



WILL ANY DREAM DO?

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Will any dream do?

A look at the life of Joseph (Genesis 37 -51)

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1 Introduction

I expect many of you will be familiar with Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical, Joseph and his technicolour dream coat. You should at least have heard the main song "Any dream will do." In fact, there is a risk that a lot of people will know the story and have learnt the supposed lessons more from the musical than the Bible.

Now, I love a good musical but the problem with them is that they, for all sorts of artistic reasons don't stick closely to the original story, whether a historical event (Sound of Music, Evita) or a story (Mary Poppins). Add to that the scripting presents a humanist understanding of the story. For example, it has Joseph promising to do his best when interpreting dreams rather than pointing to God alone who can do this.

The song itself has a jolly tune but some of the lyrics make little sense. For example, I would advise keeping your eyes open rather than closing them if you want to open curtains and see what the world outside is up to. Otherwise, you are likely to bump into furniture and injure yourself.

However, the crucial question is not just whether or not the song lyrics make sense or the facts are correct is whether or not we can learn our theology from a musical. Does "Joseph" get the main message of the story right? Is it really about having dreams and getting positive interpretations?

In this short book, we delve into the Biblical account of Joseph's life. Not only will we looking to see if the musical gets it right but we will be challenging other presumptions and traditions that we might bring to the text.

Each study follows a simply pattern. After a brief introduction, we look to see what the text has to say for itself. We then dig a little deeper into its meaning. Finally, we take a look at ourselves asking how the Genesis account of Joseph's life might apply to us today.

2 The Dreamer

God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3). Although Abraham and Sarah, his wife were childless, God had promised them a son. When the boy finally arrives, he is named Isaac which plays on the idea of laughter. Isaac has twins, Esau and Jacob but although slightly younger by minutes, Jacob wrestles the birthright and blessing of firstborn from his brother before one day finding himself wrestling with God for a blessing. It is at that point that God names him Israel (the one who wrestles God). Jacob marries sisters, Leah and Rachel. Rachel was more loved but only provides his two youngest children, Joseph and Benjamin.

Read Genesis 37:1-11

Jacob lives in Canaan, notice it is described as “the land of his father’s sojournings”, suggesting that Isaac had neither truly settled nor made it his homeland (v1). New sections in Genesis are headed with “These are the generations” or “toledot”. Here, the family tree and line of succession is tellingly traced not through Jacob’s eldest son but through Joseph. Joseph is 17 and working as a shepherd with his brothers, note these are not the sons of Leah but of the concubines that Leah and Rachel had supplied to Jacob. Despite his youth it seems that it is Joseph is the one that Jacob looks to as responsible and he is reporting back unfavourably on his brothers (v2).

Jacob loves Joseph more than his brothers, the reason given is that Joseph is born in Jacob’s old age but it no doubt also reflects the fact that he is Rachel’s eldest. This perhaps is why he is named as Israel, rather than Jacob here, a reminder that God works in unusual ways and sometimes chooses the younger over the older. He has a coat made specially for his son, often referred to as multi-coloured but perhaps simply one with long sleeves. The NIV chooses to refer to it as ornate and it is clearly seen as an extravagant demonstration of his love (v3). The brothers are jealous and are unable to control how they speak to their brother, they take out their anger and jealousy on him (v4).

Joseph dreams and he shares his dream with his brothers, it makes them hate him even more (v5). In his dream, he and his brothers are working in the field, binding up sheaves of wheat when his sheaf stands up erect and the brothers’ sheafs bow down to his (v6-7). The dream doesn’t need much interpretation, they get it straight away “do you think you are going to be our king and boss us about?” Their hate grows (v8).

Joseph dreams again that the cosmos, or representatively, the sun, moon and eleven of the stars bow to him. This time he tells his father too given that dad and mum are included as represented by the sun and moon. The response is similar although whilst questioning Joseph’s expectations, Jacob holds his counsel whilst his brothers get even more angry and jealous (v9-11).

Digging Deeper

It is often presumed that Jacob and Joseph are unwise/in the wrong here. Jacob is portrayed as showing unwise favouritism whilst Joseph is seen as arrogant and presumptuous. The follies of old age and youthfulness perhaps combined.

However, Scripture doesn’t seem to place such a moral spin on things. Indeed, the reference to Jacob as Israel when describing his love for Joseph suggests that we should see this positively. Jacob is not showing mere favouritism but identifying his heir and showing how God’s covenant

promise will be kept through and in Joseph. Joseph like Isaac and Jacob himself was the son and heir of the promise.

Note too that Joseph would be vindicated. He received dreams from God. He shares them with his brothers and so it is God and his purposes they reject. Joseph is already hated and mistreated by them and their hatred seems disproportionate to mere sibling rivalries.

We should beware the temptation to learn ethical lessons before we have seen what God is doing here. First, God is acting to protect and enact his covenant. Second, Joseph acts as type, foreshadowing Jesus as the beloved son, hated by his kinsmen but their true king and saviour.

A look at ourselves

If Jesus is the beloved son of the Father, then the question for us is where we place ourselves in the story. Will we stand in hatred against him with his brothers or will we recognise the Father's love and Jesus' rightful status as our true king?

3 Sold

Joseph continues to work for his father. However, there is no doubt that the combination of the bad reports he was passing back to his dad, the favour shown by Jacob and the dreams made for an uneasy working relationship between the brothers.

Read Genesis 37:12-36

Jacob sends Joseph to check in on his brothers who are supposed to be pasturing the flocks in Shechem and to check that all is well or peaceful with them and their flocks (v12-14a). It seems that Jacob has cause to be concerned and perhaps here we see Joseph vindicated from verse 2 because when he gets there, the brothers have moved on, they are not where they are meant to be (v14b-17).

His brothers see him coming and plot to kill him, again, the truth of the situation is revealed as hearts are exposed (v18-20). The response isn't united though. It seems that primarily it is the sons of the concubines who are most vexed by Joseph. Reuben, the eldest son to Leah attempts to protect his brother, to have him thrown in a pit for a while to teach him a lesson before returning him home. Note, that even Reuben cannot come out and directly challenge what they are doing as wrong (v21-22).

So, when Joseph arrives, they strip him and throw him into the cistern (v23-24). When they see a caravan of Ishmaelites passing, Judah proposes that they sell Joseph to them, better to make money than to have blood on their hands. It seems this is another attempt to protect Joseph, though had he not picked up that this was Reuben's intent too (v23-38)?

