

Handout: Genesis Lesson 18

...we must believe that he wearied them with so many tribulations, in order to arouse them to a confession of their sin and the healing of repentance. Finally, with great grief they said they suffered those ills deservedly, because they had sinned against their brother, "whose anguish of heart they witnessed." Since blessed Joseph knew that his brothers could not be forgiven their sin of murder without much penance, one, twice and a third time he worried them with salutary trials as with a spiritual fire. His purpose was not to vindicate himself but to correct them and free them from so grave a sin.

Caesarius Bishop of Arles (470-543 AD), *Book of Promises and Predictions of God 1.30.42 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament, vol. II, page 277).*

Joseph put his brothers through a series of three trials:

1. The first test was the brothers' three day imprisonment which was intended to cause them to come to terms with their sin against him.
2. The second was a test of their willingness to rescue their brother Simeon by bringing their brother Benjamin to Egypt and returning the money Joseph put in the sacks of the pack animals.
3. The third was a test of their willingness to sacrifice their freedom for the life of their youngest brother.

This section of the narrative can be divided into three parts:

1. The steward's test of the brothers' loyalty and integrity (44:1-13).
2. Joseph's test of Judah's loyalty and sense of self-sacrifice (44:14-34).
3. Joseph's revelation of his true identity and the offer of reconciliation (45:1-15)

The key words are "father," used 20 times in this part of the narrative (found 40 times total), and "brother" found 16 times in this part of the narrative (40 times total).

The Hebrew word used of Joseph's cup suggests it was not an ordinary cup or goblet but a cup specially used for mixing wine and communal drinking. In the ancient Near East divining the future through observation of the action of liquids (lecanomancy) was a common practice, especially by private individuals because it was less costly than divination by animal entrails (extispicy). There were three types of lecanomancy using liquids:

1. Hydromancy: Pouring water into oil and observing the surface patterns of the oil and water.
2. Oelomancy: Pouring oil into water and observing the surface patterns of the liquids.
3. Oenomancy: Pouring wine into another liquid and observing the surface patterns of the liquids.