

# Genesis 50:15-21

- Divine Providence -

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## Foreword

- ❖ “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails” (Prov 19:23)
- ❖ This is well illustrated by the account or history of Jacob and his son Joseph (Gn 37-50).
- ❖ Who could ever have imagined that the love of a father for a son, a special robe as a gift, dreams of a youngster of seventeen years old could spark a series of events spanning more than thirty years, ending in the saving of his family, but not only his family, also the whole nation of Egypt and many more people suffering from famine in the Middle East.
- ❖ It all started in Canaan. Joseph was sold as a slave to Egypt. He served in the house of Potiphar, an Egyptian official, was thrown not guilty into the prison of the king, Pharaoh. There he met two high officials. Two years later, one of them remembered Joseph when the Pharaoh had his dreams. Step by step, Joseph was approaching the centre of power, and eventually ended as the second in power to rule the whole country of Egypt, being only responsible to Pharaoh.
  - The theme of the Joseph narrative concerns God’s hidden and decisive power which works in and through but also against human forms of power:<sup>1</sup> “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gn 50:20).
- ❖ The belief in God’s providence asks for reflection, wisdom, faith, vocation and responsibility of the believer, then and now.

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<sup>1</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1982, p. 293).

- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Genesis. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

## Context

- ❖ An outline of the Book of Genesis.

<i>THE CREATION</i>	
Genesis 1:1-2:3	"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
<i>THE HISTORY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH</i>	
Genesis 2:4-4:26	"account of the heavens and the earth" (2:4)
Genesis 5:1-6:8	"account of Adam" (5:1)
Genesis 6:9-9:28	"account of Noah" (6:9)
Genesis 10:1-11:9	"account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons" (10:1)
<i>THE HISTORY OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JAKOB – the foundations of Israel</i>	
Genesis 11:10-26	"account of Shem" (11:10)
Genesis 11:27-25:11	"account of Terah" (11:27) > Abram/Abraham
Genesis 25:12-18	"account of Abraham's son Ishmael" (25:12)
Genesis 25:19-35:29	"account of Abraham's son Isaac" (25:19)
Genesis 36:1-	"account of Esau" (36:1)
Genesis 37:2-50:26	"account of Jacob" (37:2)

- ❖ The Book of Genesis consists of three main parts:
  - Genesis 1:1-2:3: In the beginning;
  - Genesis 2:4-11:9: The history of heaven and earth;
  - Genesis 11:10-50:26: The history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
    - **The promise given to Abram/Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3) is fundamental to the understanding of the third part of the book of Genesis (12-50):**
      - "I will make you into a great nation
      - and I will bless you;
      - I will make your name great,
      - and you will be a blessing.
      - I will bless those who bless you,
      - and whoever curses you I will curse;

- and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
  - The promise of becoming a father of a great nation and many nations is repeated several times: "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted" (Abraham: Gen. 13:6-17; 15: 5; 17:5-6; 18:18; 22:17-18; Isaac: 26:4; Jacob: 28:14; 35:11).
- ❖ An outline of the account of Jacob. Although this is often called the story of Joseph, the focus is on Jacob, and the (saving of) the people of Israel.

<b><i>The account of Jacob (Gn 37:1-50:26)</i></b>	
<b><i>1. Joseph sold as a slave to Egypt (Gn 37)</i></b>	
Genesis 37	Joseph and his <b>two dreams</b> (Gn 37:2-11):  His brothers said to him: "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?"  His father said to him: "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"  Joseph sold by his brothers to the Midianites (Gn 37:12-28).  Jacob mourns (Gn 37:29-35) because of the alleged death of Joseph.  Joseph sold as a slave to Potiphar (Gn 37:36).
<b><i>2. Interlude: Judah and Tamar (Gn 38)</i></b>	
<b><i>3. Joseph in Egypt (Gn 39:1-47:26)</i></b>	
Genesis 39	Joseph serves as a slave in the house of Potiphar (Gn 39:1-7).  "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered" (Gn 39:2).  Joseph and the wife of Potiphar (Gn 39:8-18).  Joseph serves in prison (Gn 39:19-23).  "In the prison, the LORD was with him" (Gn 39:20, 21).
Genesis 40	Joseph and the <b>two dreams</b> of the cup-bearer and the baker of the king of Egypt.
Genesis 41:1-40	Joseph and the <b>two dreams</b> of the King of Egypt (Gn 41:1-40).
Genesis 41:41-56	Joseph in charge of Egypt (Gn 41:41-56).
<i>A turning point in the life of Joseph: the birth of two sons (Gn</i>	

