

A Theological Examination of the Tripartite Speeches of Joseph the Patriarch in Genesis 39:8-9 and 45:5-8 and its Paradigmatic Functions to African Youth

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ABSTRACT

This work emphasizes that the OT is full of speeches; both human and divine—as speeches are meant to reveal the intents of the mind. Among the myriad human speeches found in the OT, three speeches of Joseph the Patriarch become incomparable, informing and educative. Hence, through a theological examination of these three speeches found in Gen. 39:8-9; 41:15-16 and 45:5-8, this work underscores that Joseph’s speeches to Portipher’s wife, Pharoah and two of his officers and his speech to his brothers unequivocally revealed him to be a man of extreme piety, a man of uncompromising ethical standard and a man of passion, compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. In addition, it became clear that Joseph’s tripartite speeches have paradigmatic dimensions to the Christians in Africa in general and to the young people to be specific, in that their attention is called to the need for maintaining sexual purity at all cost, become uncompromising in their ethical/moral standards and also be willing to forgive and reconcile with those who wrong them even when forgiveness is not sought by the offender (we acknowledge that is divine). The work further divulges that though in slavery, Joseph stood his ground to stand for what is glorifying to His God and dignifying to his fathers; At every given opportunity, Joseph relentlessly made known his God to the unbelievers of

his day. It is therefore argued that the Christians in Africa need to imbibe this habit fearlessly.

INTRODUCTION

Joseph, one of the patriarchs of Ancient Israel has undeniably become one of the fascinating figures that have ever existed in Old Testament (henceforth OT) narrative. Moses the traditionally accepted author of Genesis gives this figure more time, space and significance than he does to any other character in the Genesis narrative. This narrative covers up to 13 chapters of the book—chapters 37-50.³¹¹ This portion of scripture has however, received abundant attention not only in the many commentaries on Genesis and biblical encyclopedias and dictionaries, but also in various special studies.³¹² This narrative becomes appealing to many scholars in history, and as such, it has been experiencing various treatments and interpretations in the hands of scholars and preachers of the OT. For instance, while some readers see him as an insensitive and cruel person, others consider his actions betray his innocence and caring attitude, yet, while some praised him as an upright hero, others condemned him as a devious brother.³¹³ Hence interpretations of Joseph's narrative continue to vary depending on one's perspective and area of focus and interest. But, interestingly, interpretations and readings in favor of Joseph incontestably outweighs the unfavorable interpretations he receives.

³¹¹ The Joseph story is one of the longest narratives in the Hebrew Bible/OT. Often described as a novella, it functions as a bridge text that unites the traditions about the earlier biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12-36) with the stories in the book of Exodus that explain how the Israelites escaped their bondage in Egypt and made their 40-year journey to the promised land of Canaan. See, Religious Freedom Center, "The story of Joseph from Genesis" *Society of Biblical Literature*, 3. <http://www.sbl-site.org> accessed September 24, 2021.

³¹² Richard D. Patterson, "Joseph in Pharaoh's Court" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (April-June): 148-64.

³¹³ Yiu-Wung Fung, *Victim and Victimizer: Joseph's Interpretation of his Destiny* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2000), 11.

Few among the numerous scholars who wrote passionately about this fascinating OT figure, using different approaches and having different focal points are; Patterson, Charles R. Swindoll,³¹⁴ Fung, Victor H. Matthews,³¹⁵ Benjamin D.H. Hilbert,³¹⁶³¹⁷ Bernhard Lang,³¹⁸³¹⁹ Lee W. Humphreys.³²⁰ These and many others have written extensively on the man “Joseph,” and they saw him as a dreamer and interpreter of dreams, a slave who turned into a prince in a foreign land, a victim who forgave his victimizers and the list goes on and on. Yet one observes that scrutinizing Joseph the patriarch’s three-fold speeches and how these speeches portray him as a person with regards to his belief system becomes yet a virgin area not explored in OT scholarship. Therefore, using a theological examination, this essay is out to scrutinize the character “Joseph the Patriarch,” with a focus on his three-fold speeches with the aim of finding how these speeches have paradigmatic functions to the Christians in Africa and youths in particular.

