

Lecture 12

Joseph — the Slave And the Master. The Suffering Messiah And Messiah the King

This chapter will consider the story of Joseph and complete our brief review of the Book of Genesis. Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan.

This is the story of the family of Jacob.
Joseph, being seventeen years old... (Genesis 37, 1–2; NRSV)

The beginning of Joseph's story is really amazing! Typically, when one's genealogy (תולדות <tol'dot> — here "the story of the family") is presented in the Bible, a multitude of their ancestors or offspring is named. In this verse, however, Jacob's genealogy is described as if he had only one son — Joseph! But what about his other children? The truth of the matter is that at the time, Joseph turned out to be the only Jacob's heir in the spiritual sense. The other brothers, as we shall see later, were not yet worthy of their high calling, having not yet grown to realize what it was, as can be seen from the story of Joseph's selling. That is why the whole spiritual genealogy of Jacob's family was likely to focus on Joseph alone. Being a prophet, Jacob himself apparently knew that and

...Loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age... (Genesis 37, 3; NRSV)

Actually, "the son of Jacob's old age" was Benjamin: he was born last. But Joseph, the firstborn son of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel was "the son of his old age" in another sense: the father's intuition or prophetic knowledge foretold him that it was Joseph who was destined to love and cherish him in his last years (as it came true after Jacob's migration to Egypt). For 17 years Jacob raised and brought up Joseph, and with the same tenderness and sensibility Joseph took care of his father during the last 17 years of Jacob's life...

This is the story of the family of Jacob.
Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. (Genesis 37, 2; NRSV)

"A bad report"... Further we shall see that Joseph was a prophet, and a prophet's vocation is not only to predict the future, but also contribute to the righteousness of people, teach them God's commandments. Since Joseph was entrusted from above to look after and lead his brothers spiritually, he brought to his father's attention everything they did. It was rather unusual because traditionally elder brothers took care of younger ones, but in this case it was quite the opposite. But it could not be helped, as Joseph alone possessed the prophetic gift at that time! This was the reason for the tragic discord in Jacob's family and the dreadful action of his brothers, which we will discuss next.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. (Genesis 37:3; KJV)

The coat of many colours is called in Hebrew כַּתְנֵת פָּסִים <ke'tonet pa'sim> — "the spreading chiton" from the verb פָּסַח <pa'sa> — "to spread", "to extend"; i.e. it refers to the clothing sewn of multicoloured parts and covering the whole body. Such clothes symbolize a special organization of Joseph's soul. The fact is, a soul of a righteous appears to be comprised of pieces of souls of all other people; that is why, he perceives their thoughts, has insight into all their affairs, and can

predict their future. Due to Jacob's prayers, Joseph was endowed with prophetic power, which his clothing is a symbol of.

But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. (Genesis 37, 4; NRSV)

Jealously bore the first wave of hatred from Joseph's brothers: they could not stand that their father loved Joseph more than he loved them, so they could not talk to him peaceably. In the original it is said that they could not speak to him לשלום <le-sha'lom> — "towards peace", "in a peaceful manner", i.e. together with him contribute to the improvement of the humanity, increase of harmony, peace among all in existence. For they, too, possessed potential for prophetic calling, but their envy of Joseph made them temporarily incapable of fulfilling it. That high spiritual stage that they were to ascend became inaccessible for them. Thus, the first surge of hatred was aroused by jealousy, rejection of love...

Then, Joseph's dreams are described. He retells his first prophetic dream to his brothers:

"There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf."
His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words. (Genesis 37, 7–8; NRSV)

"Because of his dreams" — because the Lord revealed Joseph's supremacy through them; and "because of his words" — because Joseph himself could have concealed his dreams, however, due to his innocence and simplicity he told his brothers about them, so that they understood what a pure soul he had and was totally unaware of their envy.

Here the second stage of hatred is described: if the first stage is envy caused by their father's preferring Joseph, then the second is envy because of God's favour. According to the first dream, Joseph is chosen for reigning on earth. For harvest takes place on earth, that is why bowing down symbolizes here earthly power. Harvest also points at the completion of fate, the fulfillment of the whole life's efforts, "the fruit" of the earthly course of life. All that came to pass later, when Joseph became the ruler of Egypt.

Joseph's next dream has some other meaning:

He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." (Genesis 37, 9; NRSV)

Whereas the sheaves were on earth, the celestial bodies were in heaven; the second dream speaks of him his being chosen in the Kingdom of Heaven, of Joseph's high position in the future world.

But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him saying, "What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?" (Genesis 37, 10; NRSV)

The fact that Joseph's father and brothers could bow down to him in some circumstances would be more or less understandable; but his mother Rachel had died by that time. So, the prophetic dream does not refer to the earthly life, but to the heavenly one: just like Joseph is preferred by his father on earth, thus will he be elevated by the Lord above over all his brothers in the Kingdom of

Heaven. And this could not be forgiven to Joseph by his brothers... Let us notice by the way, that the image of Israel, the people of God, as “a woman clothed with the sun” standing on the moon, with a crown of twelve stars upon her head”, can be found in the 12th chapter of the Revelation of John. The relation of this image to the second dream of Joseph is beyond any doubt.

Thus, here we have three stages of envy and hatred before us: first, envy of human preference; second, jealousy of Godly blessing in earthly doings; third, jealousy of being chosen by God in the future world. So, the brothers of Joseph openly rebel against God’s determination. Yet, they do not firmly believe that Joseph is a prophet; and when Jacob sends his son to inquire after his brothers, they say to one another:

...Here comes this dreamer.
Come now, let us kill him ... and we shall see what will become of his dreams.
(Genesis 37, 19–20; NRSV)

Consequently, because of their impudence and disbelief the brothers want to check if the will of God is truly shown to Joseph in his dreams.

And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” He answered, “Here I am.” (Genesis 37, 13; NRSV)

Besides the direct one, this conversation bears a mysterious meaning. Jacob without knowing it himself predicts Jacob’s great mission:

Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me. (Genesis 37, 14; NRSV)

In other words: “Fulfil your calling, at the expense of suffering and tortures save your brothers from starvation”...