Reuben returns from wherever he has been to. Perhaps there are clues from his brother's behaviour in chapter 38/m he is distressed to find his brother gone (v29-30). They concoct a plan and a story. They bring back the special robe, now dipped in goats blood and claim that Joseph must have been killed by wild animals. Jacob is crushed and inconsolable (v31-35). Meanwhile Joseph has been sold into slavery in Egypt (v36).

Digging a little deeper

There are echoes of these events throughout Scripture, David will be sent by his father to check up on his brothers when he meets Goliath, Jeremiah will find himself in a cistern, Daniel in a lion's den. Joseph heads to Egypt and into slavery ahead of his brothers. Joseph is also going ahead of his people Israel into slavery.

The imagery of the farm labourers seeing the son coming to check on them and plotting to kill would not have been lost on Jesus and this imagery seems to be behind his story of wicked tenants. However, that story tells the history of Israel which Joseph prefigures. Jesus is the one who is hated by his brother Jews who choose to plot his death. He is cast low into the ground, he is handed over to foreigners having been sent by the Father who sought their peace and ours.

A look at ourselves

If we are tempted to judge others, we should first of all remember that Ephesians 2 places us first of all among his enemies and haters. However, it was exactly through our desire to kill him that our salvation was brought about. So too it would turn out for Joseph's brothers.

4 A murky tale

The focus on Joseph's story means that Genesis 38 tends to be skipped over a bit which is a shame. The story of Judah and Tamar is crucial both to the unfolding Bible story line and to what is happening with Joseph. We leave Jacob's favoured son for a time, sold into slavery in Egypt. Meanwhile life has not been put on hold in Canaan.

Read Genesis 38

Judah, one of Jacob's sons moves, the one who arranged Joseph's sale leaves the family home perhaps out of guilt and moves to live with the Canaanites. He marries an unnamed Canaanite woman, she seems incidental to the plotline and has three sons by her, Er, Onan and Shelah (38:1-5).

Judah finds Er a wife, also from the Canaanites, she is called Tamar. But Er is wicked and God puts him to death (1:6-7). Judah instructs his second son, Onan to sleep with Onan to provide a son and heir for Er. This seems to suggest that an informal version of the Levirate laws existed as a custom. These would be codified by Moses to provide for a relative to step in as "kinsman redeemer" and marry a widow. However, it is clear here that the heir belongs to the original husband not the stand in. Onan knows this and so he has sex with Tamar but withdraws before ejaculation. Whether he is happy to seek sexual gratification without fulfilling his responsibility or simply goes through the motions is not stated but what is clear is that he has betrayed Tamar and his brother. He sinned. God strikes him dead too (v8-10).

Judah is afraid for his third-born son and instead of identifying the sin in his own family, seems to put the blame on Tamar as though she were cursed. He sends her back to her family, promising the third son when he is older but with no intention of fulfilling this (v11).

Later, Judah's wife dies. He grieves her for a period and then returns to see his Canaanite friend and to check in on his sheep flock (v12). Tamar hears about this and disguises herself, then goes to wait for him. She has worked out that Shelah is not going to become her husband Judah assumes she is a prostitute and asks her to sleep with him in return for one of his goats. She asks him for something as a pledge that he will honour the payment. He leaves his seal and his staff with her (v12-19). When he attempts to send payment, of course the prostitute cannot be found. Judah decides to leave things there so as not to draw attention and shame to himself (v20-23).

Later Judah is told that Tamar has been prostituting herself and fallen pregnant. He demands a harsh punishment for her, demanding that she is burnt alive (v24). However, she produces his pledge and outs the owner of them as the father (v25). Judah is forced to recognise that he is the one who has failed. He is the one who sinned and betrayed her both by failing to give his son to her and by using her for sex just as Onan did. She is vindicated. Judah recognises that in this matter, she is more righteous than him. In other words, he does not have a legal case to bring. She has a legitimate defence whereas he has no excuse. He is the one who deserves to be on trial for his immorality. He is the one who deserves death (v26).

Tamar gives birth to twins, though there is a tussle over who is born first, and we are no doubt meant to see echoes of their grandfather's birth as Esau's twin (v27-30).

Digging Deeper

Why is the story of Joseph interrupted? I would suggest two reasons. First, Judah's line is important too. Whilst Joseph will be central to the immediate continuation of redemptive history and Israel's salvation, Judah will provide long term hope. It is through Judah's "seed" that the King and eventually the Messiah will come. There will of course be rivalry between two lines, first as Rachel's other son Benjamin will provide a rival kingly line through Saul, secondly as the kingdom will divide and Joseph's tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim will dominate the northern kingdom and rival Judah. We see here that if salvation and the promise are to come through Judah that first, the seed is threatened early. Secondly, that Judah's line is chosen not because of his righteousness and indeed, the messianic line starts inauspiciously. Thirdly, Christ's line will include Tamar as well as later, Rahab and Ruth.

The other point is that Judah who had sold Joseph was himself a slave to his folly and experienced self-inflicted exile. If Joseph is threatened with death and experiences a form of death in exile, Judah's line must also experience judgement and death. The next part of the story will tell us about Joseph's response to sexual temptation by Potiphar's wife and so Judah and Onan compare unfavourably with Joseph's integrity.

A look at ourselves

There are a few things to apply here. First, there are ethical applications. Think again about how quick we can be to judge the sin of others but there is a question about our responsibility and who is more righteous. Do not judge if you do not wish to be judged yourself.

Secondly, we are meant to keep tracing the redemptive story and see how God is at work even in the midst to fulfil his plan. This should cause us to be thankful. It also means that if we know that God has fulfilled his promises in the big plan of salvation, that we can trust him in the mess of our own lives.

5 Tempted

The story now switches back to Egypt where Joseph has been sold by the traders. If Judah had failed the test and so was not vindicated or justified when it came to relationships, how would Joseph fare?

Read Genesis 39:1-20

The traders sell Joseph to Potiphar, a commander in the Egyptian army. It seems that he holds a senior rank, is wealthy and powerful (v1). There in his master's house, Joseph is successful and begins to rise in status through the ranks in the household, though he remains a slave. The reason for his success is explicitly stated up front. Yahweh was with him (v2). Potiphar is able to see that God is with Joseph and so he puts him in charge of the entire household, as a result, God blesses all that Joseph does so that Potiphar is blessed too and prospers (v3-5). Potiphar did not have to worry about anything but was simply able to enjoy life at home (v6).

Potiphar's wife sets eyes on Joseph, or in modern parlance, "makes eyes at him" and tries to seduce him "come lie with me."¹ Joseph refuses. This would be to wrong his master who has shown him favour but more importantly, it would be a sin against God (v6b-10).