	<i>41:50-52</i>
	<p>“Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said,  <i>'It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.'</i></p> <p>The second son he named Ephraim and said,  <i>'It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.'”</i></p>
<i>4. The journeys of the brothers of Joseph to Egypt (Gn 42:1-26)</i>	
Genesis 42	<p>The first journey of the brothers of Joseph to Egypt.</p> <p>“Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. <i>Then he remembered his dreams about them</i>” (Gen 42:8, 9).</p>
Genesis 43-45	The second journey of the brothers of Joseph to Egypt.
Genesis 46	The third journey to Egypt. Jacob and his family are allowed to settle in Goshen.
Genesis 47:1-26	Joseph in charge of Egypt.
<i>5. The final years of Jacob in Egypt (47:27-50:14)</i>	
Genesis 47:27-41	Joseph promises his father Jacob to bury his body in Canaan.
Genesis 48	Jacob blesses Joseph and his two sons.
Genesis 49:1-28	Jacob prophecies about his other sons.
Genesis 49:29-50:14	The death and burial of Jacob in Canaan.
<i>6. The reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers (50:15-26)</i>	
Genesis 50:15-21	Joseph comforts his brothers.
Genesis 50:22-26	The death of Joseph and his (provisional) burial in Egypt.

❖ This account of Jacob consists of six parts:

- 1. Joseph sold as a slave to Egypt (Gn 37).
- 2. Interlude: Judah and Tamar (Gn 38). This passage serves as an interlude to create suspense. Besides the narrative itself, It gives the impression that Joseph was separated

from his family for a long time, more than twenty years.<sup>2</sup> The narrative contrasts also the sexual behaviour of Judah, his sons, and Joseph.

- 3. Joseph in Egypt (Gn 39:1-47:26).
  - The birth of his two sons marks a turning point in the life of Joseph: forgetting the past, looking into the future.
- 4. The journeys of the brothers of Joseph to Egypt (Gn 42:1-26).
- 5. The final years of Jacob in Egypt (47:27-50:14).
- 6. The reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers (50:15-26).



- An Egyptian family. This family consists of husband and wife, daughter and son. According to the colour of their skin, the wives stayed mainly indoors, while the men were working outdoors. Egyptian families were not big. The family of Joseph (husband and wife, two sons) fits into this picture.

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<sup>2</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1994, Vol. 2, p. 363).

## Form and structure

- ❖ Genesis 50:15-21 consists of two scenes:

*Scene 1*                      When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said,  
*(verse 15-17)*                      "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"

So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father."

When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

*Scene 2*                      His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him.  
*(verse 18-21)*                      "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them,  
"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?  
You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good  
to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.  
So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children."  
And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

### History, a historical narrative or a tale?

- ❖ Is this story rooted in history or is it just a tale? Longacre refers to a study of Hoffmeier.<sup>3</sup> This study discusses several pieces of evidence, including:

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<sup>3</sup> Longacre, R. E. (2003). *Joseph*. In T. D. Alexander & D. W. Baker (Eds.).

- ❖ "(1) the detail that the price for which Joseph was sold, twenty pieces of silver (Gn 37:28), was the price of a slave in the first half of the second millennium (2000–1500 B.C.), while at later periods the price was considerably higher;
- ❖ (2) the names Potiphar (Gn 37:36; 39:1), Potiphera the priest of On (Gn 41:45, 50), Asenath, the wife of Joseph (Gn 41:45, 50) and Zaphenath-paneah (Gn 41:45)." Asenath is a common name of the Middle Kingdom and first Intermediate (2000–1500 B.C.);<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ "(3) the role of magicians as dream interpreters in Egypt (Gn 41:8);
- ❖ (4) the significance of Pharaoh's 'birthday' (reinterpreted according to Egyptian sources as the anniversary of accession/coronation)." This is comparable to the moment that Joseph receives a new Egyptian name.
- ❖ "(5) the scenes of the investiture of high officials whose details parallel the account of Joseph's investiture (Gn 41:41-43);
- ❖ (6) Joseph's status where the Genesis account suggests several Egyptian titles and parallels; and (7) even Joseph's age at death (110 years), which has been recognized for two centuries as an ideal age according to Egyptian sources."
- ❖ Longacre agrees with Hoffmeier: "It seems to me, however, that if the narratives look like history, are structured historiographically, and the events described (especially in the Joseph story) are not incredible and compare favorably with the Egyptian backgrounds, ... then the narratives ought to be considered historical until there is evidence to the contrary" (Hoffmeier, 91).<sup>5</sup>

