

### The Truth Revealed

In the chapters leading up to the big moment when Joseph, who was very much alive, was revealed to his brothers, we learn a great deal about the Joseph the dreamer. Joseph's God-given gift of prophecy persisted, which placed him in good stead with his Egyptian overlords. Because of his invaluable service to the Egyptian pharaoh, Joseph grew in favor so much that he rose in power and became overseer of all Egypt (Genesis 41:37-43). Although the gift of prophecy is a wondrous gift indeed, there are other reasons to admire this dreamer.

First, Joseph was obviously a young man of virtue as the somewhat tawdry little vignette found in Genesis Chapter 39 demonstrates (the Church Fathers were evidently fond of this point as they discussed it at length in their commentaries on Joseph's story). In addition to his virtue in the face of temptation, we must also look at his occupation. As the pharaoh's *vizier* Joseph could easily have abused his power, grown enormously wealthy and lived a very comfortable life. This was not the case for Joseph, "... *as governor of the country who dispensed the rations to all the people ...*" Genesis 42:6. In this we see the true measure of Joseph. He took the tremendous gifts God gave him and though things did not exactly go his way, and despite a horrific past history with his family, he used those gifts entirely for good. Joseph, a Jewish captive in Egypt, worked tirelessly to ensure that the Egyptian people were spared the ravages of famine coursing through the land. Moreover, although Joseph was entirely within his rights to restrict the rations solely to the Egyptians, scriptures make it clear: "... *since there was famine in the land of Canaan also ...*" Genesis 42:5 the Israelites were taken care of as well. Joseph even provided for his Israelite brothers who had earlier wronged him so dreadfully. Clearly, the actions of Joseph show us that he indeed walked with the Lord every day.

Perhaps we can better understand the magnitude of this reconciliation when we read Genesis Chapter 45. With his brothers gathered around him and with the full pomp and majesty of his power displayed for all to see, it was an obvious time for Joseph to show his power and retaliate against those who had grievously wronged him. Instead, not surprisingly given what we know of the virtuous Joseph, we see the following:

*“Thereupon he flung himself on the neck of his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept in his arms. Joseph then kissed all his brothers, crying over each of them; and only then were his brothers able to talk with him.”* Genesis 45:14-15

As with Esau’s forgiveness of his brother Jacob, both parties had to move for forgiveness to occur. Just as Esau ran to his brother Jacob, Joseph flung himself on the neck of Benjamin, thus moving toward the brothers who came to him. One could even argue that for Joseph the journey was even a little longer and harder than for Esau. Joseph’s brothers only sought forgiveness for the goblet mysteriously placed in Benjamin’s bag of grain in Genesis Chapter 44 and not for their cruel treatment of Joseph. However, the mercy of Joseph’s heart seemingly knew no bounds. When confronted with the men who previously sought his life, even when it was completely in his control to punish them with death, his mercy and virtue shone forth. Where we might have expected retribution, instead we see reconciliation.

#### **The Catechism and Genesis**

*In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an evil, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures: "It was not you", said Joseph to his brothers, "who sent me here, but God . . . You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive."(178) From the greatest moral evil ever committed - the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men - God, by his grace that "abounded all the more", (179) brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, evil never becomes a good. **Catechism of the Catholic Church, No, 312***

#### **The Other Joseph**

Several hundred years later, when a different author wished to describe another virtuous Joseph, all would see in this honorable man, Joseph of the Old Testament. When St. Matthew penned his Gospel in the mid-first Century for the Jewish Christians of his community, no doubt they remembered the first Joseph. The New Testament Joseph, like his Old Testament counterpart, was a paragon of goodness. He was a tremendously loving man who could have quietly divorced Mary when he discovered she was pregnant (Matthew 1:18). Instead he married her, took her into his home and did what the Lord wanted in regard to raising His son. And as He did with Joseph the Dreamer, the Lord chose to communicate with Joseph of the New Testament through dreams - dreams that laid out the future, a future far grander than an escape from famine:

*“...the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’”* Matthew 1:20-21

### **The Magisterium and Genesis**

*We repeat this prayer, as does the whole Catholic world in union with us. We are spurred by a burning love for all men, but also by that interior humility which the gospel teaches. For We know the lowliness of him whom God raised to the dignity of the Sovereign Pontificate, not because of Our merits, but according to His mysterious designs. Wherefore, to all our brethren and sons who are separated from the Chair of Blessed Peter, We say again: "I am ... Joseph, your brother." Come, "make room for us." Pope John XXIII, On Truth, Unity and Peace, 1959*