THE PLACE OF SPEECH IN OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

Speech, is an intentional organization of words in order to communicate an idea. The importance of speech cannot be overemphasized. Don Byrne sees speech as “the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably, accurately without

³¹⁴ Charles R. Swindoll, *Joseph: From Pit to Pinnacle* (United States of America: Insight for Living Publisher, 1984), 1-120.

³¹⁵ Victor H. Matthews, “Joseph and His Clothing,” n.p. [cited 24 Sep 2021]. <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/people/related-articles/joseph-and-his-clothing>

³¹⁶ Benjamin D.H. Hilbert, “Joseph’s Dreams, Part One: From Abimelech to Saul,” *Journal for the Study of the OT* Vol 35.3 (2011): 259-283.

³¹⁷ Benjamin D.H. Hilbert, “Joseph’s Dreams, Part Two: From Saul to Solomon,” *Journal for the Study of the OT* Vol 35.4 (2011): 435-462.

³¹⁸ Bernhard Lang, “Joseph,” n.p. [cited 24 Sep 2021]. <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/people/main-articles/joseph>

³¹⁹ Bernhard Lang, *Joseph in Egypt: A Cultural Icon from Grotius to Goethe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

³²⁰ Lee W. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988).

hesitation.”³²¹ Speech always takes place with a purpose, one must have an idea to communicate or information to pass across before speech takes place. This in other words implies that a speech without a purpose is considered “meaningless” or better still “non-sense.” Equally, anyone who speaks without purpose is considered a “fool” and hence earns no respect in the community.

Undeniably, speech from time immemorial has been used for various purposes. Speech has played the role of informing listeners. This is to mean that when a person speaks, he has the intention of imparting information to his/her audience, to create an awareness about something or someone, to bring about an understanding about something. It is also interesting to note that speech performs the function of convincing or persuading listeners. This mostly takes place in arguments and debates where rhetorics are used with the intention of winning the listeners to align with the speaker’s point of view. Furthermore, there are many people who speak with the purpose of stimulation, this is where speech performs the function of motivating people to do certain things through a change of ideology or perspective. Similarly, it is crucial to underscore the blatant fact that speech has the ability of entertaining listeners in that a speaker uses his speech to amuse people and lift the spirits of those who listen to become humorous and feel thrilled and euphoric. In addition, it can be used as a tool to console people who are downcasted, to sympathize and empathize with those in bad conditions in order to minimize the effects of their sufferings.

In the same vein, speech has played a very crucial role in the Bible and OT (in particular as our focus). The OT begins with a speech or narrative which gives an account of God’s act of creation, we also here God in the creation narrative giving a command to the first human beings on what to do in the Garden

³²¹ Don Byrne, *Teaching Oral English* (London: Longman Publishers, 1976), 56.

of Eden for their continued peace and prosperity. Still, in the OT, we hear God speaking at different instances unveiling his mind to the people he considered His. Hence, God made his mind known through speech and so also all the characters that played key roles in the OT narrative used speech in order to make the intents of their hearts known to those who listen. This in other words suggests that the OT is full of speeches; both divine and human. We hear God speaking to his people, and we in turn hear people speaking back to God mostly in worship and prayers. Speech in the OT also plays the role of disseminating information, it played a rhetorical role of persuasions, also used as a way of stimulating an audience to take a certain action, it also brings about, joy and peace of mind to those who listen and so serves as an effective tool to console those in trouble, igniting a sense of hope to the disenfranchised audience of the OT authors.

Harman Gunkel one of the earliest scholars who began the exploration of the place of speech in Biblical narrative, centering his study on the prophetic books came up with an observation that prophecy is comprised of individual prophetic sayings. These sayings are also known as “prophetic speeches.” Similarly, Claus Westermann writing on and recognizing the power and place of speech in the OT with a focus on the OT prophets too, argued that “the Old Testament prophetic books contained three major kinds of speech: A) accounts, by which he means historical narratives, B) prophetic speeches, and C) utterances directed from man to God, or prayer.”³²² Westermann’s observation on the major kinds of speeches enveloped in the OT prophetic books is quite informative. However, this should not be limited to only prophetic books of the OT because this texture cuts across all the books of the Old Testament as earlier observed. For instance, Bill T. Arnold commenting on Westermann’s assertion says “. . . examples of what Westermann means by account are generally prophetic

³²² Westermann (90-91).

sections in the historical books.”³²³ What this connotes is that in all the sections of the OT, prophetic speeches are found, so also all other kinds of speeches as enveloped within the tapestry of the varied texture of the sacred text of the scripture.

