

## Malcolm's Monday Musings : 18 May 2026

Greetings,

Back in November 2024, I circulated recordings of four Zoom messages which I had given a short time before, on the subject: 'The early life of Joseph'.

I have decided that (over this and the following three weeks) my 'Musings' will consist of the full notes (slightly adapted, together with footnotes) of those four Zoom messages.

This week, the 'Musings' below cover (i) the background and context of Joseph's life story and (ii) how his early experiences fit into the main Bible storyline.

God willing, over the following three weeks of 'Musings', we shall be surveying the Old Testament account of the early life of Joseph, as detailed in Genesis 37-41.

Meanwhile, here are three unconnected items to be going on with:

### **1. 'He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by their names' (Psa 147. 4).**

'He has an intimate acquaintance with each separate orb, so as to know its name or character ... Vast as these stars are, they are perfectly obedient to His bidding; even as soldiers to a captain who calls their names, and allots them their stations. Do they not rise, and set, and move, or stand, precisely according to His order?

'What a change is here from 'He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds' (verse 3). Read the two without a break, and feel the full force of the contrast. From stars to sighs is a deep descent! From worlds to wounds is a distance which only Infinite compassion can bridge. Yet He who acts a surgeon's part with wounded hearts, marshals the heavenly host, and reads the muster-roll of suns and their majestic systems. O Lord, it is good to praise thee as ruling the stars, but it is pleasant to adore thee as healing the broken in heart'.

(C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Treasury of David', comments on Psa. 147. 4.)

### **2. 'An inheritance ... reserved in heaven for you' (1 Pet. 1. 4).**

'Scripture repeatedly makes clear that heaven is a realm of unsurpassed joy, unfading glory, undiminished bliss, unlimited delights, and unending pleasures. Nothing about it can possibly be boring or humdrum. It will be a perfect existence. We will have unbroken fellowship with all heaven's inhabitants. Life there will be devoid of any sorrows, cares, tears, fears, or pain'.

(J. MacArthur Jr, 'The Glory of Heaven', page 68.)

### **3. 'With thanksgiving' (Col. 4. 2).**

'Today, you can thank God for the prayers He answered the way you wanted ... for the times when God didn't give you what you prayed for, but used His wisdom instead. You can thank God for the closed doors that kept you safe from situations you didn't know were dangerous and for the delays that helped you get ready for when it was His timing to answer your prayers'.

(Lightly adapted from W. Hopley, 'A Prayer of Thanks for Not Getting What You Prayed For', accessed at <https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/your-daily-prayer/a-prayer-of-thanks-for-not-getting-what-you-prayed-for.html>.)

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

---

# THE EARLY LIFE OF JOSEPH

## Part 1: the background

### SCRIPTURE

Our first Bible reading<sup>1</sup> comes from Genesis chapter 37, verses 1 and 2:

And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan ... Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren.

Then from chapter 41, verse 46:

And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.

And, finally, from chapter 45, verses 4 to 9.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, 'Come near to me, I pray you'. And they came near. And he said, 'I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life ... God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

'So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God ... go up to my father, and say unto him, "Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt"'.<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

One thing which must strike even the casual reader of the book of Genesis as decidedly odd is the relatively large amount of space devoted to the life of Joseph, for his story occupies no less than twelve full chapters<sup>2</sup>, and is equalled for length only by the story of Abraham himself.

And yet neither the priestly nor the royal tribe of Israel (which spring from Levi and Judah respectively) comes from the line of Joseph. Nor does he figure in any way in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Joseph is mentioned by name in only two chapters of the New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

And yet, as I say, a disproportionately large amount of space is occupied with his story. Clearly, therefore, it must be of great importance for other reasons.

But before we consider any of the details of Joseph's life-story (as we shall, God willing, in three subsequent 'Musings'), I want us to stand back and to consider both

- (i) the background and context to Joseph's life story and
- (ii) how Joseph's life story fits into the main Bible storyline.

And I make no apology if this opening document comes over as something of a history lesson (and, to no small extent it is just that) for I firmly believe that, without some such background, we shall be in real danger of losing sight of the wood for the trees in these later 'Musings'.

Chronologically, at least, the life of Joseph functions as a kind of bridge between the days of the patriarchs on the one hand<sup>5</sup> and the formation of the nation of Israel on the other.<sup>6</sup>

### TWO REASONS THAT JACOB'S FAMILY MUST LEAVE 'THE LAND OF PROMISE'

The first point I need to make—and to make most strongly—is that, given the account we have of the lives of the patriarchs, Jacob's family certainly couldn't stay where it was ... no matter how comfortable it may have felt there.

And this for at least two reasons.

