

8. Joseph

(Genesis 37:1–41:45)

Joseph, His Dreams, and his Brothers.
Interlude: Judah and Tamar. Joseph and
Potiphar, in Prison, and before Pharaoh.
Zaphnath-paaneah, Governor of Egypt.

[Culture Moment: Yom Kippur]

- Hebrew for “Day of Atonement”
- Based on Lev 23:26–32, where “you shall afflict yourselves” has been interpreted as fasting and denial
 - No eating and drinking
 - No wearing of leather shoes
 - No bathing or washing
 - No anointing oneself with perfumes or lotions
 - No marital relations
- 10 Days of Awe preceding Yom Kippur, when Jews prepare by repenting and making amends
 - “On Rosh Hashana it is written, on Yom Kippur it is sealed”
- Original involved temple rituals, centering on the high priest’s entering the holy of holies, have been replaced with synagogue prayer services
 - *Kol Nidre*, “Our vows will not be vows”
 - *Avinu Malcheinu*, “Our Father, Our King”

History of Joseph

- Joseph Dreams of Greatness (37:1–11)
- Joseph is Sold by His Brothers (37:12–36)
- Judah and Tamar (38:1–30)
- Joseph and Potiphar's Wife (39:1–23)
- Joseph Interprets the Dreams of the Butler and the Baker (40:1–23)
- Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dream (41:1–36)
- Joseph's Rise to Power (41:37–57)
- Joseph's Brothers in Egypt (42:1–45:27)
- Jacob Settles in Goshen (45:28–47:12)
- Famine in Egypt (47:13–26)
- The Last Days of Jacob (47:27–31)
- Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons (48:1–22)
- Jacob's Last Words to His Sons (49:1–28)
- Jacob's Death and Burial (49:29–50:14)
- Joseph Forgives His Brothers (50:15–21)
- Joseph's Last Days and Death (50:22–26)

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Joseph's Position in Jacob's Family (37:1–5)

- "These *are* the generations of Jacob...Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours." (Gen. 37:2-3)
 - Note that "*many*" is in italics, the Hebrew actually means something like a "tunic with long sleeves" which implies he was not out in the field doing hard labor but possibly in the house with his father. The Greek rendering of this word is "striped"
- Why would later editors focus on Joseph considering they were likely to favor Judah or Levi?
 - Moses would have known that Joseph was the birthright son
 - Simple favoritism? Joseph is the son of his favorite wife, and Benjamin probably had some bad associations for Jacob...
 - Joseph was known to be the birthright son, although it should have been Reuben
 - Reuben lost his birthright in Gen 35:17 though not explicitly stated until Gen 49
 - In the Law, the birthright would go from the firstborn of the first wife to the firstborn of the second wife – but this is before the Law and in Near Eastern tradition it would have gone through all the sons first
- Sibling Rivalry – note how often the phrases "his brothers hated him" or "his brethren envied him" occurs in these chapters!

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Joseph's Dreams (37:6–11)

- And he told *it* to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What *is* this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying. (Gen 37:10-11)
 - “Thy mother” – we don’t know the timeline of Rachel’s death, though it is assumed that Benjamin has been born and Rachel is gone
- Jacob “observed the saying”
 - Cf. Luke 2:19 “But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart.”
 - Jacob himself had a dream at Peniel, he likely had some idea that Joseph was chosen
- “His brethren envied him” -

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Joseph and his Brothers (37:12–26)

- Jacob sends Joseph from Hebron to find his brothers at Shechem – quite a distance away!
- “And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.” (37:19-20)
 - **Reuben redeems himself here because he convinces his brothers not to harm Joseph – also upholding the Noachic command not to shed blood**
- Ishmaelites and Midianites are both descendents of Abraham, children of Hagar and Keturah
 - The Midianites rescue Joseph only to sell him for 20 pieces of silver
 - Cf. Christ was sold for 30 pieces, Joseph is 17 so his price was lower...
- The brothers stole Joseph’s coat, the symbol of his position in their father’s house, and used it to cover up their crime
 - **Another theme – clothing?**
 - Nakedness and covering
 - **Rent clothes as symbol of scattering** – “...let us remember the words of Jacob, before his death, for behold, he saw that a part of the remnant of the coat of Joseph was preserved and had not decayed. And he said—Even as this remnant of garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God...” (Alma 46:23-24)
- Jacob mourns for Joseph and cannot be comforted (37:35)

