

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 8 June 2026

Greetings.

I set out below the fourth and last of the main 'Musings' that focus on 'The early life of Joseph'.

There we consider the final four links in 'a chain of ten links which brought young Joseph from the home of a loving father in the land of Canaan to the very highest position open to him in the whole of the land of Egypt'.

As with previous Parts, here are three unconnected items to be going on with:

1. 'Jerusalem, the city I have chosen for myself, to put my name there' (1 Kings 11. 36).
'Jerusalem is the only place on earth where God saw fit to place His name, the only city where He has had a local address ... It saw the Son of God executed, buried, raised, and exalted to God's right hand. And here the Holy Spirit came to empower the Church for the greatest rescue operation in history'.
(J. B. Nicholson Jr., 'The Zion of God', Uplook Ministries: Taste and See, 13 May 2026.)

2. 'It was necessary for the Christ to ... arise from the dead ... this is Jesus, whom I preach to you' (Acts 17. 3).
'It is on account of the resurrection that Jesus the preacher became Jesus the preached'.
(Jon Paulien, 'The Resurrection and the New Testament', Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 50, No. 2, 249.)

3. Jesus' threefold 'Do not be anxious' (μὴ μεριμνήσητε).
(i) 'Do not be anxious about your life' (Matt. 6. 25).
(ii) 'Do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?"' (Matt. 6. 31).
(iii) 'Do not be anxious about tomorrow' (Matt. 6. 34).

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

PS

For ease of reference, the link to the original Zoom recording of the message is ...
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSu73KocpA8&list=PLIB3Of9ijFXbxyAQh_eFJbUsioWHGDmRr&index=4&t=13s&pp=iAQB

THE EARLY LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 4: Genesis 39. 1 to 41. 46

SCRIPTURE

Our first Bible reading comes from Genesis chapter 39, verses 7 to 10 ...

And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, 'Lie with me'.

But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Behold, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.

'There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife.

'How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

Then from chapter 40 verse 20, through to the beginning of verse 1 of chapter 41 ...

Pharaoh restored the chief butler to his office again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but he forgot him.

And it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream ...

THE CHAIN OF TEN LINKS

Our Chain of Ten Links consists of ...

1. **The jealousy of Joseph's brothers.**¹
2. **The anxiety of Joseph's father.**²
3. **The friendly inquiry of a certain man of Shechem.**³
4. **The timely intervention of Reuben and Judah.**⁴
5. **The journeying of certain Arabian traders.**⁵
6. **The domestic needs of Potiphar's household.**⁶
7. **The wickedness of Potiphar's wife.**⁷
8. **The injustice of Potiphar's decision.**⁸
9. **The falling from favour of Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker.**⁹
10. **The memory of the chief butler.**¹⁰

INTRODUCTION

We concluded Part 3 by considering the sixth link (that of 'The domestic needs of Potiphar's household') in the ten-link chain of providence which brought Joseph from the house of Jacob in Canaan to the very highest position open to him in all Egypt.

Towards the close, we recalled that, when Joseph arrived in Egypt:

1. He was only 17 years of age.
2. He had no money.
3. He had neither friend nor acquaintance in the whole land.
4. He had no knowledge of the language spoken there.
5. He had no trade or occupation which the Egyptians respected.

We left young Joseph in the house of Potiphar, 'an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard', having recently been sold to Potiphar as a slave. As something of 'a spoiler' towards the close of Part 3, I commented, 'although Joseph doesn't yet know it, courtesy of Potiphar's wife, things are going to get even worse for him before chapter 39 is out'.

THE FINAL LINKS

For details of Joseph's worsening situation, we move forward to link number seven; namely ...

7. The wickedness of Potiphar's wife.¹¹

The timing.

In terms of overall timing, we know only that:

- (i) Joseph spends thirteen years in Potiphar's house and Potiphar's prison combined—for Joseph is seventeen years of age when he is taken to Egypt¹² and thirty years of age when he 'stands before Pharaoh' (that is, when he begins to serve Pharaoh),¹³ and
- (ii) Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker two years before he appears before Pharaoh.¹⁴

And that is all we know. In all likelihood, Joseph spends (i) several years in Potiphar's house before he is made overseer, (ii) several years as overseer before Potiphar's wife repeatedly¹⁵ attempts to seduce him and (iii) the remainder of the thirteen years in prison.

As a result of the Lord's presence and blessing,¹⁶ over an unspecified period of time, Joseph rises from being one of Potiphar's household servants to being the 'overseer' ('chief steward', chief manager') over Potiphar's entire household.¹⁷

The temptation.

All goes well for Joseph—until the day comes when Potiphar's wife 'casts her eyes on' Joseph ('looks with desire' on him).¹⁸

I note that the Holy Spirit links this attraction with two pieces of information:

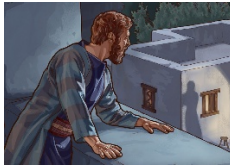
- (i) Joseph's physical appearance: he was 'a goodly person, and well favoured', that is, he was well-built and good-looking.¹⁹
- (ii) Potiphar's wife is first attracted to Joseph only 'after these things', namely, after Joseph's rise to power and position.²⁰ It is unlikely, I guess, that Potiphar's wife would have shown any interest in a common slave—in a mere household servant. But a man who has great leadership abilities and high position—and very good looks to boot—well, that is something else!

Mrs Potiphar may have been the wife of a very high ranking official in the land of Egypt but, I can tell you, she was certainly no lady!

Rather interestingly, this part of the story about Joseph throws into reverse stories earlier told of Abraham. For, according to chapters 12 and 20, previously, it had been the good-looking wife of a patriarch who had been sought by foreign rulers—namely, Sarah, by both Pharaoh²¹ and Abimelech²²—whereas, now, it is Joseph, the good-looking patriarch,²³ who is himself sought by the wife of a foreign high ranking official from the royal court.²⁴

And so, in the case of Potiphar's wife (as with so many), sin attempts to let itself in through the window of the eyes.²⁵

As you no doubt recall, the very same sin succeeded admirably with King David (when he was not 17 years of age as Joseph but when he was about 50 years of age) in the sad Bathsheba-Uriah incident—when, in rapid succession, David *looked at, lusted for* and *lay with* another man's wife²⁶—when he, metaphorically speaking, 'fell from the roof'.



And what is Joseph's response to Mrs Potiphar's proposition and offer of sharing her bed?

The triumph.

'He refuses'!²⁷ There is no hesitation—no dallying—no messing about. Joseph resists her temptation with even greater determination than she shows in tempting him. In truth, it is Potiphar's wife and not his chief steward who is a slave—a slave to her lust.

