

In January and February, we have been investigating some of the events and stories that are described in the book of Genesis and tonight we'll be considering Joseph to finish that off. In March and April, we'll be pondering through Paul's letter to the church in Philippi.

Joseph was like me. He was the youngest of his family, dreamt a lot and he had a beautiful and colourful coat that was a present from one of his parents.

Joseph is a prominent person in the book of Genesis. A lot of people have heard about him, though that may be more to do with Andrew Lloyd Webber's and Tim Rice's brilliant musical that was written in 1968. I went to see it at the London Palladium in 1991 when Jason Donovan was Joseph.

Jacob was Joseph's dad. If you read Genesis chapters 29 and 30, you'll find out that he had thirteen children through four ladies: Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilhah. Only Leah and Rachel were his wives, as the other ladies were servants in his household. Joseph might have been Jacob's favourite child because Rachel, his mum, was Jacob's favourite wife. Rachel had two children: Joseph and Benjamin and it was Joseph who was her first child.

His brothers didn't really like Joseph as they saw that *he* was obviously their dad's favourite. I wonder how they felt when Jacob gave Joseph that beautiful coat?

I wore my coat, with golden lining, bright colours shining, wonderful and new
And in the east, the dawn was breaking and the world was waking
Any dream will do....

Joseph's coat was definitely distinctive, but the Hebrew word could suggest it was multi-coloured, but it might have been that it had long sleeves, which was also unusual.

Joseph was probably a very content and happy chap. He was a dreamer and obviously loved his family. However, things seemingly started to go wrong while he was a young teenager.

In the second half of chapter 37 we read how Joseph as a young lad was sent by his dad to check that his brothers were ok whilst grazing their large flocks of sheep and goats. His brothers took his lovely coat off him and threw him in a hole in the ground. How unexpected! Not at all nice for Joseph! He must have called his brothers quite a lot from the pit that might have been around 7-10 foot deep. What were his brothers messing around at? He certainly loved them and in his innocence, he would have wondered what game they were playing.

The brothers wanted Joseph out of their hair. Killing him was one option, but then an hour or so later a group of travelling merchants happened to come along. They sold Joseph to these Midianites. These merchants continued travelling taking Joseph with them and after arriving in Egypt they sold him to one of Pharaoh's officials called Potiphar. If they were like Arthur Daley or Del Boy Trotter, they'd have sold him at a greater price than they had paid for him.

In chapter 39, we read how Potiphar was a good judge of character and after a while put him in charge of practically everything in his household. Obviously, this wasn't as good as being with his family, but he was doing ok and probably dreamt about being a success in Egypt. He *was* a success, but bad and unexpected things happened too.

Over a period of time Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. She wanted a physical relationship with him as he was a bit of a looker. Joseph wanted none of it and so eventually Potiphar's wife pretended that he had tried to rape her and so Joseph was put into prison. How unexpected!

Close every door to me, hide all the world from me,
Bar all the windows and shut out the light...

Things had now gone pretty badly, but worse was still to come. Where were his dreams now? Perhaps in prison he would have thought about his mum and dad. Perhaps he thought about the good times he'd had in Potiphar's house before he'd put in prison. At the end of chapter 39, we see how God was still with Joseph. The prison warden saw that Joseph was a good chap and so put him in charge of quite a few things. Maybe Joseph was starting to dream again?

A few months later two of Pharaoh's officials were put in prison. Joseph was in contact with them. These two men, a baker and a cupbearer, had dreams and Joseph was able to interpret them. When they came true, the cupbearer was released, but he didn't think to mention Joseph to the Pharaoh. I wonder how Joseph felt? That wasn't fair. How unexpected!

Two years later Pharaoh too had a dream. Cutting a long story short, Joseph was able to interpret it and was then released from prison. Potiphar had put him mostly in charge of his household. The prison warden had put him mostly in charge of the prison. Pharaoh put him in charge of the whole country. How unexpected!

Due to a long famine Joseph's brothers and then his father came to Egypt. They were reunited with Joseph. How unexpected!

Decades passed, with Jacob dying and then finally Joseph passing away.

That wasn't the end. Joseph was still dreaming even near the end of his life. He didn't want to be buried in Egypt. Instead he was embalmed and put in a coffin. It would be several hundred years before the Israelites left Egypt, but when they did, they took Joseph's bones with them. How unexpected!

Hebrews 11:22 [NIV]

By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

God wants *us* to dream too. Dreaming about the past, 'the good old days,' can be good sometimes and I'm getting to an age where I have plenty of lovely things I can reminisce about over five decades. We can all dream about the past, but what about dreaming for the future? As we listen to God in our homes on a regular basis, so we can ask Him to put His dreams into our hearts. We don't need to switch off or settle down and do nothing for the next 10-15 years. God loves us all very much and wants to use us all. It's safe to remember what God has already done, it can be a little scary to trust God for the future and to dream about the positive things that might happen. Let's give thanks for what God has done in the past, but let's open our eyes to what God will do through us this week, as well as into the more distant future.

As we follow Christ, let's be wholehearted in being His disciples. Let's praise Him for when we know He is with us even in the valley of darkness and of great concern. We *can* trust God for the future. We *can* dream of the massive possibilities that lie ahead.

God was with Joseph. God is with *us* too.

Hymn: Tell out my soul!