#### Reason 1: the lack of space

First, because Jacob and his immediate descendants needed a safe space in which they could increase numerically— a location where they could multiply and grow from a relatively

small family into 'a great nation', as the God of glory had promised Abraham long before, when he was still living in Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia.<sup>7</sup>

In Abraham's own days, his 'household' (his 'clan') posed no threat whatever to the surrounding tribes and nations. Although there were Canaanites in the land—a fact we are told twice<sup>8</sup>—Abraham's neighbours clearly saw it as no great problem that Abraham had 318 trained servants.<sup>9</sup> The only strife which Abraham encountered was between his herdsmen and those of his nephew Lot,<sup>10</sup> and the only conflict in which Abraham was ever involved was against the foreign invader Chedorlaomer and his allies.<sup>11</sup> If anything, Abraham was highly respected by the people of Canaan. When we read of his negotiation for a burying place for his wife Sarah, we hear 'the sons of Heth' answer him, 'You are a mighty prince ('chief', 'leader') among us'.<sup>12</sup>

I note, however, that in the days of Isaac there were already rumblings to the effect that at least some of his neighbours resented his prosperity and relative strength. Genesis 26 records how 'the Lord blessed him, and the man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants, so that the Philistines envied him and stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug ... and filled them with earth. And Abimelech (the king of the Philistines<sup>13</sup>) said to Isaac, "Go from us, for you are much mightier than we". And Isaac', we read, 'departed from there'.<sup>14</sup>

When we come to the days of Jacob, we find him terrified that, on account of the violent actions of two of his sons (in massacring the men of Shechem without mercy)<sup>15</sup> and because he was 'few in number', the 'inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites', would 'gather themselves together against' him and destroy both him and his household.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, then, in the days of the patriarchs, the clan was nowhere near large enough to conquer the land of Canaan and to possess it. David later stresses that, when God both gave and confirmed His promise to the patriarchs to give them the land of Canaan as their inheritance, 'they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it'.<sup>17</sup>

We are told that Jacob's household, which, in the event, went down from Canaan to Egypt, numbered only seventy persons<sup>18</sup> and that it was there—in Egypt—that they increased and multiplied in a most remarkable and unnatural manner. As Moses records later, 'Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the Lord your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude'.<sup>19</sup>

But, had Jacob's family remained in Canaan, there was no way that the tribes and nations around them would have stood back and watched them develop towards nation status and thereby pose a very real threat to them. At some point, Jacob and his growing clan would have been attacked and wiped out.

As yet, they were only a family and as such were too insignificant to arouse the hostility of the Canaanites. But any indications of major increase and growth would inevitably (and, doubtless, immediately) bring them into conflict with their neighbours, from which conflict they had no hope of emerging. In the eyes of Israel's neighbours, a family was one thing—a fully-fledged nation would have been something entirely different.

The big issue then was how to get the children of Israel past the critical point ... past that point when they were strong enough to excite the hostility and military action of the surrounding nations yet not strong enough to defend themselves—let alone to defeat their attackers and to occupy their land.

And we remember that God had spoken to Abraham in terms of making his descendants, not only into a nation but also into a 'great' nation.<sup>20</sup>

But there was not only the issue of their numerical size. Territory was another key issue.

Up until now, the patriarchs and their descendants had been 'strangers ('foreigners') and sojourners' in Canaan,<sup>21</sup> owning next to no property there.

Yes, Abraham had his cave and field at Machpelah, near Hebron, which he had purchased from Ephron the Hittite, initially, as a burying place for Sarah,<sup>22</sup> and where later, not only Sarah but also Abraham himself, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah were buried and where, one day, Jacob would also be buried.<sup>23</sup> And yes, Jacob had the parcel of ground which he had bought

from the sons of Hamor at Shechem.<sup>24</sup> But, as yet, the patriarchs and their descendants possessed no other property.

And yet ...

(i) if God were to fulfil His repeated promises to Abraham<sup>25</sup> and to keep His repeated covenant with him, that He—the Lord—would surely give ‘all the land of Canaan’ to his descendants<sup>26</sup> and

(ii) if God were to prove true to His renewed promises to Isaac in chapter 26<sup>27</sup> and Jacob in both chapters 28<sup>28</sup> and 35<sup>29</sup> that He would give the land to their descendants

... if the Lord was to fulfil these, His promises, then at some point the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must become powerful enough to field an army capable of routing and conquering the Canaanites and of taking possession of their land. And we know that, in the event, it was ‘about 600,000’ men of military age who left Egypt,<sup>30</sup> suggesting a nation numbering somewhere in the region of two million.<sup>31</sup>

But where could Jacob's family possibly go that they would be allowed to expand into a nation of that size?

The great need was for ...



... an ‘incubator’—a big ‘incubator’—a very big ‘incubator’—where the potential nation could grow and become strong.

And the only candidate in the ancient world was the land of Egypt. For the Egypt of the day was the only kingdom in the entire Middle East large enough to permit such growth—the only kingdom big enough ‘to fit the bill’.