Writing on the role of speech, Simon J. Kistemaker coming with a New Testament perspective with a specific interest on the book of Acts of the Apostles rightly articulates that “the speeches in Acts make the book interesting, because when people talk, we learn something about their personalities.”³²⁴ This is also true of the OT narrative. The speeches in there, make the narrative interesting and informing. Genesis in particular, as the book of the beginnings has given an introductory account of the creation story and how everything came to being through divine speech. To this end, it could be said that speech has the power to create and destroy. Speech is used in judgement where the guilty is sentenced to judgement while the innocent is declared free to a life of joy and peace.

It is noteworthy that in the OT, we cannot run away from hearing the speeches of the patriarchs at different instances of their lives. We hear them speak to God their maker as well as speak to their fellow humans. Nonetheless, it becomes fascinating that their speeches were shaped and informed by God as a result of the relationship they shared. They spoke as people of responsibility who would be held accountable for what they say, to whom and why they say it. They spoke as people who understood their calling as God’s people who were called to be a blessing to others. As such, their speeches came out of sincere hearts that were willing to bring glory to God, they spoke with all sense of carefulness because their speeches revealed who they really were. Joseph the dreamer is one of these Patriarchs, whose narrative in the closing chapters of Genesis have over the years triggered so much discussion among OT

³²³ Bill T. Arnold, *Forms of Prophetic Speech in the Old Testament: A Summary of Claus Westermann’s Contributions* (1967)

³²⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, “The Speeches in Acts” *Criswell Theological Review* Vol. 5. No. 1 (1990): 31-41.

scholars such that the sea of OT scholarship that focuses on this character almost overflowed with different approaches and interpretations.

THE TRIPARTITE SPEECHES OF JOSEPH THE PATRIARCH

As Joseph's narrative begins to unfold in Genesis 37, it relates to us the beginning of Joseph's dreams. And for his dreams to come true, he had to be sold into slavery—where he eventually ended up in Potiphar's house. The story of Joseph is full of different speeches, however, three amongst these speeches our outstanding and unique. These speeches revealed whom Joseph really was and the values he upheld as a young Jew in diaspora.

Joseph's Speech to Potiphar's Wife (Genesis 39:8-9)

The story of Joseph began to take shape in chapter 39 and throughout the narrative, the reader would encounter a profound portrayal that signals the brain behind the success and victory of Joseph, thus "the LORD was with Joseph." This is one of the descriptions that influences the readers' perception of Joseph's character and it is assumed that the presence of God with Joseph is proof of Joseph's moral excellence.³²⁵ Consequently, all of Joseph's breakthrough in the narrative hinges upon his connection with God. Joseph was blessed greatly, and God gave him success in everything he did; Potiphar noticed this, as a result, he placed him in charge of his house and as a consequence of Joseph's presence in his house, everything in the house was greatly blessed. However, White observes that "the marked prosperity which attended everything placed under Joseph's care was not the result of direct miracle; but his industry, care, and energy were crowned with divine blessing. He attributed his success to the favor of

³²⁵ Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 12.

God. . .”³²⁶ Unquestionably, the narrative portrays Joseph to be industrious, he was not a lazy man, and since God was with him, God blessed the works of Joseph’s hands. He worked with all diligence, sincerity and enthusiasm, doing everything to the glory of his God. In other words, without steadfast, well-directed effort, however, success could never have been achieved. And so, God was glorified by the faithfulness of his servant [Joseph].³²⁷ Joseph’s diligence and excellence attracted his master’s attention, as well as the attention of his master’s wife. But then, when people were seeing his hard-work, resilience and faithfulness, Potiphar’s wife was observing how “handsome and well-built” the young man was (because among the blessings God has given to Joseph is the blessing of handsomeness), which instigated her desire to have him sleep with her. It is now in response to her demand that his first speech comes on board. Hence, he responded:

With me in charge. . . my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master 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? Gen. 39:8-9 NIV.

