

## Day 28 of “Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”

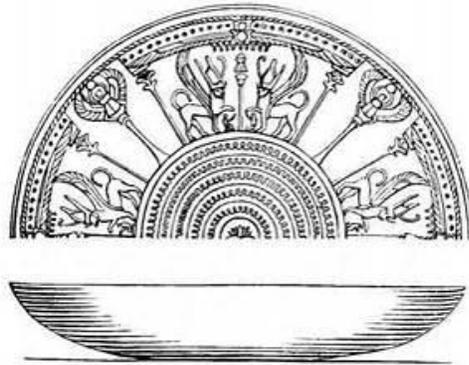
**Jan. 28, 2016**

- Genesis 44 – Joseph, Benjamin, and Judah.
- Hebrews 8-9 – Christ as Mediator of a better covenant (8); Earthly & Heavenly Sanctuaries (9)
- Ecclesiastes 11:1-4 – Diligence and divine providence.

### Reflections:

1. Genesis 44. Overview: Joseph is using Benjamin to test his brothers and to get them to recognize their evil. If they failed this test, if they had no compassion for this second son of Rachel, then perhaps they would have no part in the fulfillment of the promises. God could start over again and make Joseph into a great nation if the others proved unworthy (cf. Ex. 32:10). The brothers demonstrate that they had repented of their sin against their brother Joseph (“God has uncovered your servants’ guilt,” 44:16). Note their concern for their father and their youngest brother Benjamin in that they would have preferred Egyptian slavery to breaking their father’s heart (44:33–34). This is a far different attitude than they had when they threw Joseph into the pit many years hence. It is important to understand that spiritual growth is all about the change of character, it is about gaining virtue, spiritual and theological virtue. Apart from growth in virtue as a human being and as a Christian, we are not really growing at all. It is virtue that enables the believer to grow closer to the Lord and thus better through adversity in life—and it is adversity that reveals more of where we are with the Lord than anything else. Are we more loving of God and others, especially fellow believers, than we were, say, five or ten years ago? Or have we become more sour and skeptical? The love that the brothers display for both Benjamin and their father indicates that their character had improved. It really is all about becoming better, more like Christ, than we were and the trials of life are the most effective means of advancing us.

- **Archaeological confirmation of the “divining cup.”** The technique of divining by means of a cup is well known from the ancient world. It took various forms: the use of water (hydromancy), oil (oleomancy), or wine (oenomancy). The practitioner professed to be able to interpret either the surface patterns formed when a few drops of one liquid were poured onto another or the movement of objects floating on or sinking in the fluid. The aim of the exercise was to determine the future, to locate the source of trouble, or to apportion blame or credits. The legislation in Deuteronomy 18:10 outlawed divination in Israel. Whether Joseph actually practiced divination, or only pretended to do so, or merely instructed his steward to ask an ironical question, is not clear. The standard conservative position is that Joseph did not practice divination. The point here is that the mention of this cup confirms the historicity of this narrative: archaeology confirms that divining cups were used among the Egyptians. Here is a picture:



2. Hebrews 8-9. After the writer of Hebrews speaks about the new and better covenant (8), he introduces the superior sacrifice of Christ (9). He notes that humans are sinful and destined to die once, and after that to face judgment. But *then* he says that this judgment is turned aside by the fact that Christ was sacrificed once (*hapax*, cf. v. 26) to take away the sins of many people. The recurrence of “once” (9:26, 28) and of “once for all” (7:27; 9:12; 10:10) stresses the finality and the singleness of Christ’s sacrificial work in contrast with the repeated Levite ministrations. As I mentioned in our last Bible class, the gift of salvation, which includes forgiveness plus the gift of imputed divine righteousness, is the most precious gift that we possess. We never have to worry about the loss of salvation and regardless of where we or our loved ones are on our spiritual journey, Christ has paid the complete penalty for our sins. That’s grace! It is the freedom from condemnation that provides the motivation to live unto Him instead of being enslaved in sin. What a gift!
  
3. Ecclesiastes 11:1-4. While Ecclesiastes discourages the pursuit of wealth, it favors wise investment and diligent work. Verses 1–2 speak of long-term investment. To “give portions to seven or eight” is, in modern terminology, *to diversify investments*. While we should look out for dangers on the horizon, we cannot allow ourselves to be so cautious that we do nothing. Better to recognize that all things are in God’s hands and proceed with our work with an eye toward all possible contingencies. The fact of the matter is that God is in control and we are not. He picks the parts we play. All we can do is determine the kind of character in His Story. I was asked after Bible class what do we say to someone who asks why God created Satan knowing that he would tempt Adam and Eve to fall into sin, which would result in sin spreading death to all men and destruction throughout our planet. The bottom line is that God has a great good in mind in all evil and tragedies. Only He can bring a great good out of a painful tragedy. If I was asked “why?” by an unbeliever, I would direct the questioner to reflect on the sufferings of Christ. Why did God orchestrate a plan that included Christ being beaten, stripped naked, and mocked on the Cross? After all, none of this degradation and cruelty at the hands of man had any atoning value. God could have constructed a plan whereby Christ was born in the Temple in opulence, and then “zap” Him with our sins. However, God wanted us to see the love of God manifested by the sufferings. As far as Satan, a world that includes Satan, unbelievers, and believers, all acting in free will, is far better than a world in which nothing exists. More in our next Bible class as we move into the problem of evil and the sufferings of Christ. In sum, God has a greater good for every individual that goes

through sufferings than is possible without the sufferings. They really are the means to a greater spiritual life—this we find throughout the Word of God even if it is denied in many modern evangelical movements. What are we doing with our sufferings, becoming more bitter and callous or using them to grow in the greatest of all virtues: love for Christ?

**1 Peter 1:6** In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

On the Glory Road,

Pastor Don