

Joseph. Adamsdown. 24 March 2009.

Read : Gen. 27. 6-9, 15-16, 21-23; 37. 31-35; 38. 24-26a.

You may recall that last week I finished when speaking about the fourth link 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.

As you can see, this link is 'the timely intervention of Reuben and Judah'.

Last Tuesday, we considered the role played by Reuben, and we left off when watching Joseph's extremely callous and unfeeling brothers sit down to enjoy their meal while *he* languished helplessly in a dry water cistern. And I closed by pointing out that it was just as well for *them* that Joseph *wasn't* left to die of hunger in that cistern – or they all would likely have died of hunger some 20 years later – and a whole lot more people with them!

And so ... enter Judah.

Judah, as Reuben, intervened to save Joseph's life – but *his* underlying concern was very different from that of his older brother. For, whereas Reuben sincerely wished to return Joseph safely to his father, Judah was as glad as any of the others to be rid of Joseph – as determined as they that Joseph's outrageous dreams might never come true.

But what gave Judah pause – what Judah balked at – was killing someone who, I note, he described in his very short speech, not only once as '*our flesh*', but *twice* as '*our brother*', vv. 26-27 – even though, as Judah knew well, Joseph was in truth but their *half*-brother.

But, though Judah showed more respect than his brothers for their common and close relationship to Joseph, he certainly wasn't driven by any warm feelings of brotherly love for him. Indeed, he could see – and he suggested exploiting – a far more profitable method of achieving their common objective of seeing the back of Joseph once and for all.

For the brothers had spied an approaching caravan of foreign traders, and this gave Judah an idea which would avert the shedding of Joseph's blood altogether. So Judah proposed to his brothers that – rather than leave Joseph to die of starvation and exposure – that they sell him to the merchants. That way, they would avoid the messy affair of murder, together with, as Judah pointed out, the necessity of concealing a brother's blood – which blood would be regarded, as had once been the case with the blood of Abel, as crying to heaven for vengeance on account of the murder of *a brother*, Gen. 4. 10.<sup>1</sup>

'Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites', was Judah's proposal.

To Judah, it is *not* okay to *kill* your brother, but it *is* okay to *sell him into slavery*.

Several years ago I came across the following short letter printed in a magazine<sup>2</sup> : 'The Minister of our church always calls the children up to the front of the church during the service to tell them a short story. One Sunday, after telling them the story of Joseph, he asked, 'Now none of *you* would sell your little brother or sister, would you?' Immediately, half a dozen heads shook vigorously ... 'No'. Except for one little chap – who proclaimed rather loudly, 'But I've got a cousin you can have'.

But, alas, Judah wasn't as reluctant as that little chap about selling *his* own brother!

Oh, I see, Judah. It is *not* okay to kill your brother, but it *is* okay to sell him into slavery, right? I think not! And neither, I guess, did Joseph. The evidence points to Joseph having felt very keenly the fact that *his own flesh and blood* were willing to do just this. For I note that, when, some 22 years later, he – then 'lord of all Egypt' – made himself known to them, he right away identified himself as 'Joseph *your brother, whom you sold into Egypt*', Gen. 45. 4.

But I suspect that the very idea of selling Joseph *into slavery* held strong appeal to Judah and his brothers. I recall their retort when Joseph had shared his first dream with them back in verse 8: 'Will *you* indeed *reign over us*? Will *you* really *rule over us*?' Well, what more fitting destiny, they doubtless felt, for someone who aspired to be a king and to exercise dominion over them, than – in the language of Psa. 105. 17 – for him to be 'sold as a *slave*'.

*And* they would be twenty pieces of silver to the good as well – which seems to have been a *fair price* for a healthy seventeen-year-old slave. Certainly it was the value which the law of Moses *later* fixed on a young man of *anything* between five and twenty years of age, Lev. 27. 5.<sup>3</sup>

To say goodbye to Joseph and his insufferable dreams for ever – and to have some pocket-money to share between them ... what more could any man ask? So, *motion carried!*

And it is clear that the whole business had been settled in Reuben's absence – *possibly* because his brothers *half suspected* that he intended to rescue Joseph.