And, indeed, as we know well, even there, the Pharaoh of Exodus 1 became decidedly nervous and uneasy about Israel's abnormal growth rate and size, viewing them as a no small threat to his authority.<sup>32</sup>

And so, Egypt must be the God-provided ‘incubator’, where the Lord could preserve, nurture and multiply the children of Israel until they ‘became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous’,<sup>33</sup> and where the Lord ‘made them stronger than their enemies’<sup>34</sup> and, therefore, able to invade and conquer the land of Canaan.

I said above that ‘Jacob's family certainly couldn't stay where they were ... and this for at least two reasons’. As we have seen, the first was that they needed a safe and large location in which they could increase numerically.

## **Reason 2: their present low spiritual condition**

The second reason was that they couldn't stay where they were because they couldn't stay as they were.

God had called them that they might be, not only ‘a great nation’ but also ‘a holy nation’.<sup>35</sup> And, for the most part, their present lifestyle was anything but holy! Both spiritually and morally the state of the sons of Jacob left a lot to be desired. We see nothing in them of the close relationship with God which had marked their forefathers.

For example, both Abraham and Isaac had earlier objected to marriages outside of their own people and had taken steps to ensure that their sons did not marry Canaanites.<sup>36</sup> But things were very different now. Indeed, it seems that the Holy Spirit draws this very point to our attention by wedging Genesis chapter 37 between chapters 36 and 38.

Noting that the opening verse of chapter 37 stresses that Jacob and his family were in the land of Canaan, we find, on the one hand, that the second verse of chapter 36 reminds us

how Esau took wives of the daughters of Canaan— a reference back to the end of chapter 26, which tells us that 'Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: who were a grief of mind to Isaac and to Rebekah'.<sup>37</sup>

It is for this reason that Rebekah later said to Isaac, 'I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth ... what good will my life be to me?'<sup>38</sup> And, although Rebekah didn't actually say it, the implication was clear ... 'And, if that happens, yours won't be worth living either'!

And we find, on the other hand, that Judah took as wife a daughter of a Canaanite.<sup>39</sup> He, Judah, the son of Jacob, through whom the Messiah would one day come<sup>40</sup>, was so carnal that he was willing, not only to take a heathen for his close companion<sup>41</sup> and to marry a Canaanite woman but also happily to purchase the services of a young woman he believed to be a prostitute.<sup>42</sup>

And I note, in passing, Judah's real (albeit, secret) reason for refusing to give his son Shelah as a husband to Tamar: 'Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown". For he said (that is, his unexpressed thought was), "Lest he also die like his brothers"'.<sup>43</sup>

The verses immediately before tell us that the real cause of death of his first two sons was their own sinfulness. But Judah clearly believed that Tamar was a woman 'who brought bad luck'—a superstitious notion more worthy of a heathen Canaanite than of a member of the family of faith. And I note that this rather sordid story told in Genesis 38 is the only recorded incident in twenty-two years of the history of the house of Jacob.<sup>44</sup>

We learn elsewhere that Judah was not the only son of Jacob who took a Canaanite wife: Simeon had done the same.<sup>45</sup>

Again, we discover that Reuben (Jacob's firstborn, and then probably about 30 years of age) had slept with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine.<sup>46</sup> This act cost Reuben dear, for his father 'heard' of it; indeed, Jacob referred back to it in his blessing on his sons in chapter 49.<sup>47</sup>

And the opening verse of 1 Chronicles 5 tells us that, because Reuben, 'the firstborn of Israel', 'defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph',<sup>48</sup> as a result of which the double portion of the inheritance passed from the first-born of Leah to the first-born of Rachel, Jacob's first love.<sup>49</sup>

But, from Reuben's typical Canaanite lifestyle, we can see that the family of Jacob was greatly exposed to Canaanite influence.

And so, without a doubt, in terms of the purity of Israel's faith, the land of Canaan was proving to be a very dangerous place indeed. To no small degree, the family was beginning, not only to intermarry with the Canaanites,<sup>50</sup> but also to imbibe the moral and religious standards of the Canaanites. The God-appointed walls of separation were breaking down and breaking down fast.

And the situation was made all the worse by the general attitude of the Canaanites themselves. For the name of the game among the various clans and nations of Canaan around the sons of Jacob was 'mixing and mingling'. And so, although the Canaanites were vastly inferior to Israel spiritually, by and large they showed themselves to be very genial and amiable people, only too ready to develop friendly relations with the descendants of Abraham.

We see this in chapter 34 particularly, which chapter records the rape of Dinah and the slaughter of the men of a Hivite city by Jacob's two sons, Simeon and Levi. Whereas in chapter 38 (as we have just seen), a Jew (Judah) went in to a Gentile girl, (the daughter of Shuah), back in chapter 34, a Gentile (Shechem) went in to a Jewish girl (Dinah).

