

August 12, 2007 (LS)

THE REDEMPTION OF THE FIRSTBORN: THE TEST BEGINS
GENESIS 42.1-38

A central focus: *the relationship of the individual seed with the firstborn sons.*

Central to the passage: *Through this testing, this proving of his brothers—their own death and resurrection—Joseph will bring them into the inheritance that he has secured.*

A JACOB'S REFUSAL TO SEND BENJAMIN (1-5)

Fruitlessness of Jacob's sons (1): Note "Jacob" not "Israel." Jacob is characterized by fear, not fighting, in this passage.

Jacob *sees* that there is grain (i.e., food) in Egypt and renders a proper judgment about what to do. Contrast with sons.

"Why are you standing around looking at one another?" They are looking to one another, but they cannot provide food. The firstborn sons are fruitless.

Their sin and the guilt from it has rendered them powerless. *The firstborn sons are unfruitful and have no power to produce fruit.*

The commission to go down to Egypt for food (2-3): "Joseph's brothers" - they are his flesh and blood. He is connected to them.

"Joseph's *ten* brothers" - creation imagery (?). Creation comes into being with "ten words." May be assoc. with original creation.

Jacob's fear concerning Benjamin (4): Benjamin ("son of my right hand") is 'connected' to Joseph in a special way: he is also born of the barren wife and is joined up in the "seed" mission.

From the beginning Jacob is fearful of losing another son like he lost Joseph. Benjamin has, in some sense, replaced Joseph and he must be protected.

Fruitlessness of the land of Canaan (5): tie between the land and the sons. Both are fruitless.

B JOSEPH'S ROUGH TREATMENT OF HIS BROTHERS (6-14)

Joseph is ruling the land (6a): Joseph as ruler alerts us to themes:

(a) *The individual seed precedes his brothers into exile and dominion.* Joseph has gone down to Egypt and endured all that he has endured as an individual in order that he might prepare a place for his brothers to be fed and cared for. Cp. Heb 2, 6.

(b) *The Gentiles precede the Hebrews in receiving and submitting to the Word of God embodied in the individual seed.* Pharaoh is converted and brings his entire kingdom under the word of God revealed in Joseph. Cp. Rom 11

(c) *The individual seed has secured the inheritance. The brothers who come after need only be submissive to him in order to participate in that inheritance.*

The deception of Joseph (6b-8): Joseph tests them at a place where they failed. They deceived their father about his death. He is now deceiving them.

Joseph is treating them in accordance with the way they have acted. The difference here is, Joseph is doing this in order that he might ultimately give them life. They did it to his destruction.

The firstborn accused of trying to seize authority (9-14): The brothers seized the robe of Joseph. Now Joseph will deal with them concerning that sin by accusing them of being spies who have come to see the nakedness of the land.

Spying = the precursor to seizing dominion. Cf Num 13; Josh 2.

To be "naked" is to be stripped of power or authority. It is to be vulnerable like Noah was in his tent when Ham tried to seize his authority. The brothers had "stripped" Joseph.

Their claim to be "honest men" when they have deceived their father in the destruction of Joseph, needed to be called into question and exposed for what it was. And Joseph is about to do this.

C. JOSEPH'S TESTING OF HIS BROTHERS (15-17)

The test explained (15-16): Test accomplishes at least two things: (1) it protects the life of Benjamin from that point forward seeing that their lives depend upon his life. (2) Joseph will see how they treat Benjamin when he is honored before them.

Joseph is going to send them to "the pit." They must follow their brother in death/testing in order to be found faithful. They need to understand this in order to be proper rulers, sharing the inheritance with them.

The test implemented (17): Note 3 days. Time for judgment/evaluation. Their sin needs to be dealt with.

B' JOSEPH'S ROUGH TREATMENT BY HIS BROTHERS (18-28)

Time for judgment (18-20): Joseph "fears God." This "Egyptian" is telling these Hebrews that he fears God. He is encouraging fear of God in them. If they fear God they will deal with their sin properly.

The guilt of the firstborn sons (21): They believe that all of this is coming on them because they are guilty concerning their brother. Really, they don't know how right they are at this point.

I do believe that their guilt could be felt, but their guilt was true whether they felt it or not. They were guilty concerning Joseph because they sinned against him. They saw how Joseph pleaded for mercy at their hands and they refused to give it. "He shall have judgment without mercy who has shown no mercy." They weren't receiving mercy because they had shown none.

The powerlessness of the firstborn son (22): Reuben is the firstborn of the firstborn sons. His inability in stopping his brothers from dealing with Joseph the way they did reveals his powerlessness. In doing so he is a picture of the powerlessness of the old Adam to protect the seed.

"Therefore, behold, his blood is now required of us." This is language reminiscent of Genesis 9 when God directs Noah in how to punish crimes of murder (cf. 9.5). They are indeed guilty of the blood of Joseph. They have, essentially, murdered him. Now, his blood is crying out for vengeance. (This agrees with all that "pit" imagery I have told you about.)

Joseph's sorrow and grace (23-25): No gloating from Joseph, only pain. This is something that must be done for his brothers' good.

Joseph fills their bags with grain and even returns their money to them. This last act was certainly magnanimous, but it could very well be an additional test of their claim to honesty.

The testing of honest men (26-28): Because of their guilty conscience they are only able to fear at the prospects of this. They cannot see grace in this. Their hearts fail and they are afraid. Again, they believe that God has put them in this position in order to punish them.

A' JACOB'S REFUSAL TO SEND BENJAMIN (29-38)

Recounting what "the man" said to them (29-34): Joseph is "the man, the lord of the land." They say this 2x (vv. 30, 33).

Joseph was presented to us in ch. 37 as a new Adam. His trek has been consistent with that throughout the story. As a new Adam he is to be "the man." And as Adam was supposed to take dominion over the world, Joseph has done so.

Fear grips them all (34):

Accusation of the firstborn sons (36): Jacob suspects that they had something to do with Joseph's disappearance.

The foolishness of the firstborn son (37): Reuben's impetuous judgment show that he is unwise and not fit to rule.

The fear of Jacob (38): Benjamin is "left alone." That is, he is the "seed child" that is left. He is the one to whom the blessing will go. Jacob does not yet see everything.

(1) The guilt that we had because of sin in Adam has been dealt with by Jesus Christ.

(2) We must follow our Lord through death and into resurrection if we are to share glory with him.