

---

## Talking Vegetables and Family Conflict: How VeggieTales Adapts the Joseph Story

Corrinne Carlson

### Publication Date

21-12-2023

### License

This work is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license and should only be used in accordance with that license.

### Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

Carlson, C. (2020). *Talking Vegetables and Family Conflict: How VeggieTales Adapts the Joseph Story* (Version 1). University of Notre Dame. <https://doi.org/10.7274/24884844.v1>

This work was downloaded from CurateND, the University of Notre Dame's institutional repository.

For more information about this work, to report or an issue, or to preserve and share your original work, please contact the CurateND team for assistance at [curate@nd.edu](mailto:curate@nd.edu).

Corrinne Carlson

Professor Bugyis

PLS 20302

29 April 2020

Talking Vegetables and Family Conflict:

How *VeggieTales* Adapts the Joseph Story

VeggieTales is a familiar, widely-viewed program for many modern Christians, evangelicals especially, but also non-Christians with young children. As such, their interpretation of a familiar story has a great impact on the development of the moral, biblical, and religious beliefs of its audience, given storytelling is formative to the development of the young age demographic that the series targets. Thus, it is important to analyze carefully the strengths and weaknesses of the adaptation in contrast to the original source--the Book of Genesis. While leaving out many of the non-child-friendly aspects and moral and narrative complexities of the original text, VeggieTales' adaptation of the Joseph story does remain fairly accurate to the general plot while portraying evangelistic values. As such, it is a successful adaptation based on the company's aims of value-based, family-friendly media, though less successful in capturing the full impact of the narrative.

To analyze a particular adaptation, it is first important to understand the intentions and strategies of the adaptors. The VeggieTales franchise in particular, with their very public stances and goals, must be understood by their true aims. The creators of the VeggieTales series had very specific goals of being a family-friendly, evangelical, value-based media company, which in turn had significant effects on each episode of the series, although these goals were not always accomplished in the purest form.

## **The VeggieTales Model**

VeggieTales was the product of Big Idea, which in turn was designed to be a family-friendly, Christian media company that would grow into a competitor of other, bigger production companies. The union of Christian values with modern media was clear from the beginning of the company. Hillary Warren quotes an interview with the series' creator Phil Vischer in which he states his vision: "I want to spread God's truth through products that creatively and technically exceed the best Hollywood has to offer" (35). The whole purpose of the series was to produce high-quality entertainment that would convey Christian messages while still entertaining. In other words, the creators wanted to produce a show that Christian parents would feel good about their children watching, and that, in showing quality storytelling and production, could even appeal to a wider audience. As Janine Dunlap has observed, "The selling point of the VeggieTales series is 'Sunday morning values in a Saturday morning cartoon'" (Dunlap 10). Values were incredibly important in the design of the series, and are a defining feature of the show. As Telford Work explains, the Thomistic theological cardinal virtues--faith, hope, love, prudence, justice, temperance, and courage--categorize the show's themes (476). Obviously, this ties the show directly to the Christian theological tradition. In fact, Phil Vischer, one of the show's creators, believed that the show was God's calling for his life: "I had always felt that God wanted me to tell the stories and teach the lessons he laid on my heart" ("What Happened to Big Idea? (Part 1)"). As such, the series was fundamentally Christian, as were the creators.

However, as Big Idea Productions grew, their goals shifted beyond simply telling Christian-approved stories to becoming a competitive media company. Vischer writes that as he

watched VeggieTales' increasing success, he decided his new goal was to "build a top-four family media brand within 20 years" ("What Happened to Big Idea? (Part 1)"). This goal was distinctly different from the original aims of the series, and dramatically shifted the company's strategy going forward. However, rapid growth regularly leads to bigger goals, and Vischer's new goal could be reconciled with his old aims under the justification that the bigger the company, the broader the positive influence--which was Big Idea's initial aim anyway. The shift to a more market-competitive focus had major impacts on the company and subsequent shows. Vischer seems to credit the shift as the beginning of Big Idea's downfall, leading eventually to their bankruptcy ("What Happened to Big Idea?"). VeggieTales, though technically Christian, was intended to appeal to a wider audience. This required strategic storytelling: "The mainstream market was seen as unwilling to support a company that was too overtly Christian, so keeping that faith closer to the vest allowed the series to play to the majority of potential purchasers who claimed a belief in God but did not perhaps identify with the kind of evangelicalism of the more overtly Christian media" (Warren 39). In other words, Big Idea had to be willing to tone down or dilute their evangelical position in the interest of keeping and maintaining a broader audience. To become a competitive media company and reach more communities, VeggieTales, and Big Idea Productions, became more about Christian values than overt Christianity--that is, expressing morals Christians hold dear without expressing the gospel of Christ itself.