Even the language used in the two incidents is similar. We are told of Shechem that, concerning Dinah, he 'saw her, he took her, and lay with her',<sup>51</sup> and of Judah that, concerning the daughter of Shuah the Canaanite, he 'saw' her, he 'took her' and 'went in to her'.<sup>52</sup>

The story of Dinah in chapter 34 demonstrates just how great a threat the Canaanites posed to the separation of Jacob's family. For, when the sons of Jacob required the circumcision of all the males of Shechem's home city as the condition for marriage between Shechem and Dinah, Shechem and his father proposed to their fellow citizens that they should submit to the

rite, saying, 'These men are at peace with us. Let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for indeed the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters ... let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us'—which their fellow citizens were only too happy to do.<sup>53</sup>

In such circumstances, sooner or later (and probably sooner), the children of Israel, as the smaller group, would be submerged in, and absorbed by, the culture and the ways of the Canaanites and their distinct identity and role as the people of God would be lost.

And there was also the danger that alliances and intermarriage with the people of Canaan would lead, as surely as needle pulls thread, to the worship of the gods of Canaan.

The Lord later made it clear to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, 'Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst ... and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods also'.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, God knew this to be a very real danger.<sup>55</sup>

To borrow the graphic language of the Book of Ezra, 'the holy seed' were in grave danger of becoming 'mingled' with the heathen people around.<sup>56</sup>

Clearly, something drastic had to be done! There was obviously an urgent need for the family of Jacob to be removed from Canaan to some place where they would be insulated—socially, morally and spiritually.

And, again, everything pointed to Egypt as the safest haven for them, for the spiritual and moral dangers were by no means as great there. Apart from any other factors, it was common knowledge in the Ancient Near East that Egyptian pride led that nation to disdain all foreigners<sup>57</sup> and, in the good providence of God, to abhor shepherds and herdsmen in particular—which is, of course, exactly what Jacob's family was.<sup>58</sup>

Ancient Egyptian monuments depict shepherds as withered, distorted and emaciated,<sup>59</sup> giving *some* idea of what the Egyptians thought of them.

As Joseph later explained to his brothers (when counselling them how to answer Pharaoh's question, 'What is your occupation?'), 'every shepherd is an abomination ('an object of loathing') to the Egyptians'.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, we are told before that, when we read of the seating arrangements at the dinner which Joseph had prepared for his brothers, 'the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians'.<sup>61</sup>

Because then, in Egypt, Jacob's family would be living among a people who were averse to eating with Hebrews and to whom shepherds were objectionable, it was the one land where there would be no risk of intermarriage nor of their losing their national identity. For, even if Jacob's sons and descendants had been inclined to inter-mingle and intermarry with them, the Egyptians would have rejected outright any such suggestion.<sup>62</sup>

And so, in summary, the children of Israel faced two very acute dangers if they remained in Canaan: (i) of being wiped out completely as they grew in number and (ii) of being absorbed into the Canaanite nations around them and of adopting their pagan practices.

So, to ...



... they must go!

Ah, but not to just anywhere in Egypt!

**BUT WHERE IN EGYPT?**

If they are to remain spiritually and morally separate, they will need to be geographically separate from the centres of mainstream Egyptian life and culture.

This because, although, as shepherds, they would be unacceptable by far to the vast majority of Egyptians, there would always be a Potiphar's wife—always those whose baser desires would surmount all social and racial barriers ... and we remember that Potiphar's wife made her advances to Joseph when she knew full well that he was a 'Hebrew'.<sup>63</sup>

And, apart from the likes of Potiphar's wife, there was always the risk that, though socially set apart, Jacob's descendants would be dazzled and allured by the impressive idolatry of Egypt.

I note that things turned out badly enough in that direction, even with the precautions which Joseph (and, through him, God) took. For, just before his death, Joshua pointed out that, during the people's sojourn and bondage in Egypt, the children of Israel had actually worshipped the gods of Egypt: 'Put away', he urged, 'the gods which your fathers served ... in Egypt'.<sup>64</sup>

It is at least possible that the 'golden calf' (the 'golden bull-calf') worshipped by the recently-redeemed Israel in Exodus 32 was patterned on the Egyptian god, Apis.<sup>65</sup>

And so, to be completely sure that Jacob's family remained spiritually and morally pure, they must be located in their own territory, at a safe distance from the corrupting influence of the centres of Egyptian life.<sup>66</sup> In other words, to preserve their spiritual separation they would need to achieve physical and geographical separation.<sup>67</sup> Only this could guarantee the preservation of their God-given role as God's people.<sup>68</sup>

And so, all we need to do is to move Jacob's family from Hebron in Canaan,<sup>69</sup> to a suitable suburb in the land of Egypt! That's all! But, believe me, for anyone other than God, that was far easier said than done!

### **WILL JACOB COMPLY?**

First, we will need to persuade Jacob to take his family there—to persuade him, please, to leave the 'land of promise'<sup>70</sup> to which God had called his grandfather Abraham and to make his merry way down to Egypt of all places!

