

Joseph

Gen. 37 - 47.

He "that was separated from his brethren."

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For judging the history of Joseph to be typical or allegorical, like that of Hagar and Ishmael and a thousand others in scripture, we have clear warrant of the Holy Ghost. See Acts 7. But without this warrant, the use which in the New Testament is made of the Old Testament narratives, might authorise us to look for some mystery or "hidden wisdom," in none of them so strongly marked as this.

I propose now simply to follow out the series of events in this history, as given us in these chapters, briefly unfolding what I judge to be their mystical or hidden meaning. May the Lord, in such sweet and heavenly labours, both enlarge and control our minds!

Genesis 37 —

This chapter gives us the first part or section in the history.

Joseph here signalises himself as the righteous or separated one, and as such provokes the enmity of his wicked brethren. The light makes manifest the deeds of darkness, and the darkness hates it, as Joseph's Lord was afterwards hated of the world, for He testified that its deeds were evil. And this enmity is only further moved by tokens of the divine favour which are put upon the righteous one. Joseph was a younger son, no way entitled according to the flesh to distinguished favour; yet the Lord marks him out as the appointed heir of blessing and glory, and Joseph speaks of the goodness he had found, and of the high purposes of God concerning him. But his brethren did not care for any divine purpose which interfered with their pride. He might be the one that was to receive the kingdom, but they said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." As Cain had slain his brother Abel because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous, so it is now. Joseph's brethren envy him; and again when in the field together, like another Cain, they take counsel together whether to slay him, to cast him into the pit, or sell him to strangers. And they do sell him for twenty pieces of silver. And they who could thus trespass against their innocent brother's life, easily deem it a light thing to wound their aged father's heart. "This have we found," said they of Joseph's coat which they sent to Jacob besmeared with blood: "know now whether it be thy son's coat. or no." And thus was their offence of high and double bearing — they sinned against their aged father, and their righteous unoffending brother.

In all this we have the stiff-necked and uncircumcised Israel betraying and murdering the just one. His father had sent Joseph to his brethren to enquire after their welfare. But it was not as the bearer

of kind tidings that they saw him or received him, but "behold this dreamer cometh." "Come therefore and let us slay him." So afterward toward the Greater than Joseph; it was not as the minister of grace and messenger of love, but as the envied Heir of the vineyard that they looked on Him with malicious heart, and said, "come let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours." His love was refused, and for envy His brethren delivered Him unto death. For His love they were His adversaries. There might be one in the counsel who would plead for the prisoner, as Reuben did, who would not consent to the counsel and deed of them (Luke 23: 51, John 7: 51); but this could prevail nothing. Thirst for blood may yield to covetousness, but the evil heart, in some of its desires against the righteous one, must have its way. For thirty pieces of silver they sold Him to strangers. They crucified Him that was the Father's elect One, and all His delight. "They pleased not God, and were contrary to all men;" they sinned against God and their brother.

Genesis 38 —

This chapter gives us the second part in the history.

The spirit of revelation here interrupts the course of Joseph's history, in order to give us a view of his brethren during Joseph's separation from them. And what is the view we get of them here? Just filling up the measure of their sins, making terms with the uncircumcised, and defiling the holy seed.

And so it is now. The holy seed has mingled itself with the seed of men, and all in Israel is corruption and uncleanness. They have profaned the covenant of their fathers' as Judah here does; and the Lord has been a witness between them, and the wife of their youth. Judah dealt treacherously and profaned the holiness of the Lord, marrying the daughter of a strange god. He wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh passed from him. (Jer. 11: 15.) So Israel has played the harlot with many lovers, and is now, while Jesus is separated from them, filling up the measure of their sins.

But while the Spirit of God thus for a moment raises the veil, and we see the abominations that are now done in Israel, we are given also to catch the faint glimpse of distant blessing. Judah is brought to know and confess his sin; the pledges of his full abomination are produced and owned by him in the spirit of a repentant one; and then "mercy rejoiceth against judgment." Pharez comes forth, and he is the second Jacob, the supplanter, who, in spite of fleshly title in his elder brother, gets the birthright. The kingdom suffers violence at his hand, and he takes it by force. And from this Pharez comes the true Inheritor of the blessing, the righteous Supplanter of every usurper, the one that shall prevail, and whose kingdom shall stand for ever. (Matt. 1: 3.)

Genesis 39 - 41 —

These chapters together form the third part in the history.