One day, Potiphar's wife catches Joseph alone in the house and grabs hold of him but he runs away leaving her clutching onto his garment (v11-12). She calls out to others to come, falsely accusing him of attempted rape. She repeats the accusation to Potiphar when he gets back to the house. She blames him, saying he has brought a Hebrew into the house in order to insult them (v13-18).² Potiphar is angry and has Joseph thrown into prison. Though perhaps the fact that he does not have him killed indicated some question marks in his mind (v19-20).

Digging Deeper

In terms of typology, we can see how Joseph's experience of temptation foreshadows Christ's temptation in the wilderness. If Joseph would have to resist, day after day, Jesus would face forty days and nights of Satanic onslaught. Unlike Judah, Joseph proves upright and righteous. This does not protect him from false accusation. Jesus too would face false accusation. Here, Potiphar's wife is even able to use false evidence against Joseph that appears to incriminate,

A look at ourselves

There may be some helpful ethical and practical application here. I do think that we are meant to learn about how to live as God's people, living faithfully and righteously, withstanding temptation. We can also see here how even those who do right will be unjustly accused. 1 Peter instructs us on how to live righteously, there is an element of looking to Christ as example but this is only after we see his obedience and sacrifice as substitution, He is redeemer before example. Joseph foreshadows Christ as the one "tempted in every way but without sin" so that he could be just that.

¹ It is worth considering that if Joseph was overseeing the household, then in Proverbs 31 terms, he was taking on the role that she should have been fulfilling and perhaps this indicates a lack of trust in her on Potiphar's part too.

² This may also reflect Egyptian antipathy to semitic people, there was rivalry with other groupings including the Hyskos.

6 Prison

It had seemed like Joseph had fallen as low as possible when he found himself sold as a slave in Egypt. Yet, now he had fallen further still, just when things had looked like they were on the way up again. He now finds himself falsely accused, treated as a criminal and in prison.

At the end of his life, Joseph would talk about God intending things for good. How was he able to say that? How can believers today suffering literal enslavement or imprisonment and worse say that God is good? How can we, when our life feels metaphorically like prison, even like death say that God is good?

Read Genesis 39:20b -40:23

The start of Joseph's experience in prison seems to echo his experience in Potiphar's house. God is with him in the prison cell and so he is increasingly given authority and responsibility (39:20b -40:23).

Joseph is soon joined by two important prisoners, Pharaoh's personal cup bearer and baker. These two men would not simply be responsible for serving food and drink but would have been trusted right hand men, responsible for ensuring that no one got to the king via his food. They are put under Joseph's care (40:1-4).

Both men have dreams that trouble them. They seem to realise, perhaps because of the similar themes and the apparent coincidence of dreaming the same night, that these are no ordinary dreams but ones with meanings to interpret (40:5). Joseph finds them downcast the next morning because there in prison they have no access to the wise men and magicians in the court who would be able to interpret dreams. Joseph insists that interpretation belongs to God, by implication, not to men. He gets them to share their dreams with him (40:6-8).

The cupbearer goes first. He had seen a vine with three branches. He had squeezed the grapes from the branches into Pharaoh's cup. Joseph interprets for him. The branches represent three days and indicate that in three days he will be restored to his position (40:9-14). Joseph asks only that the cupbearer will remember him and plead his case for him before Pharaoh when restored (40:14-15).

The baker, encouraged by his colleague's interpretation, shares his dream. He had seen three baskets of bread and pastries on his head. He was taking them to Pharaoh but the birds were eating them. Joseph says that the baker will also be taken from the prison in three days but not to be restored, instead he will be executed. He will be hung or impaled and the birds will eat his flesh (40:18-19).

Three days follow and the Pharaoh has a feast to celebrate his birthday. As predicted, he releases the two men from prison, one is restored to his position, the other is killed. However, the cupbearer forgets all about Joseph's request (40:20-23).

Digging a little deeper

In the darkest prison, God is still there and acting. In 1 Peter 3:18-20, we are told that during the process of Christ's resurrection, "he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits..." Quite what this is referring to has provoked much debate. However, what we can say is that Jesus has been to the very darkest places, beyond our imagination, in all of space and time. There is nowhere beyond his reach, not even a prison cell. Joseph in prison points us to Jesus.

A look at ourselves

If God could work in Joseph's literal prison and that points us to the truth that nowhere is beyond Christ's reach in all of space and time, and beyond then this is good news for us. Whatever our situation, no matter how dark, we can trust Jesus to be there.

7 You raise me up

Despite God acting in the prison cell, Joseph remains in prison, forgotten about. His brother Reuben had of course failed to come back to rescue him from the pit, now the cupbearer fails to remember to help. How could God's promises come true.

Read Genesis 41

Now Pharaoh himself is troubled by dreams. First seven fattened, healthy cows appear by the Nile but these are soon swallowed up by seven skinny cows. In a second dream the sequence is repeated, except this time it's seven bails of corn. He wakes up disturbed and calls his advisors but no one can interpret the dreams. You will notice that throughout, whether it's Joseph's dreams of corn and cosmic signs, or the two prisoners' dreams that the dreams are paired, a reminder of the need for at least two witnesses (v1-8).

The cupbearer's memory is triggered and he tells Pharaoh about Joseph and the time he interpreted his dream and that of the chief baker (v9-13). Pharaoh has Joseph released and brought to him. He asks Joseph if he is the one who can interpret dreams. Contra the lines in Lloyd Webber's musical, Joseph doesn't say "I'll do my best" but rather he points to God as the one able to interpret (v14-16).

Pharaoh retells his dreams and Joseph interprets the dreams. He says that there were two dreams to confirm the certainty of God's decision to act. He explains that the dreams point to seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. (v17-32).

Joseph goes on to advise Pharaoh on what to do. He should appoint a wise person to oversee the harvests during the years of plenty to ensure that reserves are stored up for the time of famine and then to oversee the distribution of grain (v35-36). Pharaoh deliberates and concludes that he cannot think of anyone wiser than the one whom God is clearly with (v39). Echoing what had happened in Potiphar's house and the prison, he appoints Joseph to high rank, second only to himself (v39-40).

Pharaoh clothes Joseph with robes representing power and authority, gives him his ring representing his personal authority and sends him out in a chariot representing military power. He gives him a new name to indicate his including in the Egyptian people and a wife (v41-45).

Joseph takes charge of the famine relief project. It's now 13 years since he dreamed about being raised up to a position of authority and power (v46-49). He has children of his own, an encouragement that even here in exile, God is keeping his promise to Abraham of descendants. The names Manasseh and Ephraim have meanings which point to this, his ability to forget suffering and persecution and to be fruitful away from home (v50-52).