But whether that was so or not, it is at this point that Reuben puts in a further brief appearance ... but, alas for Reuben – and for Joseph at the time – he is too late. For Reuben now returns to the empty cistern – and this time it *really is* empty. No water ... and no Joseph! Reuben is devastated. How can he – the oldest of the brothers – the one more responsible than any for the safety of Joseph – the one who had earlier blotted his copybook so badly with his father over Bilhah – how can he return to face his father? 'The lad is no more', he cried, 'and I, where shall I go?'

*In his own eyes* at the time, Reuben has failed – and failed miserably. And yet, in terms of *God's* great plan and purpose, Reuben has played his part brilliantly ... and Joseph at that moment is safely en route to Egypt.

'Where shall I go?', Reuben asked. But, frankly, for you and me where *Reuben* went is of no great moment or interest. Of far greater importance to us, in terms of God's grand design – and of the history of the world – is the question, 'where is *Joseph* going?' And Joseph is now safely on his way to Egypt – and to the next-but-one link in the chain!

I say 'next-but-one', because we have, you may have noticed, *bypassed* another of the vital links. That which I guess you might call 'The Missing Link'!!! And it is to that which we must now turn our attention. I refer to link number five ....

##### 5. **The journeying of certain Arabian traders, Gen. 37. 25, 28.**

We have already noted that, while heartlessly tucking into their meal, Joseph's brothers had spied an approaching caravan of foreign traders. Scripture does not devote much space to them – and yet in that short space we learn all we need to know.

First, we are told *who they were*. According to verses 25, 27 and 28 (and 39. 1), they were 'Ishmaelites', and, according to verses 28 and 36, they were 'Midianites'. But there is *no* contradiction here – and we need no weird and wonderful Document Hypothesis of the Pentateuch, with its imaginary J,E,D,P sources,<sup>4</sup> to explain the variation. For we know that the Ishmaelites and the Midianites were the descendants of two men born to a common father – to Abraham, that is ... for *Ishmael* was Abraham's son through Hagar, Gen. 16. 15<sup>5</sup>, and *Midian* was Abraham's son through Keturah, Gen. 25. 2. And we also know, from chapter 28, that Esau ... another of Abraham's descendants and the father of another tribe-cum-nation, Edom ... we know that Esau married the daughter of Ishmael, Gen. 28. 9. We are aware, that is, that there was intermarriage between the various descendants of Abraham. And it is hardly surprising therefore that, over time, there should have been intermarriage between *these two tribes* – between the Ishmaelites and the Midianites – both of which were descended from Abraham.

And it is clear, not only from *our* passage, but from a passage in the Book of Judges, that the two tribes – the Ishmaelites and the Midianites – had indeed developed very close links and often joined together in common enterprises. Judges chapters 6 to 8 record Gideon's famous victory over the *Midianites* – the great 'pitchers-torches-and-trumpets' victory – achieved in effect by Gideon's legendary 300.

But when, in chapter 8, Gideon urged the men of Israel, 'each of you .... give me the earrings from his spoil' – that is, when each man was required to donate the earrings which formed part of the spoil taken from the defeated Midianites – we are told – immediately and explicitly – that 'they *had* gold earrings, *because they were Ishmaelites*', Judg. 8. 24. So we know that the Ishmaelites and the Midianites were joined together *in a military project* then, just as now, in similar fashion here in Genesis 37, they were joined together *in a business venture*.

So that is who they were.

Second, we are told *where they have come from and what their business was*. They came, we are told, from Gilead. Now, Gilead was a lushly forested region across the Jordan, famed for its gums, its balms and its spices. You may recall the question once posed by Jeremiah, 'Is there no balm in Gilead?' Although I guess some of us older folk may owe our familiarity with that question *more* to an African/American spiritual and the singing of George Beverley Shea than to Jeremiah 8. 22! In any case, we know where the commercial traders came from.