“...And bring word back to me...” Jacob received that “word” many years later, when Joseph sent chariots in order to bring his father and his whole clan to Egypt... And Joseph replies: “Here I am”, i.e. “I agree to do everything you have ordered”. None of them know the real meaning of their dialogue, which is concealed in their words. For the word of a prophet is not always and not immediately clear even to himself.

...So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. He came to Shechem. (Genesis 37, 14; NRSV)

Jacob himself at that time lived in Hebron, not far from the tombs of his fathers Abraham and Isaac. The name חברון <Hev’ron> is derived from the verb חבר <kha’var> — “to unite”, “to connect”, “to fasten”; “kha’ver” means “a friend”, “a fellow”. Hebron is “a place of friendship”, where Joseph grew up in love and joy. And the place he came to was שכם — Shechem, a city to the north of Hebron (see also Lecture 6 “Abraham — “the Father Of Heaven”. The Soul Turns Into the Spirit”), where his brothers were pasturing the flock. “Shkhem” means “a chine”, “a spine”, and also “fate”. He is now passing from the first period of his life, from “Hebron”, when everything was friendly to Joseph, to the second period — “Shechem”, when a great burden falls on his spine, and he is destined to bear everything which is sent to him with patience...

And a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” (Genesis 37, 15; NRSV)

It is not said who that “man” is; apparently, it is not even referred to a human. He is called אִישׁ <ish> — “a man”, and as we know (see the previous chapter), angels were called that way, too (see also Daniel 10, 5; Zechariah 2, 1–3).

“And a man found him wandering in the fields...” Joseph’s soul, as well as the soul of any person, knew much more than he himself; and his soul was in doubt, trembling at a hard mission not being able to undertake it: the mission related to staying in slavery, in prison, in a foreign land — the youth was “wandering in the fields”. And the angel addresses Joseph with the words, which penetrate right into the heart: “What are you seeking?” In other words, “What do you want from this earthly life, what are you straining for?” And then Joseph, having inquired himself, having searched the depth of his soul, replies:

“I am seeking my brothers,” he said... (Genesis 37, 16; NRSV)

In fact, the simple answer of Joseph conceals his deepest aspiration to live not for himself, but for his brothers, to bring them peace, redemption and salvation. The choice of his life is made: he has devoted himself to sacrifice his life for the sake of his brothers. And at that moment the angel shows him the way to the place they are staying at.

The man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers... (Genesis 37, 17; NRSV)

Even if the man had heard the conversation of the brothers, how could he have learnt that these people were Joseph’s brothers? Clearly, he could hear more than common human hearing is able to perceive.

They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him.
They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer.
Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.” (Genesis 37, 18 — 20; NRSV)

The brothers, fierce with envy and hatred, challenge not only Joseph and their father, but also the Creator Himself: they intend to test, whether their younger brother’s prophetic dreams come true. To be more precise, blind spiritually, they want to prevent those dreams from fulfilment... So they seize Joseph, strip him of his precious robe of many colours and throw him into a pit. It is only Reuben who wants to rescue Joseph and return him to his father. It is due to Reuben’s advice that the brothers do not kill Joseph, but throw him into the pit alive (see verses 21–24). But Reuben retires, and at that very moment Judah suggests selling him to Ishmaelite merchants, who are passing by:

...What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?
Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites... (Genesis 37, 26–27; NRSV)

In fact, with his suggestion Judah rescues Joseph from death and his brothers from the deadly sin of fratricide...

There are two versions of the selling of Joseph, and both of them are based on the following verse:

...When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt. (Genesis 37, 28; NRSV)

Who sold Joseph then — some Midianite traders or his brothers? According to a well-known Jewish traditional narrative it was exactly Midianite traders from a passing-by caravan: they heard screams from the well, lifted the young man and sold him to other merchants. And the latter, having bought such a handsome young slave, took him to Egypt hoping to receive a much higher price for him from some nobleman. The brothers of Joseph were eating bread in the distance at that moment (see verses 25 — 29) and had no time to do anything about it, or they did not notice how Joseph was taken out of the well. The hardness of their hearts is well presented by the fact that having thrown the young man into the well, they ate their food with tranquility...

The name of “Joseph” consists of four letters יֹסֵף <Yo’sef>. The very writing of that name symbolically points at the way of a righteous man, of a high spirit, in our world, as well as at the way of the people of Israel, Joseph’s blood descendants, and at the earthly way of Jesus Christ himself. The outline and succession of these four letters speak volumes.

The first letter, י <yod>, which is placed above and “does not reach the earth”, signifies the staying of the righteous spirit in the higher world. It is in the heaven and is just going to come down. In a way the righteous spirit partially stays in heaven throughout the earthly life, too. But in order to take part in the reformation of the humanity, in the salvation of the world, the righteous spirit is to “reach the earth” and take shape of a body, which is denoted by the second letter ו <vav> representing the letter “yod” as though it was “prolonged down”: the righteous man born on earth, but his spiritual mind remains in heaven, thus, he unites heaven and earth with his life. Now, he starts the fulfilment of his higher mission on earth. On completing such mission Jesus Christ uttered his last word on the cross: τετελεσται <te’telestai> — “has been completed”, “has been fulfilled”, “has reached perfection” (John 19, 30). The completion of the world-important mission of the righteous man is denoted by the third letter — כ <samekh>, round with an upper line turned upwards with its left end. This sign vividly depicts the coming down of the Light and its circulation: the Light touches the earth, lightens it and returns to the higher world.

And lastly, the fourth letter פ <phai so’phit>, whose form hints at the main calling of the righteous man. The vertical stroke of the letter goes below the baseline: the righteous man does not only reach the earth and turns it towards the heaven, but he also “descends into the lower parts of the earth” (Ephesians 4, 9) — let us recall Jesus Christ’s “descent into hell”. Reaching the netherworld the righteous spirit illuminates it with his light, too, announcing redemption to the souls, which stay there. Thus, he unites all the three worlds under the dominion of heaven. And the hook stroke of “phai so’phit” resembles a step of a ladder, which is erected by the saint to help other souls in their ascent.

So, the four letters of the name of “Joseph” point at the way of a righteous spirit. We are going to speak about that later. And now let us return to the literal meaning of the narration.