I note that the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, gets carried away a little when writing up this story:

'When the woman had said this, with tears in her eyes, neither did pity turn Joseph from his chastity [his purity, his virtue], nor did fear compel him to comply with her ...'.²⁸

But scripture says nothing either of her tears or of Joseph's 'pity' or 'fear'.

No doubt, it would have been a dangerous course for any man to cross this particular female. But Joseph would not let any dread of offending her—nor, for that matter, any feeling of flattery that she should find him attractive—move him.²⁹

Two considerations.

In verses 8 and 9, the Holy Spirit makes clear the two principal (and, for Joseph, compelling) considerations which weigh heavily with him: (i) The first concerns his master and the trust which he places in him and (ii) the second concerns his God, against whom he sees such an action as 'sin'.³⁰

Consideration (i).

First, Joseph makes it clear to his temptress, 'Behold, my master ... has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife'.³¹

Joseph feels most keenly the debt which he owes to his master for the unqualified confidence which he has placed in him and has no intention whatever of abusing and betraying Potiphar's trust in him.

Yes, it is true, for his part, Potiphar is indebted to Joseph for a great deal. For we read back in verse 5 that 'the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field'.

I have no idea how much Potiphar paid the Arabian traders for young Joseph (although I have no doubt that it was considerably more than the twenty pieces of silver that they had paid for him!) but I know that the payment—whatever it was—proved the best investment Potiphar ever made!

God had promised Abraham long before, 'in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed',³² and God's word receives an early (although, of course, only a partial) fulfilment in Potiphar's household through Abraham's great-grandson.³³

But, for his part, Joseph never gives a moment's thought to how much his master owes to him. What matters to Joseph is how much he owed to his master.

And I guess that, were the whole story told, Joseph owed Potiphar far more than his current high position of responsibility and trust. I think we must assume it was in Potiphar's house that the young Hebrew slave first learnt the Egyptian language and culture, together with the elements of successful business administration—including that of agricultural management.³⁴

And we can only imagine how far, in God's good providence, all of this serves to fit and equip Joseph for his future role as 'governor over Egypt'³⁵—when he would be responsible for administering the agricultural policy for the whole empire.³⁶

Yes, the time Joseph spent in 'the Potiphar Preparatory School' served him in very good stead later! Well did William Cowper begin one of his more famous poems, 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform'.³⁷

But, back to the ranch (or, more accurately, to Joseph's 'triumph' over the immoral suggestion made by Potiphar's wife').

Joseph regards any intimate relationship with his master's wife as a breach of his master's trust.

As far as Joseph is concerned, his business in life is to manage the affairs of Potiphar's household – not to have an affair with Potiphar's wife!

Potiphar has not 'kept back anything from me', Joseph says, 'but you, because you are his wife'.³⁸ Mrs Potiphar may esteem her marital status lightly. Joseph certainly doesn't.

It seems that Potiphar's wife is one of only two things in Potiphar's whole house which Joseph is not allowed to touch.

Verse 6 speaks of the other: 'he (Potiphar) left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate', signifying that Potiphar's food is the only area of household administration which is not entrusted to Joseph—not on account of any fear on Potiphar's part that he was in danger of being poisoned but on account of Egypt's strict dietary rules. I note the comment made several chapters later, that 'the Egyptians ate by themselves because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination'.³⁹

And I cannot help smiling when I read at the close of chapter 41 that, 'When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. And Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph ...'.⁴⁰



Did Potiphar remember then that there had been a time when he wouldn't trust the 'bread' in his own house to Joseph?

But, if disloyalty to his master is one factor in Joseph's resolute refusal to sleep with Potiphar's wife, another factor is of even greater importance to him.

Consideration (ii).

'How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' is Joseph's rejoinder to Potiphar's wife.⁴¹ And I note that, in that rejoinder, he calls her vile suggestion by its proper (and ugly) name, 'wickedness'⁴²—and 'great wickedness' at that.⁴³

Some may label it 'just a moment of weakness'; to Joseph it is an act of 'great wickedness'. And what is more, committing such an act would be to 'sin against God'!⁴⁴ Joseph recoils with horror at the very suggestion.

Sometime later, he will say to his brothers, 'I fear God'⁴⁵—and so he did. Joseph may not fear his master's wife but he certainly did fear his own God.⁴⁶

For obvious reasons, Joseph could not have known Solomon's proverb, 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil'⁴⁷ but he certainly lived his life on that principle. And, speaking of 'principle', we can hardly miss that, whereas Potiphar's wife is ruled by passion, Joseph's life is ruled by principle.

To Mrs Potiphar, an illicit affair may be great fun; to Joseph, it is 'great sin'.

Possibly, you sometimes struggle with knowing the will of God for some department of your life. Well, I cannot help you with any of the details—but I can tell you, in the words of 1 Thessalonians 4, that 'this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality'⁴⁸

Ethically, then, Joseph refuses to violate Potiphar's trust and, spiritually, he refuses to violate God's standard.

A contrast between two brothers.

In so doing, he stands in marked contrast to the other son of Jacob who dominates the previous chapter.⁴⁹

I refer to Judah—who, as the euphemism runs, ‘went in to’ a foreign woman he believed at the time to be a prostitute,⁵⁰ in stark contrast to his young brother—who steadfastly refuses to ‘go in to’ a foreign woman whom he knew to be married.⁵¹

And, although in both cases, at some point, personal articles are left behind with the foreign women and are later produced as evidence to incriminate the brothers,⁵² there the similarity ends—for, while Judah is guilty as charged, Joseph is entirely innocent!⁵³

Potiphar’s wife persists and Joseph resists.

But Joseph may as well have told the sun to stop shining as tell Mrs Potiphar that he isn’t interested. And she persists—and does she! ‘Day by day’ is the language of verse 10.⁵⁴

But verse 10 speaks not only of the persistence shown by an evil married woman, but also of the precautions taken by a virtuous young man.⁵⁵ For ‘he did not heed her’, we read, ‘to lie with her *or to be with her*’.

As far as he is able, Joseph avoids not only her bed, but her company.⁵⁶ As one of the Puritans comments, ‘he that would not hear the bell, must not meddle with the rope’.⁵⁷

Our Lord Jesus makes it clear, on more than one occasion,⁵⁸ that, if we wish to avoid sin, we must, as far as in us lies, avoid temptation—no matter how costly that may prove! ‘If your right eye causes you to stumble’, He says (metaphorically, of course), ‘gouge it out and fling it from you’ ... and so on!⁵⁹

Frankly, none of us is as strong as he thinks: ‘let him who thinks he stands ...’.⁶⁰

But, on one occasion, Joseph is cornered: ‘It happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me. But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside’.⁶¹

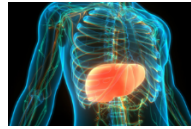


Joseph is no fool—he knows that ultimately there would be a high price to pay for refusing the sexual advances of Potiphar’s wife.