But, for the purpose of our story, of *far* greater importance to us than *who they were, from where they came or their line of business*, were three other matters – namely, (i) *their destination*; (ii) *the route they were following*; and (iii) *the timing of their business trip*.

(i) As far as their *destination* was concerned, it was, we are informed, 'Egypt'. Not that there is anything remarkable about that. The 'spices, balm and myrrh' carried by this particular caravan were *all* articles highly valued by the Egyptians, both for embalming their dead and for medicinal purposes. Egypt was the obvious market – and therefore the obvious destination. And it's a good thing for us that it was!

(ii) But *the route* being followed by these men was perhaps *a little surprising*. I understand that – although there *is* a road which passes a short distance to the north of Dothan and which can get you from Gilead to Egypt – there is also, in fact, a far more prominent highway which comes across the Jordan near Beth-shean, and continues down to Hebron and from there south-westward to Egypt. But evidently, and no doubt for very good – and very sound – reasons, this particular caravan chose to follow the lesser-used route – which brought them past Dothan. And, again, *for whatever reason*, it's a good thing for us that they did.

(iii) And what can I say about the timing? It *hardly* needs to be said that, had they passed that way a week earlier or a week later, Joseph would never have seen Egypt, Potiphar or Pharaoh! Surely, there is nothing for *anyone* to say about it, except to stand back in awe in the presence of a God whose clock *always* – but *always* – keeps perfect time. And if *you* are ever tempted to doubt it, I suggest that you just ask Joseph – or Mordecai for that matter!

And as I watch the company of Arabian traders disappear over the horizon in the general direction of Egypt – I know that they will be travelling through a long stretch of land from which Joseph will be able to see in the distance the heights of Hebron – where, oblivious to all that has happened, his father anxiously awaits his return.

But, as I watch the caravan disappear over the horizon, I marvel afresh at how my God's unseen hand manages to weave so many *seemingly* trivial, accidental and unrelated events into the tapestry of His purpose and will. And I marvel afresh at His uncanny knack of working all things for the good of those who love Him – which, for shorthand, we call His good providence.

The very smallest details of Joseph's experiences are crying out to us, my brother, my sister, that, in all the hustle and bustle of everyday life, *our God is* in control – even when *events seem* not to be.

But, before we follow the traders – and Joseph – *to Egypt* ... and Joseph, at least, to *Potiphar's house* ... you and I shall need to stay around *in Canaan* for a short time to watch events unfold back at *Jacob's house*. The account of which occupies the closing section of Genesis 37.

Well, we have to give it to them; Joseph's brothers were nothing if not resourceful. And to forestall any awkward and penetrating questions from their father when they returned home without Joseph, they concocted a clever ruse to deceive him.

As far as the narrative goes, they didn't actually *lie* to the old man – they saw to it that they didn't need to. But what they did was as bad as if they *had* lied – if not worse. They simply faked the evidence, and left him to draw his own conclusions.

And it seems that, rather than confront him *themselves* with Joseph's blood-stained tunic – and just possibly rouse some suspicions in his mind – they 'sent' the tunic on ahead of them – presumably by the hand of some servant or servants – who had been primed by them to carry it to Jacob, to say that he or they (the servant or servants) had found it out in some field in this condition, and, rather brutally, I feel, to invite him to identify the tunic as his son's if he was able. Oh, yes, he was able alright!

As you can see, if we ignore the words supplied by our translators to make up the sense, Jacob's instant response was, 'My son's tunic!', v. 33.

To some extent, the conclusion to which the aged patriarch jumped was understandable – 'My son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces' – for there were many wild beasts – particularly lions, bears and wolves – in the region of Canaan through which Joseph had travelled – through which, please, Joseph had been '*sent*' – and sent by whom, pray? By the old man who now '*rent*' – who '*tore*' – his clothes ... even as he supposed some wild beast had *torn* his son's body.