Joseph is taken to Egypt. The merchants who have purchased him are carrying gum, balm, and resin (see Genesis 37, 25). The traditional narration says that they used to carry oil tar and other evil smelling instances and it was only this time that they were carrying fragrances. This was the way God sent Joseph consolation on his way to a foreign land. And symbolically this means “the fragrance that comes from knowing Him [God]” (2 Corinthians 2, 14), which Joseph takes with him to Egypt... Yet the brothers take Joseph’s robe and dip it into the blood of a killed goat. They bring the clothes to their father saying: “see now whether it is your son’s robe or not”. Jacob plunges into the desperate woe and says:

...It is my son’s robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces. (Genesis 37, 33; NRSV)

Indeed, “the wild animal” — the feeling of hatred and revenge, animal rage which took over human feelings in the brothers — “had torn Joseph into pieces”...

And the father tears his garment, puts ashes on his head lamenting: "...I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning" (Genesis 37, 35). For the deep sorrow of one's soul leads to death, and it is only in the other world that Jacob hopes to meet his beloved son. Jacob's tearing of his garment points at the fact that driven to despair he lost his prophetic intuition for a long while and was unable to learn that Joseph was still alive. Surely, it happened by the will of God, otherwise, Jacob would have gone to Egypt in order to find and buy out his son... Joseph's robe, as we have already mentioned, also symbolizes special features of his soul. The fact that it is stained with blood of an animal points at the sacrificed soul, the soul of a righteous man which is given to sufferings and death in atonement for others and for the sake of their lives.

We shall pay our attention to another important detail. Jacob says that he will go down to his son to "Sheol" — שאול <she'ol>, the part of the afterworld where evildoers suffer atoning their sins (see also Job 18, 5—14; Psalms 18, 4—5; 107, 10—11; Isaiah 14, 9—11; Ezekiel 21—31). It is spoken about the righteous forefathers that after death they "are gathered to their people", i.e. to the righteous, but do not go down to Sheol (Genesis 25, 8; 35, 9; 49, 33). Why did Jacob decide that exactly at that place Joseph was staying? Probably, he believed that such a terrible and unexpected death — by a wild animal — was beyond any doubt sent to him because of some terrible sin. And Jacob's love to his son was so immense that even after his death he could not think of staying apart from Joseph and wished to refuse the grace of staying among the righteous spirits of his fathers and stay together with Joseph in the gloomy underworld sharing his sorrowful fate... Such a decision of Jacob anticipates Moses' plea to blot him out of the Book of life for the sake of the salvation of the Israeli people (Exodus 32, 32) and Jesus Christ's wish to "die for the ungodly" (Romans 5, 6—9), as well as his coming down to "the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3, 18—20).

In Egypt Joseph is bought by Potiphar, the captain of the Pharaoh's guard, a ranking official. And from that moment the blessing comes upon his whole house. Potiphar sees that and hands over all his household to Joseph (Genesis 39, 1—5). Throughout the slavery period the Lord does not leave Joseph, but in order to get his belief and hope for the Almighty stronger, sends him a temptation.

The temptation comes through the wife of Potiphar, who falls in love with Joseph, for he "was handsome and good-looking" (Genesis 39, 6). According to the narration of the Aggadah, God apportioned ten measures of beauty for the whole world; nine of them went to Joseph the Fair and one was divided among the rest of the people of various generations... As the Aggadah and Quran (12, 30—31) go, Potiphar's wife Zuleika told of her love to her lady-friends, who began to reproach her, so she suggested: "Come to my place and take a look at him with your own eyes". The women were sitting at a table peeling oranges the moment Joseph came in, and each of them cut their hands, fascinated with his beauty...

The wife of Potiphar is trying to seduce Joseph, but he resists the temptation reminding her of the commandments of the Lord:

"...My master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand.

He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39, 8—9; NRSV)

One day this woman caught hold of Joseph's garment, but he left his garment in her hand, and fled (Genesis 39, 11—12)... The episode with the garment here also points to the tumultuous condition of the soul of the righteous man... Offended and humiliated, Potiphar's wife having the garment at her disposal as a material evidence

...Called out to the members of her household and said to them, “See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice”... (Genesis 39, 14; NRSV)

As her husband returns home, she tells him the same:

...The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me;
But as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside. (Genesis 39, 17–18; NRSV)

It is worth noting that the word “Hebrew” is used with a negative connotation for the first time in the speech of Potiphar’s wife, and moreover, twice, and above all, it is used in the context containing slander against a righteous man, a real libel on him. This first example of antisemitism in the Scripture implies (as well as any other first mentioning of this or that phenomenon in the Bible) the prototype of the whole further development of a phenomenon (causeless hatred, false accusations, desire to devastate an innocent person).

Joseph does not even object to the accusation; his utter meekness, his absolute faithfulness to God, his provision of God’s ways makes him accept it... He completely entrusts all the flow of further events to the Creator, relying only on Him. Besides, the objections would not have led to any changes: an Egyptian nobleman would hardly have believed a slave more than his wife. Joseph is put to prison...

Seemingly, there is no more hope left for Joseph. Thrown to prison without charge or trial, he may stay there for the rest of his life as it often happened (and still happens) in despotic states. The prison of Ancient Egypt was a stinking underground jail; such is its name in the original: בור <bor> — “hole”, “pit” (see Genesis 41, 14).

The first pit Joseph was thrown to by his brothers was a prototype of the second one — the prison where he was now staying. Both pits symbolize Egypt, which in the Holy Scripture is in its turn a symbol of our earthly world — the world in which man suffers in a double measure: with his soul and with his body. In the holy language Egypt is named מצרים <Mits’rayim> — “[two] gorges”, “[two] narrow places” (the dual number of מצר <me’tsar>). That is why it is said about Joseph that he was “lowered”, “taken down” to Egypt (Genesis 39, 1): in Hebrew הורד <hu’rad> — from the verb ירד <ya’rad> meaning “to go down”, “to descend”. Exactly this verb is used in the Bible in any description of migration from the Holy Land to Egypt.