'Egypt of all places'—to which, given his grandfather Abraham's rather unhappy experience there back in chapter 12, and the fact that his father Isaac had been expressly forbidden by God to go there in chapter 26 (notwithstanding that there had then been a severe famine in Canaan at the time<sup>71</sup>), Jacob may well have been less than keen to go.<sup>72</sup>

Yet I have no doubt that Jacob would have gone if God had told him to—and I have my eye on God's word and undertaking to him in chapter 46, 'Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation *there*. I will go down with you to Egypt'.<sup>73</sup>

Well, that's all right then!

No, not quite. You are overlooking one small detail, Malcolm, for getting Jacob to pack his suitcase and set out for Egypt, in and of itself, would achieve precious little.

### **WILL PHARAOH COMPLY?**

We will also need to persuade the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt to make a suitable suburb available to Jacob and his family, together with which, Jacob's family will, of course, need resident visas and a land grant—and the grant of good pasture land at that.

Now, I ask you, 'Is Pharaoh likely to grant all this just because a band of seventy or so strangers from the land of Canaan turned up one day at his royal court, somehow obtain an audience with him and then have the cheek to ask him if he would be ever so good as to allocate them the best of Egypt's pasture land?'

I think not! Frankly, Jacob and his sons would have had more chance of being struck by lightning! They would be far more likely to receive the Order of the Boot—as had their ancestor Abraham the first and last time any of their ancestors or family had previously ventured into Egypt.<sup>74</sup>



So, we are going to need a man in Egypt who will be able not only to persuade Jacob to pack his bags and leave the Promised Land for pagan Egypt<sup>75</sup>, but who will also wield sufficient clout in Egypt to obtain from Pharaoh some suitable and spacious territory for Jacob and his family.

We are going to need a man then, who can secure for Jacob's family a province such as (shall we say) 'Goshen'—a sensitive border region in the north eastern section of the Nile delta, for Goshen was not only large (occupying, as it does, some 900 square miles) but also most suitable for their needs ... abounding in good pasture land—'the best of the land', to quote Pharaoh himself<sup>76</sup>—and I guess he should know!<sup>77</sup>

### **BUT HOW?**

Well, this is our challenge. So, how can we set about achieving this?

We will need to find a man to whom Jacob will listen—preferably, one of his own immediate family and, preferably, one he loves very much. We shall then need to get this man to the very top of the political powerhouse of Egypt—to a position where he has Pharaoh's ear and enjoys Pharaoh's confidence.

But, first, we will need to get such a man into Egypt himself—not, I suggest, an easy move if he means as much to his father as we know to be necessary. And then we must secure him an audience with Pharaoh himself and this in such circumstances that he can so impress Pharaoh that Pharaoh will (there and then) appoint him to the very highest position in the land ... will (there and then) make him 'lord of all Egypt'.<sup>78</sup>

Oh, boy, where do we start?

Well, how did God do it?

### **ENTER JOSEPH**

Enter Joseph—and the story of Genesis 37-41.<sup>79</sup>

#### **That which Joseph perceived in retrospect**

With the benefit of hindsight, Joseph later saw his chequered experiences as God's appointed means of saving many lives in time of severe famine. He made it clear to his brothers that, though they 'sold' him into Egypt, they didn't 'send' him there—that God did that to save the lives both of his (Joseph's) family, and of many others with them:

'Now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life ... God sent me before you to preserve a posterity ('a remnant', literally) for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.<sup>80</sup> So now it was not you who sent me here, but God'.<sup>81</sup>

And he made the very same point to them again following the death of their father, Jacob: 'As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive'.<sup>82</sup>

Oh, yes, Joseph could see very clearly how God had overruled all the affairs of his life that he might be, under God, the 'Sustainer of Life', which is what his name 'Zaphnath-Paaneah' (given to him by Pharaoh) may mean.<sup>83</sup>

#### **That which Joseph never grasped**

But, as far as I can tell, for all that Joseph never did:

- (i) see 'the big picture',
- (ii) discern that God was in fact painting on a much larger canvas than he was,

(iii) work out that, in reality, God had 'sent' him, not only to save lives but also to be the Lord's chosen instrument to move Jacob and his family from Canaan to Egypt—and that, to that very end, 'He (the Lord) called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread. He sent a man before them—Joseph—who was sold as a slave'<sup>84</sup> and that this all formed part of God's grand and glorious (albeit, mysterious) purpose and design.

For, as you can imagine, if there had been no famine, (i) Pharaoh, for his part, would never have had his dreams and would, therefore, have had no reason to exalt Joseph and (ii) Jacob, for his part, would have had no reason to send his other sons down to Egypt and have had even less reason to have gone down there himself.

### **Joseph—the man God sent**

So, it is then, that, just as God later 'sent' a man, Moses, to lead Israel out of Egypt,<sup>85</sup> He first 'sent a man ... Joseph', to lead them in!<sup>86</sup>

Well might we exclaim in wonder with the apostle Paul, 'Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out'<sup>87</sup>.