I guess that the brothers had little choice but to do something of this kind to cover up their evil deed – and yet there is something heartless and cruel about the way in which they drove their aged father to hold *himself* ultimately responsible for his son's death – in that *he* had sent him such a long distance – *he* had sent him to such a dangerous place – *he* had sent him through such dangerous terrain – and *he* had sent him alone.

He – Jacob – had lost his beloved Rachel only a few years before, and now he has lost her firstborn son – and it was all his own fault!

I guess that, had Jacob been able to control his grief – and who can blame him that he couldn't? – he might have been rather puzzled that the tunic itself was not torn – unlike – apparently – its one-time occupant ... only soaked in blood. But Jacob was in no state for such rational thinking. The light had gone out for him.<sup>6</sup>

Small wonder that Jacob proved utterly inconsolable ... 'All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted ...'. How hollow – how hypocritical – must have seemed to his sons their attempts to console their father!

And there we leave Jacob, with torn garments, clothed in sackcloth – the first recorded instance of this in our Bibles<sup>7</sup> – with tears coursing down his wizened face – as, in the very last words of the section, he 'wept for' Joseph.

But please remember that, while Jacob sat *sobbing*, there sat a God in heaven who was *working* – working through *these* very events – to bring the most marvellous blessing to Jacob and his family – and, through them, to the entire world ... of Jacob's day and ours.

And I love to connect, and contrast, *this* incident at the end of chapter 37 with the incident at the end of chapter 45. *Here*, Joseph's brothers produce *false* evidence (Joseph's tunic) to convince Jacob that Joseph was in fact *dead*. *There*, Joseph's brothers produce *true and incontrovertible* evidence (the Egyptian wagons) to convince Jacob that Joseph was *very much alive*. In the first case, Jacob responded, 'Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces ... *I will go down into the grave to my son*'. Whereas, in the second case, Jacob responded, 'Joseph my son is yet alive; *I will go and see him before I die*'.

And yet there is more to say about this very moving section. And, first, it is probably impossible to miss the irony of the situation. For is not this the very same Jacob, who back in chapter 27, deceived his own father Isaac by the skilful use of kids of goats which had been slain?<sup>8</sup>

And, to that extent, Jacob was only reaping what he had sown – and the man who had once deceived *his own father* with the *skins* of goat kids, is now himself deceived *by his own sons* with the *blood* of a goat kid.

And, separately, it is not difficult to spot the fascinating connection between events in this section and some of the events in the chapter immediately following – namely, in chapter 38, which relates the story of Judah and Tamar<sup>9</sup> – and which might well be titled, I guess, 'The Case of the Vanishing Prostitute'.<sup>10</sup> For in that chapter also we have an instance of 'the deceiver being deceived'.

For the sake of time, let me simply point out some of the more obvious points of contact between the two chapters.

First, *both* chapters culminate in an episode where individuals are *asked to identify objects linked, in one way or another, to goats*.

*Chapter 37* ends with a garment (Joseph's tunic) dipped in the blood of a slaughtered goat kid, Gen. 37. 31; whereas, in *chapter 38*, Judah offers to pay Tamar – posing at the time as a religious prostitute<sup>11</sup> – to pay her a goat kid for her services, Gen. 38. 17.<sup>12</sup>

In *chapter 37*, Jacob is asked to 'know' (to 'recognize', to 'discern', to 'examine', that is) the bloodstained garment of Joseph. In *chapter 38*, Judah is asked to 'know' (to 'recognize', to 'discern', to 'examine' – the same word) the personal insignia he had given in pledge to Tamar – given against full payment of the goat kid.

The parallel between the two passages is quite striking – literally translated, the passages read :

'And they sent...and said.... Examine.... and he examined, and said ...', Gen. 37. 32–33.

'And she sent...saying.... Examine.... and Judah examined, and said ...', Gen. 38. 25–26.