So, Joseph is thrown to prison. But together with him two of the Pharaoh’s courtiers come to stay there — the cupbearer and the baker. Both of them are obviously in a “pre-trial detention”, their cases are still under investigation. So, Joseph, who is not left by God even in prison, is charged by the captain of the guard to wait on them. Both courtiers see unusual dreams, and since inhabitants of Ancient Egypt were used to dream interpretation (there was even a special class of priests who specialized in it), on waking up they fall into melancholy. Joseph asks them about the reason of their sadness. The courtiers reply:

... “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.” (Genesis 40, 8; NRSV)

So the cupbearer speaks about his dream: he saw there was a vine with three branches; its blossoms came out and then grapes appeared; he took the grapes and pressed the juice into a cup, and handed it to the Pharaoh. Joseph interprets the dream: the three branches are three days; in three days the Pharaoh will restore the cupbearer to the palace and the latter will offer

wine to the Pharaoh just as he used to do. The baker in his turn saw three baskets on his head, and birds were eating bread out of them.

And Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days;
within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a pole; and the birds will eat the flesh from you." (Genesis 40, 18—19; NRSV)

Joseph's prophecy comes true. Obviously, some poison was found in the food meant for the Pharaoh's meal, and the investigation which was carried out in the palace came to the conclusion within the three days that the guilt was the baker's, whereas the chief cupbearer was innocent. And Joseph saying goodbye to the cupbearer addresses to him the following words:

But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place...(Genesis 40, 14; NRSV)

Joseph does not turn to God, but he asks man "to remember him"; and some exegetes blame Joseph for that. Such point of view, for example, found reflection in an old spiritual poem "Joseph the All-comely":

Joseph would stay here for three days,
For those very words
He will stay here for three years.

Exactly for his relying on a man Joseph is blamed: had he appealed to God, but not the cupbearer, asking Him "to remember" and save him, he would have been delivered from prison within those very three days; but since he had asked a man for kindness, he was kept in custody for "three years" more. However, there is a commentary which denies such conclusions and asserts that Joseph was released right on the day when he had been predetermined from above "to come out of prison to reign" (Ecclesiastes 4, 13—14) — and the cupbearer remembered him at the predestined time.

Right on his release from prison

...The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. (Genesis 40, 23; NRSV)

When one's circumstances change to the better, they often forget about those who did them a favour in need.

More than two years passed and the Pharaoh saw a dream, which troubled him a lot: this dream was about seven fat cows who came up out of the Nile, and then seven thin cows came up and ate up the seven fat cows, but they were still as thin as before. Moreover, the Pharaoh dreamt of seven plump ears of grain which were growing on one stalk, then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them and they "swallowed up" the seven full ears. None of the priests, interpreters or wise men of Egypt could interpret this dream to the Pharaoh, for it evidently gave warning of one and the same course of events.

And that was the moment when the cupbearer remembered Joseph:

Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my faults today.

Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard.

We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own meaning.

A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each according to his dream.

As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged. (Genesis 41, 9—13; NRSV)

The Pharaoh sent for Joseph that very moment. And Joseph says to the Pharaoh:

...It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer. (Genesis 41, 16; NRSV)

At the age of thirty Joseph goes before the Pharaoh: it has been thirteen years since he had come to Egypt (Genesis 41, 46). Joseph is an absolute saint; he does not take the credit for his spiritual gift, but says at once that it has been sent to him from above; he converts people to the Lord with each word. Joseph, though, is concerned not only for the glory of God, but also for the honour of his fellows. Narrating his fate to the cupbearer and asking the latter to stand up for him and get him out of the prison, he says:

...Make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place.

For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon. (Genesis 40, 14—15; NRSV)

There is not a single word of accusation uttered by the righteous man regarding his brothers: "...I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews..." (in fact, the word "stolen" might speak for the version of Joseph's selling: it was exactly the Midianite traders who "stole" and sold him). Joseph is not mentioning the crime of his brothers, just as he is holding back the treachery of Potiphar's wife. Nor is he speaking of his own merits, only denying his guilt. For the righteous man is called upon to be people's intercessor and defender, but not their accuser.

When the Pharaoh sent for Joseph and the latter was brought out of the prison, he "changed his clothes" (Genesis 41, 14), which means that God gifted him a new power of prophecy, greater than before. Each time the clothes are changed, it is a hint to a change in the soul of a righteous man. In his interpretation of the Pharaoh's dream Joseph mentions God four times emphasizing His providence and His care for the Pharaoh and Egypt (Genesis 41, verses 25, 28, 32). The saint is trying to convert the king and his courtiers to the true faith. He says that the fact that the dream came twice speaks for its truthfulness (see also Job 33, 14—18). The meaning of the dream is as follows: The seven good cows which came up out of the Nile are seven years of plenty in Egypt, whereas the seven lean cows stand for seven years of famine, which will come after the plenty. All the nourishment of Egypt depended on the Nile: Egypt was irrigated with this great river's flooding, but not with rains. That is why the crops of the future years — "the good and lean cows" — came up out of the Nile. And, according to Joseph's words, the Pharaoh should select a man who is discerning and wise who could collect the bread of the upcoming plenteous years and create a huge supply of food for all the years of famine.

Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the Spirit of God?"

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.

You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you."

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."
Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck.
(Genesis 41, 38–42; NRSV)

Clothes of fine linen and golden chains were the attributes of Egyptian priests, and Joseph the visionist became one of them through this action. Some evidence can be found in the written artifacts of the culture of Ancient Egypt that one of the religious foundations of that country was the doctrine of twinship: each man including the pharaoh has a twin, and the lives of the twins are mysteriously connected. The union and mutual recognition of two twins brings blessing to their souls, whereas mutual rejection and hatred bring both of them to sufferings. It is exactly this doctrine that may account for such rapid reaction of the Pharaoh to Joseph's words: according to the worldview of ancient Egyptians, twins were connected not only in reality, but also in sleep, that is why they could interpret each other's dreams. Having recognized Joseph as his twin, the Pharaoh made him "second-in-command". In the Hebrew original the word *משנה* <mish'ne> — "second" is used, which could also be understood as "a twin"; thus, a literal translation of verse 43 might be as follows: "He had him ride in the chariot of his second [i.e. "twin"], which was his" (in the NRSV translation it goes as "...He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command...").

Perhaps, there is another reason for such an instant resolution of Joseph's destiny: the Pharaoh as well as his courtiers must have been astonished by Hebrew slave's knowledge of Egyptian economics and accepted that without the inspiration from on high he could not have made such a non-trivial evaluation of resources needed for the nutrition of the Egyptian population: one-fifth of the seven-year produce of the land was to provide supply for the following seven years (see Genesis 41, 34–36). Probably, the data, on which such a complicated forecast could be based, was a state secret. But of course, the main cause of Joseph's rise lay in the fact that the Almighty affected the Pharaoh's sense, thought and will (see also Psalms 105, 19–22).