#### A timeline

- ❖ Timeline of the life of Joseph:
  - Joseph was 17 years old when he had his dreams (Gn 37:2).
  - He spent approximately 12 years in slavery and prison (Gn 38-40).
  - At the age of 30, he entered the service of Pharaoh (Gn 41:46).
    - He became the father of two sons when he was approximately 32/34 years old. The birth of his two sons marked a turning point in his life (Gn 41:50-52; see above).
  - At the age of 37/38, seven years of famine.

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<sup>4</sup> Yee, G. A. (1992; Vol. 1, p. 476). *Asenath (Person)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

<sup>5</sup> See Hoffmeier, J.K. (1997). *Israel in Egypt The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- The brothers went to Egypt in the first year of the famine.
- The brothers went to Egypt for the second time in the second year of the famine. There are five more years to come (Gn 45:6).
- Jacob and his whole family moved to Egypt. Jacob was a hundred and thirty years old when he was presented to Pharaoh (Gn 47:3).
- At the age of 44/45, the famine came to an end.
  - Jacob lived another seventeen years in Egypt. He died at the age of a hundred and forty-seven (Gn 47:28).
- Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten years (Gn 50:22).

### The numbers two and three

- ❖ The numbers two and three play an important role in the story of Joseph. Some examples:
  - Dreams play an important role in this story. There are three sets of two.
    - The dreams of Joseph (Gn 37:5-11); The dreams of the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt (Gn 40:1-5); the dreams of the Pharaoh (Gn 40:1-32)
      - “The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon” (Gn 40:32).
  - Cloth play also an important role on three major occasions.
    - “A richly ornamented robe” (37:3, 23); “caught by his cloak” (Gn 39:12); “dressed in robes of fine linen” (Gn 41:42).
  - The brothers travel two times to buy grain; the third time they take Jacob and their families with them to settle in Egypt (Gn 42-46).
  - Twice the money is put back in the sacks of the brothers (Gn 42:27; 44:1).

### Faith

- ❖ The faith of Joseph:
  - “No one is greater in this house than I am. My master (Potiphar) has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Gn 39:9)
  - “Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, ‘It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household!’” (Gn 41:51).
  - “The second son he named Ephraim and said, ‘It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.’” (Gn 41:52). See also Genesis 48:8, 9.
  - On the third day, Joseph said to his brothers: “Do this and you will live, for I fear God” (Gn 42:12).

- “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die. But **God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**” (Gn 50:24; also 50:25).
- ❖ The faith of his brothers:
  - “‘My silver has been returned,’ he said to his brothers. ‘Here it is in my sack.’ Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, ‘**What is this that God has done to us?**’” (Gn 42:28; 43:23).
  - “‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ **Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father**” (Gn 50:17).
- ❖ The faith of Jacob:
  - “So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, ‘Jacob! Jacob!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. ‘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’” (Gn 46:1-3).
  - Then Jacob blessed Joseph and said,
  - "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
  - **the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,**
  - the Angel who has delivered me from all harm
  - —may he bless these boys.
  - May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,
  - and may they increase greatly upon the earth."