### **The Forgiveness of Joseph**

And just like that, it is over. What began at the moment of creation (the majestic Priestly version of the origin of the world) ends in an Egyptian court with the death scene of Joseph, the virtuous dreamer. Before it ends, however, we are given the following words from the lips of the dying Joseph:

*"Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die. God will surely take care of you and lead you out of this land to the land that he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'"*

Genesis 50:24

Clearly, the story is not over as there is one question left hanging, which has been present ever since Jacob and his sons left Canaan to journey into Egypt. How will the promise of God be fulfilled? As the Book of Genesis comes to a close, we still do not know the answer. This is by design as the first five books of the Old Testament are meant to be read together. For the Jews these five books were the Torah, the center and heart of their faith. For them the stories in the Book of Genesis were not the most important part of the Torah as they were a preparation for what they believed to be the more important book which followed. These stories served to prepare for the great lawgiver, Moses, and his reception of the laws of God on Mt. Sinai. The story of Joseph, that we studied earlier, serves as our transition. By locating the Jews (the sons of Joseph who were to eventually make up the Twelve Tribes of Israel) in the land of Egypt, the stage is set for Moses (who appears in the next book of the Torah, the Book of Exodus).

These last chapters about Joseph also give you a very strong hint of what is to come and which of the twelve brothers (and their corresponding tribes) will be important in not only the rest of the Torah, but also in Jewish biblical history. If you carefully read Genesis 49:2-26 in the Testament of Jacob, only one of the twelve brothers seems to have a promising future. That brother is Judah of whom it is written, "*the scepter shall never depart from Judah ...*" Genesis 49:10. This is significant for the Jewish readers because it would be from the house of Judah that a king of the Jewish nation would emerge - King David. As you continue to read through the Old Testament you will begin to notice that each book seems to be leading up to King David.

The Jews will at times follow the Lord and at times wander away into pagan practices. However, the absolute highpoint of their history (and indeed the highpoint of the Old Testament from a Jewish perspective) will be the enthronement of David in Jerusalem and the unification of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

### **The Twelve Tribes and Christ**

For Roman Catholics, and indeed for most Christians, the stories surrounding the origins of the twelve tribes, while interesting, don't seem to have all that much significance. To a great extent most of what is discussed has little bearing on salvation history as we understand it. I use the word "most" because part of the story surrounding the Twelve Tribes is of tremendous importance to the story of Christ.

In our discussion of the parallels between Joseph in the Old Testament and Joseph in the New, we briefly discussed how each man was both virtuous and divinely blessed with the ability to communicate with God in dreams. There is one other parallel that we should discuss. Of all the tribes (of all the possible Jewish ancestors of Christ) it is no accident that both Matthew and Luke trace Jesus' lineage back through history to Judah, the son of Jacob from whom King David also came (Matthew 1:3 and Luke 3:33).

### **The Promises**

We now come to the heart of the matter. What is being promised in the Book of Genesis? On a very literal level the Lord God is promising land, progeny and blessing to a particular group of nomadic peoples at a specific time in history. These promises are expanded upon to some extent in the Testament of Jacob. In addition to all of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, now there is an allusion to the formation of a kingdom and the elevation of a king from the house of Judah. What makes the promise of a kingdom all the more striking (and problematic) is that we are also told that "*the scepter shall never depart from Judah ...*" Genesis 49:10. Any student of Israelite history knows that this statement (and similar statements found in 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings) are hard to reconcile with the facts of the Babylonian Captivity. The political entity, known as the Kingdom of Israel, headed by a Davidic king ceased to exist during the Babylonian Captivity (2 Kings 25:27).

Yet, God always keeps his promises. The everlasting covenant with Abraham was precisely that - everlasting. Thus the promise of the kingdom, the land, the blessing and the progeny must have more meaning than what we see. For Christians there can be only one deeper connotation to the story of Genesis. All of it, every story from "*In the beginning...*" Genesis 1:1 to Joseph being laid to rest in Egypt (Genesis 50:26) must be pointing to and preparing us for Christ. At times in the Bible, the path to Christ is a somewhat confusing journey. We travel in foreign lands among people with which we have very little in common, yet this journey leads us precisely to where we should be going - to Christ.

As we discussed in the introduction, the Book of Genesis and indeed all of Sacred Scripture is an account of our relationship to God over the millennia. It is a relationship in which, over the course of these fifty chapters of the Book of Genesis, you can see us as a people, growing closer to our Creator.

Granted, from the standpoint of the Book of Genesis we still have a long, long way to go. The road will be rocky, we will stray off the path and this path will take many into foreign lands.

It will nonetheless lead us back to the Promised Land - the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This journey will lead us to a very small out of the way corner of that Promised Land, to a manger cradling the One in whom all the promises will be fulfilled.