But Joseph would have paid a much higher price if he had relented, for victory over the temptation secures him the continued sense of God’s presence and blessing. ‘The Lord was with him’ in Potiphar’s house⁶² and in Potiphar’s prison⁶³ but He would not have been with him in the bed of Potiphar’s wife!

Joseph knows that this is not the time to try to argue himself out of the situation. Frankly, there are times when one’s feet are more useful than one’s tongue—and this is one such time.

‘Flee fornication’ (‘Flee sexual immorality’), Paul writes to the Corinthians in verse 18 of chapter six of his first epistle.⁶⁴ In verse 9 of the previous chapter, he had said, ‘I wrote to you ...not to company with fornicators’—which, several years ago, I noticed, with some amusement, is rendered in the New English Bible, ‘you must have nothing to do with **loose livers**’.



The mind boggles!

When Joseph (literally) ‘fled’ from temptation to immorality, we read, ‘he left his garment in her hand’. Yet, although Joseph leaves his coat, he retains something of infinitely greater value—his character.

One commentator of long ago expresses the point well: ‘It is better to lose a good coat than a good conscience’.⁶⁵

And so, for a second time, Joseph is stripped of his clothes. Earlier, the envy of his brothers had stripped him of his distinctive tunic⁶⁶—now, the lust of Potiphar’s wife strips him of his outer garment.

Which brings us to link number 8 ...

8. The injustice of Potiphar’s decision.⁶⁷

If Joseph’s tunic is used by his brothers to hide and cover up their sin, his outer garment is used by Potiphar’s wife to hide and cover hers.

For, although, without doubt, there is something here of the ‘rage of a woman scorned’⁶⁸ and that, in part, she plans to avenge herself on Joseph for his rebuffing of all her advances,⁶⁹ she now finds herself in something of a corner—having Joseph’s abandoned garment as prima facie evidence to incriminate her. And so, in part at least, to divert suspicion from herself, she launches a pre-emptive strike—going on the offensive by raising an outcry against him.⁷⁰

And, just as once Joseph’s tunic had been used to deceive his father into believing he was dead when he wasn’t, so now his garment is used to deceive his master into believing he is guilty when he isn’t.

We do not have space for me to expand on it but it is interesting to follow the thread which runs through chapters 37 to 39:

- (i) In chapter 37, Jacob is deceived, with his son’s coat produced as evidence.
- (ii) In chapter 38, Judah is deceived, with his own signet and staff produced as evidence.
- (iii) In chapter 39, Potiphar is deceived, with his servant’s robe produced as evidence.

In each of these successive chapters then, key characters are deceived. And, in each case, they (Jacob, Judah and Potiphar respectively) are compelled to ‘recognise’ certain personal items⁷¹—items by which other key characters are identified and by means of which cleverly planned schemes prove successful.

Here in our story, the young man, who has earlier suffered trials of slavery and of temptation, must now suffer the further trial of false accusation and of slander.⁷²

I commented in Part 3 on Potiphar’s status as ‘Chief of the Executioners’, possessing the authority, no doubt, to execute anyone proved guilty of serious crime. And that in itself bodes ill for Joseph! The more so, given that the normal fate of a servant who sexually assaulted his master’s wife in Egypt would be execution.⁷³

And yet ... and yet, remarkably, we read that Potiphar only ‘took him, and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were bound’.⁷⁴ Why? we must ask.

Ancient historians indicate that the chastity of Egyptian women was in bad repute from time immemorial.⁷⁵ It may well be that Potiphar had some doubt about the veracity of his wife’s version of the story and, therefore, was relatively lenient in the punishment he meted out to Joseph. Certainly, imprisonment was a very moderate punishment if Potiphar had believed Joseph to be guilty.⁷⁶

But, even if Potiphar were suspicious of his wife's role in what had happened, he was in no position to disprove her accusations and, in any case, could hardly be expected to relish the shame which her guilt would bring upon him—and he did hold a very important post in the palace!

All that remained, then, was for him to remove his highly efficient and effective business manager! And so, Potiphar cast his servant into prison⁷⁷ ... and his wife into history!

At this point, Joseph is taken off to the prison where 'the king's prisoners were bound',⁷⁸ which prison appears to have been on Potiphar's own property.⁷⁹ The word translated 'prison' is unique to this section⁸⁰ and this particular prison is later described as 'the house of the captain of the guard'⁸¹ ... and we all know who that was! Yes, Potiphar.⁸² And it was this same 'captain of the guard' who himself later assigned the chief butler⁸³ and chief baker to Joseph's care in that very prison.⁸⁴

This may explain why (apart, of course, from the 'favour' which the Lord gave Joseph in his eyes⁸⁵) 'the keeper of the prison' (the prison superintendent or warden) so readily places Joseph in charge of the running of the prison under Joseph's charge⁸⁶—Joseph may have been well known to the man.

But whatever personal (and entirely natural) reasons Potiphar had for sparing Joseph's life, you and I cannot fail to detect an unseen divine hand at work. For, given the crucial place which he occupies in the main story-line of the Bible (as outlined in Part 1), young Joseph was effectively (in the words of John G. Paton, 30 years missionary to cannibals in the New Hebrides) 'immortal till his work was done'.⁸⁷

And we note that that unseen hand not only restrains Potiphar's anger (which we are told 'was kindled', was 'glowing hot'),⁸⁸ but also directs him in the choice of prison—to that prison 'where the king's prisoners were bound'.⁸⁹ And I hardly need to tell you just how critically important that little detail is to prove!

For, although neither Potiphar nor Joseph knew it, Joseph was there in that prison to keep a divinely-fixed appointment ...



... which will form the next link in the chain which will take Joseph to the top job in all Egypt.

At that time:

- (i) the young man who now let go his outer garment rather than sin against God⁹⁰ will be clothed in the finest linen robes;⁹¹
- (ii) the young man who now lost his good name (in preserving his character)⁹² will be given a new name – 'Zaphnath-Paaneah'⁹³—possibly meaning 'the Sustainer/Nourisher of Life';⁹⁴
- (iii) the young man who now forfeits his position as 'overseer' of Potiphar's house⁹⁵ will be made, in the words of Stephen in Acts 7, 'governor' over Pharaoh's house.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, just as the opening of chapter 39 records twice that 'the Lord was with him' concerning Joseph's time in Potiphar's house,⁹⁷ so now the close of chapter 39 records twice that 'the Lord was with him' concerning Joseph's time in Potiphar's prison.⁹⁸

Yet we could hardly criticize Joseph, if at this time—with 'his feet hurt by fetters' and lying 'in irons'⁹⁹—he should be asking himself, 'What price my dreams now?'