Here we see Joseph filling up the measure of his sorrow, while his brethren are filling up the measure of their sins. He in exile preserves his purity and separation to God, like a Nazarite purer than snow and whiter than milk, while they at home are defiling the covenant. God is with him, and man against him. He takes his place in the cloud of witnesses, suffering for righteousness' sake. For conscience toward God he endures grief, suffering wrongfully. But the Lord is still with him. God shows that His covenant was with him, and that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed; for Potiphar first, and then the keeper of the prison, were made to prove this in their own persons. The archers are sorely grieving him, and shooting at him; but his bow abides in strength, and the arms of his hands are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. He may be persecuted of men, but

God will not forsake him, but give him favour in the sight of strangers in spite of all the dishonour and humiliation to which the wickedness of his kindred and others may reduce him. And all this "affliction of Joseph" is made the discipline of God, Who loved him; for as we read, "the word of God tried him" (Ps. 105: 19). This tribulation under the divine hand was made to work patience, and by it the crown was brightening for him.

And we find Joseph not only distinguished with favour, but in some sense glorified also in his prison. For though power in the earth is not his yet, so that he could burst his prison doors, yet we see him glorified as a prophet, knowing the secret of God.*

*The butler's treatment of Joseph seems to be referred to by the prophet, as exhibiting the conduct of those that are at ease in Zion, and thus is a warning to us (Amos 6: 1-6).

These dreams of the butler and baker were "according to the interpretation," words which imply that they were of God. For dreams have two sources; either God sends them, or the multitude of business (Joel 2: 28, Ecc. 5: 3). In them God may reveal His mind, or they may be simply "divers vanities," the fruit of our own passions or necessities (Ecc. 5: 7, Isa. 29: 8).

And thus was it with the Lord in the day of His sorrow, and still with Him in measure in His sympathy for the church, for in that He is still saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" In Jesus, as in Joseph, it was clearly shown that, though in weakness and rejection, God's covenant was with Him, that He was God's object, all blessing passing through His hand, though in shame and poverty. And even beyond this. Jesus was in His day of sorrow, like Joseph, glorified as a Prophet (Luke 4: 15). And so in His saints now in measure. They may be despised, but they "have the mind of Christ," they are in the secrets of God, they know the love of the Father, the judgment of the world, and the coming kingdom and power of Jesus. And of these secrets they bear witness to sinners, as Joseph told of the secrets of God to Pharaoh, and his servants. They tell both of judgment and of mercy, as he did.

Such are the ways of Christ, and the saints now. They are among strangers, in a world that is but foreign to them, and where they have no citizenship. They may be poor, "silver and gold having none." lonely, in prison, and forgotten there, like Joseph. But "God is with them." Patience with self-denial, and a holy keeping of their Nazaritism or separation to God, is their calling, and their present praise. But even in the humiliation, they have "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" in Christ. They can interpret the dreams that tell out God's purposes; the voices of the prophets and apostles are their delight and their counsellors.

But in the close of all this we see Joseph not only as at the first comforted in sorrow, but brought out of sorrow — not only glorified as a prophet, but introduced into the full confidence of him who held the royal power, and authority in the earth. Pharaoh was then the lord of Egypt, and Egypt was then the lady of kingdoms; and Pharaoh gives Joseph authority to go over all the land, as the great executor of all rule, desiring that no man in Egypt was to lift up hand or foot without him. Joseph receives the king's ring, and rides in the second chariot. He is made lord of Pharaoh's house, and ruler of all his substance, to bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his senators wisdom (Ps. 105).

He becomes the sole treasurer and dispenser of the resources of the whole earth, the one who alone could open and shut those storehouses on which his once injurious brethren, and all the world were soon to become entire dependents for preservation in the earth. Only in the throne was Pharaoh greater than he; and all this Pharaoh makes him and gives him, because he owned that the Spirit of God was in him, that he had been distinguished as "the friend of God," knowing His ways, and was entitled to be called "the revealer of secrets."

This was indeed glory among the strangers. The poor was thus raised from the dust, and the beggar from the dunghill, to be set even above princes. But this was not all. Joseph must have joy as well as glory among them, and the king gives him a wife, a lady of honour, and Joseph becomes the husband and father of a family in this strange land. Like Adam he gets Eve as well as dominion.

Such was Joseph now. And surely a greater than Joseph is here. Surely this is none other than Jesus the Son of God seated beside the Father on His throne in His full confidence and favour, and though cast out by Israel, receiving unquestioned title to all power, and made the Treasurer of all that grace and blessing upon which Israel and the nations are soon to draw for life and preservation in the earth. And all this because a right spirit was in Him as Pharaoh owned in Joseph. Jesus honoured not Himself. "Do not interpretations belong to God?" said Joseph. "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me," said Jesus. Jesus was obedient, wherefore God has highly exalted Him. "Grace is poured into Thy lips: therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever."

