

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; others may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings. © Chris Haslam

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Genesis 45:1-15

NRSV

Joseph has risen to power in Egypt. There is a famine in much of the Middle East, and Jacob (Israel) has sent ten of his sons to buy grain, but has kept Benjamin, son of his first wife and full brother of Joseph, at home. When they seek to buy grain, they are accused of spying; as surety that they will return with Benjamin, they must leave Simeon behind in Egypt. To lose Benjamin would break Jacob's heart, (with Joseph gone, only Benjamin can inherit) but the old man agrees to his heir joining his brothers on the second trek to Egypt. When they depart for home with the grain, Joseph has them arrested for stealing; he has had his silver cup placed in Benjamin's pack, where it is found, so Benjamin is detained. Judah pleads for Benjamin's release, saying that he expects Jacob to die if Benjamin fails to return home. And here our reading begins.

Joseph can no longer hide himself from his brothers. He dismisses his courtiers, to be alone with his family: this is a personal affair. He identifies himself (v. 3) and then (vv. 5-8) explains the theology behind what has happened to him: God has worked through his brothers. By selling him into slavery, he says, "God sent me before you to preserve life." God acts in history, through special people. It is Joseph's management of Egypt's grain stores that will keep Jacob's family (clan) alive through the famine. Israel, "a remnant on earth" (v. 7) will survive. God has even made Joseph "a father to Pharaoh" (v. 8), vizier or prime minister.

In v. 9, Joseph shows that he is eager to see his father again: "... do not delay". He offers them land in "Goshen" (v. 10), the fertile area east of the Nile delta. There they will be "near" (v. 10) him: this and other clues in this chapter place the story in time: the royal court was in lower Egypt during two periods; the Hyksos period (1720-1550 BC) fits this and other data in the story. Joseph forgives his brothers (v. 15).

Psalms 37:1-12,39-40

NRSV

It may seem that ungodly people succeed while those who follow God's ways face continual injustices, but the psalmist (a sage, v. 25) offers words of encouragement for the faithful from his own observations. A time will soon come when the ungodly ("wicked") "fade" as vegetation does when a dry east wind blows. God will care for the godly, giving them "the land", Palestine (as he promised to Abraham). He will not only bless the godly, but will also show all that the godly are on the right path (v. 6). Do not be upset by the transitory success of the ungodly, but "wait patiently" (v. 7), for the "wicked" (v. 9) will be "cut off" from any possibility of being with God; indeed, they will cease to exist (v. 10). Then "the meek" (those who are aware of their dependence on God) will "inherit the

land" (v. 11), enjoy "prosperity", and live long lives ("forever", v. 29). Despite present experiences, God does deliver, and shelter the godly in bad times (v. 39). He does help, rescue, and save those who follow his ways (v. 40).

1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50

NRSV

Paul has written: "Christ has been raised from the dead ... so all will be made alive in Christ" (vv. 20-23) when he comes again. Will we have the same kind of bodies then as we have now? By analogy from nature (vv. 36-38), Paul points out that: (1) seeds need to die in order to have new life; (2) they change state following death: plants have different *bodies* (forms) from seeds; (3) God chooses the body of a plant; and (4) seeds look alike but are changed into a variety of plants. There are various kinds of bodies, "flesh" (v. 39) and "glory" (vv. 40-41), so there may be more meanings of these terms than we know.

In resurrection, our state is changed: before it, we are subject to decay ("perishable", v. 42) and death ("dishonour", "weakness") and have a "physical body" (v. 44); after it, we will be immortal ("imperishable") and have "glory", "power", and a "spiritual body", . So there must be two modes of existence, and two bodies. There are two *prototypes*: "the first man, Adam" (v. 45) and "the last Adam", Christ. Adam received life; Christ is "life-giving". The "first" was earthly, physical, "a man of dust" (v. 47), and the "last" heavenly, so the physical came first (v. 46) contrary to what some claimed. Correspondingly we bear the image of (have the same kind of body as) Adam now; and will have bodies like Christ's (vv. 48-49). In our present state ("flesh and blood", "perishable", v. 50) we cannot participate (fully) in God and in immortality ("the imperishable").

Luke 6:27-38

NRSV

Jesus has told his disciples (probably in the hearing of a crowd) whom God will favour when Christ comes again: those who are now "poor" (v. 20), "hungry" (v. 21), sorrowful and *hated* (v. 22) will be "blessed"; fortunes will be reversed.

Now he interprets his teachings to potential followers ("you that listen") in radical terms. He speaks to those now hated: bring before God ("bless", "pray for", v. 28) those who persecute you, and offer no resistance to anyone who deprives you of your most basic possessions, "your coat" (v. 29) and "your shirt". Reciprocating the love and loving actions already shown and taken by others is basic human behaviour (the cultural norm) and so does not warrant God's notice ("credit", vv. 32-33). Even lending when you expect to be repaid is not enough (v. 34); rather love others by doing for them as you would wish they would do for you (v. 31, the Golden Rule), even when you are fairly sure they will do nothing for you ("enemies", v. 35). In doing so, you will be doing as God does; he gives even to those who reject his love ("ungrateful", grace-less) and work against him ("wicked"), without expecting recompense. Further, abstain from critical attitudes to others, "forgive" (v. 37) those indebted to you, and "give" (v. 38) freely. God will reward you very plenteously for your generosity.