But, whereas the *first* set of 'evidence' – Joseph's blood-stained tunic – was, of course, intended to deceive, and to *cover up* the truth ... the *second* set of 'evidence' – Judah's personal insignia – was intended to expose, and to *uncover* the truth.

And so it is, that Judah, who played no small part in deceiving his father in chapter 37, is himself deceived by Tamar in chapter 38.<sup>13 14</sup>

And so, whether the closing section of chapter 37 is linked backwards – to chapter 27 – or forwards – to chapter 38, it provides the basis for illustrating a deceiver being deceived!

Having then taken a detour for a short time to observe these important developments at Jacob's house in Canaan, we can now rejoin the Arabian caravan – and Joseph – en route to Egypt, and – in Joseph's case at least – to Potiphar's house.

And so, to link number 6 ...

## 6. The domestic needs of Potiphar's household, Gen. 37. 36; 39. 1-6.

The identical description of Potiphar as 'an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard' in both the *last* verse of chapter 37 and the *first* verse of chapter 39, serves to pick up the story of Joseph again – following *the separate* – although *the related* – story of Judah and Tamar in chapter 38.

The fact that the word translated 'officer' in both verses is rendered 'eunuch' in *some later* passages of the Old Testament has, *in the past*, led some to conclude that Potiphar was himself a eunuch. But we now know that, in the early Ancient Near East, this particular word refers simply to a high-ranking court official, rather than to a man who had been castrated.<sup>15</sup>

It was not until the days of the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian empires that kings began to employ eunuchs for certain key tasks – not only, for obvious reasons, supervising the royal harem ('*hairum*') – as they did, for example, in the book of Esther – but also employed them in *any* high position which might have tempted them to stage a military coup, to do away with the existing monarch, and to establish a dynasty of their own. But if you cannot father a son, you cannot establish a dynasty! And kings in those later ancient empires were taking no chances!

Contrary to the claims of some then, Potiphar was *not* a eunuch – indeed I note in passing that, as Joseph was later to find to his cost, Potiphar had a wife. The word 'officer' is simply telling us that Potiphar held a *very* high position in the court of Pharaoh.

And the following expression tells us *what* that position was. Potiphar was 'captain of the guard'. He was, literally, 'chief of the slaughterers' – that is, 'chief of the executioners'. Potiphar was the commanding officer of the elite royal palace guard – which would, among other duties, execute anyone the king didn't like.<sup>16</sup> And only an officer as close to the palace as Potiphar would have had the authority to later throw Joseph into *that* prison-house where *the King's prisoners* were kept – as verse 20 informs us he did.

And, with my eye on later events, I smile when I read that Potiphar held this particular office. For an inscription which comes from the tomb of one Egyptian Prime Minister of a somewhat later date, said of the Prime Minister that 'it is he who gathers the troops moving in attendance upon the king'.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the Prime Minister was in supreme command of the royal palace guard. Which means, of course, that later, as Prime Minister of Egypt, Joseph would have exercised direct and personal control over Potiphar. Now that must have been interesting – not least, I guess, for Mrs. Potiphar!

Well, that's what *Potiphar* was – and we *all* know what *Joseph* was! Joseph was a *slave* – a point which the Holy Spirit emphasizes for us by describing Joseph's situation from two directions. The *last* verse of chapter 37 tells us that he was '*sold*' to Potiphar, and the *first* verse of chapter 39 tells us that he was '*bought*' by Potiphar. And, although the opening section of chapter 39 doesn't actually *use* the word 'slave', Potiphar's wife *does*, when she later accuses Joseph to Potiphar – as recorded in verses 17 and 19.