Well, the history lesson is over!

### **TO BE CONTINUED**

God willing, in the following three 'Musings', we shall consider together how it was that the Lord achieved His great and gracious purpose for Joseph and for Israel—and, through Israel, for the whole of mankind.

And we shall discover, from the text of Genesis 37-41, that, apart from certain revelations which God made by way of dreams (by three pairs of dreams in fact), there was a chain of at least ten links which brought the young man whom God had chosen to be His instrument, from the home of a loving (even, a doting) father in the land of Canaan to the very highest position open to him in the whole of the land of Egypt.

I am not claiming that there are, in fact, only ten links in the chain of divine providence which runs through Genesis 37 to 41. I may well have missed some links but comments on ten links will be sufficient to fill the 'Musings' for the following three weeks!

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 37, 39-48, 50.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 1. 1-16; Luke 3. 23-38.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 7. 9, 13, 14, 18; Heb. 11. 21, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 12-35.

<sup>6</sup> Exod. 1-19.

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 12. 1-2; Acts 7. 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 12. 6; 13. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 14. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 13. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Gen. 14. 13-16.

<sup>12</sup> Gen. 23. 6.

<sup>13</sup> It seems that 'Abimelech' was a fairly common title of Philistine kings, similar to the title of 'Pharaoh' among the Egyptians and of 'Caesar' among the Romans. I note that, in the heading of Psalm 34, the name/title of 'Abimelech' is given to the king of Gath, whose personal name is given as 'Achish' in 1 Sam. 21. 10-14; cf. 1 Sam. 27. 2-12; 28. 1-2; 29. 2-9.

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 26. 12-17.

<sup>15</sup> Gen. 34. 25-29.

<sup>16</sup> Gen. 34. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Psa. 105. 9-12. We know that at least the first fifteen verses of Psalm 105 were written by David, when he brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom (where it had rested for three months, 2 Sam. 6. 11), 1 Chron. 16. 7-22.

<sup>18</sup> Gen. 46. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Deut. 10. 22.

Note that Stephen adds the three grandsons and two great-grandsons born to Joseph in Egypt: 'Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt', Acts 7. 14-15. Even in Jacob's lifetime, the clan grew rich and numerous, prospering in spite of the famine and the poverty which Egypt experienced: 'Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly', Gen. 47. 27.

<sup>20</sup> Gen. 12. 2. Note God's later confirmation to Jacob; 'Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you there a great nation', Gen. 46. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Gen. 23. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Gen. 23. 17-20.

<sup>23</sup> Gen. 50. 13; this was in accordance with Jacob's express wish, Gen. 49. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Gen. 33. 19; Josh. 24. 32; John 4. 5.

[For the meaning of Genesis 48. 22, note the following: 'The perfect is used prophetically, transposing the future to the present as being already accomplished ... Jacob would wrest the land from the Amorites, not in his own person, but in that of his posterity', *Keil and Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, page 385. This can hardly be a reference to chapter 34, for in that action Jacob had no hand and sharply rebuked his sons for it. Apart from which, any conquest of territory would have been entirely at variance with the character of the patriarchal history. The land, which the patriarchs desired to obtain in Canaan, they procured not by force of arms, but by legal purchase. It would be very different in the future, when 'the iniquity of the Amorites' was full, Gen. 15. 16!]

<sup>25</sup> Gen. 12. 7; 13. 15

<sup>26</sup> Gen. 15. 18; 17. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Gen. 26. 3. The 'plural ('all these lands') refers to all the lands or territories of the different Canaanitish tribes', *Keil and Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, page 270.

<sup>28</sup> Gen. 28. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Gen. 35. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Exod. 12. 37. The more precise number ('603,550') is cited by the Holy Spirit, both in connection with the calculation of the atonement money, Exod. 38. 25-26, and in the numbering of the people at Sinai, Numb. 1. 46 and 2. 32 (following numbers quoted for each of the individual tribes and excluding, of course, the tribe of Levi, for which we need to add a further 20,000 or so, Numb. 3. 39).

<sup>31</sup> And yet even a population in the region of two million was not large enough properly to occupy the whole of the land which God had promised Israel—"from the desert to the river", Exod. 23. 31. God, therefore, promised the nation that He would drive out the Canaanites 'by little and little ... until you have increased', lest the land became desolate and wild beasts multiply, Exod. 23. 29-30 (cf. the language of Isa. 7. 23-25).

<sup>32</sup> Exod. 1. 9-10. The Pharaoh in question may have been Amosis, who had recently 'defeated the Hyksos, a people ethnically akin to the Hebrews, and might be concerned that the populous and rapidly multiplying Hebrews could become a threat to his newly established authority', Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pages 58-59. See also Leon Wood, *Survey of Israel's History*, pages 34-38.

