

# **GENESIS**

## **A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY**

***THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB***

**DR CHARLES VOGAN**

## THE REVELATION OF THE SON (*GENESIS 45*)

Every good story has a climax where all the characters and plot development finally come together for the grand unveiling. It's here when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers that the entire book of Genesis reaches its climax. We've seen the failure of the son (Adam, in Genesis 3), the calling of Abraham to form a new heir and son of God, the nature of the life of the son (born by miracle – Isaac), and the son's desperate struggle for the Firstborn's inheritance (Jacob). We've watched Joseph prepare for something great – not by his own doing, but by God's slow and painful ways to raise him from slavery and prison to Pharaoh's second-in-command. And now Joseph's brothers were facing him in his court, abject and fearful for their lives, not knowing who he really was – and the time came to reveal himself.

It turns out that *this* is the son that God has prepared to gather his people together to form the Firstborn son of God (the name by which Israel was called later in Exodus). Here is the *perfect son*, a son pleasing to the Father, who is like his Father and works his Father's will for the sake of the Family of God. The brothers (and Jacob when he arrived in Egypt later) were looking at the image of the Son of God on earth doing the very work that Christ does for his Church. In Joseph were found all the qualities of God's Son that are so necessary to the task.

And because this is God's work, the formation of the son and his skills and responsibilities were God's doing. All the issues of Creation, of the Covenant, of pagans and believers, the culmination of the work so far and its preservation, the foundation stones being set for millennia to come not only for Jews but also for Christians, are found in the placement of Joseph in this key moment of history. And Joseph knew this.

**Only to the Family** – What Joseph was about to show his brothers was not for people outside the Family. He sent his attendants out of the room; and though they heard him crying, they didn't know what was going on. In fact, Joseph probably reverted to speaking Hebrew when talking to his brothers.

What God was about to do through Joseph would impact the Egyptians, but it wasn't for their spiritual welfare. In the end the Egyptians would be punished for what they did to the Israelites. The love within the Family, the Covenant blessings, the special relationship with God, is only for the Family. Our modern notion of preaching the love of God to the pagans is entirely wrong.

Joseph loved his brothers, not the Egyptians.

**Loved his Family** – But if you're in the Family, you're going to see a side of the LORD that you didn't expect to see at all. Joseph came to pieces in front of his brothers. In spite of what they did to him, he had a passionate love for them; he had been aching inside for years to see them again. The reunion overwhelmed him, particularly since now he was in a position to not only make everything right between them, but also to richly bless them. Whatever they had done, they were still his brothers: not servants, not strangers, but his Family. This reunion and rectification had been on his heart for all these years.

If the brothers needed any proof that this strange yet somehow familiar man wasn't going to hurt them, here it was. Whether they deserved his love is another matter; but there was no question that all the problems were put into the past forever, and from here on they were going to be treated like royalty. When the second-in-command over all Egypt loves you deeply, you may still be painfully aware of your own shortcomings, but there is no question about what the future holds for you. The war is over.

**No idea who he was** – Even at this point in the story, the brothers still didn't know who Joseph was. Consider that Joseph had been in Egypt a number of years, had grown older, and no doubt looked like the rest of the Egyptians. And when he was dressed in his royal regalia he certainly didn't look like his former Hebrew self.

When Joseph had lived with his family before his slavery, there were no signs of the glory that he would one day have. Even though he told them the dreams about him ruling over them in the future, there was nothing there in his appearance or demeanor that supported his claim. “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” (Isaiah 53:2) The whole thing had to be taken on faith or they would simply not believe his story.

And now when he appeared before them in his glory, they still didn't make the connection, even though he had clearly warned them before that this would happen.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. (Revelation 1:17)

**Revelation** – The key to understanding this chapter is the concept of *revelation*. Up until this point the Egyptians didn't know anything about what God was doing through Joseph. Joseph's brothers had no idea that he was still alive. Add to that the fact that they were standing in front of him and *still* didn't know who he was! So the time had come for Joseph to reveal himself to everyone – to the Egyptians and to his family.

It's simple but profoundly important: the only one who knows the truth must tell the rest of us the truth. He alone is the source, the only one who can enlighten the rest of us. Our opinions would never get to the heart of the matter, because there's no possible way we can see things from his perspective.

The act of revelation is an essential step in all the works of God. God “moves in mysterious ways.” His eternal work is spiritual in nature; it's beyond the reach of our senses and even of our intellect. The only way we can see or understand what God is doing is if he shines his light on the situation and shows us – indeed, makes us *able* to see and understand his glory.

This is why true Christianity is founded firmly on God's Revelation, his Word, that explains to us what we cannot find out on our own. The Word of God is the only true explanation of the works and realities that we handle in our faith: it comes from God alone, not from the mind of man. Any time we see something religious that is not based on that first step of God revealing his spiritual world to us in his Word, it's not true Christianity. It's a false religion.