Yes, Joseph was, as Psa. 105. 17 expresses it, 'sold as a slave'. And yet, for all that, he was destined to rise to become, as he expressed it himself in chapter 45, 'lord of all Egypt', Gen. 45. 9. Yes, this is very much the story of a bondservant who rose to become lord! Does that not ring some bells with you? For I know Someone, who, very literally, 'rose' to become Lord – and that, not, as Joseph, 'of all Egypt' – but, as the apostle Peter expressed it in the house of Cornelius, to become 'Lord of all', Acts 10. 36. And we remember that He, our Lord Jesus, wasn't 'sold' as a bondservant – He *chose* to become a bondservant – willingly taking on Himself, as the apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2. 7, 'the form of a bondservant'. What matchless grace!

I can't help wondering how young Joseph *felt* about his present predicament.

For the change from holding the first place – both in his father's *heart* and in his father's *home* – to being sold as a slave in a foreign land must have been horrendous for him. And it was not in just *any* foreign land – but in *Egypt*. And Joseph may well have been told *by his father* of how his *grandfather* Isaac had been expressly forbidden by God to go down into Egypt, Gen. 26. 2, and of his *great-grandfather's* most unhappy experiences there, Gen. 12.

And now here *he* is – in Egypt.

And he is, please remember, only 17 years of age ... having no money ... having neither friend nor acquaintance in the whole land ... having no knowledge of the language spoken there (and we remember that later his brothers needed an interpreter to understand all that Joseph said to them in Egyptian) ... and having no trade or occupation which the Egyptians respected or valued – for he had been brought up as a shepherd – and shepherds were – as Joseph himself pointed out to his brothers later – an abomination to the Egyptians, Gen. 46. 34. Indeed, I suspect

that, *when* Joseph pointed that fact out to his brothers, he was speaking from his own bitter experience over twenty years before.

Do you remember the words of Joseph's brothers in chapter 37 to which I drew attention last Tuesday – 'what will become of his dreams'. I wonder ... did Joseph *now* ask himself that very question, 'what will be become of my dreams?' – 'what price my dreams now?' And, although Joseph doesn't yet know it, courtesy of Potiphar's wife, things are going to get *even worse* for him before the chapter is out.

But whether or not *Joseph wondered* what would ever become of his dreams, *I wonder* what were the chances of Joseph ending up in the house of Potiphar – of him ending up in what was to prove *the only house* in all Egypt which would preserve our chain intact.

Scholars tell us that slavery flourished in Egypt at the time, and that the number of slaves being brought from Canaan and Syria was growing constantly.

But scholars have no basis on which to form an estimate of the total number of slaves in Egypt – although we do know that, about this period, one Egyptian official recorded over 40 slaves in his personal possession<sup>18</sup>, and one Egyptian household owned no less than 79 slaves, at least 45 of whom came from the same part of the world as Joseph.<sup>19</sup> There were certainly a lot of slaves in Egypt!

Nor do scholars have any basis on which to estimate the number of households which owned slaves at the time.

But we do know, from a papyrus from this era, that *many* Egyptian officials of wealth and high standing *did* own slaves.<sup>20</sup> Potiphar was, then, just one among very many.

And I understand that there is no evidence that, at this time, there were any markets for the selling of slaves – but that, rather, individual dealers would approach their customers directly.<sup>21</sup>

Putting all this together – we can take it that the odds against *this* particular Hebrew young man being sold into the home of Potiphar – one of the most responsible officers in Pharaoh's administration – were simply astronomical.

*But he was!* ... ... Against all the odds, our Ishmaelite trader friends *just happened* to sell Joseph into that one house in all of Egypt which was to forge this absolutely essential link in the chain of God's providence.

How *does* God do things like this – without over-riding anyone's freedom in the process? How is it that He works behind the scenes – accomplishing unseen – but infallibly – His loving and gracious purpose for the good of those who love Him? I don't know. But I am sure glad He does.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Compare Ezek. 24. 7-8; Isa. 26. 21; Job 16. 18.

<sup>2</sup> From Readers Digest.

