

**The Story of Joseph**: from Genesis chapters 37 to 47 and Andrew Lloyd Webber.

*“Way, way back many centuries ago. Not long after the Bible began. Jacob lived in the land of Canaan, a fine example of a family man. Jacob! Jacob and sons!...”*

Jacob REALLY loved his wife Rachel. He worked for his uncle for seven years, and then another seven years to get to marry her. This may help explain why, although Jacob ended up having 12 sons from his two wives and his wife’s maids, his favourite one was Joseph, the first son Rachel gave birth to.

And Jacob’s favouritism was no secret. In fact to advertise it, he gave his son Joseph a fancy posh coat of many colours. Which, not surprisingly, made Joseph’s brothers feel second class and jealous of him. Not only was Joseph swanning about singing

*“I look handsome, I look smart, I am a walking work of art,..”*

(allegedly) he also ratted on his brothers to his dad, and then topped this all off by sharing his dreams with them, dreams that clearly suggested he was going to rule over them one day.

*“I dreamed that in the fields one day the corn gave me a sign; your eleven sheaves of corn all turned and bowed to mine; my sheaf was quite a sight to see, a golden sheaf and tall, yours were green and second rate and really rather small...”*

To which his brothers replied (raspberry)

So having right royally wound his brothers up, they decide to get rid of him. Joseph goes to meet them, grazing their flocks away from home. The majority vote is to kill him, but his brother Reuben doesn’t want to go that far and persuades them to take his fancy coat off him and throw him in a cistern. Reuben’s plan is to sneak back and rescue Joseph later, but he doesn’t get the chance, as in the meantime some Ishmaelite traders come riding by and the other brothers decide to sell Joseph to them as a slave. That way they get rid of him, but won’t have his blood on their hands. It’s a compromise of sorts.

So Joseph’s punishment for being a very annoying brother is to be sold into slavery, taken off to a foreign country, separated from his friends and family. This is scary stuff, going from favourite privileged son to slave.

The brothers go home and tell Jacob a big fat whopping lie about how Joseph must have been killed by a ferocious animal, and show Jacob Joseph’s posh coat, which they’ve dipped in goat’s blood, as evidence.

*“You know you had a dozen sons, well, now that’s, not quite true, but feel no sorrow do not grieve, he would not want you to....There’s one more angel in heaven, there’s one more star in the sky. Joseph we’ll never forget you, it’s tough but we’re gonna get by....”*

Arriving in Egypt, the traders sell Joseph on to an important rich guy called Potiphar.

*“Potiphar had very few cares, he was one of Egypt’s millionaires, having made a fortune buying shares in pyramids...”*

As being a slave goes, Joseph wasn't badly off, because it was obvious that God was with him and helping him to be very good at his work, which put him in favour with his owner, Potiphar, who put Joseph in charge of everything he owned. But more trouble was brewing for Joseph in the form of Potiphar's wife. She fancies Joseph, but she's married and should keep her hands off. And Joseph is faithful to God's ways and doesn't want to get involved with another man's wife, so he's all "don't even think about it!" But his rejection makes Potiphar's wife mad so she tells her servants and her husband that Joseph threw himself at her, and that he only ran off when she screamed for help. Which makes Potiphar mad, and he has Joseph thrown into prison.

As being a prisoner goes, Joseph wasn't badly off, because it was obvious that God was with him and helping him to be very good at his work, which put him in favour with the prison warden, who put Joseph in charge of the whole prison.

Now the prison Joseph was in was the prison where Pharaoh's prisoners were also confined, and after Joseph has been there sometime, Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker get on the wrong side of him and find themselves in the prison. Where they both have dreams.

*"There I was standing in front of a vine, I picked some grapes and I crushed them to wine. I gave some to Pharaoh, who drank from my cup. I tried to interpret...but I had to give up"*

Joseph tells him, it's going to be ok, Pharaoh will pardon him, and when he does can the cupbearer ask Pharaoh about him, and try to get him out of the prison, what with him being innocent and all. The cupbearer does get to go back to working for Pharaoh, but doesn't mention Joseph to him, so it looks like Joseph is going to be stuck there in prison forever more.

It's two whole years later when Pharaoh has a dream he wants someone to interpret for him, and the cupbearer is finally like, oh yeah, there's this guy in prison who can interpret dreams. And so Joseph is brought before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh says:

*"Well I was wondering along by the banks of the river, when seven fat cows came up out of the Nile a-ha-ha Oh yeah. And right behind these fine healthy animals were seven other cows, skinny and vile a-ha-ha. Oh yeah. Well the thin cows ate the fat cows, which I thought would do them good a-ha-ha oh yeah. But it didn't make them fatter like such a monster supper should. Oh no. Well, the thin cows were as thin as they ever, ever had been. Well this dream has got me baffled, say Joseph won't you tell me what it means..."*

Joseph explains that the dream means there will be seven years of bumper crops, followed by seven years of really bad famine, and the thing to do is put someone in charge of storing all the excess food in the good years, ready for the bad years. Pharaoh says "This is a good plan! Joseph, I put you in charge, you can sort it out". And so Joseph goes back to wearing posh clothes, and gets to run Egypt.

After the seven years of plenty, there is famine everywhere, not just in Egypt,

*"Those Canaan days we used to know, Where have they gone, where did they go? Eh bien, raise your berets To those Canaan days"*

But it's known that Egypt has food stored up, so Jacob sends his sons from Canaan to Egypt to buy food. And that's how the brothers end up bowing down before Joseph, requesting to buy food to take home.

The brothers don't recognise Joseph, but he recognises them and questions them and tests them by setting up his brother Benjamin as a thief to see how they react. It's Judah, whose idea it was to sell Joseph as a slave, who steps in and offers to take the punishment in place of Benjamin.

*"Oh no! Not he! How you can accuse him is a mystery. Save him, take me. Benjamin is straighter than the tall palm tree."*

It's then that Joseph reveals his true identity and tells them not to blame themselves because his being sold into slavery in Egypt was all part of God's plan to save them all from starvation.

Let's re-cap and do some maths. We know that Joseph was 17 when he was sold into slavery, and we know that he was 30 when Pharaoh put him in charge of running Egypt. This means that Joseph spent.... 13 years between being a slave and being in prison. We know he was in prison for at least two years, because of the two year gap between Joseph interpreting the servants dream, and the servant remembering to tell Pharaoh about Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. So the best case scenario is that Joseph spent 11 years as a slave, and two years in prison for something he didn't do, but the ratio could have been different. And it was another 7 or 8 years after taking over running Egypt that his brothers showed up, so that's 22 years between Joseph's dreams of his brothers bowing down to him, and it actually happening. The point is, that's a lot of years to hang in there... a lot of years to keep going, doing your best, trusting in God, when everything looks terribly bleak and there's no obvious route of escape. A lot of years to have to resist self-pity and the temptation to blame God. I think that is perseverance.

*"Go go go Joseph, you know what they say. Hang on now Joseph you'll make it some day. Sh la la Joseph, you're doing fine. You and your dream coat ahead of your time!"*

The End.