

RCF DREAMERS Joseph

Genesis 37 then 39 to 50

Joseph was a key person in OT history. 13 chapters of Genesis. Nearly as many as are devoted to Abraham.

We first encounter Joseph in Genesis 30:24 where Joseph is born to Jacob's favourite wife, Rachel. At the time Jacob was labouring for Laban, having been deceived into working an extra 7 years in order to marry her, after Laban had forced him to first marry her elder sister Leah. Initially Rachel was not able to conceive whilst Leah continued to bear children. Rachel even suggested that Jacob should sleep with her servant, Bilhah, which he did, fathering further sons and one daughter by a combination of mothers, Leah, Bilhah and Leah's servant, Zilpah. It's all rather messy. But all this time Jacob really wanted a son through his favoured wife, Rachel, who he'd first fallen in love with many years earlier. So, when Rachel eventually became pregnant and bore a son, she named him Joseph, meaning "God will add". Jacob was overjoyed. Rachel, herself wanted another son, which eventually happened sometime later when Benjamin was born (Genesis 35:18). Tragically, Rachel died in giving birth. She and Jacob were on their way to Bethlehem when this happened. We now know of another couple who were also journeying to Bethlehem, this time with a better outcome, but not without its own tragedy! In Genesis 35: 22-26 we are given a list of Jacobs 12 sons.

Understandably, even though we would not condone it, Joseph became Jacob's favourite son. Jacob even had made for him, the now famous, coat of many colours. This was a richly ornamented robe, the type in future that would likely be worn by greatly favoured children of the king or ruler. (there's another example in 2 Sam.13:18); it would be totally unsuitable for manual work, thus setting Joseph apart from his half-brothers who had been tasked to look after the extensive flocks of sheep that the family owned. You can imagine then that Joseph would have been resented by his brothers. It was in the context of this complex and dysfunctional family that Joseph suddenly has two vivid dreams and being a young naive 17-year-old, he promptly tells these dreams to his family. **Not a good idea!**

The predictable result was that his half-brothers hated him all the more. It is interesting that in the early civilization and culture of Canaan, his family did not sit around and say things like "well that was a strange dream" or "what did you eat last night?" "You've been on the cheese again!". They didn't try to analyse the imagery. To them the meaning was absolutely clear, so much so that they quickly formulated a plan of action. They would see to it that Joseph's dreams would never come true.

So, what was so disturbing to them.

Genesis 37:6-11

He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had: ⁷ we were binding sheaves of corn out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered round mine and bowed down to it.'

⁸ His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹ Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. 'Listen,' he said, 'I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.'

¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, 'What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?' ¹¹ His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Their reaction is no surprise. What brother would have said "Well I guess it must be prophetic and I'm to bow down to you sometime in the future....some hope" In telling his family the content of his dreams the best that Joseph really could have hoped for was a "Well....we'll see"

They weren't to know how prophetic they were and how events were to unfold in the years ahead.

One lesson that we can learn from Joseph's telling of his dreams is how careful we must be in telling anyone else about our dreams, especially if the dream seems to be about them. It may be that the dream should not have been shared at all; possibly God only wanted to provide Joseph with two dreams to encourage him. Yet, God still uses our mistakes (if it was a mistake to blab about his dreams of superiority) in order to bring about a dramatic series of events. These events would take Joseph on a painful journey to Egypt where he'd experience some extreme highs and lows.

That journey started when his brothers sold him into slavery for twenty silver shekels. Do you remember that someone else who was betrayed in exchange for thirty pieces of silver? Joseph's life story is not dissimilar in many ways to that of Jesus about 1800 years later. He became a servant in a strange land and eventually became the saviour of many who had no other hope.

For Joseph the key to his elevation up the ranks in Egypt came through a series of dreams. Not his dreams. But the dreams of others. **Joseph the dreamer became Joseph the interpreter of dreams.** God had first revealed the future to Joseph in two dreams. Now God brings about the fulfilment of those plans by providing Joseph with the gift of being able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams some 21 years later.

Genesis 41: 1-16

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: he was standing by the Nile, ² when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. ³ After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the river-bank. ⁴ And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

⁵ He fell asleep again and had a second dream: seven ears of corn, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. ⁶ After them, seven other ears of corn sprouted – thin and scorched by the east wind. ⁷ The thin ears of corn swallowed up the seven healthy, full ears. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream.

⁸ In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

⁹ Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, 'Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. ¹⁰ Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. ¹¹ Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. ¹² Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. ¹³ And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled.'

¹⁴ So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.'

¹⁶ 'I cannot do it,' Joseph replied to Pharaoh, 'but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.'

In the intervening years Joseph had experienced a good life working for the Egyptian nobleman, Potiphar, had known terrible injustice, courtesy of Mrs Potiphar. Knew life in an Egyptian jail and had his hopes of release dashed by a forgetful cupbearer. We are probably familiar with the protracted account of Joseph's life not only through the Bible but also due to the well-known Andrew Lloyd Webber musical "Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat". It makes a good story, and all the more so because A) its true and B) because there's a great moral in there.

And so, we come to the fulfilment part of Joseph's first two dreams. Joseph is now about 40 years of age. Because he found favour with Pharaoh through the correct interpretation of his dreams and then by demonstrating his God given integrity and wisdom, Pharaoh has elevated him to be the second most powerful person in the land. Joseph assumes control of domestic and international food supply and distribution. It has taken 21, at times painful, years to get here. Joseph had to learn patience and in that learning we read time and again that "God was with him and gave him success" (39:2; 39:21). If God has given us a vision for the future, he may require us to learn patience in the process of seeing the vision realised. The Bible tells us that God himself is patient. 2 Peter 3:9 says **The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

Similarly, He tells us through John's vision in Revelation that:

If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed.' This calls for **patient** endurance and faithfulness on the part of **God's people.**

Joseph gave us a good example of that kind of patience.

We now come to the end of the story, or at least this part of Joseph's life.

Through a series of disastrous harvests at home Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt to buy food. They don't recognise Joseph. He's dressed like an Egyptian, he's fluent in Egyptian, he's older, wiser, he's top dog in the Egyptian civil service. They, well apart from being older, are much the same. It is easy for Joseph to recognise them. He decides to test them to see if they've changed in their motivation or characters. He's convinced by the way they act and their transformation that he reveals his own identity to them. Joseph's brothers are fully repentant and beg for his forgiveness for the wrongs they did to him.

Finally, Israel (Jacob) is convinced of what his sons tell him that Joseph is alive and in Egypt. The remaining chapters of Genesis recount how eventually Jacob and his extended Jewish family moved from Canaan to Egypt. Genesis 46: 2-4 tells us of another vision or dream. This time to Jacob in his old age.

Genesis 46: 2-4 "And God spoke to Israel in a **vision at night** and said, 'Jacob! Jacob!'

'Here I am,' he replied.

³ 'I am God, the God of your father,' he said. 'Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. ⁴ I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes.'"

The dreams that God had given to Joseph as a youth were now complete.

There are so many more facets to dreams and visions. On the one hand they can be interpreted as a jumble of mixed up thoughts that disturb our sleep or cause us to daydream. On the other hand, we should not be surprised to find that God can, and sometimes does choose dreams and visions to communicate with us, even revealing His plans to us in advance of them taking place.

There's a very good book that I've found helpful in preparing this called:

The God of Dreams by Dr Archie W.N.Roy.

Q. 1 Have you had any kind of dream or vision for your future or for the future of anyone else?

Q. 2 Has that vision or dream been fulfilled or are you having to wait? Patiently?