

st Andrew
STAPLEFORD

Joseph

Extracts from Genesis 37-50
(NIV UK)



The Story of Joseph (first painting) – *Biagio d'Antonio (1446-1516) ca. 1485*

Depicts Jacob sending Joseph's brothers to the field, his brothers stripping him of his jacket and throwing him into a pit, the sale of Joseph and the journey to Egypt, Jacob mourning his son as he is shown his blood-smeared coat

J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Joseph's dreams

37 ¹Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

²This is the account of Jacob's family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made

an ornate robe for him. ⁴When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

⁵Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had: ⁷we were binding sheaves of corn out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered round mine and bowed down to it.'

⁸His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. 'Listen,' he said, 'I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.'

¹⁰When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, 'What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?' ¹¹His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Joseph sold by his brothers

¹²Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³and Israel said to Joseph, 'As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.'

'Very well,' he replied.

¹⁴So he said to him, 'Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.' Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, 'What are you looking for?'

¹⁶ He replied, 'I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?'

¹⁷ 'They have moved on from here,' the man answered. 'I heard them say, "Let's go to Dothan."'

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

¹⁹ 'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. ²⁰ 'Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.'

²¹ When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. 'Let's not take his life,' he said. ²² 'Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him.' Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe – the ornate robe he was wearing – ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? ²⁷ Come, let's sell him to the

Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.’ His brothers agreed.

²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. ³⁰ He went back to his brothers and said, ‘The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?’

³¹ Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, ‘We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.’

³³ He recognised it and said, ‘It is my son’s robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.’

³⁴ Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. ‘No,’ he said, ‘I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.’ So his father wept for him.

³⁶ Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

Joseph and Potiphar's wife

39 ¹ Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

² The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, ⁴ Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵ From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶ So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, ⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me!'

⁸ But he refused. 'With me in charge,' he told her, 'my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ 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?' ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even to be with her.

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by

his cloak and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹³ When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, ¹⁴ she called her household servants. 'Look,' she said to them, 'this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. ¹⁵ When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.'

²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹ the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warder. ²² So the warder put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. ²³ The warder paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Pharaoh's dreams

41 ¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.'

¹⁶ 'I cannot do it,' Joseph replied to Pharaoh, 'but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.'

¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, ¹⁸ when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. ¹⁹ After them, seven other cows came up – scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. ²¹ But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before. Then I woke up.

²² 'In my dream I saw seven ears of corn, full and good, growing on a single stalk. ²³ After them, seven other ears sprouted – withered and thin and scorched by the east wind. ²⁴ The thin ears of corn swallowed up the seven good ears. I told this to the magicians, but none of them could explain it to me.'

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.

²⁹ Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, ³⁰ but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. ³¹ The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be

so severe. ³²The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

³³ ‘And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵ They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. ³⁶ This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.’

³⁷ The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. ³⁸ So Pharaoh asked them, ‘Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?’

³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.’

Joseph's brothers go to Egypt

42 ⁶ Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognised them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. 'Where do you come from?' he asked.

'From the land of Canaan,' they replied, 'to buy food.'

⁸ Although Joseph recognised his brothers, they did not recognise him. ⁹ Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, 'You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.'

¹⁰ 'No, my lord,' they answered. 'Your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.'

¹² 'No!' he said to them. 'You have come to see where our land is unprotected.'

¹³ But they replied, 'Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.'

¹⁴ Joseph said to them, 'It is just as I told you: you are spies! ¹⁵ And this is how you will be tested: as surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!' ¹⁷ And he put them all in custody for three days.

¹⁸ On the third day, Joseph said to them, ‘Do this and you will live, for I fear God: ¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. ²⁰ But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.’ This they proceeded to do.

²¹ They said to one another, ‘Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us.’

²² Reuben replied, ‘Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.’ ²³ They did not realise that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

²⁴ He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

²⁵ Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man’s silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey.

²⁹ When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, ³⁰ ‘The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land.

³⁵ As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man’s sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened. ³⁶ Their father Jacob said

to them, 'You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!'

A silver cup in a sack

44 Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: 'Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man's silver in the mouth of his sack. ²Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain.' And he did as Joseph said.

³As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. ⁴They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, 'Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, "Why have you repaid good with evil?"

¹⁴Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. ¹⁵Joseph said to them, 'What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?'

¹⁶'What can we say to my lord?' Judah replied. 'What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves – we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.'

¹⁷But Joseph said, 'Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace.'

¹⁸Then Judah went up to him and said: 'Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself.

²⁴When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

²⁵ ‘Then our father said, “Go back and buy a little more food.” ²⁶ But we said, “We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.”

²⁷ ‘Your servant my father said to us, “You know that my wife bore me two sons. ²⁸ One of them went away from me, and I said, ‘He has surely been torn to pieces.’ And I have not seen him since. ²⁹ If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my grey head down to the grave in misery.”

³⁰ ‘So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy’s life, ³¹ sees that the boy isn’t there, he will die. Your servants will bring the grey head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. ³² Your servant guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father. I said, “If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!”

³³ ‘Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. ³⁴ How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father.’

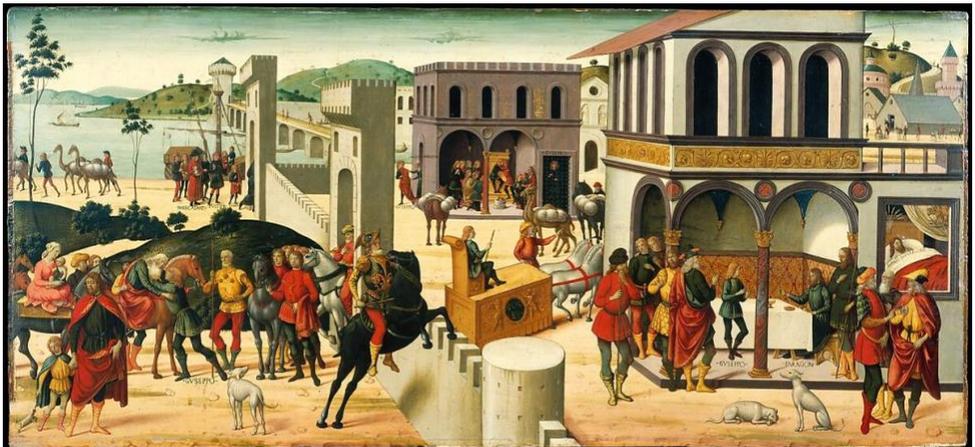
Joseph makes himself known

45 ¹ Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, ‘Make everyone leave my presence!’ So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still living?' But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come close to me.' When they had done so, he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

⁸ '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. ⁹ Now hurry back to my father and say to him, "This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay.



The Story of Joseph (second painting) – Biagio d'Antonio (1446-1516) ca. 1485

Depicts the sale to Potiphar, Joseph feeling Potiphar's wife, Joseph's imprisonment, Pharaoh's dream and Joseph interpreting it, Joseph greeting his father and family

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York