And besides all this present glory on the throne, the Son of God has received a present joy, as we have seen Joseph did in Egypt. He has now received, from among Gentile strangers, a new unlooked for family. And Joseph's Egyptian family clearly typify Christ's heavenly family, or the church. For in the joy of His having received the church, the Lord has for a while forgotten Israel, as Joseph called his first-born "Manasseh," for "God," said he, "hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house;" and his second son, he calleth "Ephraim," for "God," said he, "hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

All this a child might trace; but the Holy Ghost, Who graciously reveals "to babes and sucklings," has Himself led us in this interpretation. In the seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the rapture of the Son of man into heaven is given exactly the same place as the glory of Joseph in Egypt. The whole bearing of St. Stephen's words leads to this. He is drawing out the proofs, that Israel had been always resisting the Holy Ghost; that as their fathers had done, so had that present generation been then doing; and thus that their treatment of Joseph and Moses (whose history as well as Joseph's he recites) were thus types of their treatment of the Just One. Joseph, it is true, was at last made known to his brethren, as we shall see presently, and at the last also Moses delivered his people. But during a long interval, both were separated from them. And so with Christ. In the end He will be made known to Israel, as their Redeemer and Brother, but for the present He is separated from them. And His separation is unto heaven, as Joseph's had been unto Egypt, and Moses' unto Midian. And wives and children given to Joseph and Moses, in the place and during the season of this separation, is thus necessarily the type of the gathering of the church to Jesus now.

But Joseph and Moses not only get a special glory and a peculiar joy in the separated place, but they are there also under preparation for becoming the future benefactors and redeemers of their unbelieving brethren. Joseph, as I have been noticing, is made the treasurer of those supplies on which Israel was soon to draw; and Moses gets the rod of strength by which he was soon to make a passage for Israel forth from the land of their bondage. But, till the appointed hour, Israel was in an evil case, filling up their sins, and knowing the service of the nations; as now they are a scattered and outcast people, and their sanctuary a disclaimed dishonoured ruin, while He, Whom they have rejected, is in heaven. So perfect are the patterns of old, of the secrets which are now revealed unto us by the Spirit.

Genesis 42 - 44 —

These chapters give us the fourth section of the history.

In the preceding sections, we have seen, first, Joseph cast out by his brethren; secondly, his brethren filling up the measure of their sin; thirdly, Joseph brought to glory and joy in the midst of those strangers among whom his brethren's enmity had cast him. And all these we have seen setting forth Jesus, Israel, and the church.

But Israel is not always to lie in their blood or be forgotten. Their sins and iniquities are soon to be remembered no more, as soon indeed as sore affliction brings them to Jesus and to repentance, so here stress of famine in the land of Canaan leads his brethren to seek that help which was now laid for them on Joseph alone.

Joseph, however, had something more to do for them than simply to supply their present need. He must prepare not only a blessing for them, but them for a blessing. And though the method which he had to take may be strange in their sight for a while, yet love and wisdom were to direct it all from beginning to end. In order to bless them with real blessing, as he purposed, he must lead them to repentance; and he orders his behaviour before them now according to this purpose. He had once come to them, and they had said, "behold, this dreamer cometh;" they now come to him, and he says, "ye are spies, ye are spies." He makes himself strange, and speaks roughly to them, and by this he calls their sin to remembrance. "We are verily guilty," say they, "concerning our brother." But he hides himself while all this is going on. He speaks to them by an interpreter. It was indeed his work, but it was his strange work; he was doing his act, but it was his strange act. He orders circumstances so as to let sorrow work repentance, but he does not set show himself. For all this may be the way of his hand, but it was not the way of his heart. In secret, though unknown to them, he enters into the very sorrows that he was occasioning. In their affliction, like One that is better than he, he was afflicted. He would not have put on this rough mood, could he have helped it. But by this their iniquity was to be purged, and this was all the fruit to take away their sin. His love therefore must be firm and wise, as well as tender. They had once bound and sold their poor brother to strangers, and now a stranger takes and binds one of them. All this was fixing the arrow of conviction in their hearts, there to spend its venom, and lay the sentence of death deeply in them. He dismisses the rest with present supplies for their houses, charging them not to see his face again, except their youngest brother was with them. For he must know whether they had as yet the affections of children and of brothers, or whether they were still, as once, when he had known them, reckless, of a brother's cries and a father's bereavement.

Ere they departed, however, he commands his steward to restore every man's money to his sack. But this was only to carry on the same work of repentance in their now awakened hearts. And so it does; for on opening their sacks, and discovering their money, "their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, what is this that God hath done to us." The money in their sacks will not let them forget that, though they may now have turned their backs on that stranger in Egypt who spake so roughly to them, and called their sin to remembrance, yet God's eye was still upon them, and God had still to do with them.