The goal of each VeggieTales episode is to convey a moral value, and those values are largely ones shared by evangelical communities, but explicitly Christian elements like Jesus and the Church remained absent from the work. Each VeggieTales episode highlights a specific moral which it explains through the episode's plot--usually derived from a Biblical story. As

Telford Work explains, “Veggie ethics are narrative ethics, recasting biblical stories and offering new parables to form viewers morally” (474). There is an inherent moral code within VeggieTales, and each episode presents an aspect of this moral code to its viewers. It combines this with a format that will allow its young audience to absorb the values it preaches--namely, through story. Dunlap notes, “Stories are a powerful avenue into a child’s memory as well as his or her repertoire of behavior” (20). As such, VeggieTales’ use of stories to convey values subconsciously shapes its viewers’ future attitudes and actions. These values come from the evangelical approach, familiar to Big Idea’s Bible-college trained creators, of allegorically interpreting stories to apply morals to one’s own life, viewing the Bible as “a storehouse of divine ethical wisdom that God decrees into our moral life” (Work 478). As such, Vischer’s previously mentioned goal to “spread God’s truth” is more about Christian, especially evangelical moral values, than the gospel itself.

This led to the exclusion of the traditional evangelical Gospel-centered narrative. This exclusion is a trait often criticized by VeggieTales’ more religious viewers: “Jesus’ narrative is marginal to the series. With only a few exceptions, it is entirely absent from every episode” (Work 478). This omission has two possible causes--both of which likely had an effect. The first--appeasing the religious critics--is to respect the sanctity of Christ by refusing to portray him as a vegetable (Work 480). This is reasonable, and indeed important. However, it does call into question the series’ own intentions and its creators’ stated goals--to spread God’s truth. The stories are viewed through an evangelical lens but without the final evangelical voice, without the ultimate evangelical truth: the gospel. Excluding Jesus from the narrative allowed Big Idea to grow and appeal to a broader market--the second possible reason for the omission. Work’s

analysis of this position is direct: “K-Mart will stock and promote videos about a loving, inclusive ‘God,’ giving Big Idea the market presence they need to succeed. However, material that invokes the ‘J’ word or his church is sectarian, divisive, and unattractive to buyers” (Work 480). It is indubitably true that excluding Christ--as well as explicitly Christian organizations or theology--from the narrative encourages a broader audience, and that it encourages application of values in a reality that does not always have Christ at the center, or even as a visible influence. Perhaps, this was done with the good intent of reaching more people; perhaps it was done for convenience and commercial benefit. Regardless, what is important to note is that Big Idea Productions and VeggieTales’ creators specifically expressed evangelical intent in their aims for the series. The Biblical stories adapted are done so by Protestant Christians and bear evangelical cultural values. The topical lack of Christ may bring the stories to a more general audience, but one cannot pretend that the stories are adapted with scholarly, historical, Hebrew or even some sorts of Christian interpretations. Of course, all of these groups likely find truth within the adaptations--VeggieTales is not changing the stories themselves. Rather, it is simply important to bear in mind the tradition the adaptations are coming from.