### God's providence

- ❖ The belief in God's providence offers a grand vision on God's dealing with individual lives being part of the history of families, generations, peoples. Genesis 37:12-36 and 41 serve as an example.
  - Genesis 37:12-36:
    - Actors:
      - **Jacob** sends **Joseph** to Shechem to see if all is well with the brothers (Gn 37:12-15).
      - **A man** tells Joseph that his brothers went to Dothan (Gn 37:15-17).
      - **The brothers** initially wanted to kill Joseph, the dreamer (Gn 37:5-11). These dreams already gave a glimpse of the future. Joseph is saved by

**Reuben** (Gn 37:19-24). **Judah** proposed to sell him to the Ishmaelites (Gn 37:25-27).

- **The Ishmaelites** (Midianites) were on their route to Egypt (Gn 37:28, 29). They bought Joseph from the brothers. They took him to Egypt and sold Joseph to **Potiphar**, one of **Pharao's** officials (Gn 37:36). Pharao is introduced.

- All these men were not aware of the plan of God and their part in it.

- The encounter with “the man” seems to be unimportant but marks a turning point!

- Genesis 41:

- Actors:

- **Pharaoh**, who had his two dreams (Gn 41:1-7).
- **The magicians and wise men of Egypt** (Gn 41:8) couldn't interpret the dreams of the Pharaoh.
- **The chief cupbearer** remembered Joseph (Gn 41:9-13), who had interpreted his dream while he was in prison (Gn 40).
- **Joseph**, who interprets the dreams of the Pharaoh and advises the Pharaoh to do so and so (Gn 41:14-36).
- **The officials of the Pharaoh and Pharaoh** judged the plan of Joseph to be good (Gn 41:37-40).

- Joseph became increasingly aware of the providence of God and his revelation.

❖ Joseph and his belief in God's providence:

- “The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered” (Gn 39:2; also Gn 39:5; 39:20, 21).
- “We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.” Gn 40:8).
- Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. (Gn 41:25; 41:16, 28, 32).
  - “The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon”(Gn 41:32).
- “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you” (Gn 45:5).
  - “But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Gn 45:7).

- **“So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt”**(Gn 45:8; 45:9).
- Genesis 45:5–9 and 50:17–21 are the theological passages for understanding the story as a whole. God has been at work throughout. God is acting throughout: “the Lord was with him.” Joseph is aware that he is God’s instrument: “the interpretation of dreams belongs to God.”<sup>6</sup>

## Exposition

### Verse 15-17 (scene 1)

- ❖ **“When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said.”**
  - They “realized they were now without their father”<sup>7</sup> and that they lost their father’s protection. The brothers believed that while their father was still alive, Joseph wouldn’t take revenge but now their father’s protection has ended with his death.
- ❖ **“What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?”**
  - It must be remembered that Joseph was very powerful.
  - Were they **still angry with themselves for selling Joseph to Egypt as a slave?** (Gn 45:6).
  - Wenham referring to Von Rad writes: “that the brothers should have felt anxious at this time is **‘quite realistic psychologically’**”<sup>8</sup> See also Genesis 27:41.
  - The words, **“pays us back for all,”** forcefully expresses the fear of their deserved fate.<sup>9</sup>
- ❖ **“So they sent word to Joseph, saying,”**
  - They sent a messenger to Joseph because they are afraid.
  - Wenham remarks: “The brothers certainly pull out all the emotional stops in an effort to obtain Joseph’s mercy.”<sup>10</sup>
- ❖ **“Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph:’**

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<sup>6</sup> Scullion, J. J. (1992, Vol. 2, p. 955). *Genesis, the Narrative of: The Genesis Narrative*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

<sup>7</sup> Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 1113).

<sup>8</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1994, Vol. 2, p. 489).

<sup>9</sup> Mathews, K. A. (2005, Vol. 1B, p. 925).

<sup>10</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1994, Vol. 2, p. 490).