But, speaking of dreams, we now come to link number nine ...

9. The falling from favour of Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker.¹⁰⁰

We now sit in as observers on what, for Joseph, is a totally unexpected meeting with two of Potiphar's former colleagues—two of Pharaoh's other high-ranking officials.¹⁰¹ And I stress that Joseph's encounter with the two men was 'unexpected' by Joseph, because you and I know that, in the unerring providence of God, the three men have converged on this particular prison right on schedule!¹⁰²

When it is said that the two men had ‘offended’ Pharaoh,¹⁰³ this reads literally that they had ‘sinned’ against him—that is, they had both been guilty of some crime against the king. Since the baker and butler were responsible between them for all that Pharaoh ate and drank (and since there is no mention of any others being put into prison with them at the time) I think it likely that the crime committed had something or other to do with Pharaoh’s table.¹⁰⁴

Joseph’s attitude towards the two men provides us with a window into another of his lovely character traits, namely, his sensitive and caring nature:

‘Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and, behold, they were sad. And he asked ... saying, “Why are your faces sad today?” And, when they answered, “We have each dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter”, he said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me”.¹⁰⁵

It is likely that the men’s trouble of mind stemmed from the fact that the Egyptians regarded dreams and their interpretation as carrying great significance.

In this particular instance, the dreams did have great significance for the two men and not only so, for the dreams could be traced back to God Himself and served to pave the way, in His time, for Joseph to stand before Pharaoh.

I suspect that the two dreams rehearsed by the butler and baker brought to Joseph’s mind the two dreams which he had had long before as a lad in the land of Canaan, for we are later told that he remembered his dreams very clearly when he saw his brothers again for the first time in chapter 42.¹⁰⁶

In asking the chief butler, at such time as the man would be restored to Pharaoh’s favour, to do a favour for him (namely, to ‘remember me when it is well with you, and show kindness to me, and mention me to Pharaoh’¹⁰⁷), Joseph was, in effect, hoping to facilitate the fulfilment of his own dreams.¹⁰⁸

Not, of course, that it is wrong to use lawful means to achieve God’s purpose—after all, God Himself does it all the time!¹⁰⁹ But, in this particular case, such a move was premature ... to some extent, I suppose, like Moses attempting to liberate Israel from Egypt some forty years too early.¹¹⁰ Happily for Joseph, he would not need (as was the case with Moses¹¹¹) to wait a further forty years before God’s clock would strike.

But Joseph would have to wait two years! Which brings us to the last link in our chain ...

10. The memory of the chief butler.¹¹²

According to Joseph’s interpretation of their dreams, in three days’ time both the chief butler and the chief baker were to have their heads ‘lifted up’¹¹³—but with one all-important difference, namely, that, in the baker’s case, his head would be lifted up ‘from off’ him.¹¹⁴ Whereas the chief butler would be reinstated, the chief baker would be decapitated.¹¹⁵

And, happily for the chief butler (but unhappily for the chief baker), Joseph’s interpretation of both dreams proved accurate ... in the case of the baker, you might say, ‘deadly accurate’!

‘Within three days Pharaoh shall lift up your head from off you’; the chief baker was ‘for the chop’.



Given that it is only the butler who plays any further role in the story, we may wonder why God, in His providence, causes the baker also to be there in the prison and to dream as well.

I suggest the answer lies in that the equally correct (albeit, very different) interpretation of the chief baker’s dream was necessary to convince the chief butler that the interpretation which Joseph gives of the butler’s own dream is not just an inspired and ‘lucky’ guess. This perception of the chief butler becomes critical, of course, when later he speaks to Pharaoh on Joseph’s behalf.¹¹⁶

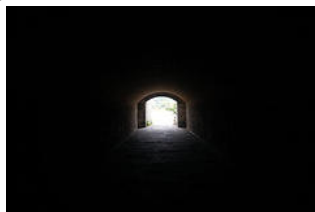
But, alas for Joseph, chapter 40 closes with the statement, 'Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph (paraphrased well in the Good News Bible, he 'never gave Joseph another thought') but forgot him'.¹¹⁷ The opening verse of the next chapter reveals that there is no further action for 'two full years'¹¹⁸—and I guess that, as the days, the weeks, the months dragged by, those 'two full years' must have seemed virtually endless to poor Joseph.

Did Joseph never ask, in the words of David, 'O Lord, how long?'¹¹⁹

It all seemed so unfair:

- (i) the betrayal of his brothers,
- (ii) the false accusation of Potiphar's wife,
- (iii) the injustice of Potiphar and now,
- (iv) the ingratitude of the chief butler.

Is there to be no end to this tunnel?



Did Joseph never ask, 'Lord, why were the chief butler's and chief baker's dreams fulfilled in just three days, and mine have remained unfulfilled for well over 11 years? Lord, what price my dreams now?'

It is all very well for you and me ... in our Bible reading, we can race from the beginning of chapter 37 to the end of chapter 41—we can race from Pit to Prison to Palace. But it was certainly no race for Joseph! Alas for him, Joseph isn't in the position to 'fast-forward' the story!

Yet we soon come to see that it was the same happy providence which brought Joseph into contact with a man able to speak to Pharaoh for him, that caused that man to forget him!¹²⁰

For, had the butler remembered Joseph and spoken up on his behalf immediately following their parting, the very most Joseph could have hoped for then would have been his release from prison. Indeed, I note that Joseph laid bare the limit of his horizon when he requests that the butler 'remember me ... and ... mention me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house'.¹²¹

But you and I know that God had far bigger—far better—far more exciting—plans for Joseph than that.

When the butler had first been reinstated, Pharaoh would have had absolutely no reason to confer any dignity on Joseph.

So, yes, the dreams of the butler and baker were all-important ... but they were all-important in God's time and not in Joseph's! And God's clock keeps very strict time.

But, although the chief butler had forgotten Joseph, contrary to all appearances, Joseph's God had not!

And, right on time ...



... there comes another pair of dreams—given this time by God to Pharaoh.¹²²

And in next to no time, this third pair of dreams¹²³ (of which Joseph became aware, of course, only because of his interpreting correctly the second pair of dreams¹²⁴) was rapidly leading to the fulfilment of the first pair of dreams.¹²⁵

God simply puts ...

(i) *a double dream* into the head of Pharaoh,¹²⁶

(ii) *a distant memory* into the head of the butler¹²⁷ and

(iii) *a desired interpretation* into the head of Joseph¹²⁸

... and it is all over!

In next to no time,¹²⁹ Joseph exchanges a prison for a palace and his iron collar¹³⁰ for a gold chain.¹³¹

CONCLUSION

Let's hear you summarise the story, Stephen:

'The patriarchs, moved with jealousy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house'.¹³²

We have traced 'The Early Life of Joseph' from the jealousy of his brothers to his being made governor over Egypt by way of a 'chain of ten links'.