<sup>3</sup> "The price of twenty shekels of silver paid for Joseph in Genesis 37:28 is the correct average price for a slave in about the eighteenth century BC: 94 earlier than this, slaves were cheaper (average, ten to fifteen shekels), and later they became steadily dearer. 95 Notes : 94 So in the 'Laws' of Hammurapi, §§116, 214, 252 (1/3 mina = 20 shekels), *ANET*, pp. 170, 175, 176; and in Mari legal documents, cf. G. Boyer, *ARMT*, VIII, 1958, p. 23, No. 10, lines 1-4. 95 *E.g.*, in fifteenth century BC and later, 30 or even 40 shekels; in the first millennium BC, the general price rose to 50 shekels and even to go or 120 shekels by Persian times. See I. Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, 1949, pp. 117-155, and in *IEJ* 5 (1955), p. 68; Kitchen in *NBD*, pp. 1195-1196.

<sup>4</sup> Such as that of Graf-Wellhausen.

<sup>5</sup> 150 years had passed since Ishmael's dismissal from his father's house – a period sufficient for his descendants to have grown through marriage into a respectable tribe.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob seemed to have handled the death of Deborah (Gen. 35. 8) and even that of Rachel (Gen. 35. 16-19) with a fair amount of composure, but the death of Joseph overwhelmed him.

<sup>7</sup> Reuben had torn his clothes in verse 29, but not put sackcloth on his loins.

<sup>8</sup> See Gen. 27. 9, 16, 22-23. And note there the word 'discern', v. 23 – the word found in Gen. 37. 32-33; 38. 25-26.

<sup>9</sup> Tamar's plan resembles that of Jacob and Rebekah (chapter 27). Through a disguise she obtained that which the patriarch should have rightfully given. According to Hittite law, when no brother-in-law existed to fulfil the levirate duty, the father-in-law was responsible for it, *History of Israel*, Leon Wood, page 76. In that sense, Tamar was 'more righteous' than Judah.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 38 is concerned with the survival of the line of one of Jacob's sons – with the continuation of the royal, messianic line. The chapters either side are concerned with the survival of the whole clan through a time of severe famine.

<sup>11</sup> See ... [http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article\\_19.pdf](http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_19.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> This may well have been the common payment for what Tamar was offering. She was posing as a cultic prostitute – and, in classical antiquity, the goat was sacred to 'the goddess of love', whether connected with an occasional act or that of a professional. Compare Hosea 4. 14; Deut. 23. 18. It should be noted that the Hebrew terms for 'male goat' in Gen. 37. 31 and 'kid' in Gen. 38. 17, 20 are similar but not identical. The Hebrew expression 'recognize' in the citation from the Midrash is identical in Gen. 37. 31 and Gen. 38. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Tamar's plan resembles that of Jacob and Rebekah (chapter 27). Through a disguise she obtained that which the patriarch should have rightfully given. According to Hittite law, when no brother-in-law existed to fulfil the levirate duty, the father-in-law was responsible for it, Leon Wood, page 76. In that sense, Tamar was 'more righteous' than Judah.

<sup>14</sup> A Jewish Midrash (a rabbinic interpretation or exposition of biblical text) on Genesis 38, addresses Jacob well : 'You deceived your father with a kid. By your life, Tamar will deceive you with a kid. You said, Recognise' – now Tamar will say to you, Recognise', Gen. Rab. 84:11-12, cited by Alter.

<sup>15</sup> NIDOTTE, number 6247; TWOT, number 1545. See also TDNT, volume II, page 766. See also : <http://rosetta.reltech.org/TBT/CD3/1996/01/TBT199601.html?seq=44> ... and click for later pages.

