



God, we come to the final session of this series, we give thanks for the times of conversation we have enjoyed with each other.

**O God, we give you thanks
for existing commitments strengthened,
for new insights gained,
for challenges encountered
and for questions raised.**

We pray for those who teach biblical studies in theological colleges and university departments;
we pray for ministers who share the fruits of biblical research with their people in sermons and studies.

**May the enrichment in understanding
that comes from these activities
strengthen all who seek to follow the
way of Jesus. Amen.**

Please read these excerpts from Genesis 37—45 before the study, if you are able:
The questions we may discuss are listed on the following pages.

37:36 Meanwhile the Midianites had sold [Joseph] in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

39:1 Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

3 His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favour in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. 7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" 10 And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her.

11 One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, 12 she caught hold of his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran

outside. 13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, 14 she called out to the members of her household and said to them, "See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; 15 and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside."

16 Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, 17 and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; 18 but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside."

19 When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, "This is the way your servant treated me," he became enraged. 20 And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. 21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favour in the sight of the chief jailer. 22 The chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23 The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

41:46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. 47 During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly. 48 He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. 49 So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance — like the sand of

the sea — that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

50 Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him.

51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house."

52 The second he named Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes."

53 The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. *[the sons of Jacob twice go to Egypt to obtain grain from Pharaoh; on neither occasion do they recognise Joseph]*

42:3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. 5 Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

45:1 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10 You shall settle in the land

of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there — since there are five more years of famine to come — so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' 12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honoured in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here."

14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

16 When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. 17 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan. 18 Take your father and your households and come to me, so that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you may enjoy the fat of the land.' 19 You are further charged to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. 20 Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

21 The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. 22 To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. 23 To his father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. 24 Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Do not quarrel along the way."

25 So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan.

26 And they told him, "Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt." He was stunned; he could not believe them.

27 But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

28 Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die."

The lectionary, in characteristic style, picks and chooses select passages that it offers, week by week, as we move through the ancestral narratives that have been collected and consolidated in Genesis. As we have noted before, these stories have been told and retold, collected and written down, because they have shaped the self-understanding and identity of the ancient nation of Israel. Woven together into a narrative thread, the whole story stands as a foundational saga for the ancient nation. So this week we jump from last Sunday's tale of young Joseph, sold off to the Egyptians (Gen 37), to the account of his encounter with his brothers, suffering under famine in their land (Gen 43–45).

1 The chapters we jump over

First, however, we need to note what has happened in between these two stories.

Why do the brothers not recognise Joseph as one of their own, rather than as one of "those Egyptians"? What does that tell us, today, about putting people in ethnic boxes?

2 Joseph and his master's wife

Potiphar's wife—like many women in the patriarchal stories—does not have a name. And yet, her presence, and the interaction between her and Joseph, are crucial in the story.

How does this interpretation change the way you understand this story?

Do you agree that that Potiphar's wife has been misrepresented?

Do you agree that Joseph is not as pure as we might have thought?

3 Life in Egypt

Psalm 105 tells of a time when "Israel came to Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham" (v.23). Of that period, the psalmist sings that "the Lord made his people very fruitful" (v.24). This presumably reflects the time after the severe famine in Canaan (Gen 43:1), when, after various machinations, Jacob and his family relocate to Egypt, and Joseph, having revealed his true identity to his family (Gen 45:1–5), "settled his father and his brothers, and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed; and Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents" (Gen 47:11–12).

Of course, soon after this, famine hit Egypt as well (Gen 47:13). Joseph's scheme for surviving the famine works (Gen 47:14–26), the country survives, and "Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly" (Gen 47:27). This bounty is reiterated in the opening chapter of Exodus, which declares that "the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them" (Exod 1:7). So Egypt ended up as a good place, for quite some time, for the Israelites.

4 Joseph and his brothers

The lectionary takes up the story (Gen 45:1) as Joseph reveals his true identity to his brothers. The brothers have been in Egypt before, but did not ever recognise Joseph.

When the brothers finally stood before Joseph in Egypt without knowing who he was, how did their past actions come back to haunt them?

Joseph put his brothers through several tests when they came to Egypt for food.

Was he acting out of a desire for revenge, or was he testing to see if their character had truly changed?

Finally, the narrator tells us that Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers (Gen 45:4).

How is true forgiveness different from just pretending a hurt never happened?

What can we learn from Joseph about letting go of bitterness?

5 Honouring Joseph

The irony of the stories about Joseph is that Israel as a whole is identified with reference to Joseph at a number of places in the Hebrew Scriptures. Both narrative texts and prophets refer to the whole nation as “the house of Joseph” (Josh 17:17; 18:5; Judg 1:22–23, 35; 2 Sam 19:20; 1 Ki 11:28; Amos 5:6; Obad 1:18; Zech 10:6; and see Ps 77:15; 80:1; 81:4–5). The name of Joseph was revered in the ongoing traditions of Israel.

There are suggestions that the detail of these chapters of Genesis means that Joseph may well have been an actual historical person, in contrast to the patriarchs and matriarchs before him, who are offered as “characters” in a narrative developed before and during the Exile as the foundational story (the grounding “myth”) of Israel. His ultimate character is one of redeeming goodness, in contrast to the schemers and deceivers who have gone before him.

What do you make of this interpretation?

In what ways does this add weight to the suggestion that Joseph was more certain as an historical figure than those who go before?

6 To conclude this series

What have you learnt from discussing the narrative about the patriarchs and matriarchs running through Genesis?

How has your discipleship in 2026 been encouraged or challenged?

See also John’s blog on this passage at

<https://johntsquires.com/2023/08/14/benjamin-wept-upon-josephs-neck-gen-45-pentecost-12a/>

If you would like to do further reading about the Genesis narratives, you could look at John’s blogs on “who have we missed?”

<https://johntsquires.com/2023/08/11/who-have-we-missed-women-in-genesis-in-the-season-of-pentecost-year-a/>

<https://johntsquires.com/2023/08/17/who-else-have-we-missed-more-women-in-genesis-in-the-season-of-pentecost-year-a/>

and also on the passages earlier in Genesis before we started these studies

<https://johntsquires.com/2023/06/05/in-you-all-the-families-of-the-earth-shall-be-blessed-gen-12-pentecost-2a/>

<https://johntsquires.com/2023/06/12/visiting-abraham-and-sarah-by-the-oaks-at-mamre-gen-18-pentecost-3a/>

<https://johntsquires.com/2023/06/22/come-lift-up-the-boy-and-hold-him-fast-the-other-son-ishmael-gen-21-pentecost-4a/>

If you would like to do further reading about the Exodus narratives which come in following weeks in the lectionary, you could look at: John’s blogs on “how do we read the Exodus story?”, that are listed at <https://johntsquires.com/2023/10/27/never-since-has-there-arisen-a-prophet-like-moses-pentecost-13a-to-22a/>