Thus the work goes on in their souls. They had been convicted, and godly sorrow was then working fear in them. And very soon much more than sorrow and fear is seen in them, for being returned home, and letting their father know that Benjamin's presence with them was the only condition on which they dared to hope for a fresh supply from Egypt, Reuben and Judah at once stand forth in the spirit of self-sacrifice. "Slay my two sons," says Reuben, "if I bring him not onto thee." "I will be surety for him," says Judah: "of my hand shalt thou require him."

All this blessedly shows how repentance was yielding its meet fruit in them, but to aggravate their grief, and thus still to carry on the work in their souls. Jacob seems now for the first time to come

to a suspicion that they had been guilty concerning Joseph. He had before said, "An evil beast hath devoured him," but now it is "me have ye bereaved of my children." He seems to say of them, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." All this must have stirred the arrow afresh in their hearts, that it might still be doing there its needed work.

But Jacob at last consents to let Benjamin go — and after all this exercise of heart, and with Benjamin in their hand, more prevailing than all the honey and balm and spices which they carried, they return to Joseph. On seeing Benjamin, Joseph is moved to new affections, and fresh kindness, and he gives his house commandment that all these men should dine with him at noon. But, kindness or roughness works alike with an evil conscience. To the defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure. A shaken leaf might well frighten the brethren now, for conscience had made cowards of them all. "They were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house." And other thoughts await them there. They are seated before Joseph, "the first-born according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth," and they marvelled one at another, while they ate and were merry. So wisely was Joseph calling in every passion of the mind, and weaving them together, wonder with fear, and gratitude with joy, that there might be a thorough renewal unto repentance.

Thus does the work go on, and prosperously too, but it has some way to travel, ere it reach the perfection that Joseph had purposed. He lays a further plan for fully testing whether indeed a child's heart and a brother's heart were in them. Joseph's cup is put into Benjamin's sack, and they are again dismissed with fresh supplies. But now was the crisis. Benjamin, the cup being found on him, becomes forfeited to Joseph. This was the solemn moment in the whole proceeding; and the question is, how will the once murderous brethren, and the once thankless children, now carry themselves? Are they still what once they were, or has the heart of flesh been given them? Will the sorrows of Benjamin move them, with whom the cries of Joseph could not prevail? or will the thought of the grief of their aged father at home, plead with their hearts as once it refused to plead? These were the questions, and they get their triumphant answer. Judah stands before Joseph in the shame of confessed iniquity. They were all innocent touching the cup; but they were not so touching their brother, and this their sin only is before them now. "What shall we say? what shall we speak?" says he, "how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants." Joseph for a moment feigns as though their former iniquity, thus confessed, were nothing to him. Benjamin. is his, and he must remain with him. Then Judah draws near, and again pleads as with the bowels of a son and a brother for Jacob and for Benjamin. "The lad" and "my father," are the oft-repeated burthen of Judah's sorrows now. He is ready to abide a bondman himself, only let "the lad" go back to "his father"; let the father's heart be comforted, and the brother's innocency preserve him, and Judah will be satisfied, come to himself what may.

Thus did Judah plead, proving himself indeed one "whom his brethren might praise." And now nothing more is asked for! Joseph had not been willingly afflicting his brethren. All his way was only to lead them to this place of repentance. He meets them now not as a judge, but as a brother. . . His love could no longer hide itself. "Cause every man to go out from me," said he, and then he made himself known to his brethren. He showed to them his thoughts how kind they were. He set free their evil conscience, and bound up their broken hearts. The channels were now cleared, and grace and blessing flow through in living, refreshing, and gladdening streams.

So it will be with Israel and the Lord. The Lord has now retired to His place, the place to which Israel's enmity had sent Him, but made to Him of God the place of honour and of family delights, as Egypt was to Joseph. But in their affliction by-and-by, they will seek Him in that distant place (Hosea 5: 15), and He will then be found of them, and, in richer wisdom and love than even that of Joseph,

lead them to repentance, sit over them as a refiner and purifier of silver, give them a broken and contrite heart, cause them to look on Him whom they pierced, and then open to them a fountain for all their sorrows. For though He has spoken against them, He remembers them still, and in all their afflictions has been afflicted, and will then rejoice over them. Joseph no longer spoke to them by an interpreter, no longer hid himself as with a veil from his repentant brethren. "Your eyes see," said he, "that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you." And so shall Israel's eyes see the King in His beauty, and the veil shall be taken away, and with a surer and readier love, than that with which Joseph fell on his brethren's neck, and kissed them, will Jehovah Jesus return to them (Lev. 26: 40-42). "I will say it is My people, and they shall say, the Lord is my God."