The famine hits and not just in Egypt but all around the known world so that people come from further afield willing to pay for grain (v53-57).

Digging a little deeper

We now see Joseph raised up out of prison, vindicated, given a name, clothed with power and authority so that the people must bow to him, or at his name. If he is second in command, then he is Pharaoh's right hand man, the one who would sit at his right side. Does that remind you of anyone? It should. We are transported to Ephesians 1 and Philippians 2 by the imagery here.

Jesus is the one, clothed with majesty and authority, seated at the right hand of the father. It is to Jesus that every knee must bow.

A look at ourselves

Pharoah recognises that if God is with Joseph and he is wise, then he must also be given authority and must be followed. Do we recognise that Jesus too must be followed and his word not just read but obeyed?

8 A sort of reunion

There is one thing missing from the jigsaw. Joseph has been exalted to a high position but he remains exiled from his family. His original dreams indicated that his own family would bow down to him and recognise his authority. This has not happened yet and does not look like happen. How will God bring the promises to fruition is still not completely answered.

Read Genesis 42

Jacob's family in Canaan have been afflicted by the famine. They hear that there is food in Egypt. Jacob sends ten of his sons to confirm this and bring back food. He keeps the youngest, Benjamin at home. Joseph and Benjamin were the two sons of his favoured wife, Rachel. Jacob believed Benjamin to be the only survivor and so wanted to keep him near. Notice too the ongoing switching between "Jacob" and "Israel" as his name, the latter a reminder of God's covenant purposes and promises which seem threatened at this point (v1-2)

The ten, referred to poignantly as "brothers of Joseph" rather than as "sons of Jacob" set off. When they arrive, Joseph spots and recognises them but they don't recognise him. It may seem like an unlikely coincidence that with many coming seeking food and with a whole system to administer that Joseph would have direct contact with them. However, first of all, we should perhaps think of the wider world in terms of those provinces under Egyptian influence and control which did at times include Canaan. Secondly, those coming would no doubt arrive in effect as ambassadors for tribes or nations. This is probably the role that the brothers would have carried out. They weren't there to get food for 12 people but for the wider clans including by this time their own children and potentially grand-children, servants in Jacob's household and aligned Canaanites, including Judah's friends and extended family.

Joseph's questioning as to where they are from would have been seen as the expected interrogation to confirm their credentials and determine their right to corn. In fact, Joseph's system will have been increasing the dependency of outlying regions on Egypt and so extended Pharaoh's power.

Joseph recognises them but they did not him. It was around 20 years since he had left as a teenager, he would have adopted Egyptian clothing and culture including shaving the body and head, wearing a headdress and also makeup. So, it should not be a surprise that they did not recognise him (v3-9).

Joseph recalls his dreams. He now sees that they are coming true as his brothers bow down. He continues to keep his identity secret and accuses them of being spies. He claims not to believe them when they tell their story. Perhaps he is intrigued by their description of him as "no more." Are they still living with the pretence that he had died? He has them imprisoned and tells them that they can only send one of them back to get their brother. However, after three days, he releases all but Simeon who he keeps in prison as a kind of hostage.

They recognise that what is happening to them parallels their treatment of Joseph. They believe that God is now punishing them. They begin to confess this to each other. They don't realise that Joseph speaks their language and can understand what they are saying. Joseph is moved to tears by this.

Joseph also has their silver returned to their food sacks as well as provision for the journey. One of them discovers his silver in his sack when they stop on route. This fills them with trepidation. Are they being tricked? Back in the land, they tell Jacob what has happened. He is distressed

believing that he has now lost two sons and risks losing a third. They also discover that all of them have had their silver returned to them.

The brothers insist that they need to go back but Jacob is not having it. Reuben offers up his won sons as a pledge or security for Benjamin. Note that he isn't willing to stand as the pledge himself! (v29-38).

Digging Deeper

Confession and repentance are drawn out from the brothers by their experience in Egypt. They are forced to confront their past, their deception and murderous intent. By facing accusation and prison, they must live through a mini experience of what they had subjected their brother to.

Joseph the unrecognised brother offers a precursor to Christ, the one who came to his own people but was neither recognised nor accepted. Jesus was of course not recognised by the men on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24 perhaps due to a combination of his crucifixion injuries and the changes brought by a glorified resurrection body as well as the fact that they did not expect to meet him there.

In Hebrews 2:11, we see that our relationship to the Father is through our relationship to Jesus as brother, just as Genesis places the focus on the 10's relationship to Joseph as brother taking precedence over their relationship to Jacob as father.

A look at ourselves

Meeting Jesus requires that we come to the point of true repentance. This means that we learn to look back on our lives and see the truth of our words, thoughts and actions without attempting to justify ourselves. The brothers are beginning to realise that what happened to Joseph was what they deserved just as we deserved the death that Jesus suffered. Jesus took our place so that we are set free from condemnation.

Joseph's tests give the brothers the opportunity both to speak the truth and to demonstrate that repentance is real by how they respond to the crisis. The Doctrine of Justification enables us to be honest about our own sins and failings. True repentance for us should be characterised by changed lives.

9 Before the throne my surety stands

Now it is Simeon's turn to seemingly be left forgotten. Jacob is loath to let the brother return however the severe and ongoing famine will soon force his hand.

Read Genesis 43

The famine continues in severity and the family eventually run out of food. The brothers beg Jacob to let them return to Egypt (v1-2). Judah however also reminds his father that "the man" had insisted on them bringing their younger brother. This causes Jacob to lament their oversharing though the brothers argue that full disclosure was necessary to prove their credentials. They do, however seem to spin the account a littler in order to mask how readily forthcoming they were with the information (v3-7).

Judah asks his father to send Benjamin with him. Note that although they talk about Benjamin as "the boy" or "lad", he would presumably have been in his thirties perhaps suggesting a level of protectionism towards the youngest and new favourite. Whereas Reuben was willing to offer his own sons as surety, Judah offers himself (However, he expresses some frustration at his father's delay (v8-10). Jacob acquiesces and sends them with gifts and additional silver, hoping to appease the Egyptian leader (v11-14).

Joseph sees them with Benjamin and arranges for them to come to his own private dwelling for a meal. They fear that they are being taken away to be punished and so fess up to Joseph's steward finding the silver in their bags. The steward reassures them and attributes their good fortune to their God. He returns Simeon to their company (v14-23).