So, Joseph comes out of a deepest humiliation and practically becomes the ruler of Egypt, just as the Pharaoh said to him: "...only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you" (Genesis 41, 40).

...Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."
Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah... (Genesis 41, 44–45; NRSV)

which in Egyptian language means "nourishing life" — and at the same time it sounds similar to the Hebrew "revealing the mystery".

So, Joseph receives the status of an Egyptian priest of high ordaining. It goes on as follows:

...And he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On...(Genesis 41, 45; NRSV)

The name of Joseph's wife means "the priestess of goddess Neith", the goddess of wisdom, approximately the same as the Greek Athena. Asenath's father was the priest of god On, i.e. Osiris. Thus, Joseph merges into the Egyptian priesthood and gets involved into the mysteries of Egyptian religions. Obviously, the spiritual task of Joseph was very complicated and important: without refuting the postulates of Egyptian religion, and having been appointed for the position of a higher courtier and an outstanding priest, he was to gradually lead the Egyptian people to the knowledge of one God. This fact is directly stated in the psalm: in Egypt Joseph was to

...Instruct his officials at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom. (Psalms 105, 22; NRSV)

It is evident that teaching the Egyptians a true monotheism at once was impossible. We remember that Abraham had preached in Egypt already, and his preaching had been fruitful. And apparently, Joseph's activity affected the religious reform of Amenhotep IV, or Echnaton, the great pharaoh who made the first attempt to establish state monotheism, though it was introduced much later. However, not the Lord God was acknowledged as the only deity, but the god of light, whose symbol was the sun disk, but at the same time Echnaton abolished worshipping all the other gods. Some researchers trace the consonance of the very name of "Aton" with Hebrew אֲדֹן <A'don> — "the Lord", "the Master", which could flow into the Egyptian language back at the time of Joseph. Besides, after the death of Echnaton, when Egypt returned to official polytheism, there remained a tradition to consider different gods as "persons" of the one Amon, or Atum-Ra, which found reflection in various temple hymns. The Bible states that at the time of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt there were many Egyptians who feared the God of Israel and prayed to Him, and who had avoided the heavenly punishments and joined the sons of Israel leaving their own land. (Exodus 9, 20; 12, 38). It was some kind of "late fruits" of Joseph's activity: the people of Egypt was partially prepared for the acceptance of one God.

...But the seven years of plenty pass and the seven years of poor harvest come not only to the land of Egypt, but also to the land of Canaan. And Jacob sends his sons to Egypt — the only land where one can buy bread. At the same time Joseph's wisdom saves from starvation not only Egyptians, but also surrounding nations, who receive their food supplies from Egypt now. Not being able to recognize Joseph, of course, his brothers who have come to him to buy bread are recognized by him: they can only see an Egyptian courtier and cannot even think that he is their brother. Joseph must have changed a lot for the last twenty years. Besides, he speaks to his brothers through an interpreter on purpose, so that they could not suspect anything (Genesis 42, 23). This is the way the first part of Joseph's distant dream comes true: the brothers would bow themselves before him with their faces to the ground (Genesis 42, 6). According to the traditional narrative, Joseph had known that his brothers would come to Egypt on that very day, and his prophetic provision allowed him to specify for his servants the accurate date, the people and their origin who were to be brought to his house...

When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."

Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" (Genesis 42, 7—9; NRSV)

"Spies" — מרגלים <merag'lim>, literally "those who walk around", "peepers", — those who come with a secret goal, thief-like, in order to look something out to their own advantage. And indeed, that was the real spiritual state of Joseph's brothers at the moment they came to him. They had not yet repented of what they had done in their youth. In ancient times spies were sentenced to death. And the Law of God says:

And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him... he shall surely be put to death.
(Exodus 21, 16; KJV)

The brothers "stole" Joseph from their father and intended to sell him. If this plan has not been fulfilled (as one of the versions that we have already stated above), it was not to their credit: the Midianite merchants had just managed to do it first (though, in fact, special will of God can be viewed here, which did not allow the brothers to commit such a terrifying crime in reality). Let us remember that, according to the second version, the brothers sold Joseph themselves (see also

Genesis 45, 4; Acts 7, 9). In the world of God such unrepentant sinners are considered to be some kind of “spies” — not sons, or at least guests or strangers, but exactly “spies”: as if they have penetrated into the world of God as thieves looking only for their own benefit. Consequently, Joseph characterized the spiritual state of his brothers very precisely.

He puts them into prison for three days and then had one of them tied up before their eyes, namely, Simeon, leaving him in Egypt. He says to the rest of them that he would not trust them until they bring their youngest brother Benjamin to him, the one who Jacob did not let go fearing that “harm might come to him” (Genesis 42, 4). The father might have suspected the brothers’ hostile feelings towards his most beloved son Benjamin, the second son of Rachel. Joseph desires to see Benjamin not only because they have one mother, but also because Benjamin did not participate in the selling of Joseph.

So Joseph lets his brothers go, and orders to put the silver they paid into their sacks secretly, probably, trying to test their honesty — whether they return the money that belong to other people or not. However, Simeon stays in Egypt as a hostage... But why exactly Simeon? Jacob’s firstborn son was Reuben, whereas Simeon was born second. According to the traditions of the East, the younger brothers must absolutely obey the elder ones. As we remember, Reuben wanted to return Joseph home and prevented his murder. But when Reuben retired for some time (Genesis 37, 29 —30), Joseph was sold, and when Reuben came back, he could not do anything. Joseph could learn about all that not only due to his prophetic provision, but also from his brothers’ conversation, for they believed that the “Egyptian courtier” could not understand them (Genesis 42, 21—24). Reuben’s words spoke for the fact that he had not planned to sell Joseph. “Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother”... — guess the brothers when they find themselves in trouble. And Reuben reminds them: “Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen.” That is why Joseph takes to prison the second-born brother, Simeon, for, having the highest authority after Reuben, he did not prevent the crime.