We have found that each and every link was absolutely essential ... that, if any one link had failed or snapped, the history of Israel—the history of the world—indeed, the history of heaven itself—would be very, very different!

I close this short series on 'The Early Life of Joseph' with the following important announcement:

**The God of Joseph has not abdicated!
He is still on the throne.**

And God wants you and me to trust Him through the very hardest and darkest of times, assured that ...

**although we may not always be able to grasp His ways,
we can always grasp His hand!**

Notes

¹ Gen. 37. 1-11.

² Gen. 37. 12-14.

³ Gen. 37. 15-17

⁴ Gen. 37. 18-24; 26-27.

⁵ Gen. 37. 25, 28.

⁶ Gen. 37. 36; 39. 1-6.

⁷ Gen. 39. 7-18.

⁸ Gen. 39. 19-23.

⁹ Gen. 40. 1-4.

¹⁰ Gen. 40. 20-23; 41. 9-13.

¹¹ Gen. 39. 7-18.

¹² Gen. 37. 2.

¹³ Gen. 41. 46.

¹⁴ Gen. 41. 1.

¹⁵ 'Day by day', Gen. 39. 10.

¹⁶ Gen. 39. 2-3.

'In contrast to the detail in the last chapter that God put Judah's sons to death, Gen. 38. 7, 10, here the Lord is with Joseph, and he prospers', J. H. Walton, '*Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary*', comment on Gen. 39. 2.

¹⁷ Gen. 39. 4.

'The phrase "over the house" was used 'to identify the most senior representative of the administration that he served. This was the highest status that could be achieved under a given ruler. For example, it was the status that was given to Joseph when Potiphar made him overseer of his house (Gen. 39. 4). Later, Joseph once again received this status when the Pharaoh of Egypt appointed him Vizier over Egypt (Gen. 41. 39-44). Ultimately, Joseph had his own steward who managed his affairs and served "over his house" (Gen. 43. 19-24). In this latter case, it is clear that the individual was uniquely privy to the actions and wishes of the individual he served ...

'Similar language is used in the New Testament when the angel announced to Mary that she would give birth to Jesus, who would be called the Son of the Most High, who would be granted the throne of His father David, and who would reign "over the house" of Jacob forever (Luke 1. 33). In the Book of Hebrews, He again is described as a great high priest who is "over the house" of God, thus encouraging believers to draw near with confidence (Heb. 10. 21)', B. Rickett, '*New Discovery of another First Temple Seal in Jerusalem*'.

¹⁸ Gen. 39. 7; the phrase is used with the same sense (in Akkadian) in section 25 of the '*Code of Hammurabi*'.

¹⁹ Gen. 39. 6. The Hebrew expression is exactly the same as is used to describe Joseph's mother, Gen. 29. 17.

²⁰ 'It was not uncommon for slaves in Egypt to be employed in professional tasks such as household management and the administration of property. This situation is illustrated by an Egyptian papyrus deriving from 1830-1742 BC, which lists the names of nearly eighty slaves in an Egyptian household, together with their occupations. Strangely, the Asian slaves clearly enjoyed superior status and performed the skilled jobs, while the Egyptian slaves were given the more onerous and strenuous labours in the fields. By working in the house, Joseph has the opportunity to display his administrative talents and to win the favour of his master', N. M. Sarna, '*Genesis: The JPS Torah Commentary*', page 252.

²¹ Gen. 12. 14-15; cf. 'a woman fair ('beautiful') in appearance', Gen. 12. 11.

²² Gen. 20. 2.

²³ The twelve sons of Jacob are described as 'patriarchs' by Stephen, Acts 7. 8.

²⁴ Gen. 39. 6.

²⁵ 'His master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph', Gen. 39. 7.

²⁶ 2 Sam. 11. 2-4.

Job has left us a sterling example of one who set a guard on his eye-gate: 'I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?' Job 31. 1.

²⁷ 'But he refused', Gen. 39. 8.

²⁸ Flavius Josephus, '*The Antiquities of the Jews*', Book II, Chapter IV, Section 4.

²⁹ Joseph's success had not corroded his moral fibre.

³⁰ We can link this two-fold consideration with the opening of the chapter (chapter 39), which has much to say both about how, in the house of Potiphar, Joseph has been both (i) blessed by his God and (ii) trusted by his master.

In the opening six verses, the Holy Spirit stresses both of these points by a series of double expressions:

(i) Joseph was blessed by his God: (a) 'the Lord was with', vv. 2, 3; (b) 'the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake', v. 5, 'the blessing of the Lord on all he had', v. 5; (c) Joseph 'was a prosperous man', v. 2, 'the Lord made all that he did to prosper', v.3.

(ii) Joseph was trusted by his master: 'all that he (Potiphar) had he put into his hand', v. 4b, 'he (Potiphar) left all that he had in Joseph's hand', v. 6a.

³¹ Gen. 39. 8-9a.

³² Gen. 12. 3.

³³ Compare the earlier words of Laban to Jacob, 'the Lord has blessed me because of you', Gen. 30. 27.

³⁴ I have my eye in particular on the reference to 'the field' in Gen. 39. 5.

³⁵ Acts 7.10.

³⁶ In Potiphar's household, Joseph becomes familiar with Egyptian life in general and with business matters in particular.

'When we see that Joseph was an Egyptian steward, we see him getting the kind of on-the-job training he would need for the ultimate task God had for him, the task of preserving the people of Israel during the coming time of great famine ... Joseph will eventually become the head of agriculture for the entire land of Egypt. Under Potiphar, he received vital experience on a smaller scale', Charles Aling, '*Joseph in Egypt*', Bible and Spade 15. 2 (2002), page 38a.

³⁷ A later stanza reads:

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.*

³⁸ Gen. 39. 9.

³⁹ Gen. 43. 32.

'The segregation of the Hebrews was due to the Egyptian feeling of racial and religious superiority that engendered contempt for foreigners who were regarded as unclean. Herodotus ('*Histories*', 2. 41) reports that because the cow was taboo to Egyptians but eaten by Greeks, no native of Egypt would kiss a Greek, use his kitchen utensils, or even eat the flesh of an ox that had been cut with the knife of a Greek. It is, therefore, likely that Egyptian particularism asserted itself here because the Egyptians were shepherds—an abhorrent profession (Gen. 46. 34)—and because they ate sheep—an abomination to Egyptians', N. M. Sarna, *ibid.*, page 304.

⁴⁰ Gen. 41. 55.

⁴¹ Gen. 39. 9.

⁴² The Hebrew word (הרעה) occurs 664 times in the Old Testament, mostly rendered 'evil'.