**Explanation** – Along with the idea of revelation comes *explanation*. There was much that the brothers didn't know anything about; the last they had seen

Joseph, he was being dragged off to Egypt by the slave traders. They knew nothing about his bondage in Egypt, his experience with Potiphar, his time in prison, the dreams that he interpreted, his meteoric rise in Pharaoh's court, or his current status in Egypt. Between the event of his being sold to the slavers and his standing before them now in power was a perfectly rational and sensible explanation for everything. But it was understandable only when Joseph explained it to them; they could never have dreamed up something like this on their own. *Now* the situation became clear to them. But only now could Joseph reveal to them God's plan, because before this would not have been the right time for them to know (they would never have believed it!). The time had finally come for them to be let into God's mystery so that they could take part in the plan of the fulfillment of the Covenant.

This shows God's inclination (the Bible calls it his "ways") to leave us in the dark until the time is right. Knowledge of the future would not be helpful to us, and probably would be harmful or dangerous. But when the time comes, once all the pieces are in place, he explains what he's doing to his people so that they can now take the appropriate steps to cooperate with his unfolding plans.

**What do the brothers see?** What Joseph was showing them – what *God* was showing them in Joseph – is the Perfect Son to whom the entire Genesis Covenant has been leading.

What did they see?

- They saw a *new life*. Joseph had changed completely – once the despised eleventh son of Jacob, now the second in command of Egypt,

rich and powerful. He wasn't at *their* mercy anymore.

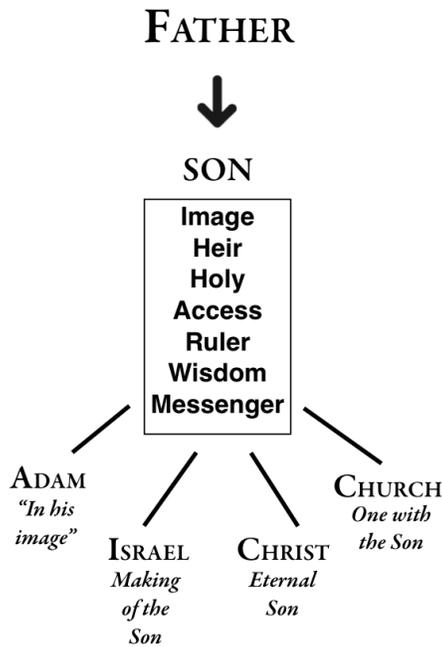
- They saw the *treasures* of the Covenant inheritance. Joseph had all the resources of Egypt at his disposal; in fact he (and Pharaoh) told them they didn't even need to bring their possessions back from Canaan; whatever they wanted of the treasures of Egypt would be theirs.
- They saw the *Priest* who would intercede for them with God and with Pharaoh. Nobody would deny Joseph's requests on their behalf; in fact, the powers of Egypt would willingly comply with his decrees concerning them.
- They saw the *Deliverer* who would rescue them from the famine and trials coming upon them in Canaan and bring them into a rich land where they could settle down in peace and prosperity. Their troubles were over; the past was behind them and forgotten.
- They saw the *Ruler*, the man in authority, the one to whom they must all submit in complete subjection and obedience. His rule over them was for their good in the end – not only would he pull the Family together (for which he required their complete submission), but he also would arrange circumstances within Egypt to make sure they were not molested and would be treated with special honor. And, knowing his sterling character, they could trust him with their lives.
- They saw *wisdom*. Joseph understood the times, he knew Pharaoh's heart, he knew the mind

of God and what God had planned for the entire Middle East, he knew exactly what had to be done to save both Egypt and Jacob's Family.

- They saw the *Prophet* who had spoken the Word of God to them. Through Joseph they were in touch with their God. Whatever Joseph spoke to them was the Truth, the will and Word of God, and must be obeyed as such.

There was a woman in the New Testament who saw the same glory in the man Jesus, and she fell on her knees before him in humiliation and submission. For her faith in him, the King forgave her of her sins. (Luke 7:36-50)

These seven aspects of God's Perfect Son have shown up in the Bible's history in four ways.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> See *Biblical Theology for Pastors and Teachers* for a more complete treatment of the Father/Son relationship.

What Adam was created to be to glorify God, what Israel was trained to be all through her 2000-year history (beginning with Joseph), what Christ was by nature and was revealed to us in the Gospels, what Christ is forming his Church to be now – this is what Joseph was in his day, just when God required it. This is, in fact, the kind of “New Man” that God had in mind when he started working on Abraham's Family, one who would be fitted to live in his “new heavens and new earth” in eternity.

This is the Perfect Son that Genesis has been building up to. It's the first complete instance of the kind of Son that God wants to see; we then see it again in Israel's history; and finally on a magnificent scale in the New Testament. The Son is ruling over both Gentiles and Family to bring everything to a harmonious whole, in fulfillment of the Covenant made with Abraham. He alone has the necessary character, skills and resources to accomplish the work to God's satisfaction.

But it all had to happen in another world, not this one. Joseph's removal to Egypt was necessary. Establishing the foundation for the Nation of Israel was not possible in the circumstances previous to his removal.