The primary initiator of Joseph’s selling was Judah (Genesis 37, 26—27). Joseph does not put him to prison, but he leaves him to lead the brothers, so that he could come to repentance. Joseph’s aim is to bring all his brothers to the state of complete repentance. Only in this case they could regain God’s grace they had lost, and like their forefathers accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit and become Joseph’s real cooperators in the enlightenment of Egypt, in the propagation of the true faith. How is it possible to incline somebody to complete repentance? They need to find themselves in the same place and position of the one they have harmed, feel the same emotions, the same fear and mental sufferings...

So, the brothers go back to their father and some time later start asking Jacob to send them to Egypt to buy bread, for their supplies are coming to an end. Jacob is not willing to let Benjamin go with them: it is his last hope, the last son of his beloved wife, the memory of her. But Judah standing at the head of his brothers now guarantees the boy’s security to his father:

...I myself will be surety for him; you can hold me accountable for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever... (Genesis 43, 9; NRSV)

It is Judah who heads the brothers, for he is the one who is destined to become the forefather of the king line in Israel (Genesis 49, 10). Judah passed his word, and Benjamin was allowed to go. Seeing him among the brothers, Joseph feels extraordinary love towards him:

...He was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there. (Genesis 43, 30; NRSV)

So he makes his brothers take their seats at the table with him, and then sends them away filling their sacks with grain. But Joseph gives a secret order to put his precious silver cup in Benjamin's sack. And when the brothers are already leaving the city, Joseph sends the steward of his house to overtake them and declare that they have returned evil for good stealing the silver cup which he uses for divination (Egyptian priests used to have special divination cups — such have been found in the Pyramids). Naturally, the brothers deny this and keep saying: "We are honest men..." In order to escalate the tension the steward searches their sacks, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest, and finally finds the cup in the sack of Benjamin. Then the brothers tear their clothes and say:

...God has found out the guilt of your servants; here we are then, my lord's slaves, both we and also the one in whose possession the cup has been found. (Genesis 44, 16; NRSV)

The brothers find themselves in front of Joseph and hear his words:

...Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father. (Genesis 44, 17; NRSV)

But how can they go back to their father to whom they have sworn to guard him as the apple of their eye?

Then Judah steps out — the one who bears the greatest blame for Joseph's selling, and who is accountable for Benjamin with his own life before their father:

Then Judah stepped up to him and said, "O my lord, let your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. (Genesis 44, 18; NRSV)

And he reminds that "the lord" asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' And the brothers replied that they had an old father who did not want to let Benjamin go, but Judah stood surety to him...

Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, When he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol... Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers... (Genesis 44, 30—33; NRSV)

Sometimes there is a peculiar mystical bond among human souls; there are souls which make up a unity, — in such a way the soul of Jacob was connected with the souls of Joseph and Benjamin. Judah cannot endure the calamity which will come upon his father with the new sorrowful news. Many years have passed since the time of Joseph's selling. Judah has changed a lot, he has suffered those years much. Two of his sons have died, a lot of other grieving has he had. All those events described in the 38th chapter followed Joseph's selling and, of course, came as a punishment for the committed crime. The narration about them intervenes the story of Joseph not without reason... And now Joseph achieves his goal: he draws Judah into the situation when he resolves to become a slave instead of Benjamin and thus expiates the sin against Joseph. Judah's complete repentance, along with the repentance of his brothers, is accomplished...

Further follows one of the most dramatic, most beautiful episodes of the Book of Genesis:

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. (Genesis 45, 1—3; NRSV)

And at last Joseph discloses the great plan of God which revealed itself in his fate and in the fate of his brothers:

...And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life...(Genesis 45, 5; NRSV)

Later, after the death of their father, Joseph will express the same idea in a different way, more decisively emphasizing the good purpose of the Providence, which appears even through people’s evil doings:

... Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today... (Genesis 50, 20; NRSV)

Yet now, Joseph just makes a passing remark about the evil plot of his brothers, for they have completely repented to God and to him... Joseph tells them to bring Jacob to him. The sons of Israel must live in Egypt now to teach Egyptians monotheism. But right after that they are to go through the dreadful Egyptian slavery, which has been foretold by God to Abraham, and await redemption — the Exodus which will take place 430 years after the covenant with the great patriarch was made (Genesis 12—14; Exodus 12, 41).

Thus, the story of Joseph who was sold by his brothers according to the Divine Providence so that they themselves would be saved from death as well as the whole Egypt, is the story of the events due to which the evil made by people was turned into the good. This story has got a deepest meaning and many sense levels; some of them will be discussed further on.

First of all, Joseph foreshadows the history of the people of Israel, whereas Egypt symbolizes the pagan world. There is a prediction concerning God’s visitation of Egypt:

See, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, one against the other, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom... (Isaiah 19, 1—2; NRSV)

And further it goes on to say:

On that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand that the Lord of hosts raises against them.

And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians; everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the plan that the Lord of hosts is planning against them. (Isaiah 19, 16—17; NRSV)

Referring to Egypt in its literal meaning, the historic Egypt, the words “the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians” seem to have had no chance for fulfilment ever. “The land of Judah”, i.e. Judea, is a small state in Palestine, whereas Egypt is a huge country, which has

always overpowered “the land of Judah” by far. And still, it is definitely said here: “And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians; everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the plan of the Lord of hosts”... The prophecy of Isaiah came to life in the XX century, as the wars of the recently reemerged state of Israel against Egypt began, and as, for instance, in 1967 during the Six-Day War Israelites reached the Suez Canal having conquered a significant part of Egyptian territory — the Sinai Peninsula — and having defeated the Egyptian army. “The land of Judah” literally became “a terror to the Egyptians”.

Symbolically Egypt denotes the pagan nations, whereas Joseph taken to slavery and suffering symbolizes the people of Israel scattered among pagans. But what for did this scattering take place, why does this nation called and marked by God has been suffering for centuries? For the knowledge of God, in order “Egypt” got to know the Lord. For further Isaiah goes on to say:

On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, Whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.” (Isaiah 19, 24 —25; NRSV)

Great is the Lord’s plan for salvation of the whole humanity, of all nations! Egypt and Assyria here stand for the pagan kingdoms of the West and East, and the prophet foresees the salvation of them all united together with Israel in one worshipping to the Lord God.