⁴³ Compare the same Hebrew expression in Jer. 44. 7.

⁴⁴ Compare David's confession, 'after he had gone in to Bathsheba ... "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight', Psa. 51. 1-4.

⁴⁵ Gen. 42. 18.

⁴⁶ 'It is significant that the name of God comes readily to Joseph's lips at critical moments: (i) when he is confronted by Potiphar's wife, Gen. 39. 9; (ii) when he interprets dreams Gen. 40. 8; 41. 16, 28, 32: and (iii) when he tests his brothers, Gen. 42. 18; 44. 17; 45. 7-9', N. M. Sarna, *ibid.*, page 236.

⁴⁷ Prov. 8. 13. (The word translated 'evil' is the same Hebrew word as is rendered 'wickedness' in Gen. 39. 9; see note 42 above.)

⁴⁸ 1 Thess. 4. 3.

⁴⁹ Genesis 38 serves as a foil to Genesis 39.

⁵⁰ Gen. 38. 18. I am assuming (as do many commentators) that Tamar was, as Shua, a Canaanite, Gen. 38. 2, 6.

⁵¹ Gen. 39. 7-8.

⁵² Gen. 38. 18, 25-26; 39. 12, 15-17.

⁵³ From Genesis 38, we learn that God is able to bring good out of evil and to accomplish His purpose, even if He chooses to use means other than His people to accomplish that purpose. I note that, (i) in Genesis 37, 39-41, God preserved the family of Jacob ('of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came', Rom. 9. 5) and that, (ii) in Genesis 38, He preserved and secured the line through which Christ came.

⁵⁴ 'The constant pressure, "day after day", was profoundly searching: it was this that would find out Samson twice in his career (Judg. 14. 17; 16. 16)', D. Kidner, '*Genesis: Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*', comment on Gen. 39. 10.

The explicit sexual proposal, 'Lie with me', is all Potiphar's wife is ever reported saying to Joseph, Gen. 39. 7, 12.

⁵⁵ Compare the words of the apostle John: 'Everyone that hath this hope set on Him' (he Lord Jesus) 'purifies himself even as He is pure', 1 John 3. 3. John uses the same tense that he had in chapter 1 verse 7; there that the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing me; here that I am to keep on purifying myself—that I am to keep on resisting the defiling influences around me.

⁵⁶ 'Millie Dienert has worked with the Billy Graham team for forty years. Her comments on the ethics of Mr Graham, Cliff Barrows, George Beverly Shea, and the rest of the male members of the team make the point:

"I have always appreciated, from a moral point of view, how the men have been in their attitude toward the secretaries. The doors are always left open. There is a high regard for the lack of any kind of privacy where a boss and his secretary are involved. At times, I thought they were going a little too far, that it wasn't necessary, but I'm glad they did it, especially today. They have kept everything above reproach. When you are working on a long-term basis with the same person, constantly, in hotels, where the wife is not there and the secretary is, that is a highly explosive situation. You have to take precautions. I have always respected the way they have handled that. It has been beautifully done" [Source: William Martin, '*A Prophet with Honour: The Billy Graham Story*', page 566].

'What a remarkable compliment', Steve Farrar, '*Finishing Strong*', pages 41-42.

The wise man warns us to avoid those things that tend and expose us to sin; especially the sin of uncleanness: 'Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his garments not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? So, he that goes in to his neighbour's wife: whosoever touches her shall not be innocent', Prov. 6. 27-29.

⁵⁷ Thomas Brooks, '*Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*', page 67.

⁵⁸ Matt. 5. 29-30; 18. 8-9.

⁵⁹ Matt. 5. 29-30.

⁶⁰ 1 Cor. 10. 12. The downward slope is more slippery than we imagine!

The Nazarite is commanded to avoid grapes—'fresh or dried', Num. 6. 3. 'It is observable that because they were to drink no wine (which was the thing mainly intended) they were to eat nothing that came of the vine, to teach us with the utmost care and caution to avoid sin and everything that borders upon it and leads to it, or may be a temptation to us', Matthew Henry, '*Commentary on the Whole Bible*', comment on Numb. 6. 3-4.)

⁶¹ Gen. 39. 11-12.

⁶² Gen. 39. 2, 3.

⁶³ Gen. 39. 21, 23.

⁶⁴ 1 Cor. 6. 18.

⁶⁵ Matthew Henry, *ibid.*, comment on Gen. 39. 10.

'Joseph's flight, unlike a coward's, saved his honour at the cost of his prospects', D. Kidner, *ibid.*, comment on Gen. 39. 12. In other words, Joseph cared more for his purity than for his prospects.

'If Joseph had filled his mind with thoughts of romance or sexual indulgence with Mrs Potiphar, she would have got him and not just his coat', Dallas Willard, '*The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*', page 59.

⁶⁶ Gen. 37. 23.

⁶⁷ Gen. 39. 19-23.

⁶⁸ A frequent misquotation of William Congreve's 1697 poem '*The Mourning Bride*'. The accurate quotation is: 'Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turn'd. Nor hell a fury like a woman scorn'd'.

Amnon, the son of David, could have sat for a portrait of the first part of the quotation, 2 Sam. 13. 15.

⁶⁹ 'The lips of a strange woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but afterward she is as bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword', Prov. 5. 3-4.

⁷⁰ Gen. 39. 13-14. 'I cried out', v. 14—such was regarded as evidence of resistance to attempted rape and, therefore, of innocence; cf. Deut. 22. 24, 27. I note that there is no record of her having 'cried out' in verse 12.

'We are twice informed that the raising of the voice came after the flight, Gen. 39. 14, 18, as a strategy for coping with it, and not before the flight as its cause', R. Alter, '*Genesis*', page 227.

⁷¹ Gen. 37. 32 (Jacob); 38. 25 (Judah); 39. 15-18 (both the men of Potiphar's household and Potiphar himself).

⁷² Gen. 39. 13-20.

⁷³ 'He did not execute Joseph, as would normally have happened in rape cases', G. J. Wenham, '*The IVP New Bible Commentary*', page 86.

'The normal punishment for adultery in ancient Egypt was death', Charles Aling, '*ibid.*', page 99a.

⁷⁴ Gen. 39. 20. 'Egypt was one of the few nations in the ancient Near East that had prisons in the classical sense of the term', Aling, *ibid.* page 99a.

⁷⁵ Pheron (probably the Pharaoh of the Egyptian twelfth dynasty, the same era as Joseph) 'made trial of many, but found not one that was chaste save a certain gardener's wife', Diodorus Siculus, '*The Library of History*', Book I, Section 59—accessed at ...

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/1C*.html#ref44.

Compare the testimony of Herodotus, '*The Histories*', Book 2, Section 111—accessed at ...

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Herodotus/2B*.html#111.