At Joseph's house, they offer their gifts to him, note the imagery of men from the east bringing out gifts. He inquires about their father and is visibly moved to see Benjamin whom he blesses. They seem lacking in curiosity about his concern for their family and the specific son. They are astonished to find that they are sat in age order. Joseph and the Egyptians eat separately to the Hebrews due to cultural expectations. Joseph remains segregated from his family (v24-34).

Digging a little deeper

Notice the comparison between Judah and Reuben. It was Reuben who had wanted to save Joseph before but had failed. Judah had in effect betrayed his brother, handing him over for personal gain, just as another Judah/Judas would do so for Jesus many years later. Now, Reuben's attempt to protect the family and his brother prove half hearted and not enough again. Judah however steps up to the plate. Where Reuben can only offer his own sons as surety, Judah offers himself. It seems that something has changed in Judah. The events of chapter 38, his own experience of tokens of surety then and his understanding of what it means to be justified seem to have had an effect. Judah now is willing to step up as a brother and offer himself to stand in Benjamin's place.

A look at ourselves

When the people come out to John the Baptist, he urges them to live lives that bear fruit of repentance. The indication is that Judah's life is bearing fruit. If so, then he has moved from recognising another as more justified than him to finding true justification through God's grace.

Judah himself stands as surety, a foreshadowing of how Christ does that for us. By taking our place and bearing our penalty, Christ enables us to be justified through union with him. It is this truth that enables us to live changed lives.

10 The switch

We are now moving to the big reveal in the story. Joseph is now almost reunited with his younger brother and there is evidence of repentance on his brothers' part but they still do not know his true identity.

Read Genesis 44

Joseph gives instructions to his steward to again provide for the brothers and return their silver. This time, he gives his personal, silver cup to the steward to place in Benjamin's bag. He then instructs that this time, his servant is to pursue the brothers and accuse them of theft. It is intriguing and no doubt troubling to see that he refers to the cup as used for divination. It is possible that it is simply part of the act, to appear fully Egyptian but it is also possible that as a fallen human, that Joseph had become compromised in Egyptian practices (v1-5).

The steward does this and of course the brothers protest their innocence, pointing out their prior exemplary behaviour in seeking to correct a mistake. Note how the steward speaks with Joseph's voice "they will be my slave" (v6-10). When it turns out that the cup is in Benjamin's sack, they are devastated. Though 10 are free to go, they all return to the city (v10-13). They offer themselves as slaves to Joseph but he insists that he will only take the guilty one (v14-17).

Now, Judah steps in, reminding Joseph about his previous questions and how they'd answered them. He talks about Benjamin's life and his father's life being bound up together. If Benjamin does not return, it will destroy Jacob (v18-31). The climax to this speech is that Judah now offers to stand in and take Benjamin's place. He comes good and follows through on his promise to stand as surety for Benjamin (v32-34).

Digging a little deeper

Judah is offering to stand in Benjamin's place, to become a substitute, to bear his punishment, to pay his debt. It will mean that he will end his days in exile. He will become dead to his family and his old life. There is an extent to which here Judah is surely recognising that this is what he himself deserved. Yet the pointer is also to Christ who stands in as our substitute.

A look at ourselves

We should be careful not to place ourselves in the story as Judah if we think of his actions here paying for his own sin. He is of course modelling repentance but there needs to be recognition that we cannot make atonement for ourselves. We need the true substitute, the descendant of and and true and better Judah, Christ Jesus.

11 The great mystery revealed

Now that Judah has revealed his heart and demonstrated repentance, how will Joseph respond? Is it time for him to make full disclosure?

Read Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph is overcome with emotion and can no longer hide his feelings. He sends out the Egyptians with him and begins to weep. It seems that Joseph's apartment is attached to the royal palace so that Pharaoh's household are able to hear him weeping (v1-2).

Then he reveals his true identity to his brothers. He asks them about his father's welfare. They are too afraid to answer. Joseph reassures them, confirming his identity and inviting them to draw in close to them. He goes on to tell them that all that has happened, even the terrible things they did was part of God's plan. God had planned and purposed it for their deliverance or salvation (v3-8).

He then makes plans for them to live in Goshen, the fertile Delta region of Egypt and tells them to go and get his Father, to bring him down to Egypt. Then he brothers again, Benjamin first with all of them weeping (v9-15).

Digging a little deeper

Joseph introduces to God's sovereign purposes. It's not just that God makes the best out of bad circumstances, but he is fully in control of all that happens and is the one planning and orchestrating events. Keen Bible students will remember that God had in fact predicted many years previously to Abraham that his descendants would be exiled to Egypt.³

If the build up in the narrative has been towards this big reveal, then we may describe it as something that had been a mystery but now revealed or made clear. This is both in terms of Joseph's identity as a mystery to his brothers and both for the brothers and for future readers to understand what is happening.

Paul in the New Testament will describe the Gospel

A look at ourselves

One of the reasons why Joseph is able to forgive is that he is able to see all that God is doing. It's our sense that the great mystery has been revealed and to see God's sovereign purposes in our own suffering that helps us to forgive. We don't need to control the outcome with others. Nor, do we need to fear trouble. Instead we can see God at work. When we see God's big and greater drama, we don't need to worry about our little soap operas.

³ Genesis 15:13-16.

12 Sending for dad

Now the stage is set for the greatest re-union of all. Joseph sends for his father. However, before the brothers can return, there is another important step to happen first. Joseph may have significant authority but he has taken a bold step in inviting his family. Will they all be welcome?

Read Genesis 45:16-28

The news reaches Pharaoh about Joseph's brothers. He instructs that they should go back to Canaan and bring their Father. He makes provision for their journey home and return. Furthermore, he provides generously for when they come to settle in Egypt (v16-24).

The brothers arrive back in Canaan. They tell their father that Joseph is alive. Again, given their previous deceit, this must have made for a difficult conversation and included confession. Jacob is stunned. However, any difficulties are soon swept away by joy at the wonderful news that the son, presumed dead is alive (v25-28).

Digging a little deeper

Notice how the details here will be echoed through Scripture. The Israelites will depart Egypt as they arrived, with the Egyptian people providing for them. Jesus will tell a story about a father who believes his younger son is dead only to discover he is alive. There is a contrast too between Joseph and the prodigal. The latter's exile is self-inflicted and he turns out to be foolish and to waste all he has whilst Joseph is exiled against his wishes, proves wise and is an effective, prosperous steward of all that is given to him.

A look at ourselves

As an aside, not the main point, note how Joseph's winsomeness and good reputation with the Egyptians opens doors for his brothers. Does our good conduct open or close doors for our brothers and sisters?