The VeggieTales franchise was also written with children as the intended audience--though the show makes an effort to engage parents, too--and this target audience undoubtedly affects the lens of adaptation. All of the stories are biblical, but even these stories have content deemed unsuitable for children’s television, either because it is too mature or would not hold their interest. For example, as Work notes, the story of David’s adultery with Bathsheba “(a sensitive topic in children’s videos) is turned into a prohibition on stealing and selfishness” (475). In her work interviewing families who watched VeggieTales, Hillary Warren notes that

many mothers, while they love the values of VeggieTales, find some of the ways they retell the stories distracting: “Some people don’t like *Veggie Tales* because it’s not right on the money biblically, but first you have to start them with the basics and this makes the basics real and at a kid’s level” (85). VeggieTales certainly takes liberties with its adaptations, whether it is changing the plot of the David and Bathsheba story or having the guards of Jericho drop slushies onto the marching Israelites. However, for the most part, these liberties are intended to engage children while still capturing the heart of the message. VeggieTales is not revising biblical stories for their own purpose so much as they are reframing them for a new audience in a new medium.

An important way that this engagement happens is by adding humor. In fact, Dunlap explains that humor is a key factor in engaging children’s attention, and VeggieTales heavily utilizes it: “Humor is used in an entertaining, non-sacrilegious manner to highlight the lesson of each *VeggieTales* story. ...What *VeggieTales* does is to take humorous situations and inject them into Biblical stories without sacrificing the moral of the story” (Dunlap 14, 15). VeggieTales is biblically based, and its focus is conveying values, but it is also entertainment. As such, it must capture its audience, whether that is the children it was created for or the parents watching alongside them. And indeed, VeggieTales was created to capture the parents’ attention as well. Describing her interactions with families talking about children’s media, Hillary Warren explains, “The fact that mothers could watch the [VeggieTales] tapes without gritted teeth speaks to the multilevel nature of the story lines and the number of popular culture jokes, such as a send-up of *Gilligan’s Island*, that don’t resonate with the preschool set but do with the mothers” (Warren 80). Big Idea Productions intended to create family-friendly media that was also

high-quality; to do so, they had to engage both children and their parents, and a surefire way to accomplish engagement is through humor. This required VeggieTales to take certain liberties with the texts they adapted, for they did just that: adapted them for a new generation's entertainment, as well as edification, not simply recreating the stories as they originally appeared.

VeggieTales takes biblical stories and values and adapts them creatively for a young audience. However, this often requires a simplistic and clear moral portrayal of the stories and characters. This simplification does not always fit neatly into the stories themselves. In particular, scholarly understanding of the Joseph story reveals that it is much more complex than what first meets the eye, and than what is presented in *The Ballad of Little Joe*, the VeggieTales version, including in its moral messages, role as a narrative, genre classifications, and Joseph's portrayed heroism.

### **The Joseph Story in Genesis**

Readers and scholars often focus on the Joseph story's emphasis on forgiveness, but the story's reconciliation narrative is actually rather complicated. Joseph is not the paradigm of forgiveness he is regularly described as. For a large portion of his first interactions with his brothers in Egypt, Joseph acts noticeably coldly and manipulates his brothers unnecessarily, even though they do not know who he is yet. This is often framed as Joseph testing his brothers. However, in the moment just before this cold interaction, he "remembered his dreams about them" (Genesis 42:8) from his youth in their family home, in which he saw them bowing down to him. Joseph, before forgiving his brothers, seemingly uses his power to manipulate and make



their experience more difficult. Joseph's continued rocky relationship with his brothers, even after their reunion, is emphasized by the fear they express after their father's death in chapter 50: "And Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, and they said, 'If Joseph bears resentment against us, he will surely pay us back for all the evil we caused him'" (Genesis 50:15). This fear, as Gabriel Josipovici notes, is an indication that the initial reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers in chapter 45 "was no final reconciliation but a temporary and qualified one, at least on the part of the brothers" (125). Joseph cannot be held up as a pillar of family reconciliation and forgiveness: his own brothers continued to feel fearful of him, believing that their father was the only thing keeping him from taking revenge. This may have been incorrect, as Joseph assures them later, but the fact remains that after their supposed reconciliation, Joseph's brothers do not appear to feel forgiven. This is perhaps, again, because of Joseph's tone. As Gordon McConville observes, "Joseph is indeed hard to read because many of his actions, mainly toward his brothers in Egypt, are enigmatic. For example, why did he not attempt to communicate with his family in the first place, once he came to power in Egypt? Equally, why does he now conceal his identity from his brothers when they arrive in their search for food?" (McConville 639). Joseph's actions, or lack thereof, make readers question his true feelings towards his brothers and his underlying intent. This is an aspect of Joseph that may never be revealed, as the story does not explain the odd interactions between them. However, in the end, the story does depict Joseph's assurance that he will care for and provide for his brothers, so whatever his intentions were, his actions end up being moral, at least based on the Christian theological virtue of love mentioned previously, a virtue which the original Hebrew audience also strongly valued. The wavering simply serves to