[For the assumption about the twelfth dynasty, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sesostris>.]

- ⁷⁶ According to Egyptian law, 'An attempt at adultery was to be punished with 1000 blows, and rape upon a free woman still more severely', C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *'Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament'*, Volume 1, page 345.
- ⁷⁷ 'Within a single day he is plunged from trust and honour into the ignominy of prison', G. J. Wenham, *'Genesis 16-50: Word Biblical Commentary'*, comment on Gen. 39. 11. At the outset, this was very severe; 'whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in iron', Psa. 105. 18.
- ⁷⁸ Gen. 39. 20.
- ⁷⁹ 'The state-prison, according to Eastern custom, forming part of the same building as the dwelling-house of the chief of the executioners', C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *ibid.*, page 346.
- ⁸⁰ The word occurs eight times in this narrative, but nowhere else in the Old Testament; literally, 'a house of enclosure'.
- ⁸¹ Gen. 40. 3.
- ⁸² Gen. 37. 36.
- ⁸³ The word rendered 'butler' (or 'cupbearer') indicated 'an officer of considerable importance at Oriental courts, whose duty it was to serve the wine at the table of the king ... The holder of this office was brought into confidential relations with the king, and must have been thoroughly trustworthy, as part of his duty was to guard against poison in the king's cup. In some cases, he was required to taste the wine before presenting it', *'Hastings Dictionary of the Bible: single volume'*, article 'Cupbearer', page 171.
'The Egyptian cupbearers were often called "pure of hands", and in the 13th century BC one such cupbearer is actually entitled, "cupbearer who tastes the wine". These officials often became in many cases confidants and favourites of the king', K. A. Kitchen, *'IVP New Bible Dictionary'*, Second Edition, article 'Cupbearer', page 255.
- ⁸⁴ Gen. 40. 4.
- ⁸⁵ Gen. 39. 21.
- ⁸⁶ Gen. 39. 22.
- ⁸⁷ 'Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, I left all in His hands, and felt immortal till my work was done', John G. Paton, *'Autobiography'*, page 191.
- ⁸⁸ Gen. 39. 19.
- ⁸⁹ 'The prison will prove to be a steppingstone to the palace', G. J. Wenham, *ibid.*, 'Explanation' on 'Joseph in Prison'.
- ⁹⁰ Gen. 39. 12.
- ⁹¹ Gen. 41. 42.
- ⁹² Gen. 39. 14-18.
- ⁹³ Gen. 41. 45.
- ⁹⁴ See Note 83 to Part 1.
- ⁹⁵ Gen. 39. 4.
- ⁹⁶ Acts 7. 10.
- ⁹⁷ Gen. 39. 2-3.
'It is a characteristic feature of the Jacob cycle that God promised to be with Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 26. 3, 24, 28; 28. 15, 20; 31. 3). Now the same thing is said about Joseph', G. J. Wenham, *ibid.*, comment on Gen. 39. 2.

⁹⁸ Gen. 39. 21, 23. The lives of Abraham and Jacob were punctuated by supernatural appearances, revelations, visions and/or voices. Abraham had eight visits; Jacob had five. Even Isaac had two appearances. Nor had such experiences ceased, Gen. 46. 2-4. Yet Joseph had none! But, although Joseph received no reassuring revelations or communications, God 'was with him'. And that was enough. See also:

1. Genesis 39 'begins and ends very much the same way. This literary "inclusion" signals that the themes in the opening and the closing control the entire chapter.

'At the beginning, Joseph is sold into the service of Potiphar. God is so very much with him that in due course he becomes the head slave of this substantial household. We must not think this took place overnight; the chronology suggests eight or ten years elapsed. During this time Joseph would have had to learn the language and work his way up from the bottom. But all of this was tied to the blessing of God on Joseph's life, and Joseph's consequent integrity. 'At the end of the chapter, Joseph has been thrown into prison on a false charge, but even here God is with him and grants him favour in the eyes of the warden, and in due course becomes a prisoner-trustee.

'Thus, the chapter as a whole demonstrates that sometimes God chooses to bless us and make us people of integrity in the midst of abominable circumstances, rather than change our circumstances', D. A. Carson, '*For the Love of God*', Volume 1, comment for 6 February.

2. Genesis 39 ends the way it began, with Joseph in bondage, Gen. 39. 1; 39. 20.

But the chapter is clearly bracketed also by expressions signalling the providence of God:

(a) 'The Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand', v. 3; 'Whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper', v. 23.

(b) 'Joseph found favour in his (Potiphar's) sight', v. 4; 'The Lord ... gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison', v. 21.

(c) 'He (Potiphar) gave all that he had into Joseph's hand', v. 4; 'The keeper of the prison gave all the prisoners who were in the prison into Joseph's hand', v. 22.

(d) 'He (Potiphar) did not know anything he had', v. 6; 'The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was in his hand', v. 23.

And above all else ...

(e) 'The Lord was with Joseph ... the Lord was with him', vv. 2-3; 'The Lord was with Joseph ... the Lord was with him', vv. 21, 23.

⁹⁹ Psa. 105. 18.

¹⁰⁰ Gen. 40. 1-4.

One excellent quality seen in Joseph, time and again, is his conscientious service for those we might loosely describe as his employers—whether (i) going the second mile for his father from Shechem to Dothan; (ii) serving Potiphar well, originally, as his household servant and, subsequently, as his senior steward; (iii) serving the prison governor faithfully; and, later, (iv) promoting Pharaoh's best interests in securing for him ownership of more or less all the land of Egypt.

¹⁰¹ 'Pharaoh ... put the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was bound', Gen. 40. 3.

¹⁰² A further instance of God's good providence can be seen in that Potiphar assigned Joseph to wait upon the chief butler and chief baker, Gen. 40. 2.

¹⁰³ Gen. 40. 1.

¹⁰⁴ 'Genesis 40 gives no hint what sequence of events has landed these officials under Joseph's care. Offences against Pharaoh certainly could take many forms. Whether these officials are suspected of involvement in a conspiracy or just guilty of displeasing the king in the disposition of their duties is impossible to tell. Perhaps Pharaoh got sick from a meal and they have come under suspicion', J. H. Walton, *ibid.*, comment on Gen. 40. 1.

Presumably, the chief butler and chief baker were in the prison pending investigation and trial. Guilt and punishment would be decided by Pharaoh later.

¹⁰⁵ Gen. 40. 6-8. A lesser man than Joseph could have responded with sarcastic cynicism: 'Oh, you've had dreams, have you? Trust me, they'll never amount to anything. I once had dreams too. That was eleven years ago and look where they have got me! If you follow my advice, you are best forgetting your dreams'. But no hint of such cynicism came from Joseph's lips.

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 42. 9.