**Pharaoh's response** – It's a mistake to put too much emphasis on Pharaoh in this situation. Joseph saw the situation as it really was: God gave Joseph complete power over Egypt to the extent that Pharaoh put everything in his hands to deal with it according to his wisdom and skills. “I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:44) Joseph knew that God had made him the real ruler of Egypt. As he explained the situation to his brothers –

He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (verse 8)

Joseph wasn't working for Pharaoh; he was working for God. The real relational axis was not between Joseph and Pharaoh but between Joseph and his father Jacob. Pharaoh was only a marginal character to this story. Joseph wasn't working on Egypt's agenda, but Jacob's. Joseph was bringing together Abraham's Family to set the foundation of Israel as a Nation; the fact that he was also securing Egypt's well-being was a sideshow. In Joseph's hands the Abrahamic Covenant, the inheritance of the Firstborn that Jacob so valued, was now a sure and certain event in the annals of history. What was started with Abraham was brought to a climax with Joseph.

God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. (verse 7)

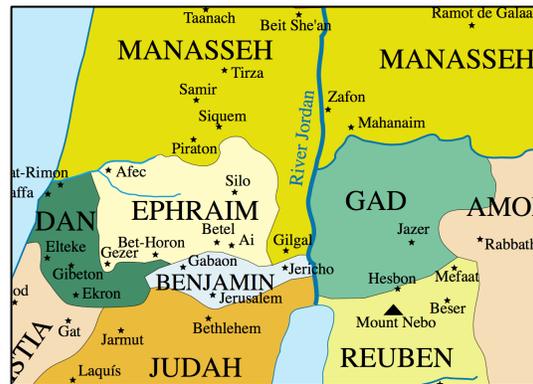
Pharaoh's "command", then, about having Joseph send for his Family and bring them to Egypt was actually no more than his official signature on the decree that Joseph (and God) had already made.

**Benjamin** – Joseph gave gifts to his brothers, but to Benjamin he gave many times more. From a natural point of view this makes sense, because Benjamin and he were full brothers: they both shared the same mother.

But it was also a precursor to what was to come. Joseph, being Jacob's Firstborn son in God's eyes, passed on his part of the Family inheritance to his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Four hundred years later these two tribes

formed the very heart of the land of Israel, dominating the central part of the land. Benjamin's descendants were less numerous, but that tribe received their land right in the center of Israel; not only that, but the future capital city of Jerusalem was inside the Benjamite territory.

So God honored Joseph with the rights of the Firstborn son, and Benjamin with the center of the Kingdom of David.



**Jacob hears and believes** – When the brothers returned home and told their father Jacob about their experiences with Joseph, Jacob was suddenly grappling with two new realities. *First* of all, the son he thought he lost was alive after all. He had been convinced of Joseph's death, he had accepted it, and had lived the last years in light of that. Now the whole world had turned upside down for him and the impossible had happened. This was a virtual "resurrection from the dead!" It probably brought back memories of the story of his father Isaac's reprieve from death, and Abraham's understanding of the event, when the Covenant was hanging in the balance. Isaac's son came back from the grave.

If Jacob's intention from the very beginning (which seems likely) was to

make Joseph his Firstborn heir legally, the plan was back on track now.

*Second*, what was more fantastic and unreal was the fact that Joseph was second in command in Egypt under Pharaoh himself. Nothing in Joseph's life while living in Jacob's house pointed to such an event, and nothing in the normal occurrences of life would have given credibility to such an impossibility. As the saying goes, such things only happen in fairy tales!

Both these new realities came from the testimony of *those who had seen and heard Joseph in his glory in Egypt*. All of the brothers had seen this, they all testified to the same fantastic story. This is the role of the witness of God's works: they testify to the hand of God in miraculous events. Jacob had no recourse but to believe them, though he himself had not yet seen it with his own eyes. And this is the root of true faith as his forefather Abraham had learned, as Israel would learn in its history, and as the Church now learns:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. (Hebrews 11:1-2)

Perhaps in his younger years, when he was so offended with Joseph's dreams that he also must bend the knee to his son's preeminence, Jacob figured that – being the Covenant heir – God would always honor *him* with preeminence over others. Not so: we *all* must live by faith, including the Heir of the Covenant.

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the

righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)

And faith comes from the Word, the reliable testimony of eyewitnesses who have seen and heard the glory of God.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)

**The Point** – The Abrahamic Covenant is always the driving force in the stories of Genesis. In spite of the problems that came up during Jacob's lifetime, especially in regard to his sons, the project was now back on track with Joseph. God was still in charge of things, building the foundation for even bigger things in the future. The Covenant is a complex and massive project that was just beginning to take shape, which everyone in the Family began to realize because of the special role of Joseph in Egypt.

For a time, while Joseph was gone, Jacob and his family were pretty much "lost at sea." Nobody knew what was going to happen next, or what they had to do. The entire Project hung by a thread on the life of a single man tossed about by the events of seemingly adverse circumstances. But this man was created by God to be the Perfect Son who would bring his father Jacob's Family together to a safe place, to grow strong and prosper into a great Nation.

What Joseph so longed for – reunion with his beloved brothers – was effected when he revealed his full glory to them, and they put themselves into his hands as the Designated Heir of the Family.

The Covenant was saved, and the heirs entered into their joy – reorganized into

a new hierarchy.

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