Joseph’s response to Potiphar’s wife is extremely fascinating. The narrator used the word *·/a@m*y+w~* *Way^amaa’een* which is a Piel verb with a *waw-consecutive* serving as a conjunction, though here used as contrast “But,” to create a notion in the reader’s mind that Joseph acted against the wish and persistent request of Potiphar’s wife. The usage of the verb in *Piel* form indicates intensification of Joseph’s refusal to act in accord to his master’s wife’s request. This, in other words mean that Joseph vehemently and passionately refused Potiphar’s wife’s

³²⁶ E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (New York: Yonkers Global Distributors, 2003), 151.

³²⁷ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 151.

requests. Interestingly, Joseph used stronger rhetorics in order to counteract his master's wife seductive request. He logically constructed and philosophically arranged his reasons why refusing the offer was his only option, with the intention of averting the evil embedded in the mind of his master's wife. Matthew Henry in describing Potipher's wife's attitude opines that "here is a most shameful instance of impudence and immodesty in Joseph's mistress, the shame and scandal of her sex, perfectly lost to all virtue and honor, and not to be mentioned not thought of, without the utmost indignation"³²⁸

As the narrative unfolds, the reader listens to Joseph responding to Potipher's wife. He first began by saying that his presence in the house has made his master *ud~y` Áaý lo yaada* which could be translated in a variety of senses; figuratively, literally and euphemistically and meaning "not to know, not to acknowledge or not to have some level of acquaintances." So, Joseph is simply saying that with him in the house, his master does not bother to get himself involved in any of the house's affairs, to the extent that he does not even know or have an acquaintance with what is been done daily in running the affairs of the house. By this, Joseph is basically alluding to the absolute trust his master has on him as a servant. His faithfulness in service earns him the complete trust of his master and for the fact that everything he touched got blessed by the LORD (39:3-6), his master needed not to trouble himself doing anything in his house since all he needed to be done is done beyond perfection. Therefore, Joseph in his argument cited in clear terms that he could not abuse his master's trust by satisfying the thoughtless request of his master's wife. Joseph's reference to his master's trusts unequivocally showcases his strong moral ethics towards making sure that maintaining people's trusts is far beyond personal sexual pleasure. He understood that real men are made and known

³²⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible* (PC Study Bible formatted Electronic Database, 2006), n.p.

through their moral standards and willingness to sacrifice their pleasure for the sake of a good name (Prov. 22:1; Eccl. 7:1).³²⁹

Correspondingly, within the tapestry of Joseph's response to his master's wife one finds a texture that obviously suggests his knowledge of what legal and lawful marriage is. He understood that it is unlawful for married people to be engaged in extramarital affairs of any kind and the young people have no right for sex until they get married. This is the reason why he considered giving into the request of his master's wife not just an abuse and betrayal of trust but also an offense which was completely against the moral standard upheld by his fathers. The word hu*r`h* *hara`ah* "wickedness or evil" is used here deliberately to underscore Joseph viewing Potipher's wife's request as an invitation to engage into evil. He realized that granting her demand would inevitably make him evil which would eventually serve as a disconnecting factor between him and His God, whose blessing and presence he enjoyed in unprecedented ways throughout his journey from the pit to foreign land and from being a survivor to a savior. Stimulatingly, Joseph's response to his master's wife further shows that he was not just concerned about being wicked to his earthly master, but he had a strong belief system and an understanding of the omnipresence of God, where he believes that God is everywhere and He sees everyone. Therefore, committing adultery with his master's wife behind closed doors would be a sin against his God, and he would not dare to do that. By this act, Joseph was clearly reminded of his moral upbringing not to succumb to temptation, but to resist it with

³²⁹ Robert C. Harbach in his book *Studies in the Book of Genesis* clearly enumerated the points Joseph used in his argument against his master's wife: First, he could not repay with treachery the high confidence placed in him. Second, he made not a proud, but a modest reference to his greatness (v. 9), doing so in argument against sin. Third, he reminded Potipher's wife of the limiting factors in the extent of his power. Forth, he honored the covenant of marriage, being himself an Israelite, indeed, in covenant relation with God. see: Robert C. Harbach, *Studies in the Book of Genesis* (Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2001), 736.