¹⁰⁷ Gen. 40. 14.

¹⁰⁸ I note that Joseph is careful not to expose: (i) the sin of his brothers in selling him to the Ishmaelites, (ii) the false accusation of Potiphar's wife or (iii) the injustice of Potiphar in putting him into the prison. (I should not be surprised if, as the wife of another of Pharaoh's senior officials, Potiphar's wife was well known to the chief butler.)

For the first time in the Genesis narrative, Joseph asserts only his own innocence, making it clear that he had been 'stolen' ('carried away by force') and had not, therefore, absconded because guilty of some crime, Gen. 40. 15.

¹⁰⁹ 'Trusting God's providence is not to be confused with succumbing to fatalism. It is not a resigned sigh of *Que sera, sera*—"What will be, will be". This Joseph understood.

'The account of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker does not tell us which of the two, if either, was actually guilty of something; it only tells us which of the two Pharaoh decided was guilty. Even then, we are not told the nature of the crime. The focus, rather, is on their respective dreams, and the fact that only Joseph, of those in prison, is able to interpret their dreams. The interpretations are so dramatic, and so precisely fulfilled, that their accuracy cannot be questioned.

'Joseph himself is under no illusion as to the source of his powers. "Do not interpretations belong to God?" he asks (Gen. 40. 8). Even before Pharaoh, where he might have been expected to slant his explanations just a little so as to enhance his own reputation, Joseph will later insist even more emphatically that he cannot himself interpret dreams; God alone can do it (Gen. 41. 16, 25).

'Yet despite this unswerving loyalty to God, despite this candid confession for his own limitations, despite the sheer tenacity and integrity of his conduct under unjust suffering, Joseph does not confuse God's providence with fatalism. 'The point is demonstrated in this chapter in two ways.

'*First*, Joseph is quite prepared to tell his predicament to the cupbearer (the servant who will be released in three days and restored to the court) in the hope that he might be released (Gen. 40. 14-15). Joseph's faith in God does not mean that he becomes entirely passive. He takes open action to effect improvement in his circumstances, provided that action is stamped with integrity.

'*Second*, when he briefly describes the circumstances that brought him into prison, Joseph does not hide the sheer evil that was done. He insists he "was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews" (Gen. 40. 15). The point was important, for most slaves became such because of economic circumstances. For example, when people fell into bankruptcy, they sold themselves into slavery. But that was not what had happened to Joseph, and he wanted Pharaoh to know it. He was a victim. Further, even during his life as a slave in Egypt he did "nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon"—which means of course he was incarcerated unjustly ...

'Robust biblical theism encourages us to trust the goodness of the sovereign, providential God, while confronting and opposing the evil that takes place in this fallen world', D. A. Carson, *ibid.*, comment for 7 February.

¹¹⁰ Acts 7. 25. Before the close of the 400-year period of which God had earlier spoken, when the iniquity of the Amorites (the Canaanites) would be 'full', Gen. 15. 13-16.

¹¹¹ Acts 7. 30.

¹¹² Gen. 40. 20-23; 41. 9-13.

¹¹³ Gen. 40. 13, 19.

¹¹⁴ Gen. 40. 19.

¹¹⁵ The corpse of the chief baker was 'hanged', Gen. 40. 22; 41. 13—probably being publicly impaled after his execution; cf. Josh. 10. 26; 1 Sam. 31. 10. 'The baker's dire fate would seem to be first decapitation and then exposure of the body on a high stake', R. Alter, *ibid.*, page 229.

'The additional profanation of the corpse makes it clear that the baker must have committed a serious offense', C. Westermann, '*Genesis*', page 277.

'The exposure of the body was ... especially repugnant to the superstitious Egyptians, who regarded the life after death as dependent on the body remaining un mutilated', G. J. Spurrell, '*Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Book of Genesis*', page 289.

¹¹⁶ Gen. 41. 9-13.

¹¹⁷ Gen. 40. 23.

¹¹⁸ Gen. 41. 1.

¹¹⁹ Psa. 6. 3; cf. Psa. 13. 1-2; 90. 13; Rev. 6. 10.

¹²⁰ Gen. 40. 23.

¹²¹ Gen. 40. 14.

¹²² Gen. 41. 1-5. 'The wheel ... has turned full circle. Joseph's misfortunes began with dreams, and now end through dreams', N. M. Sarna, *ibid.*, page 261.

¹²³ The dreams of Pharaoh, Gen. 41. 1-7.

¹²⁴ The dreams of the chief butler and the chief baker, Gen. 40. 8-19.

¹²⁵ The dreams of Joseph, Gen. 37. 5-11.

¹²⁶ Pharaoh's advisors ('soothsayers' and 'sages') were unable to figure out and/or to interpret his double-dream to his satisfaction, Gen. 41. 8.

¹²⁷ Gen. 41. 9-13.

¹²⁸ Gen. 41. 25-32.

¹²⁹ Save only for a (quick?) shave (the Hebrew word covering also a haircut, Num. 6. 9) and a change into more suitable clothing, Gen. 41. 14.

'He had to wait two years; now he must suddenly hurry', C. Westermann, *ibid.*, page 281.

'It is obvious that an imprisoned slave would have to make himself presentable before appearing in court ... In the ancient Near East, only the Egyptians were cleanshaven, and the verb used here can equally refer to shaving the head, or close-cropping it, another distinctive Egyptian practice ... When Pharaoh elevates him to viceroy, he will undergo still another change of clothing, from merely presentable dress to aristocratic raiment', R. Alter, *ibid.*, page 232.

¹³⁰ 'His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron', Psa. 105. 18 ESV.

¹³¹ Gen. 41. 42.

'Many Egyptian paintings show the Pharaoh placing a gold chain or collar round the necks of servants he is rewarding', G. J. Wenham, *ibid.*, comment on Gen. 41. 42.

¹³² Acts 7. 9-10.

Stephen summarised well the text of Genesis 37-41, and, as such, tells the story of Joseph with its lovely 'fairy-story' ending, when the young man earlier sold as a slave rose to become ruler of all Egypt.

And what a lovely story it is ... ending where the once-abused Joseph and his once-wicked brothers kiss and make up, Gen. 45. 14-15, and they all live happily ever after.

But I cannot help imagining the following conversation:

Questioner: 'Tell me, Stephen, will your story end up like that? Are you destined to become governor of all Egypt? Or might you rather end up pounded to death by the stones and rocks of the unbelieving Jews?'

Stephen: 'Yes, you are right—stoned "outside the city". But you must take into account my final destination—another city—another world—a bigger, better, more glorious world—a world with vistas which exceed your wildest dreams. In that world, everything will be put right—there you and I will be able see, as not now, that God brings good out of the evil. So, weep not for me'.