<sup>33</sup> Deut. 26. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Psa. 105. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Exod. 19. 6. In their early days, there was precious little evidence of any sense of unity among Joseph's brothers. The intended founding fathers of the nation were the sons of four different mothers, showing little, if any, brotherly love the one for the other. I suspect that there are few better ways to stimulate unity than through persecution. A brotherly quarrel is quickly forgotten and family unity is intensified when opposition comes. Four hundred years spent among the Egyptians, who despised and afflicted the Hebrews, did much to develop and strengthen the unity of the tribes of Israel.

<sup>36</sup> Gen. 24. 3; 28. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Gen. 26. 34-35.

<sup>38</sup> Gen. 27. 46.

<sup>39</sup> Gen. 38. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Genesis 49. 9-10; Rev. 5. 5..

<sup>41</sup> Gen. 38. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Gen. 38. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Gen. 38. 11.

<sup>44</sup> The twenty-two years are made up of (30-17)+7+2 years; see Gen. 37. 2; 41. 46; 41. 53; 45. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Gen. 46. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Gen. 35. 22.

<sup>47</sup> 'Reuben, you are my firstborn ... you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it', Gen. 49. 3-4.

<sup>48</sup> 1 Chron. 5. 1. The double portion was transferred to Joseph, but the leadership was transferred to Judah.

<sup>49</sup> Gen. 29. 18, 20.

<sup>50</sup> As the children of Israel later did when they returned to Canaan, Judg. 3. 6. Then there were large numbers of genuine Israelites to counter-balance (in part at least) this effect. But at this early stage in Israel's development it would have proved disastrous.

<sup>51</sup> Gen. 34. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Gen. 38. 2. Only the last expression differs, and both of the terms used describe physical union.

<sup>53</sup> Gen. 34. 21-24.

'When Hamor, the king of Shechem, offers Jacob's family a sweet deal, he says "marry us; your daughters you will give to us, and our daughters you will take for yourselves" (Gen. 34. 9)... The brothers reply that they will agree on the condition that the Shechemites circumcise themselves. If this condition is fulfilled, "we will give our daughters to you, and your daughters we will take for ourselves; we will settle with you, and we will become one people (v. 16). Shechem and Hamor agree and then present the case to their fellow townsmen. But note their words: "These men are upright with us, and they will settle in the land, and trade in it, and the land, behold, it is wide enough before you; their daughters we will take for ourselves as wives, and our daughters we will give to them" (v. 21). This is rhetoric at its best. In this go-round, the Shechemite royal pair paint the picture in the most positive terms possible, including the mention of the uprightness of the Israelites and the fact that there is plenty of land for everyone. They conveniently omit the fact that they have offered the Israelites the right to acquire real estate in the city. And most importantly of all, note the reversal of the verbs "give" and "take". The agreement forged between the two parties was that the Israelites would be the active "givers" and "takers", giving their own daughters to the Hivites, and taking the Hivite girls that they desired. But in the presentation to their kinfolk, Shechem and Hamor reverse the situation, making the Hivites the active "givers" and "takers"; it is they who will control which Israelite daughters are taken and which Hivite girls are given. Finally, only after all this wonderful build-up, do Hamor and Shechem add the fact, almost matter-of-factly, oh yes, we also need to circumcise ourselves for this deal to work (v. 22). And for closers, just for good measure, the king and the prince tell their people: "their livestock and their substance and all their animals will be ours" (v. 23)'. [Quoted from <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/jewish/30yrs/rendsburg/index.html>—no longer accessible.]

<sup>54</sup> Exod. 34. 11-16.

<sup>55</sup> Indeed, this very danger received graphic illustration later from the experience of King Solomon. Nehemiah pointed out to some of the Jews of his day, 'You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, pagan women caused even him to sin', Neh. 13. 25-26. And the Lord's prohibition of intermarriage with outsiders extended beyond the Canaanite nations, 1 Kings 11. 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> Ezra 9. 2.

<sup>57</sup> 'The Egyptian pride, which led the nation to disdain all foreigners, is well known', H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, page 1104.

<sup>58</sup> Hence, Joseph's success in obtaining the pasture land of Goshen for his family, Gen. 46. 34.

<sup>59</sup> 'This is ... attested in various ways by the monuments, on which shepherds are constantly depicted as lanky, withered, distorted, emaciated', *Keil and Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, page 375.

<sup>60</sup> Gen. 46. 34; cf. Gen. 47. 3. 'We find in the herds depicted upon the (Egyptian) monuments, sheep, goats, and rams introduced by thousands, along with asses and horned cattle', *Keil and Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, page 375.

I suspect that Joseph may well have been speaking out of his own bitter experience when he had first arrived in Egypt.

<sup>61</sup> Gen. 43. 32.

<sup>62</sup> Joseph was, of course, in a unique position, having been exalted to 'Lord over all Egypt' and having had an Egyptian name bestowed on him by Pharaoh himself, Gen. 41. 45.

<sup>63</sup> Gen. 39. 14, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Josh. 24. 14.