every night.³³⁰ He fled from her as though she were an assassin, as though she were the edge of a precipice over a deep abyss, as though she were an open barrel of gunpowder in a blacksmith shop with sparks flying all over the furnace, as though she were a wide open-mouth viper ready to strike. . . He did not refuse her hesitantly, reluctantly, or regrettably, but promptly, unreservedly, and without friendly discussion.³³¹ In all this, the moral courage of Joseph played a key role and hence it saves the day.³³²

JOSEPH'S SPEECH TO PHAROAH AND HIS TWO OFFICERS (GENESIS 41:15-16)

The story of Joseph takes the reader to a deeper level. The narrative from inception informs us that Joseph was his father's number one son, his brothers' number one enemy, his master's number one steward, master's wife's number one target, his jailer's number one prisoner and now he is about to become Egypt's number one favorite.³³³ However, before he would become Egypt's number favorite, he had to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh and two of his officials. Yet before interpreting each dream, he made an outstanding speech. Consequently, in response to Pharaoh's officers, he declared "do not interpretations belong to God? tell me your dreams" (40:8). Similarly, after Pharaoh learnt of Joseph's gift of interpretation, he related it to Joseph but he (Joseph) retorted "I cannot do it, 'but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires" (41:16).

³³⁰ Shimon Bakon, "Subtleties in the Story of Joseph and Potipher's Wife" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* VO. 21. No. 3 (2013):

³³¹ Harbach, *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, 737.

³³² John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 211.

³³³ Harbach, *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, 765.

In his reply to Pharaoh's officers, the rough translation reads; "and said unto them Joseph, [do]³³⁴ not belong interpretations to God? the word used for the negation *halow'* from the word *lo* meaning "no or not" is often used with other particles as in the case here, where an interrogative particle is used in other to rhetorically ask a question on the actual source of true interpretation of dreams.³³⁵ Interestingly, Joseph's reply to Pharaoh though both confessing God's ownership of true interpretations of dreams, but the words used differ. Joseph's second answer roughly reads; "[it is] not in me: God shall give an answer of peace [to] Pharaoh." The word used to expresses negation in Joseph's answer is *bil 'aadaay* which is a combination of a particle, a preposition with suffix. This is to mean that Joseph is debunking Pharaoh's assertion which placed Joseph in almost the same position to "a god" who owns the ability to interpret dreams. To this end, Joseph in both responses declares that interpretations belong to *Elohim*—the creator God who owns everyone and everything. In recognizing Joseph's humility and sincerity in ascribing the power of all interpretation of dreams to God, Harbach without mincing words notes that "Joseph did not pretend, nor endeavor to become, a wizard, witch-doctor, medicine man, medium, astrologer, guru, adept, avatar, magi, or magician."³³⁶ Indeed, Joseph did not claim having the power to interpret dreams of any kind, and even those who thought and held that he had that power, he quickly reorient them saying that power belongs to God alone, and he was only an instrument through which God's power was displayed in a land where the true God was not known, to the extent that these unbelieving people confessed "can we find anyone like this man, in whom is the

³³⁴ The words in parenthesis are not in the original text, but they are being supplied for easy readability.

³³⁵ Karl Ellinger & Wilhelm Rudolph, edit., *Interlinear Transliterated Bible: Old Testament* (Westminster Theological Seminary: BibleSoft, 2006), n.p.

³³⁶ Harbach, *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, 755.

spirit of God?. . . since God has made all this known to you, there is no one discerning and wise like you” (41:37-40).

Joseph’s responses to Pharaoh and his officers at this point demonstrates Joseph’s knowledge of God as all-knowing and as one who reveals his biddings to people through the instrumentality of others. Pharaoh and his officers knew that their magicians interpreted dreams based on their self-claimed ability in order to bring glory to themselves, so this notion made Pharaoh and his officers think that Joseph was also like his magicians who claim the authority of their interpretations. But at this time, the Egyptian magicians could not interpret the dreams and Joseph had to come into the scene. The question he asked, “do not interpretations [of dreams] belong to God? Means “interpretation of dreams come from God,” which also goes in line with “God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.” In both cases, Joseph is alluding the source of his interpretation to his God, whom he served, he observed and appreciated his God-given ability to interpret dreams when the Egyptian magicians and wise men could not do so.³³⁷ Undoubtedly, this depicts Joseph’s declaration of his self-piety in a greater dimension.