show that Joseph perhaps should not be held up as a blameless moral hero--the reader cannot truly determine if he is as pure of heart as he is generally assumed to be.

Just as Joseph's forgiveness is complicated, so too is the moral message of God working evil for good, which VeggieTales emphasizes. The crux of this message is said by Joseph to his brothers in Genesis 45 and repeated in Genesis 50: "While you meant evil toward me, God meant it for good, so as to bring about at this very time keeping many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). It is true that after all the poor treatment at their hands, Joseph's presence and success in Egypt ends up saving his brothers and the whole land. However, as Josipovici notes, when relaying the message of God's providence, Joseph takes a superior tone and assumes he knows what God's plan is. Josipovici says, "We saw Joseph, in chapter 50, passing from the remark that he is not in the place of God, to telling his brothers what God's pattern for him and them really was" (128). Joseph's brothers did intend evil for him, and God did indeed use it for good. However, Joseph's statement implies that he has a particular knowledge of God's intention that his brothers are excluded from--echoing the dreams that fueled his brothers' resentment in the first place. Joseph is partially right, but his assumptions and presumptions about his place in God's plan show that "Joseph has not really learned anything at all. He is still the hero of his own psycho-drama" (Josipovici 128). Joseph is a character renowned for his faith in God's plan and persistence in doing what is right because of that faith. However, his views also cause him to be unadaptable and somewhat presumptuous, a quality that bothers his brothers until they can benefit from him. Joseph's ultimate motives may be good, but his attitude surrounding them is complicated. Furthermore, Joseph is not even fully right in his understanding of God's will. In the immediate context, of course, Joseph is used, despite his brothers' intentions, for their

ultimate good. However, in the longer historical view, it is not Joseph who is God's chosen servant. It is Judah who starts the line of David--which, as Redford notes, may be the reason for the "Judah-Tamar interlude" that interrupts the Joseph story in Genesis 38 (Redford 17)--and also the line of Jesus. As such, as Josipovici notes, while Joseph describes his place in God's plan despite his brothers' opposition, "a pattern is being created of which Joseph has no idea at all" (128). One cannot pretend that what "God meant for good" solely applies to Joseph's situation. In this case, positive effects came from a negative event, and Joseph was able to see those effects. However, there were also elements of God's plan that did not involve Joseph directly, that he would never see, and that are also linked to God's greater plan--the birth of David, the great king; and Jesus, whom Christians believe to be the promised messiah, from the line of Joseph's brother, who was saved by Joseph's position in Egypt. This complicates the "God meant it for good" message because, if applied to incidents outside the text, it is entirely possible that an individual may never see the good consequences of the evil intent. This does not mean that the message is false, but rather that one cannot presume to know what God's plan entails, and that the good brought about may be outside of the realm of consciousness or understanding of the victim. There is a dualism in Joseph's message: while here, it is true for his present situation, there is also a much broader context in which it must be viewed. As such, while Joseph's faith is admirable and the moral message he conveys is true, it must be treated without presumption of the knowledge of God's true plan and with the understanding that one may never know that plan or the positive effects of a negative situation.