The way that the brothers are received and welcomed into the kingdom is completely dependent on their relationship to their brother Joseph. This is true of us on God's kingdom too. It is only in Christ that we have standing.

13 Home and Away

There is one small matter that we might risk overlooking but would have been much more on Jacob's radar. Departure from the land has tended and especially to Egypt has tended to be seen as negative in Genesis.

Read Genesis 46

Jacob begins the journey down to Egypt. He pauses at Beersheba to offer sacrifices. Notice again the interchange of names. It is Israel that goes down to Egypt (v1). It is worth recalling that we are still in the "these are the generations of Jacob" part of the story. We have been focusing on Joseph but it is Jacob's story, what became of "Israel" that the writer is concerned with. The Father and son's lives are bound up together.

So, when we find Jacob pausing, building altars and particularly when we hear about him dreaming, then we should be reminded of his night encounters with God. Perhaps it was as much because Joseph was the heir of the dreams that Jacob loved him as any other reason. God speaks to Jacob/Israel and this is a form of covenant renewal. He promises that He is going with them into Egypt, it is his plan. This is important because first it reminds us that God had promised this back in Genesis 15. Secondly, it would be reassuring that this was God's will, after all, there were question marks over the way that his grandfather Abraham had gone down to Egypt and left the promised land during a previous famine. Even more importantly, God promises that the people will be brought back from Egypt (v2-4).

It's at this stage, that the author lists out the genealogy or family tree for Jacob but note that this keeps focus on those who are living, this isn't a family tree that will come to an end, its story is still to run (v5-27).

Judah goes ahead of his father to meet Joseph and get specific directions or instructions on where they are to head for. Judah is now a trusted representative (v28). Joseph goes to meet them and there is an emotional reunion between father and son. Jacob states that he is now ready to die in peace (v28).

Joseph recommends that they live in Goshen and says that he will arrange this. He tells them to emphasise their livelihood as shepherds because the Egyptians and shepherd people don't get on. This probably reflects tensions with other semitic rivals such as the Hyksos (v31-34).

Digging a little deeper

Exile from the land of Canaan is presented negatively throughout most of Genesis and then in Kings/Chronicles and the prophetic literature. So, at one level, we should be surprised to see it treated positively here. Yet, going back to God's word to Abraham in Genesis 15, there is still a negative element to it. There is safety and salvation, but it is real exile. The Israelites were meant to long for home and this will become clearer as we move to the close of Genesis. Absence from the land was not good. We might describe it as death. However, it is death with promised resurrection.

A look at ourselves

Israel, both in terms of the person and the family could experience a form of death and resurrection by going down to Egypt because Joseph had preceded him/them and because God was going to be with him.

We can think in terms of Christ preceding us and God being with us in death and resurrection. This is seen in conversion/baptism. We die and rise in and with Christ (Romans 6). It is also there in our mini experiences of death and resurrection. It is there in the sense that we are a people in exile, longing for home in this now and not yet age.

What we see at this point is that the musical “Any dream will do” gets it wrong. The story of Jacob and Joseph is not an encouragement to dream dreams. Rather, there is one single dream, vision or revelation that all the other dreams feed out of and depend on. It’s the dream of God’s salvation plan. This is the dream we need to dream.

14 Hope in exile

We are moving to the end of the book of Genesis, the foundation of the whole Bible story of God's redemptive plan. This also means that we are moving towards the end of Jacob's life story. Remember that whilst our focus has been on Joseph, this is really the story of "what became of Jacob and his generations." We will begin to see Jacob handing on, blessing his children and reflecting on his own life.

Read Genesis 47:1-12

Joseph takes some of his brothers to meet Pharaoh. Remember that the intention had been to put the focus on them as shepherds to guarantee them good land away from the Egyptians. He now puts this into operation and is granted Goshen. Pharaoh also requests that they take charge of his own livestock too (v1-5).

Jacob also meets Pharaoh. When asked about his age and life, he says that compared to his own ancestors, it has been short and challenging, or that his years have been "few and difficult." This contrasts sharply with Joseph's later reflection upon God's goodness. It perhaps shows how the experiences of being on the run, losing his son for a while and now living in exile dominate his thinking. It also jars with the way that he had done everything to gain the birthright and the blessing. Is this what he expected when he wrestled for those things with his father and then with God? All the same, he still blesses Pharaoh (v7-10).

Joseph settles his family in the best part of the land and ensures that they are provided for (v11-12).

Digging a little deeper

By settling his family in Goshen, away from the Egyptians, and in a more fertile area, Joseph is doing two things. First, he is ensuring that they remain separated out and do not become integrated with the Egyptians, secondly, he is giving them good land which will be closest in terms of fertility to the promised land. In fact, we might see this as a sign in exile of the continued hope that they have of being a holy nation, a people with their own land and if provided with food then also reminded of God's provision and blessing. They remain, as per the Genesis 12 covenant with Abraham, God's people, in God's place, under God's rule, blessing and provision.

A look at ourselves

On a side note, I think it is worth thinking about how we will reflect back on our own lives. Do we see them as short and difficult or do we see the goodness of God? How do we talk about our day to day, week to week life? Do we seem content or disaffected?

Joseph's provision of the best of the land for his family should not encourage us towards a prosperity gospel. However, there is something here about what the church is meant to be like. If we are a people in exile, then church should be the place where God's people are distinct, holy, different and where we get a foretaste of God's provision to come.

15 Servitude

The popular version of the Joseph story runs that Jacob spoils his son and is at fault for the brother's jealousy. This is exacerbated by Joseph's arrogant boasting about his dreams. However, being sold into slavery changes Joseph making him good, wise and just. Is that a fair rendition?

Well, there have been clues along the way that suggest we may not have got everything right. First, we saw early on that Jacob's love of Joseph arose in the context of the brothers' evil. The text emphasises the covenant nature of this with Jacob identified as Israel and there are pre-echoes or foreshadowing of God's Fatherly love for his son, Jesus.

There are also clues that things weren't quite right after Joseph's encounter with Pharaoh. We've already seen that Joseph talks about his silver cup as being used for divination. There are further clues here.

Read Genesis 47:13-31

As the famine continues, the people of Egypt and Canaan first run out of money. Joseph then exchanges food for their livestock. When they have no livestock left, they come to Joseph and offer their land to Pharaoh. The king owns their land and so in effect they work for him. The author observes that Joseph has "reduced the people to servitude" (v13-21). There is an exception. He exempts the priests. Remember that he has married a daughter of a priest. They were already receiving a provision of food for free from Pharaoh. So, presumably, the priests, Pharaoh's own household and Joseph's are provided for directly, free of charge (v22).