JOSEPH’S SPEECH TO HIS BROTHERS GENESIS 45:5-8

Joseph’s third and final speech considered in this essay came up in chapter 45 of the book. At this point, Joseph’s dreams of being a great public figure has been fulfilled, because God had already made him the ruler of entire Egypt in order to execute the hunger alleviation strategy he proposed and the counsel he gave Pharaoh when he interpreted the dreams. Therefore, the narrative at this juncture reached its climax. In this chapter, Joseph disclosed his identity to his brothers after rigorous trials and in fact the imprisonment of one of them. He revealed

³³⁷ Patterson, “Joseph in Pharaoh’s Court,” 150.

himself as their sold brother, but he did this to his trembling brothers with grace and compassion when he said “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here.” (v. 5a).³³⁸ hence in furtherance to his disclosure of his identity, Joseph states;

. . . Because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. . . [and] God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. . . 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.

In Joseph’s third speech, he clearly made reference to; God’s mission in his life “to save lives” in general and to “preserve for you a remnant/posterity on earth” in particular. He also made unambiguous reference to God as the director of the drama who acted behind the scene in order to make sure his plans come true in fulfilment of God’s revelation to Abraham in chapter 15:13. Nonetheless, in order to portray the person of Joseph more plainly, with regards to his relationship with God, in this third speech, Joseph used the word *Elohim* the name for God three times. And in all these usages, it is in connection with the verb *shalach* translated “to send away or to send for.” Again, in the narrator’s usage of this verb in connection to God, it describes that God sent him away for a mission ahead of his bothers, with the aim of preparing a place for them in a foreign land where God’s promise to Abraham—the promise of numerous descendants would be fulfilled.

Joseph nonetheless furthered that it is God who made him a father to Pharaoh, the lord of his entire household and the ruler of all Egypt. This is to say that what the enemy meant for evil, God had turned it around for the good of Joseph, subsequently the Egyptians and ultimately to his own family. Joseph did not

³³⁸ Swindoll, *Joseph*, 80.

consider his brothers' actions as evil in themselves, particularly considering the end result of their actions. He believed in the predestination and the preplanning of God, and he also believed that God controls all affairs of men in the Spiritual realm. Accordingly, using the evil intents of humanity to bring about his divine perfect and unequalled plans. In addition, Joseph's acceptance of his fate as arranged by God from the beginning shows his total dependence and reliance on God, considering everything moving for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). This speech, clearly showcases Joseph's true religiousness which made him a great man even in a foreign land. No wonder "the LORD was with him"!

THE PARADIGMATIC NATURE OF JOSEPH'S TRIPARTITE SPEECHES

One of the critical questions that come to mind at this point would certainly be; how can the tripartite speeches of Joseph in Genesis narrative serve as a model to believers in Africa, especially the youths of this generation? This question is quite fundamental because in Biblical interpretation, it is made clear that exposition, exegesis and interpretation without application is pointless. From the foregoing, we emphasized with clarity that speech has many functions. Whatever functions a speech perform, one thing remains common to all kinds of speeches—they reveal the intents of the heart and also exposes who a person is within. For the Bible says ". . . a good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Luke 6:45).

Firstly, in Joseph's conversation with Potipher's wife when she seductively requested that he sleeps with her, we could learn that he replied to her with all sense of respect despite the fact that what she was requesting for was against his moral ethical standard. In his reply, Joseph clearly pointed out that he could not betray the high confidence and trust placed on him by his

master, he reminded her in all humility about his greatness in the house, he further brought to her notice the boundary he could not cross regardless of his position in the house. In addition, Joseph's reply suggests that he honored the covenant and institution of marriage as an Israelite which made him see falling into the temptation as a capital sin; not only against his master and his master's wife or against himself, but also against his God who has been with him all his life.³³⁹ Contextually, Africa as a continent has a culture of respecting elders regardless of who they are in the society. This does not mean that elders are above the law or above the ethical standard of the society. No, we rather mean that even when their behaviors go against the norm of the society, they are been spoken to, respectfully in order to bring to consciousness their wrongs and the need to act more wisely serving as model to the younger generation. In these regards, we could argue that Joseph's respect for his master's wife could serve as a model to the younger generation of Africa to embrace that well-known culture of respecting elders irrespective of their social statuses in the society. The young people in Africa are hereby called upon to know that a call to respecting their elders is equated to a call to "honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your is giving you" (Exod. 20:12; Matt. 15:3; Eph. 6:2-3).