This understanding of God's plan echoes the story's role as a narrative and a story-within-stories. In his exploration of the text, Donald B. Redford claims, "All

commentators, no matter how far they diverge on the subject of its origins, are unanimous in their judgement that the Joseph Story is a masterpiece of story-telling, perhaps unequaled in Biblical literature” (66). As such, the Joseph story must be viewed as a complete, artistic, beautiful work. It has its own plot, its own message, and its own characters. Nevertheless, it must also be viewed as a story within a story. Josipovici explains, “For Joseph’s story is after all only an episode in Jacob’s story, which begins with chapter 25 and only ends with Jacob’s death in 49...and Jacob’s story, of course, is only an episode in the larger story of Israel, which begins with Abraham, and that is only an episode in the larger story of the world, which begins with the creation in chapter 1” (Josipovici 123). Thus, Joseph’s story, and its message about God’s plan, has both an immediate effect and a much broader historical effect. Though a complete story, it must also be viewed as a piece of larger stories, and though just a piece of those larger stories, it is also incorrect to view the Joseph story as less than a complete, artistic narrative. The story cannot be removed from its broader context, nor can it be deemed merely a fragment of that broader context--both elements of the story’s role must be taken into account to appreciate and understand the purpose and art of the narrative.

Furthermore, this story and its hero cannot be pinned down into one genre or idealized form. Just as the story has multiple layers in terms of its role within other narratives, it also has aspects of multiple genres. Redford describes it as a *Marchen-novelle*, a cross between a sort of folk tale and a historicized, more realistic novella (67), while Josipovici highlights some fairy tale-like aspects (129). The Joseph story can be read as an early form of Wisdom literature, according to George Coats, but Wisdom literature cannot be the only genre that it fits into (287). He goes on to explain that part of the Joseph story should be classified as “political legend”

because of its emphasis on Joseph's leadership and character, as "the purpose of a legend would be to paint an ideal figure as a model for edification of subsequent generations" (Coats 290). In truth, the story contains aspects of all of these classifications, and cannot be pinned down into one genre. The story is too complex to fit neatly into one type; rather, it contains elements of multiple genres that blend together to create a full and unique story.

Similarly, Joseph's character role cannot neatly fit into the category of a true hero, though he does display heroic qualities. Coats explains that the main focus of the story seems to be Joseph's character: "Events occur. There is obviously a crisis...But the events are bound together, indeed, they are eclipsed by an emphasis on Joseph's character" (Coats 289). This seems to make the audience identify Joseph as not only the protagonist, but a kind of moral hero, too. He becomes a role model for how one should act in difficult situations. Most of the time, this is good, but as noted by several scholars and stated by McConville, "For other interpreters, Joseph's deepest intentions are harder to read and may even be sinister" (637). As discussed earlier, Joseph's moral action and intentions are clearly not a black-and-white matter. Joseph is a human character, and he carries the flaws and sinful nature of humanity within him. This is not to say that he cannot be a role model; rather, it is simply unwise to assume that *all* of his actions should be imitated, and some, in fact, should be avoided. As such, both Joseph and his story resist classification; they are more complicated than generalizations and broad categories allow for.

### **Joseph--The VeggieTales Version**

The Joseph story is clearly much more complex than what initially meets the eye. Its moral messages and characters are not so simply defined that they can neatly be adopted as

heroes or role models. This presents challenges for the VeggieTales adaptation, as their stories are aimed at children and intended to teach morals. The VeggieTales production of the Joseph story, “The Ballad of Little Joe,” drastically tones down, humorizes, and adapts the story for children, while still staying relatively faithful to the plot. Though a much less complex version of the story, it serves the purpose the creators intended: entertain families while conveying positive, biblically based values.

Through excluding or changing plot points and adding humor, “The Ballad of Little Joe” sanitizes and tames much of the story to adapt it for their younger target audience. A major exclusion is the Judah-Tamar interlude in chapter 38, which takes place in the middle of the original story’s action. One obvious reason for this is the somewhat graphic sexual content and themes of the interlude, which would not be appropriate under Big Idea’s vision for family-friendly programming. However, excluding this scene also drastically simplifies and streamlines the plot, as this is a scene that even many scholars do not understand the placement of. Coats explains that it is an interruption: “It disrupts the plot of the story at a crucial point...it should here be noted that no matter where chapter 38 is placed an insurmountable difficulty remains” (17). The Judah-Tamar interlude distracts from the main plot of the story, despite the nuances and historical significance it may add, as mentioned previously. As such, it is logical that, with an audience of children, the VeggieTales adaptation would choose to cut it entirely--excising the scene does not directly take away from the plot, and streamlines the action to keep young viewers focused and engaged.