Joseph explicitly states that the people now belong to Pharaoh. He offers them seed to sow in their fields but taxes them in return. Pharaoh as the landowner is owed a share of the crops as the famine ends. The people also now acknowledge that they are Pharaoh's bondslaves. They remain grateful because Joseph has saved their lives (v23-26).

In contrast to the Egyptians, Joseph's family prosper and acquire property (v27). Jacob lives another 17 years and the time of his death draws near. He gets Joseph to swear on oath that he will have him buried with his fathers back in Canaan. The assurance that he would return home, even in death causes Jacob to worship (v28-31).

Digging a little deeper

At first sight, the plan to build up stores of grain in the good years looks like an altruistic act. However, what we see here is that the corn was not given back for free. This does look like the people were having to pay to buy back what they had themselves produced in the case of the Egyptians although those who travelled from further afield will not have contributed into the storehouses.

Joseph comes across as canny here but is he completely good and just? Furthermore, it seems that he sets in motion the mechanisms that will form the precedent and perhaps build up the resentment which will lead to his own people's later enslavement.

At the same time, there is no doubt that God is using Joseph and even here as he is seen as the one who rescues the people, meaning they now owe their lives to the king, he remains a type pointing forward to Christ.

It is first of all helpful then to remember that Jesus is the true and better Joseph. Christ saves but without the problems of his type. He does perfectly what Joseph does imperfectly. It is important for the author to remind us that Joseph is not perfect, is not the Christ, is not the saviour. Secondly, we see God's grace. He chooses and uses Joseph not because Joseph is good and perfect but out of sovereign love and mercy for his people.

A look at ourselves

Being reminded of Joseph's weaknesses should first of all make us even more thankful for Christ and the Gospel. It is also encouraging to be reminded that these great heroes of Scripture were fallen and finite. They failed but God loved them and chose them. This should increase our thankfulness for his grace to us despite our weaknesses.

However, this also means that we should not treat the men and women of Scripture as perfect examples to follow. Because Joseph has a divination cup and enslaves people or because Abraham lies about Sarah being his sister does not make it okay for us to sin. We should not become presumptuous when it comes to the grace and mercy of God.

16 Echoes of a past blessing

I think there was a real sense in which Joseph had died to Jacob when he went to Egypt. He now was more Egyptian than Hebrew and that's where his priorities in the life lay, even if he still had hope for return to Canaan one day. This fact probably helps us to understand a little of what is said and done next.

Read Genesis 48

Joseph hears that his father is ill. He takes his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim to see him, Jacob rallies a bit when he is told that his son is there (v1-2). He then reminds Joseph of his vision at Luz/Bethel and God's promise to him (v3-4). He also states that he regards Joseph's son as his own. I think this reflects what I've said above that Joseph had been lost to him and was now first and foremost an Egyptian. There is also perhaps something linked in to Rachel's death. Perhaps he had hoped for more children from her (v5-7).

He is then told that Joseph's sons are present. I suspect he needs things reporting as his sight fail. But there is also a semi liturgical call and response to the question "Who are these" and the answer. Confirmation that these are the ones given over to Jacob as sons. Jacob asks for them to be brought to him to be blessed. It does seem too that this is an early meeting with the grandchildren, so it is possible that this is early in Jacob's time in Egypt. "Some time later" refers back to Jacob's meeting with Pharaoh (v8-11).

Throughout the blessing there is this ambiguity between blessing Joseph and blessing the boys. The lives of father and sons are once again bound up together. Joseph notices that his father has placed his right hand on the younger son, indicating the firstborn's blessing. When he attempts to correct Jacob, his father insists that he knows what he is doing. The older will be blessed too but the greater share will fall on the younger (v19-20).

Finally, even in this later stage, he demonstrates that Joseph is favoured. His descendants will receive a greater share of the land and so the inheritance. Ephraim is treated as firstborn even though younger because Joseph is treated as firstborn though younger (v21-22).

Digging a little deeper

Jacob's blessing of the younger son is intentional. It's a reminder both that Joseph had been favoured above his elder siblings but more importantly of his own experience of blessing and birthright despite Esau being older. More than that, there is the sense that this is God's pattern throughout Scripture starting with Abel favoured rather than Cain and including Gideon and David to come. Jesus will tell a parable of a younger son who receives grace and favour that causes his older brother to envy him. This points to the way that Gentiles will be brought in like the younger prodigal.

A look at ourselves

We do well to recognise that God turns the expected on its end. He chooses the weak and foolish things of this world as Paul puts it. That's why his grace is given to us.

17 The future of the family

Joseph has had his own private audience with his father and his sons but as Jacob gets closer to death, he has things to say to his whole family.

Read Genesis 49

Jacob assembles his family. Once again note the interchange of names, they are “sons of Jacob”, he is their “father Israel.” He prophesies to each of them (v1-2). Each prophecy involves factual description of their lives along with moral assessment and this leads to consequences. Reuben as “first born” should be his father’s heir and representative. There were times when he sought to lead and be his father’s “strength” but also serious moral failure including sleeping with his father’s concubine.⁴ Whilst some Bible’s head this chapter as “Jacob blesses his sons”, it is clear that this is not blessing but judgement. Reuben will “no longer excel”, he will not lead.(v3-4).

Simeon and Levi are spoken to together, they are described as violent and blood thirsty. Jacob may well be thinking about the occasion when they sought to avenge their sister’s rape. They will be scattered through the land. The tribe of Levi would become the priestly tribe and not have a specific allotment in the land. Simeon’s tribe would be absorbed into Judah (v5-7).

The amount of space given to each son is an indication of significance and Judah receives his own extended prophecy. Judah’s story is one of turn around, he had failed, brought shame but had come through for Joseph. Judah and not Reuben will provide the kingly line. This should also have been a clue that Saul’s dynasty was unlikely to succeed (v8-12)!

Zebulun is simply told whereabouts his inheritance in the land will be, to the north west on the coast (v13). Issachar’s prophecy is fascinating, he is described as a donkey among sheep! He will look to enjoy his inheritance but succumb to servitude (v14-15). Dan’s prophecy marks the tribe out as one that will supply, judges. The description of a snake biting at riders perhaps reflects the geography of a norther tribe positioned to defend from Assyrian invaders (v16-18). Asher, Gad and Naphtali receive short, single statement prophecies (v19-20)

Despite his sons already receiving a prophetic blessing separately, Joseph also receives an extended blessing. The persecution and trouble he has faced and stood firm in the face of is recognised. His descendants are marked out as warriors/archers. He is promised great blessing. Ephraim would of course dominate the future northern kingdom (v22-26). Benjamin is once again in Joseph’s shadow, the description of a ravenous wolf again points to warrior responsibilities (v27).