Joseph proved himself trustworthy to his master because the Lord was with him (39:4). He also made it clear through his reply to his master's wife that he valued the fact that he was trusted enough to have been elevated to the rank of Pharaoh's personal assistant and that he was not willing at whatever cost to betray the trust his master had on him. This is because regaining a trust once betrayed is almost impossible, hence maintaining it becomes the only option to Joseph as a man of integrity. Joseph's attitude and character as revealed in his reply to his master's wife is paradigmatic to the African people and the youths in particular. This in other words speaks of the

³³⁹ Harbach, *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, 732.

need for the African people to be like Joseph, in the sense that they need to become trustworthy and never willing to betray the trust people have on them. With this, we can thus underline that the African continent would surely experience great leadership, progress and transformation, and Africa would be a better place to be. Furthermore, in Joseph's reply we could deduce that he brought to the consciousness of his master's wife the fact that she was meant only for his master based on his (Joseph's) understanding of the covenant of marriage. He undeniably believed in the sanctity of marriage to the extent that he considered yielding to his master's wife's temptation as a capital sin against his master and his God. on this note therefore, the young people in Africa in addition to proving their trustworthiness must reverence marriage as a God-ordained institution and see any sex outside marriage as a capital sin against God and humanity. The youths in Africa must be self-controlled and pure in heart like Joseph. It is in line with this that Harbach described Joseph as a unique man, a man in a million.³⁴⁰ Calvin also saw him as having self-control more than "almost every old man."³⁴¹ Joseph's moral integrity sprang from his knowledge of God and the operation of divine grace through covenant relationship. . . Joseph realized that, breaking the moral law of God was sinning against God as well his own body (Exod. 20:14; 1 Cor. 6:18).³⁴²

Another paradigmatic nature of Joseph' speeches is gleaned from his conversation with Pharoah and his two officers. We made it bare in analyzing these speeches that Joseph acknowledged God as the source of his interpretations, for to Pharoah's officers he replied "do not interpretations belong to God? this is a question that when put in a statement form could read "interpretation of dreams come from God." furthermore, in

³⁴⁰ Harbach, *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, 737.

³⁴¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries, Genesis*, II (Leicester: Eerdmanns, 1948), 452.

³⁴² Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), 89.

connection to Pharaoh, Joseph relentlessly rejoined, “I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires” (41:16). In both replies, Joseph was keen enough to have made it clear to the unbelieving people of Egypt that he had no power to interpret dreams, but his God, the God of his fathers is the source. Consequently, Joseph did not claim to be a wizard, witchdoctor, medicine man, medium, astrologer, a specialist, an expert, a wise man or magician, but a humble man who gave God glory at the slightest opportunity.³⁴³

To the African Christians therefore, particularly the young people, Joseph the dreamer could serve as a great model of humility. Regardless of the knowledge we have, no matter how skillful we are in solving the problems our nations battle with, we need to ascribe the power to reveal, transform and create to God the creator of all things from the very beginning. As Joseph realized that all he had was given to him by God, the African Christians must also come to terms with this undisputable truth. Apostle Paul in addressing the church at Corinth in his first letter rhetorically asked the believers two self-assessing questions saying; “what do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? (1 Cor. 4:7). All that we have is from God, and so we must use it wisely to the glory of God. There is no room for bragging as though what we have, came to us as a result of self-effort. In addition, Joseph was on the mission to make known his God to the unbelieving Egyptians. Likewise, the African Christian youths are called upon to maximize every opportunity to shamelessly and fearlessly make known our God and savior Jesus Christ and his works among men.