<sup>65</sup> "Calf" is not a good translation of the Hebrew *'ēgel*. A young bull in his first strength is meant: for instance, the word can describe a three-year-old animal (Gen. 15. 9)', R. A. Cole, *Exodus: Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, comment on Exod. 32. 4.

'The "golden calf" (לָגַל, 'a young bull') was copied from the Egyptian Apis', *Keil and Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, page 222.

'The golden calf, which ancient sources such as Philo ("On the Life of Moses", 2. 159-173), Lactantius ("Divine Institutes", 2. 15), Jerome ("Commentary on Daniel"), and the Jerusalem Targum commentary on Exodus 32 identified as the Apis bull', D. W. Alexander, *Talk like an Egyptian*, dissertation, pages 261-262.

I note that it was also called an 'ox' ('שׁוֹר'), Psa. 106. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Joseph was strong enough spiritually to survive life in the city and in the palace. But what would become of the rest of the family if it was brought into the city and integrated into Egyptian life?

<sup>67</sup> It can be argued that it was their unbelief which kept the children of Israel from returning to Canaan from Egypt when the famine had ended—that they had forgotten their God-revealed destiny. (See, for example, Renald Showers, *There really is a difference*, page 41.) But it was clearly part of God's purpose that it should not return then.

<sup>68</sup> It is clear that God's plan proved successful because Israel retained their separate status, Exod. 1. 7-9. Yet, looking to the future, Israel needed to be in a place and situation which (in due time) could be made sufficiently unbearable that they would be anxious to leave it.

And, in God's time, they were more than ready to go, Exod. 12. 40-41. For God then overruled the hostility and persecution of the Pharaohs to make Egypt (euphemistically speaking) 'very uncomfortable' for Israel: 'He increased His people greatly, and made them stronger than their enemies. He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants', Psa. 105. 24-25. Otherwise, the people would likely have been tempted to stay in Egypt.

God's purpose was accomplished at the Exodus, for the people (then numerous and powerful enough to tackle the Canaanites) sighed and cried to God by reason of their severe bondage. They were more than ready then to leave! On the matter of timing, the iniquity of the Amorites was then fully ripe for judgement, Gen. 15. 16, and, when that iniquity was filled up, Israel was 'prepared' to be the instrument of God to destroy them.

God's purpose, as revealed to Abraham years before, was for a stated period of bondage, Gen. 15. 13-15, and His plan was for Israel to sojourn in Egypt. But I note that none of this was known to the sons of Jacob at the time. In fact, God had carefully avoided telling Abram when or where this sojourn was to be—or how it would come about.

<sup>69</sup> Gen. 35. 27.

<sup>70</sup> Heb. 11. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Gen. 26. 2.

<sup>72</sup> There was also the obvious issue of transportation. Jacob lived over 300 miles from Egypt and such a lengthy journey would have proved very, very difficult for a household as large as Jacob's. Hence the importance of Pharaoh's providing 'wagons' (or 'carriages'), of which there must have been many, Gen. 45. 19-21.

<sup>73</sup> Gen. 46. 3-4.

<sup>74</sup> Gen. 12. 20-13. 1.

<sup>75</sup> When Jacob knew that his father had been forbidden to go there – even in time of famine, Gen. 26. 2!

<sup>76</sup> Gen. 47. 6.

<sup>77</sup> This is why the Holy Spirit devotes so much text to the acquisition of Goshen, while such an emotional moment as the reunion of Jacob and Joseph is so briefly described. Goshen was not only located near Joseph so that he could see his family frequently ('And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have', Gen. 45. 10), and was the nearest part of the land to Canaan, that they might more easily and sooner get away, but, of even greater importance, it kept the family insulated from the culture and religion of Egypt.

<sup>78</sup> Gen. 45. 9.

<sup>79</sup> For the danger of moralising and 'spiritualising' the Joseph narrative, see ... <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/chorusinthecaos/stop-moralizing-biblical-narrative/#At5DIzCqso72b0CY.99>.

<sup>80</sup> There was no question but that Jacob's family were greatly blessed on account of Joseph, but the blessing continued even long after his death, when Israel continued to grow by leaps and bounds. This because ultimately it was not Joseph who was the source of Israel's blessings, but God.

<sup>81</sup> Gen. 45. 5-9.

<sup>82</sup> Gen. 50. 20.

<sup>83</sup> Gen. 41. 45. Possibly: 'the one who furnishes the nourishment of life', *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* ... 'the one who furnishes the sustenance of the land', <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/zaphenath-paneah> ... 'Overseer of the Storehouse of Abundance', Patrick Clarke, 'Joseph's Zaphenath Paaneah—a chronological key', accessed at <https://creation.com/en/articles/chronological-key-in-josephs-name-zaphenath-paaneah..>

<sup>84</sup> Psa. 105. 16-17.

<sup>85</sup> Psa. 105. 26.

<sup>86</sup> Psa. 105. 17.

<sup>87</sup> Rom. 11. 33.