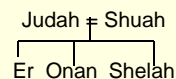
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Judah and Tamar (38:1–30)

- A strange interlude - Why is this story here?
 - Remember Genesis is about real people in real situations
 - Judah here serves as a literary foil for Joseph with Potiphar's wife
- Judah's three sons – Er, Onan, Shelah
 - Judah marries a Canaanite woman – Shuah daughter of Hirah, and has three sons with her
 - Judah finds another Canaanite woman, **Tamar** to marry his son Er
 - Er angers the Lord and is killed – according to the Mosaic law Tamar should go to the next brother, but any children would belong to the first husband
 - Levirate marriage – *levir* is a husband's brother
 - Onan dishonors Tamar, taking advantage of levirate conjugality but avoiding the responsibility of having a child for his brother, so the Lord kills him too
 - Judah sends Tamar back to her father – and doesn't intend to pass her on again!
- Tamar arranges to seduce Judah – but she is not to blame!
 - She knows her rights and arranges to get them from Judah!
 - Note that Tamar is sometimes referred to as a normal prostitute but also as a ritual/temple prostitute
 - Note that she is one of the four women mentioned by Matthew in Jesus' lineage
 - Pharez and Zarah are the children of Judah and Tamar



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Joseph in Potiphar's House (39:1–20)

- "And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand." (39:2-4)
 - Continuing theme from Abraham – even those outside the covenant recognize the Lord's hand – cf Sarah with the Pharaoh and Abimelech
 - Joseph in Egypt – remember that the Lord's plan and purpose can be brought about in seemingly worldly ways
 - The Lord is constantly with Joseph helping and blessing him
- Joseph is described as "goodly" and "favored" – meaning tall and handsome!
- "And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her." (Gen 39:10)
 - This is a pattern seen in real life – morality issues happen slowly and step by step, sometimes the best thing to do is emulate Joseph – get the heck out of there!
- When Potiphar returns he throws Joseph into prison on his wife's word

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Joseph in Prison (39:20–40:23)

- “But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing *that* was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and *that* which he did, the Lord made *it* to prosper.” (39:23)
 - **The Lord continues to bless Joseph in his trials**
- Pharaoh’s Butler and Baker thrown into prison (39:1-2)
 - They both “dream dreams”
- “And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, *Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you.*” (40:6)
 - **Joseph recognizes the Lord’s hands in his dreams**
- Joseph correctly interprets the dreams and charges the butler not to forget him but to tell Pharaoh about it: “Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.” (40:23)
- What other Joseph has similar experiences?
 - **Joseph the Carpenter: dreams and interpretations, flees to Egypt**

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Joseph and Pharaoh (41:1–45)

- Pharaoh’s Dreams
 - When the king’s magicians and interpreters fail to interpret the dreams, the butler finally remembers Joseph
 - **Joseph tells Pharaoh of the coming plenty followed by famine and advises him to find a wise steward**
- “And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find *such a one* as this *is*, a man in whom the Spirit of God *is*? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, *there is* none so discreet and wise as thou *art*: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.” (41:38-40)
 - The Pharaoh at this time likely belongs to a group of Semitic people who controlled Egypt from the 18th to 16th c. BC – **the Hyksos** – so it is not unreasonable that Pharaoh would choose Joseph, a distant relative, to rule in his house.
- Pharaoh renames Joseph “**Zaphnath-paaneah**” or “he deciphers the concealed,” like our term “revelator!”

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