At the climax of Joseph’s narrative, we find him revealing his identity to his brothers as persecuted and sold brother. Joseph’s identity terrified his brothers because they least expected to see him in Egypt occupying such a dignified

³⁴³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament* (Colorado Spring: Victor Books, 2002), 100.

position (having sold him to stop his dream from becoming a reality). Yet he did not make reference to his torture and slavery in Egypt with the aim of making his brothers feel bad, rather he mentioned this in order to make sure that they understood that he was the one really talking. The striking point Joseph made to his brothers in their interaction which revealed the kind of person he was and his understanding of God and His plans for every human being is when he said “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.” This kind of speech as analyzed earlier could only come from a person who knows God deeply and understands that ways of God and accepts God’s judgment whatever it might be. Joseph’s acceptance of his brothers shown in the feast they had together in his house shows a spirit of forgiveness as required by God from every believer.

Now, using Joseph’s story as a model to the Africans would therefore aid us in underscoring the fact that the people of Africa need hearts of forgiveness and acceptance like Joseph the patriarch. Africa is a continent where people live as brothers and sisters, the people in Africa are linked with each other in one way or the other. Africa has experienced a propitious interpersonal, interethnic, intercultural and even international relationships in the past where unity and togetherness were the watchwords, where people from different ethnic groups meet and live as one. However, times have greatly changed and Africans changed alongside the times and seasons. This has however brought us to a period when brotherly and sisterly love waxed cold and so forgiveness between brothers becomes extremely difficult, the desire for vengeance has engulfed the hearts of many. This exploration of Joseph’s life and character hence serves as a call to all Africans to see the need to take Joseph’s life as a paradigm so they can imbibe the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation.

It is crucial to note that Joseph’s brothers did not ask him for forgiveness. Rather he generously offered it to them though

after series of testing. Though he was in Egypt, his mind was still with his people in Canaan and he had a burning desire to treat them differently against their past actions. He did not allow their past evil actions affect his present relationship with them, and this is what is mean by the popular saying “forgive and forget.” In the same way, the African peoples are invited into this kind of divine fellowship with God, which would transform their lives, define the relationships with their offending brothers and sisters, make genuine forgiveness possible and reconciliation uncontestable so that our communities would become saturated with peace and tranquility as a result of the unbreakable bond that exists between us. In addition, Joseph made his brothers understand that “. . . in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). He made them know that what the enemy meant for evil through their instrumentality, God has turned it around for good. God already had a plan for his chosen people to go to Egypt as Abraham was informed through a dream earlier in Genesis 15:13, but there must be a cause which would take them there. God used Joseph’s brothers as instruments to send him ahead of them so he could prepare a place for them. On this therefore, we are called upon to be faithful in all that we do, be in good terms with the Lord and trust him wholeheartedly believing that all He does for us is perfect and for our good even when we do not see it or understand.

CONCLUSION

No one who does a serious study of Joseph’s life would deny that he was a great man. His greatness did not come as a result of anything remarkable done as in the case of other OT giants, who slew giants, wrote great portions of scripture, offered remarkable prophetic predictions, performed miracles or saw a vision. But he was simply great as a result of his character and fear of God. He was a man of piety. Using a theological examination, this work demonstrates that in all the speeches uttered by Joseph the patriarch in the land of Egypt, there are

three speeches that remain outstanding and as such paradigmatic. These are; his speech to Potiphar's wife, Pharaoh and his officers and to his brothers in his disclosure of his identity. In analyzing these speeches, it came to the fore that Joseph expressed his clear devotion to God through ascribing the power to interpret dreams to God and also accepting his humanness and limitations in order for his God to be known. even in a foreign land as a slave. The scrutiny of the Genesis texts that envelope these speeches further unveils that Joseph was a man with strong moral character, uncompromising ethical principles which help him through the grace of God to overcome the serial seductive temptations he experienced. Through the theological examination, we saw Joseph as one who understood God's love for him and the need for him to extend such love to others—and in this case his brothers. His knowledge of God and His ways and acts made him forgive the sins his brothers committed against him and embraced them as if they had never wronged him. Furthermore, applying Joseph's narrative to the African people, we saw the paradigmatic nature of Joseph's narrative which seeks to draw the attention of every Christian and every young person in Africa to see this great OT character as an example of moral purity which would inspire them to abstain from any sexual immorality, to be honesty in their daily endeavors, to be compassion in their relationship with others and to be kind enough to forgive those who sin against them knowing fully well that unforgiveness is like taking a poison but expective someone else to die. It is believed that if Joseph's character is imbibed in the African continent, Africa

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