Genesis 45 - 47 —

These chapters give us the fifth and closing section of our history.

The reconciliation, which waited only for the repentance, being now perfected, all was ready for the loading of the brethren with unstinted blessing: and Pharaoh's good-will is to be fully toward them, as well as Joseph's. They were Joseph's brethren; that was enough for Pharaoh; and Pharaoh will have their aged father brought down, and, with his households and his flock, seated in the fattest and choicest portion of the land.

All this was marvellous in Jacob's ears when he heard it. He "believed not for joy and wondered;" for this to him was receiving Joseph alive from the dead. But Jacob seems to tremble a little at the thought of Egypt. There Abram had sinned, and there Isaac had been warned not to go. Jacob might say, "Joseph is still alive, I will go and see him before I die;" but he seems to enter on his journey with some godly fear, for it was bearing him toward this Egypt. Accordingly, when he reaches Beersheba, he pauses in his way, and offers sacrifice to the God of his father. But the hand of the God of his father is now to appear to Jacob for his full confidence. He comes to him in a vision of the night, and adds His encouragement to that of Joseph's invitation and Pharaoh's desire. He enters into a covenant of promise with him, as He had done with Abram (15), giving him to know that Egypt was to be the place where Israel was to be made a great nation; and thus encouraged and commanded of the Lord God of his fathers, Jacob is fully ready, and accordingly goes down into the land of Egypt, and finds Joseph there of a truth and the place itself, the scene of Joseph's greatness and wealth — being thus given to prove that whereas he had thought all things were against him, all things had rather been working together for him; and in spirit he says, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace . . . for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

But Joseph was not only, as we have seen, to be made known to his brethren, but Joseph's kindred are also now to be made known to Pharaoh (Acts 7: 13). Accordingly he presents them to the king. They were shepherds, it is true, keepers of cattle from their youth, such as were held in abomination in the land of Egypt. But what of that? "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." He owns them in the presence of the king, and the king himself is of one mind with Joseph toward them; he owns them also, and honours them, and will have them regard the whole of his land as before them. And they are accordingly placed in the best of the land, in Goshen in the land of Rameses, and Joseph nourishes them and their households.

All this is great, and all significant. But this is not all. Joseph is to be the upholder of the whole earth in life and in order, and to secure the full honour of Pharaoh's throne, as well as to be thus the healer and restorer of Israel. He must seat the king in the dominion of the world with the willing homage of a preserved and happy people, who were to owe their lives to him. And this he does. He

gives the Egyptians their lives out of his storehouses; but he gathers their money, their cattle, their lands, and themselves, all for Pharaoh. For himself he retains nothing but his place of honour and trust and service under the king. Everyone, it is true, was to confess that he was lord, their deliverer and preserver, but this was to be Pharaoh's glory. "Thou hast saved our lives," said they, "let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants." It was into Pharaoh's house that Joseph brought their money; it was for Pharaoh alone that he bought them and their land. He settled the whole country, it is true, according to his wisdom, removing the people into cities from one end of it to the other; but the land was still to yield her increase, her holy portion, her double tithe, unto Pharaoh and his throne. This was the law of "the Joseph earth," of that world that had now been brought back from famine and the curse.*

*All but the land of the priests was purchased and became a part of Pharaoh's footstool. And so in the coming kingdom: all shall be of the footstool, but the inheritance of that family who have been related to Joseph in his Egypt, to Jesus in heaven, and who are to be kings and priests unto God then, the heirs of the throne with Jesus, having their inheritance apart from the footstool.

There may be no speech or language here, but a voice is heard by the ear that is awakened. Joseph has now received his brethren, and enriched them with the richest of the land. He has also presented them without shame before the lord the king. He has preserved the whole earth, and secured the full glory of the throne of his master. And so will it be in the end of the days. The long-forgotten and then repentant brethren shall be seated in the true Goshen, the glory of all lands, and Jesus shall own them and present them as His brethren without shame, and the world shall then be established from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. God shall be merciful to Israel, and bless them, and the earth shall yield Him her increase, and the people, yea, all the people, shall praise him (Ps. 67). At is name every knee shall bow of things in heaven and things in earth, and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

I do not notice the remaining chapters of this history, for in them Jacob becomes principal again, and the place which Joseph occupies in them is of another character. But these chapters give us properly Joseph; and constitute one complete mystery, beginning with the rejection and ending with the kingdom of Christ, taking up, by the way, His union with the church and His heavenly glory. J. G. B.