- The narrative doesn't recall such an occasion. Instead, it is likely that Joseph remained silent and didn't tell his father of what had happened. He told his brothers: "Tell my father about all the honour accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly" (Gn 45:13).
- **"Your father."** Matthew remarks: "That the brothers' message has "your father" rather than "our father" draws attention to Joseph's obligation as a son, not as a brother".<sup>11</sup>
- ❖ **"I ask you to forgive your brothers"**
  - Reyburn and Fry comment: "**Forgive**, which is used here for the first time in Genesis, translates a verb meaning "to lift up." The idea is that Joseph is asked to "lift," "remove," "take away" the wrong that his brothers did to him. **Forgive** is sometimes expressed as "wipe away the evil," "throw the sin from us," or "take the burden [guilt] from us."<sup>12</sup>
- ❖ **"the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly."**
  - Three different words are used for what his brothers had done to Joseph: "**sin**", "**wrong**" resulted from their "**so badly treating you**" = "**evil**."
  - Did the brothers tell their father what they have done to Joseph? When the brothers return from their second visit to Egypt, Jacob is still convinced of the death of Joseph (Gn 45:25, 26), who was supposedly killed by a ferocious animal Gn 37:33-35).
- ❖ **"Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father."**
  - They indirectly appeal to Joseph's respect for God, the God of his father. It is a very strong appeal.
  - By using the word "**servants**" they already hint at becoming slaves of Joseph (Gn 50:18). The Greek translation uses two different words for "**servants**."
  - Unfortunately, the narratives in which the brothers have been portrayed, don't show them as servants of the God of Jacob.
- ❖ **"When their message came to him, Joseph wept."**
  - Why? Joseph probably understood their fear for him. Even after taking care of them for more than twenty years(!; see timeline), they don't trust Joseph.

Verse 19-21 (scene 2)

- ❖ **"His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him."**
  - Probably the weeping of Joseph reassured them that he wouldn't take revenge immediately. See also Genesis 44:14.

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<sup>11</sup> Mathews, K. A. (2005, Vol. 1B, p. 925).

<sup>12</sup> Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 1114).

❖ **“We are your slaves,’ they said.”**

- About twenty years ago(!), Judah used the same words (Gn 44:16).

❖ **“But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?”**

- Joseph senses their fears perfectly. What does he mean with the following words?
- **“Am I in the place of God?”**
  - What is the problem? Is it because the brothers previously said that they were **“servants of the God of your father”** and now present themselves as his **“slaves”**? If they are, as they claim, servants of God, then it is impossible to become servants of Joseph on the same par: "Am I in the place of God?"
    - The Hebrew text uses in both cases the same word: **“עֶבֶד”**: slave, servant.
  - The same expression is found in Genesis 30:2. It indicates that Joseph cannot do the impossible. What is impossible among men, is possible with God (see Mt 19:26). The question will be how to judge the actions of the brothers in the light of God’s overall plan. Indeed, the brothers intended to harm Joseph, yes even to kill him. They were jealous and hated him (Gn 37). God intended the same action for good. What the brothers intended to do, stands in sharp contrast with the final result accomplished by God, the saving of many people.
  - Brueggemann writes: “Perhaps his response shows a high theological sensitivity in which he refuses to transgress the things of God.”<sup>13</sup>

❖ **“You intended to harm me,”**

- Wenham: “By selling Joseph into Egypt, his brothers have apparently disposed of him for good, but unwittingly they have actually helped the fulfillment of his dreams” (Gn 37).<sup>14</sup>

❖ **“but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”**

- The service of Joseph was a blessing to all he served (Potiphar and his house, Gn 39:2-7; the warden in prison, Gn 39:20-23; Egypt and the nations, Gn 41:53-57; the families of his father and brothers, Gn 42-50).
- When he made himself known to his brothers, Joseph said: “And now, do not be distressed and **do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you**” (Gn 45:5; also Gn 45:7).

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<sup>13</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1982, p. 372).

<sup>14</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1994, Vol. 2, p. 356).

- Matthew notes: “The ‘good/evil’ (tree of knowledge of good and evil; Gn 2:9,17) motif that recurs throughout Genesis (...) fittingly makes its last appearance in Joseph’s humble interpretation of his troubles.”<sup>15</sup> In 50:17–21, the guilt of the brothers is acknowledged specifically. But Joseph will not play God. It is God who has turned their evil into good.<sup>16</sup>
- The conclusion of the Joseph story (Gen 50:15–21) speaks of the benefits that many received through the suffering of one wise and righteous person: Though Joseph’s brothers meant evil against him, God used Joseph’s suffering to save many from famine.<sup>17</sup>
- ❖ **“So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.”**
  - Joseph will continue to take care of them (Gn 45:10, 11, 47:12) as he has done so since they had arrived and settled in Egypt.
  - **“So then”** has concluding overtones.
  - **“Don’t be afraid.”** This is the plan of God: **“the saving of many lives”** and he will continue to do so. This recognition of the plan of God “leads to a vocation. There is a perfect correlation between God’s will for life and Joseph’s work of providing” (see also 45:11; 47:12). Joseph has accepted his vocation.<sup>18</sup>
- ❖ **“And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”**
  - It took some time to convince the brothers of his good intention.