Thus, just like Joseph is suffering in Egypt, the people of Israel is suffering in the diaspora for the sake of monotheism propagation. Let us recall that the opportunity for the Christian and then Islamic preaching emerged due to the existence of Jewish diaspora...

Another deepest symbolic meaning of Joseph’s life lies in the fact that it is a prototype of Jesus Christ’s life. Let us go back to what we said about the Hebrew spelling of the name of Joseph. In this case such a way of writing denotes the Christ’s staying in the higher spiritual world as the Son of God at first, then his descending to the earth, his offering the great atoning sacrifice, and finally, his ascension, returning to heaven. The last letter of the name of יוסף <Yo’sef> stands for the Christ’s descending to hell and then erection of that a “spiritual ladder”, which can be used by all souls aspiring for God to ascend. Jesus Christ was betrayed for thirty silver coins, just like Joseph was sold for twenty. Jesus Christ sent his disciples to pagan nations — to the “spiritual Egypt”. The Revelation of John speaks of the city “that is prophetically called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified” (Revelation 11, 8). This “spiritual Egypt” must find salvation through the sufferings of the Christ, just like the suffering of Joseph served for the salvation of the historical Egypt. It is Egypt where the brothers come to Joseph. Respectively, after the Second Temple had been destroyed, a vast scattering of the Israelites began among those nations which were destined to become Christian. The Israelites left the Holy Land and made their way to other nations as well as the brothers of Joseph moved to Egypt. Joseph’s brothers said to their father Israel: “The lord of the land, spoke harshly to us, and charged us with spying on the land” (Genesis 42, 30). The brothers did not recognise Joseph who spoke “harshly”. The harsh, severe treatment by Christian nations did not allow the Jews to realize that Jesus Christ is their “blood brother” (Matthew 1,1; Romans 11, 24—29; Hebrews 7, 14). And only later does Joseph reveal himself to his brothers leading them to repentance. And when the brothers return to Jacob as Joseph’s messengers, they bring wonderful news to him:

...And they told him, “Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt.” He was stunned; he could not believe them. (Genesis 45, 26; NRSV)

The one who was considered dead turned out to be alive — as if he had come to life again, resurrected and now was ruling over the whole Egypt! But it is said that Israel “was stunned” by

this news, he did not believe it and accept it at once, he remained in unbelief for a while, requested proof...

But when Jacob made sure that the sons' words were true, his "spirit revived". And immediately after that he "became Israel" again: "...Israel said..." (Genesis 45, 27–28). "The spirit revived" means that the Holy Spirit, the prophetic Spirit revived the spirit of the forefather with Its presence once again and he became "Israel" — "the essence possessing power, singing, beholding God".

This great event — the meeting of Israel with Jesus Christ, the acceptance of the Good News — is only to take place in the future. When Israel having matched all the proofs finally comes to the conclusion that the Messiah is alive, then his "spirit will revive" and Israel will become the people of prophets once again (Joel 2, 27–28; Zechariah 12, 9–14; 13, 1–2).

So, Joseph is Jesus Christ's prototype, as well as other saints of the Old Testament.

Finally, Joseph symbolizes the way of a high human spirit, who descended to the earth, took shape, completed his mission in our world and, after leaving an example for the others, making way for them, building the "spiritual ladder", came back to the heavenly world. Just like Joseph, a high spirit obeys the spiritual law expressed in the Sermon on the Mount: "...pray for those who persecute you..." (Matthew 5, 44).

Besides, it needs mentioning that Joseph's mission was so to say not completed and he had not been buried in the land of Canaan until those Egyptians who were destined to join Israel and leave Egypt did it and until the very land of Canaan was conquered by Israel (compare Genesis 50, 24–26 and Exodus 13, 19 with Joshua 24, 32).

Let us make some conclusions. Due to the righteous doings of Joseph, a lot of Egyptians were saved not only physically — from starvation, but also spiritually — through the preaching of monotheism; also Israelites were saved: physically — from starvation and all as one — spiritually, by means of repentance. And it was God's will to unite the Egyptians who came into faith and Israelites into one people during the Exodus. For, only after having gone through the horrors of the Egyptian slavery did the Israelites become capable of understanding and obeying the following God's commandment:

...The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt...
(Leviticus 19, 34; NRSV)

Only those who have suffered can put themselves in the place of those who are suffering. Thus, Joseph has become the symbol of God's people, the prototype of the Messiah, the Christ, and of each high spirit.

After Jacob arrived in Egypt, Joseph brought to him his sons, who had been born to him in Egypt, — Ephraim and Manasseh — so that their grandfather blessed them. Manasseh was the firstborn son, yet, Jacob laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, and his left one on the head of Manasseh (Genesis 48, 13–20).

Jacob, the great prophet, blesses not only his grandsons, but also the generations which are to descend from them, for he foresees the distant future. And indeed, the tribe of Ephraim became afterwards more powerful and significant than the tribe of Manasseh. In particular, it was the tribe that Moses' successor Joshua son of Nun came out of.

Jacob blessed his grandsons crossing his hands above their heads saying: "...By you Israel will invoke blessings, saying, 'God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh'". Such a laying of hands

bears a mystical prototype hinting at the future times when the great sacrifice will be brought on the Cross blessing and enlightening the world...

Then Israel said to Joseph, “I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors...” (Genesis 48, 21; NRSV)

Jacob foretells the exodus from Egypt. In a similar way Joseph prophesied the same event right before his death:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, “When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here.” (Genesis 50, 24–25; NRSV)

Jacob blessed his posterity before his death, and predicted in his blessing the future history of each tribe. He called his sons and said:

...Gather around, that I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come.
Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel your father. (Genesis 49, 1–2; NRSV)

The words Jacob pronounced, for instance, in reference to the future of the tribe of Judah, are marvelous:

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you. (Genesis 49, 8; NRSV)

The tribe of Judah brought forth the king dynasty of David, and Jesus Christ belongs to it. This fact is prophesied here as the “praise” of Judah’s brothers addressed to him. Discussing chapter 10 we have already said that the very name of יהודה <Yehu’da> means “praise to the Lord”. Here in the original we have a word play: “You who praise God shall be praised by your brothers”.

“...Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies...” No matter how severely enemies have attacked the tribe of Judah in its own land, no matter how much it was chased or persecuted in the diaspora, but its “hand was on the neck of its enemies”, i.e. the spiritual influence, which spread through Christianity, overcame and subdued nations.