"Potiphar: was he an 'officer' or 'eunuch' of Pharaoh? The word used of Potiphar in Genesis (37:36; 39:1; 40:2, 7) is *sārîs* which elsewhere in the Old Testament usually means 'eunuch'. Now this meaning creates difficulties in Genesis; not only was Potiphar a married man (Gn. 39:1), but eunuchs were not customary in ancient Egypt. 49 The answer to this question is a simple one. Hebrew *sārîs* is probably a loanword from the Akkadian (Assyro-Babylonian) *ša-rēš-šarri* or *ša-rēši* which itself shows a change of meaning during the time that it was in use. Thus, in the second millennium BC, *ša-rēši* usually meant simply 'courtier', 'official', but by the first millennium BC it had come to mean specifically 'eunuch'. This is a valuable hint, for the same diachronic restriction of meaning can be seen to affect Hebrew *sārîs*. In the Joseph-story in Genesis, the early, general meaning of 'official', 'courtier', suits the context perfectly, and is also, therefore, a genuinely early usage preserved from the early second millennium BC. But all the other examples of *sārîs* in the Old Testament belong to books originating in the first millennium BC (Isaiah, Kings, Jeremiah, Daniel, Esther) and so they naturally show the later, narrower meaning of *sārîs*. The parallel development in meaning of these two related terms is not unique. In both Egypt and Mesopotamia, other and wholly unrelated words for 'official', 'courtier' also show the same change of meaning. The old Egyptian word *sr*, 'official', became *siūr*, 'eunuch', in Coptic, while in Mesopotamia in the early second millennium BC the term *girsequm*, 'eunuch', had earlier meant 'courtier'", K. A. Kitchen, 'Ancient Orient and Old Testament', pages 165-166.

<sup>16</sup> See NIDOTTE, number 3184.

<sup>17</sup> 'It is he who gathers the troops, moving in attendance upon the king, in journeying northward or southward', *Regulation laid upon the vizier Rekhmire*; see <http://reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/texts/rekhmire.htm>. Rekhmire was vizier under Thutmose III and Amenhotep II.

<sup>18</sup> 'Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Egypt', by J Dunn; see [www.toureygypt.net/featurestories/slaves.htm](http://www.toureygypt.net/featurestories/slaves.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Joseph was sold into the right house, yet he was far from the only Semitic (a descriptive term for several peoples of the Middle East - mainly Canaan and Syria) slave on offer. The Egyptologist K. Kitchen states: 'Joseph was but one of many young Semites who became servants in Egyptian households between 1900 and 1600 B.C. Papyrus

---

Brooklyn 35.1446, part of a prison-register, bears on its reverse a list of 79 servants in an Egyptian household around 1740 B.C. of whom at least 45 were not Egyptians but 'Asiatics', i.e. Semites like Joseph. Many of these have good North-eastern Semitic names linguistically related to those of Jacob, Issachar, Asher, Job (Ayyabum) and Menahem. Some were 'domestics' (hry-pr) just like Joseph in Genesis 39. 2 ('in the house'), *The New Bible Dictionary*, article 'Joseph' .

<sup>20</sup> '... a papyrus from the Middle Kingdom (lists) slaves with names, nationality and titles or jobs held by these slaves. The list contains 95 entries. Of the 95 slaves listed, about 30 can be identified as non-Egyptian, either by their non-Egyptian names or by the designation "name", meaning an Asiatic ... . Here ...we have evidence that officials of wealth and standing could own slaves. The Potiphar of Genesis must have been such a man', 'Joseph in Egypt', by Charles Aling, *Bible and Spade* 15.2 (2002) 35-38, referring to 'A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum', W. C. Hayes, 1972.

See [faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Aling-JosephPt2.pdf](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Aling-JosephPt2.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> 'Though not an uncommon business in ancient Egypt, information about slave trading is rare. *There appears to have been no public market for slaves. Rather, individual dealers seem to have approached their customers personally.* The transaction was evidenced by commercial documents, executed before officials or a local council, that contained clauses usually used in the sale of valuable commodities. One inscription that records the sale of land, together with thirty-five slaves (men and women), appears to infer that a special register of slaves was held by administrators'. 'Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Egypt', by J Dunn; see [www.toureygypt.net/featurestories/slaves.htm](http://www.toureygypt.net/featurestories/slaves.htm).