The author is clear that these are not merely individual blessings and prophecies but that each son represents a tribe. The prophecies are appropriate to them, they fit their characters and appropriately describe the future setting and history of each of the tribes.

Digging a little deeper

Because the descriptions seem to fit well with the future land distribution of territory and the history of the tribes, some have been inclined to assume that the prophecies were written after the event by later editors and then put into Jacob’s mouth. However, if we trust God as the one who is Lord of Time, then we can have confidence in Jacob to look forward and see the future. I

⁴ Genesis 35:22.

agree with the traditional view that Moses edited Genesis and will have brought together written and oral accounts. He may well have shaped the retelling of the event in order to help instruct the Israelites about to enter the land.

The big focus in the chapter in terms of space given is on Joseph and on Judah. This reflects their status as saviour figures and pointers towards Christ, Joseph as type, Judah as ancestor. The promise of kingship and description of a lion is specifically about Jesus, God's king, the lion of Judah.

A look at ourselves

If it feels repetitive to us to be consistently reminded that Jesus is our saviour and king, that's intentional on the Holy Spirit's part as he inspires Scripture to keep embedding that message. We are forgetful and need to be reminded.

At the same time, there is the challenge about the evidence of where our lives are hid, in which inheritance we share. Do we belong with the stark warnings and judgements to Reuben and Simeon or are we found in the blessings offered to Judah and Joseph?

18 God meant it for good

We are coming to the end of the story. In fact we are coming to the end of several stories, the story of famine in Egypt, the story of Joseph and his brothers, the story of Jacob and the story of beginnings, the end of Genesis.

We should therefore treat the conclusion here as one, not only on the life of Genesis but on the whole book. The bigger picture is of God creating the world, making covenants, providing for people, showing justice. Alongside this we see people sinning, rebelling, exalting themselves, resisting God, cheating, lying, murdering being unfaithful etc. How should we evaluate the story so far?

Read Genesis 50

Jacob's time to die comes. In line with his wishes, Joseph arranges for his body to be returned to Canaan and buried in the family tomb. Joseph and his brothers go up, accompanied by the Pharaoh's household which causes quite the scene as the Canaanites see this grand, mournful procession (v1-14).

When the brothers return, they are concerned that Joseph will now get his vengeance on them. They go to see him and claim, whether true or not that Jacob has told them to come to him and plead for forgiveness. They ask for forgiveness because they are "servants of the God of your father." I think it is noteworthy that when Jacob arrives in Egypt he is described as "offering sacrifices to the God of his Father."⁵ Whilst there is a right sense in which God is the God of their fathers, is there a need to think of him more as their God, the God of now too? This might explain why the brothers need reassurance of promises already given to them by Joseph (v15-17).

They throw themselves upon his mercy and now offer themselves as his slaves, echoing the Egyptians selling themselves into servitude (v18). Joseph reassures them. He does not stand in God's shoes, he is not their judge (v19). Furthermore, whilst their intentions had been evil, seeking his harm, God had always planned and intended these events for good, to benefit his people, including Joseph and glorify himself (v20). Not only does he have no desire for revenge, he intends to continue to provide for them and their families. This is real forgiveness (v21).

Joseph continues to live in Egypt, to enjoy old age and to see grand children, great grandchildren and even the next generation (v22-23).

The time draws near for Joseph's own death. It looks like his older brothers survive him. He gathers together the Israelites, notice that they are being defined as a group. He reminds them that God will bring them back home one day. There seems to be an expectation of imminence to this. Unlike Jacob, he does not expect to be immediately taken up to Canaan for burial. As mentioned previously, he has an attachment to Egypt now. However, he asks that when they do return to the land that they take his remains up for reburial (v24-25).

He dies, aged 110 and is embalmed and placed in a coffin (v26).

Digging a little deeper

If this is the conclusion, not only to the Joseph story but also to Genesis, then verse 20 is vital in helping us to understand the story thus far. The Genesis story is one of humanity in rebellion,

⁵ Genesi 46:1.

seeking to resist and rival God. In the process, men turn against each other. Brothers kill, cheat and deceive. Yet, the author, Moses wants to insist that God intends, purposes these things for good.

This means, not merely that God turns things around and does what he can with the bad hand given him. Rather, we must see God purposing and planning these events. This takes us to the heart and the pastoral goodness of the doctrine of predestination. God is sovereign, he is great and he is good, he uses his sovereignty for good purposes.

A look at ourselves

Joseph is able to see God's goodness at work. He recognises that it is God's purpose to use his suffering to bring about the deliverance of his people. He also knows that this means they will ultimately return home. He has sure and certain hope.

It is this confident hope in God's eternal plan that enables Joseph to forgive his brothers. It is our confidence in God's purposes, through Jesus and our hope in the resurrection that helps us to forgive too. It is when we are captivated by the big drama of God's redemption plan that we can let go of our own little soap operas.

19 Any dream will not do (Conclusion)

We started by asking whether or not Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's musical "Joseph" gets the message right as summed up in the popular song "Any dream will do. We must answer "no". The big problem with the song is that its conclusion is all wrong and certainly is not the point of the story. It's not that "any dream will do." The message of Joseph is not to nod off to sleep and dream dreams, especially dreams that promote your own personal desires and ambitions. There is of course a place to "dream dreams" in that we both want churches and individuals to have passions and aspirations. Going further, as a Charismatic, I would expect people to have specific dreams, visions and prophecies. Still, we are meant to weight them, it isn't that any dream will do.

To be clear, though, the main point of Joseph's story is not to do with having lots of dreams, nor, sorry Andrew is it really about his coat which is rather incidental to the whole story beyond provoking his brother's jealousy. The point is that there is a specific dream or vision that is needed. Joseph's dream is crucial because it aligns with the big dream or vision given to Abraham, Issac and Jacob of God's plan to bring his people into a land where they can know God's goodness together, a plan that will take them through exile and exodus, through suffering and conquest, through death and resurrection.

We are not meant to learn from Joseph's story that any dream will do in order to dream our own dreams. Rather, we are meant to discover the one big dream of God's purposes that through death and resurrection, bringing low and exalting high, grace and judgement seen as common threads through all the dreams of the story means that in Christ and his death and resurrection, God is working out his purpose and demonstrating his goodness.