all times finding new ways to make us fall.

Genesis 44

Written by K B Napier
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Verses 1-3

1.

“And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man's money in his sack's mouth.

2.

And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, and his corn money. And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken.

3.

As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their asses.”

The brothers were soothed into a relaxed state of mind by the feast and drink. But, Joseph still had some surprises for them. He ordered his steward to put grain into their sacks for the home journey, and to again put their money back into the sacks.

Then, he decided to add to their ‘guilt’ by putting in one of his personal silver drinking cups (it could have been a small drinking bowl), in the sack to be carried by Benjamin. It was done as Joseph commanded, and, at day-break the brothers led their asses laden with grain, out of the city to return home. It seems that Joseph wanted to keep his brothers with him, but could not bring himself to tell them who he was. So, he invented a reason to cause them to be brought back. Was he wrong to act in this way? We cannot say.

Verses 4-13

1.

“And when they were gone out of the city, and not yet far off, Joseph said unto his steward, Up, follow after the men; and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them, Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good?

2.

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Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth? ye have done evil in so doing.

3.

And he overtook them, and he spake unto them these same words.

4.

And they said unto him, Wherefore saith my lord these words? God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing:

5.

Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again unto thee out of the land of Canaan: how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold?

6.

With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen.

7.

And he said, Now also let it be according unto your words; he with whom it is found shall be my servant; and ye shall be blameless.

8.

Then they speedily took down every man his sack to the ground, and opened every man his sack.

9.

And he searched, and began at the eldest, and left at the youngest: and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

10.

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Then they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city.”

Joseph waited until the brothers had gone a short distance before ordering his steward to take soldiers to find them. He was to stop them and ask: ‘Why have you accepted my master’s goodness, and repaid him with evil?’

He was then to search them and find the cup in Benjamin’s sack. ‘Is this not my lord’s cup, the one he uses to divine? You have indeed repaid him with evil!’

This verse is very interesting, for it says that Joseph used a cup to divine with. Cups were used for this purpose to tell fortunes, or to interpret signs. Does this mean Joseph was a diviner – when divination was called evil later by God, to be punishable by death?

The practice this text appears to point to is ‘scrying’, when a cup was filled with water and gazed into to foretell the future. Some commentators try to say the *steward* said Joseph could divine, *not*

Joseph – but later Joseph admits to it. The practice was common in those days and, as yet, God had not spoken against it. So, we can only say that Joseph could divine. There appears to be no condemnation from God or the writer of the book, and Joseph’s life was otherwise exemplary. Therefore, we may not condemn him either at this stage in history. It is even possible that Joseph divined in this way by God’s permission. We do not have an answer.

The brothers were shocked and overcome; had they not escaped punishment the first time? Then, too, they were unaware the money had been put back into their sacks. Though they were innocent this time also, they feared the worse. ‘Why should we do such a thing, my lord? God forbid we should be so evil!’

In an effort to remain on friendly terms with the steward, they reminded him that they previously brought back the money they found before, so why should they now spoil their own chances by stealing silver or gold from Joseph? Then they said ‘If you find the cup in anyone’s sack, let that man die... and we shall become your master’s slaves.’

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The steward responded: 'Okay, that's how we will have it, and whoever stole the cup will become my slave – the rest of you can return home freely.' The brothers took their sacks from the backs of the asses and opened them ready to be searched. The brothers were confident nothing would be found, because they knew they had not stolen anything. But, the steward's find shot through their hearts like a bolt. The steward and soldiers searched, starting with the eldest, and, of course, found the cup in Benjamin's sack.

The brothers were beside themselves and ripped their clothing in distress, before returning again to the city to face their fate, heads down and shoulders slumped.

Verses 14-18

1.

"And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house; for he was yet there: and they fell before him on the ground.

2.

And Joseph said unto them, What deed is this that ye have done? wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?

3.

And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found.

4.

And he said, God forbid that I should do so: but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father."

The hapless band was led back to Joseph's house, who was waiting for them, and when the brothers saw him they fell prostrate to the ground before him. Before, this was their sign of his

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status, but now it was a sign of their fear and desire for mercy.

In mock anger Joseph demanded to know why they had done such a foul deed; did they not know he could divine what they had done? Judah was speechless: 'What can we say my lord? How can we show you we are innocent? We have done wrong and God has found us out – the one who stole it, and we who are his brethren!' They knew they were not guilty, but before the pontiff of Egypt there was no point in pleading this, when the cup was found before their very eyes. They knew they simply had to accept any mercy or punishment Joseph cared to give them. He had the power of life and death, and that was that.

They said they would all become Joseph's slaves as a just punishment, but Joseph would not have it. 'God forbid I should do that,' he said, 'only the man who stole the cup shall be my slave. The rest of you can go back home in peace to your father.'

Verses 18-34

1.

"Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh.

2.

My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother?

3.

And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him.

4.

And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him.

5.

And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his

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father would die.

6.

And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more.

7.

And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord.

8.

And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food.

9.

And we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us.

10.

And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons:

11.

And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since:

12.

And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

13.

Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life;

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14.

It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave.

15.

For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever.

16.

Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.

17.

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.”

Judah was beside himself. He approached Joseph, which was itself a dangerous thing to do, and began to beg to be heard: ‘Please don’t let your anger consume me – it is in your power not to turn against me, because you have the same authority and power as Pharaoh.’ Judah then began to relate all that had happened, trying to make Joseph remember when they last met.

He reminded Joseph that his father would surely die of grief if anything happened to Benjamin, after Joseph insisted on seeing the youngest brother. Jacob was emotionally torn, and said ‘Joseph has already been ripped apart by wild beasts; if anything should happen to Benjamin I will die of grief.’

Judah then came to the last part of his petition: ‘So, you see, my father’s very life is bound with Benjamin, and if we return home without him he will die. I gave him my solemn word that I would bring him home again safely – please keep me as your slave instead, so that the lad can go back to his father. I cannot return home without him, just to see my father die of grief.’

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The brothers must have been listening and waiting with immense anxiety, knowing that if Judah failed in his plea, their father would die quickly. They were indeed fulfilling the prophecies Joseph related to them years before, that told of his brothers bowing down before him and being his servants. God's plans always come to pass, no matter what objections we might throw back. If God has planned anything for us and we refuse to act according to His will, then we will miss whatever blessings He wishes to give us; but His plan will nevertheless go ahead, with or without our cooperation... our very refusal being a part of that plan.

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