

(c)Dr Russell Jay Hendel; Jun 2026

VERSES: *Gn44-18a, Gn44-18b, Gn44-18c, Gn44-20a, Gn44-22b, Gn44-29a, Gn44-29b, Gn44-31a, Gn44-32a, Gn44-33a*

In this dialogue, Judah requests to replace Benjamin so that Benjamin can return home lest, if otherwise, Jacob, his father might enter massive depression. The paragraph is organized into 4 parts: Introduction, Joseph's non-standard treatment, the cooperation with Joseph, request for Judah to replace Benjamin.

Part I-Introduction: Judah approached him [Joseph] and said: May your servant please bring to your attention a matter and don't get angry at your servant (1) *since you are like Pharaoh* (1).

Part II-Non-standard treatment of us: My lord asked your servants as follows: Do you have a father or brother (3)

Part III-We fully cooperated with your unusual requests: We answered my lord (4): We have an elderly father with a young child, whose brother died (5), who was the sole survivor of his mother; his father adores him.

My lord said, *bring him down to me so I can place my eyes on him* (3).

We said to our master *the child can't leave his father; if he left his father he might die* (6). You said to your servants *if he doesn't come down with you [to acquire food] you will not be allowed to see me.*

When we went back up to your servant our father we informed him of our lord's wishes

Our father said: *return and acquire more food*

We said: *We may not go down unless our younger brother is with us because we were prohibited from seeing the person without our younger brother*

Our father your servant said to us: *You know that my wife gave birth to two children. One left me, I think he was probably mauled* (5) *and I have not seen him till now; if you take this one and an accident happens* (6) *then you will bring down my old age to hell.*(7)

If now, I come to my father and the child is not with me then since his soul is bound to his soul, when he sees that the lad is not there he might die from anguish and your servant will place your servant our father in massive depression.

Part IV: For (8) Your servant guaranteed the lad from my father as follows: *If I don't bring him back then I will be in sin with you eternally.* Now, let your servant replace the lad (9) as a servant to my lord and let the lad go back with his brothers. For otherwise how could I go up to my father and the lad is not with me; less I see the evil that finds my father.

NOTES:

(1) I combined these two Rashis (Gn44-18b,c). The first Rashi comment emphasizes that the nuances of Judah's speech had harsh overtones while the 2nd Rashi brings out the overtones. Although Rashi cites many overtones the two most relevant ones to the overall paragraph are:

(a) You are like Pharaoh implying you can undo a decree of yours [While an example of

Joseph's power to retract his own words is not brought explicitly by Rashi, we point out the obvious that in fact Joseph originally wanted 11 brothers imprisoned and in the end said *I fear God*, he changed his mind, and only imprisoned one brother.

(b) Pharaoh's ancestor tried to marry Sarah and was severely punished leading to him cancelling his plans.

The overall gist of Judah's remarks were, *You are like the Pharaohs: you fear God like your ancestors and you can change.*

(2) Item #2 is Rashi comment Gn44-18c which we have combined with Gn44-18b in item #1 above.

(3) There are 4 themes to Judah's speech which we have labeled Parts I-IV. In this second part (as illuminated by the Ramban) Judah points out that the entire interrogation about the brother's family was very peculiar, not done to others who request food, and appears to be a machination. Several parts of Judah's speech fit into this; they are footnoted as item (3) being supportive of the theme of non-standard treatment by Joseph.

(4) In our current text of Rashi this is not a separate Rashi comment. But Rashi already cites the Midrash Rabbah in item #(3) with emphasis *despite your strange and unusual questioning we cooperated*. This seems to be a separate theme and hence I reconstructed it as a separate Rashi comment. This entire Part III besides continuing the theme of unusual requests shows cooperation with all requests.

(5) This statement, *Joseph is dead* contradicts previous dialogues between Joseph and his brothers saying *we are seeking him*. Rashi explains that Judah changed both their story and projected it onto their father; the purpose of the lie was to prevent further requests from Joseph to *bring him to me* (Gn44-20a)

(6,9) Rashi interpolates Judah's words. *His mother died while on travel and Benjamin might die the same way*. Similarly, when Judah offers to *replace Benjamin*, he probably pointed out that as measured by *service, fighting, and might* he could be of better use to Joseph.

(7) Rashi shows the way Judah built up the emotional impact on Jacob: *He lost his wife and his other son; this son, Benjamin, is the only remnant of his relationship. If you take him away Jacob will disintegrate and enter massive depression.*(Gn44-29b, Gn44-31a)

(8) Of the four parts of Judah's dialogue, this Part begins with *for, since, or because*. It ties back to Judah's original request (Part I): *Please don't be angry but give me your full attention for I was a guarantee for Benjamin even though I was not involved in the theft.*(Gn44-32a)