A distinctive feature of this adaptation is its altering, or even removal, of plot points deemed inappropriate or unnecessary for a child audience, which is done carefully to avoid

fundamental changes to the story while maintaining the VeggieTales' aims and values. One such event is Joseph's framed rape of Potiphar's wife. Clearly, rape is not one of the "Sunday morning values" that VeggieTales wants to portray to a largely pre-school and early-elementary-aged audience. To overcome the conflict between the event's importance to the story and the need to create a show appropriate for children, the VeggieTales adaptation chose to change the specific details of the event while maintaining its role in the overall plot. Instead of being framed for rape, Little Joe (the Joseph character) is framed instead for stealing by a rival employee, Miss Kitty, at his workplace (McPotiphar's Pizza Parlor). Then, the action returns to the original Joseph story's plot: Little Joe is thrown into prison for a crime he did not commit, where he remains until his dream interpretations bring him before the ruler (the Pharaoh in Genesis, the mayor in VeggieTales). Notably, VeggieTales uses a similar tactic in their retelling of the David and Bathsheba story. It replaces adultery with thievery (Work 475). Adultery is a seemingly adult sin, and definitely an adult topic, but thievery bears a similarity to it as an act of taking what does not belong to you. By swapping rape and stealing, the VeggieTales adaptation certainly changes the plot of the story, but not in such a way that the story itself is fundamentally changed. Rather, it allows the story to be told to a young audience while maintaining a basic sense of Joseph's innocence and wrongful accusations. In this manner, VeggieTales attempts to sanitize the text while keeping the overall meaning of the story.

Some of VeggieTales' other discrepancies from its source material are more subliminal, although the show does keep a few of the original text's controversial moments. Notably, "The Ballad of Little Joe" eliminates any doubt surrounding Joseph's forgiveness and reconciliation with his brothers. There is only one scene where the brothers ask for, and Little Joe grants,

forgiveness, and the scene is portrayed in such a manner that the forgiveness is clear and final. After the brothers show that they are willing to sacrifice themselves for each other, Little Joe reveals his identity, prompting his brother Jude (Judah) to ask for his forgiveness, to which he replies, “Of course I’ll forgive you!” and gives a “God works for good” speech. The scene culminates with all of the brothers cheering together, followed by their father rejoining them, thus completing the reunion and ending the story (29:00-30:31). In fact, the event is narrated as “the happiest family reunion the West has ever seen” (30:25-30:31). Such a portrayal eliminates all questions of Joseph and his brothers’ true reconciliation. This, of course, is not in keeping with the deeper scholarly analysis of the story discussed previously. It removes nuance and elevates Joseph to an almost perfect moral hero, while creating a pure happy ending. This, again, may be fitting for VeggieTales’ young audience and their focus on communicating moral values, but it does not account for all of the story’s dimensions.

“The Ballad of Little Joe” also eliminates dimensions of the story’s message about God working for good. As in the original text, Little Joe boldly proclaims this message to his brothers after their reunion (29:48-30:01). Since, however, the episode ends with this reunion, and is not connected to other stories about the descendants of the characters and the broader story of Israel, it loses the dimension that Josipovici introduces regarding God’s plan as greater than Joseph’s view (128). Of course, the limited time period and self-contained nature of the series make it difficult to introduce this broader view. Without it, though, the message is much less complex, and weaker. The story becomes somewhat of an individual fairytale with a happy ending, rather than acknowledging the sweeping story and numerous ups and downs of the rest of Joseph’s



family story. God may work all things for good, but that good may happen over more than one lifetime.

Despite these omissions of the text's complexities, VeggieTales by no means removes all controversial elements of the story. In the VeggieTales version, as in the original, Little Joe disguises himself and frames his brother Benjamin for stealing. However, in the cartoon, Little Joe clearly states that this is a test to see if his brothers have changed (27:43-27:51). In the original, as McConville highlights, Joseph's intentions are not clear (639). VeggieTales keeps the controversial moment of Joseph testing his brothers, but eliminates most of the deeper tensions by clearly stating his motive. This may explain his actions to young children, but does, in fact, oversimplify a rather complex moment, one which even scholars do not have a definite theory about. Consequently, in adapting the story for children, VeggieTales simplifies some of the text's complexities--the plot remains, but the nuances are flattened.