And further it goes:

Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness—who dares rouse him up? (Genesis 49, 9; NRSV)

“Judah the lion” firstly “goes up”, then “stretches out” (“crouches down”) and, finally, “rises up” again, i.e. gains strength. The complete prosperity of this tribe is back to the times of the Israel and Judah Kingdom during the reigns of David and Solomon. During the reigns of later kings the kingdom of Judah lost its force. It also existed as an independent state after the Babylonian captivity starting from the times of the Maccabees up to the Jewish War against Rome, but then it disappeared from the map, and the nation “crouched down and stretched out” — throughout many centuries it was as if in the state of “a spiritual sleep” scattered among the other nations. But when Jacob asks: “...who dares rouse him up?” — this means that the nation is destined to have a new awakening, new flourishing. Since the 20th century, when the state of Israel appeared on the map, this prediction has started to come true.

Then Jacob goes on to speak of the most significant, universal mission of Judah's tribe:

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. (Genesis 49, 10; KJV)

The word "Shiloh" stands for the Hebrew word שִׁלּוֹ <Shi'lo>, derived from the verb שָׁלַח <sha'la> — "to be calm", "to be peaceful". It is one of the Messiah's names, who is the Conciliator of God and people and of people among one another. The numerical value of the expression יבא שִׁלּוֹ <ya'vo Shi'lo>, "the Conciliator will come", in the Hebrew language is 358 (calculated as the sum of the numerical values assigned to the letters composing this expression). The word מָשִׁיחַ <Ma'shiakh> — "the Messiah" has the same numerical value 358. The prophecy says that "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet", i.e. the king ("the sceptre" is a symbol of the royal power) from the tribe of Judah shall rule, and the regulatory legislative council shall be in action in Judea "until Shiloh come", i.e. the Messiah. "...And unto him shall the gathering of the people be": the Messiah "shall surrender" the nations, turning them to the faith in One God.

When is the Messiah to be expected, according to this prophecy? Probably, at the time when "the sceptre shall depart from Judah". Since King David Jewish kings ruled in Jerusalem. For the time of the Babylonian captivity their reign ceased temporarily, but David's successors were considered to be "kings in exile". His direct descendant Zerubbabel returned from Babylon and became the ruler of Judea, participating in the building of the Second Temple (1 Chronicles 3, 9—19; Haggai 1, 14; Matthew 1, 6—12). In the 2nd century BCE the native Hasmonean dynasty came to power in Judea. And only in 40 BCE Roman authorities appointed Idumean Herod as King of Judea, who ascended the throne in Jerusalem in 37 BCE. Being a descendant of Esau, but not Jacob, Herod (also known as Herod the Great) proved with his enthroning the fact that "the sceptre departed from Judah". That was a Judean king, but not of the Jewish descent. And those who kept in mind the prophecy of Jacob started awaiting the arrival of the Messiah, who was born exactly in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod (Micah 5, 2; Matthew 2, 1).

...Until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his.
Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes... (Genesis 49, 10—11; NRSV)

When Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem, he sat on a colt making this prediction come true. The same event had been foreseen by Zechariah the prophet as well:

Rejoice greatly, o daughter Zion! Shout aloud, o daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9, 9; NRSV)

Before his death forefather Jacob also saw the humble king, the Conciliator, who entered Jerusalem riding a foal: "Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine..." (Genesis 49, 11). The vine is a symbol of both the whole Israel, and the city of Jerusalem: a huge golden image of a vine hung over the entrance to the Temple of Jerusalem. But another sense is implied here too: the colt symbolizes animal forces of a man, whereas the vine is a symbol of Jesus Christ himself and the Church:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the Vinegrower. (John 15, 1; NRSV)

The believers are symbolized by the branches of the vine, which are vitalized with its sap — the Holy Spirit. The foal bound to the vine denotes animal forces refined by the spirit and devoted to

serving God. The triumph of the spirit, its power over lower elements are to be announced by the Church of the Christ.

There is another meaning of this image: according to some old church tradition, the vine denotes Israel, whereas the foal stands for the pagan nations. Being “bound to the vine”, i.e. now constituting one entity, they form a whole people of God.

And Jacob goes on to speak about the Messiah the Conciliator that he:

...Washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes... (Genesis 49, 11; NRSV)

At that moment Jacob beholds the Messiah suffering, executed, in blood-tainted clothing. The Calvary stands in his sight... But at the next moment already the patriarch sees the Messiah alive again, resurrected, triumphant:

...His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk. (Genesis 49, 12; NRSV)

These words can also be translated in a different way: “...His eyes are redder (or “more beautiful”) than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk”. Such was resurrected, ascended and glorified Jesus, when he appeared before his beloved disciple John: “...His eyes were like a flame of fire...” (Revelation 1, 14).

Before his death Jacob beheld a great many of future events: he viewed both spiritual and literal history of Judah’s tribe; he beheld the coming of the Conciliator at the moment of history when the foreigner mounted the throne of Jerusalem; beheld the sufferings of the Messiah and the subsequent glory (1 Peter 1, 11). And after Jacob finished prophesying, he “breathed his last, and was gathered to his people” (Genesis 49, 33): his spirit ascended and joined “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Hebrews 12, 23).

We have spoken about Joseph; we have spoken about his way, about the way of the people of God; about the way of Jesus Christ, about the way of any righteous spirit. And in conclusion let us recall the meaning of the name of “Joseph”: “[he] will multiply”, or “the one who multiplies”. The way of a spiritual man is multiplying light and goodness. The Lord said to Adam and Eve back in the paradise, when they had no material bodies and there could not be any physical multiplication:

...Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth... (Genesis 1, 28; NRSV)

They were spiritual beings, and the light spiritual essence must “be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth” struggling with the forces of darkness. That is the way of Joseph. And when Joseph was born to Jacob, God addressed Jacob with the following words: “...Now leave this land at once and return to the land of your birth” (Genesis 31, 13) The birth of Joseph was the aim and intention of Jacob’s staying in Mesopotamia. The aim and intention of human life is the multiplication of light, spiritual ascension. But in order to achieve this goal, one has to sacrifice himself descending to the very “depths of the earth” and then erecting a ladder, without which we cannot ascend to heaven.