## Application

### Praise God

- ❖ For his grace, wisdom, covenantal faithfulness, and saving acts in history, his providence culminating in sending his son Jesus Christ:
  - **“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers,** has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a

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<sup>15</sup> Mathews, K. A. (2005, Vol. 1B, p. 928).

<sup>16</sup> Scullion, J. J. (1992, Vol. 2, p. 955). *Genesis, the Narrative of: The Genesis Narrative*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

<sup>17</sup> Simundson, D. J. (1992, Vol. 6, p. 221). *Suffering*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1982, p. 377).

murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see." (Acts 3:13-15).

- Note the **covenantal character** of this passage.

### Covenant

- ❖ Genesis 12:1-3 is fundamental for the understanding of the account of Jacob and Joseph:
  - "The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"
  - "Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'" (Gn 50:24).

### The story of Joseph

- ❖ Give a summary of the life of Joseph, highlighting:
  - Genesis 37: Joseph, his dreams, his brothers and their hatred, being sold as a slave.
  - Genesis 39: Joseph At the house of Potiphar and in prison: "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered" (Gn 39:2, 21). Petty human actions bring Joseph in new positions, used by God to bring Joseph to the centre of power, Pharaoh. "Joseph's master took him and put him **in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined**" (Gn 39:20).
  - Genesis 41: The dreams of the Pharaoh, Joseph in charge of the whole land of Egypt, his advice to deal with the years of prosperity and of famine.
  - Genesis 45: The visits of the brothers to Egypt, Joseph makes himself known: "'Come close to me.' When they had done so, he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! **And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.** For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance'" (Gn 45:4-7).

### Divine providence

- ❖ **The divine providence is illustrated and explained** by these words of Joseph: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gn 50:20).

- The divine providence is illustrated by dreams, decisions of men, emotions, unexpected encounters, famine and disasters, human wisdom. People nevertheless remain responsible for their actions, thoughts, when they sin and intend to harm other people.
- The divine providence is at work in personal lives, families, generations, peoples of the world.
- See also the two examples above.
- ❖ **The belief in divine providence asks for reflection** on the past and will support faith concerning the future. Most people are not aware of divine providence at work.
  - See also Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”
  - This doesn't mean that all questions concerning the past and present, especially when people consciously intended to harm, will be answered.
- ❖ **The belief in divine providence asks for wisdom**, faith and trust. Brueggemann refers to Von Rad, who showed that this wisdom teaching juxtaposes the plans of evildoers and the transcendent power of God.<sup>19</sup>
  - Wisdom leads to realism about the human place in history and at the same time to certitude about the outcome of history.<sup>20</sup>
- ❖ **The belief in divine providence leads to vocation**: “This way of presenting Israel’s faith is at the same time deeply believing and radically secular. It does not doubt the plan of God in the least. But at the same time, **it accepts responsibility** for the plan. Joseph does not “leave it all in God’s hands.” He accepts his vocation.<sup>21</sup>
  - This vocation overrides retribution, which the brothers feared.<sup>22</sup>

#### Faith and forgiveness

- ❖ Study the faith of the brothers and their fears. It was very difficult to accept the words already spoken by Joseph almost twenty years earlier: “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you” (Gn 45:5). They were still haunted by their guilt.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1982, p. 374).

<sup>20</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1982, p. 375).

<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1982, p. 377).

<sup>22</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1982, p. 377).

<sup>23</sup> Baldwin, J. G. (1986, p. 219).

- The brothers asked for forgiveness for what they have done more than thirty years ago.
- God's providence, revealed in the care taken by Joseph for them and their families, was already a sign that forgiveness was not in question, they already had been saved by God's grace.
- ❖ There was a major turning point in the life of Joseph when his two sons were born:
  - "Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said,
  - 'It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household.'
  - The second son he named Ephraim and said,
  - 'It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering'" (Gn 41:50-52).
  - These personal experiences are often necessary to accept and believe the divine providence.

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