Despite these plot and interpretative discrepancies, VeggieTales stays relatively true to both the plot and their own purpose. "The Ballad of Little Joe" covers the original story's major plot and themes. Coats identifies three main themes of the Joseph story: it is a story of family conflict; it presents a model of a political leader; and it reflects a theological viewpoint (296). "The Ballad of Little Joe" clearly portrays these themes: Little Joe regularly proclaims his faith in God and His plan; he is appointed as a political leader for the impending famine due to his interpretive and organizational skills; and the conflict and climax of the episode center on the broken relationship with his brothers and their eventual reunion. In keeping with the VeggieTales' model, the episode also places a major emphasis on Little Joe's character, especially his faith and righteousness in the midst of difficulty, the value the episode centers on.

The combination of the biblical plot and emphasis of values make the episode successful under the VeggieTales framework, and it keeps enough of the story and themes to maintain much, though not all, of the original story's integrity.

Pulling all of these aspects of the adaptation together, "The Ballad of Little Joe" is a successful adaptation of the Joseph story based on Big Idea's intentions. As mentioned before, the series is meant for children and for entertainment with values. Looking at the original text, the VeggieTales adaptation by no means captures all of the complexities and nuances of the Genesis account that give life and relatability to the story and its characters. However, that is not this adaptation's purpose. Success, in this case, must be relative to expectations. A children's cartoon of talking vegetables cannot be expected to convey all of the wisdom of the Genesis's author(s), nor scholars who have spent their lives studying this material. Rather, we must analyze it based on what it sets out to do: "spread God's truth through products that creatively and technically exceed the best Hollywood has to offer" (Warren 35). The humor-filled, Western retelling surely captures the attention of its audience, and the episode spreads truth about God's faithfulness--if in a less nuanced form than the original presents--while maintaining the larger themes and plot of the biblical story it draws from. As such, the adaptation must be viewed as successful within its own framework, though we can constantly ask more of the material we are presented with. This adaptation is not the definitive story; rather, it is a gateway, bringing children into a world filled with injustice, as Little Joe faces, but also defined, in the Christian perspective, by God's greater purpose.

## Bibliography

- Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2004.
- Coats, George. "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 3, Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1973, pp. 285–97, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1290019316/>.
- Dunlap, Janine W. "*VeggieTales*": *Moral Education through Entertainment -Education Videos*, Regent University, Ann Arbor, 2005. *ProQuest*, <http://proxy.library.nd.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/305380598?accountid=12874>.
- Josipovici, Gabriel. "Joseph and Biblical Revelation." *Salmagundi*, no. 66, 1985, pp. 118–131. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/40547712](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40547712). Accessed 4 Mar. 2020.
- McConville, J. Gordan. "Forgiveness as Private and Public Act: A Reading of the Biblical Joseph Narrative." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 75, no. 4, 2013, pp. 635–648., [www.jstor.org/stable/43728290](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43728290).
- Redford, Donald B. *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)*. E. J. Brill, 1970.
- Russell, James. "Evangelical Audiences and "Hollywood" Film: Promoting Fireproof (2008)." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 391–407, doi:10.1017/S002187580999140X.
- Steinberg, Shirley R. and Joe L. Kincheloe, editors. *Christotainment: Selling Jesus through Popular Culture*. Westview Press, 2009.
- VeggieTales: The Ballad of Little Joe*. Directed by Tim Hodge, Big Idea Productions, 2003.

Vischer, Phil. "What Happened to Big Idea? (Part 1)." Phil Vischer, 15 Nov 2004.

<https://philvischer.com/news/what-happened-to-big-idea-part-1/>. Accessed 13 April 2020.

Warren, Hillary. *There's Never Been a Show Like Veggie Tales*. AltaMira Press, 2005.

Work, Telford. "Veggie Ethics: What "America's Favorite Vegetables" Say About Evangelism."

*Theology Today*, vol. 57, no. 4, Theology Today, 2001.