

st Andrew  
STAPLEFORD

## Joseph

Extracts from Genesis 37-50  
(NIV UK & The Story Teller Bible)

### WEEK 1: Joseph's dreams

**37**<sup>1</sup> Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

<sup>2</sup> This 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.

<sup>3</sup> Now 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. <sup>4</sup> When 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.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. <sup>6</sup> He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had: <sup>7</sup> we 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.'

<sup>8</sup> His 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.

<sup>9</sup> Then 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.'

<sup>10</sup> When 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?' <sup>11</sup> His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.



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

Depicts Jacob sending the brothers to the field, his brothers stripping Joseph 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 sold by his brothers

<sup>12</sup> Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, <sup>13</sup> and 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.

<sup>14</sup> So 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, <sup>15</sup> a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, 'What are you looking for?'

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

<sup>17</sup> '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. <sup>18</sup> But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

<sup>19</sup> 'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. <sup>20</sup> '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.'

<sup>21</sup> When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. 'Let's not take his life,' he said. <sup>22</sup> '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.

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

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? <sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

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

<sup>31</sup> Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. <sup>32</sup> 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.'

<sup>33</sup> He recognised it and said, 'It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.'

<sup>34</sup> Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. <sup>35</sup> 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.

<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

## **WEEK 2: Joseph and Potiphar's wife**

**39** <sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. <sup>3</sup> When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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, <sup>7</sup> and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me!'

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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?' <sup>10</sup> And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even to be with her.

<sup>11</sup> One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. <sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.'

<sup>16</sup> She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. <sup>17</sup> Then she told him this story: 'That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. <sup>18</sup> But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.'

<sup>19</sup> When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, 'This is how your slave treated me,' he burned with anger. <sup>20</sup> 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, <sup>21</sup> the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warder. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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.

### **WEEK 3: Pharaoh's dreams**

**41** <sup>15</sup> 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.'

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

<sup>17</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, <sup>18</sup> when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. <sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> 'In my dream I saw seven ears of corn, full and good, growing on a single stalk. <sup>23</sup> After them, seven other ears sprouted – withered and thin and scorched by the east wind. <sup>24</sup> 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.'

<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears of corn are seven years; it is one and the same dream. <sup>27</sup> The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterwards are seven years, and so are the seven worthless ears of corn scorched by the east wind: they are seven years of famine.

<sup>28</sup> 'It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. <sup>29</sup> Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, <sup>30</sup> but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. <sup>31</sup> The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. <sup>32</sup> The 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.

<sup>33</sup> 'And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. <sup>34</sup> Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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.'

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

<sup>39</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. <sup>40</sup> 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.'

#### **WEEK 4: Joseph's brothers go to Egypt**

**42** <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.'

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

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

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

<sup>13</sup> 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.'

<sup>14</sup> Joseph said to them, 'It is just as I told you: you are spies! <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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!' <sup>17</sup> And he put them all in custody for three days.

<sup>18</sup> On the third day, Joseph said to them, 'Do this and you will live, for I fear God: <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> 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.'

<sup>22</sup> 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.' <sup>23</sup> They did not realise that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

<sup>24</sup> 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.



<sup>25</sup> 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. After this was done for them, <sup>26</sup> they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left.

<sup>27</sup> At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. <sup>28</sup> 'My silver has been returned,' he said to his brothers. 'Here it is in my sack.'

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, 'What is this that God has done to us?'

<sup>29</sup> When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, <sup>30</sup> 'The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land. <sup>31</sup> But we said to him, "We are honest men; we are not spies. <sup>32</sup> We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan."

<sup>33</sup> 'Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, "This is how I will know whether you are honest men: leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go. <sup>34</sup> But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade in the land."

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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!'

## Joseph the Dreamer

Jacob had twelve sons. That's right - twelve!

His favourite son was Joseph. Jacob spoiled him and gave him special gifts - like a beautiful coat decorated with many colours. Reds and greens. Blues and yellows. Purples and pinks. Joseph was bright as a rainbow and proud as a peacock.

Joseph's older brothers did not like this one bit. But what they hated even more were Joseph's dreams!

'I had a dream last night,' boasted Joseph.

'Oh no,' groaned his brothers.

'I dreamed that we were all bundles of wheat. And guess what happened? Your bundles of wheat bowed down and worshipped mine!'

'And I had another dream,' Joseph bragged.

'Go on,' his brothers sighed.

'I dreamed we were all stars. And guess what? Your stars bowed down to mine, just as if I were your king!'

It didn't take long for Joseph's brothers to grow tired of this. But that's no excuse for what they did.

The next time they were out of Jacob's sight, they grabbed Joseph, tore off his colourful coat and dropped him down a dry well. They were just about to kill him, in fact, when they spotted

a cloud of dust at the edge of the hill. It was a band of traders bound for Egypt, their camels loaded with goods for sale.

'Why should we kill Joseph,' asked one of the brothers, 'when we can sell him to these traders and make some money for ourselves? He'll be sold as a slave in Egypt and his foolish dreams will never come true!'

Twenty pieces of silver. That's how much the traders gave them for Joseph. And when the traders had gone, the brothers ripped up Joseph's coat, dipped it in the blood of a goat and carried it home to their father.

'Joseph is dead,' they told Jacob. And they showed him Joseph's coat, its long sleeves shredded, its beautiful colours smeared with blood.

Jacob wept and wept.

And Joseph wept too, as the traders carried him far from home.

## **WEEK 2: Joseph the Prisoner**

When the traders took Joseph to Egypt they sold him to one of the king's own soldiers - a man named Potiphar. He was kind, and Joseph worked very hard for him. So hard, in fact, that Potiphar put Joseph in charge of all his other slaves.

Potiphar's wife, however, was evil and cruel. She told lies about Joseph and had him thrown in prison!

Things looked bad for Joseph. It seemed as if his dreams would never come true. But God was watching over him.

One morning, one of the other prisoners said, 'I had a dream last night. A strange dream. I dreamed I saw a grapevine with three branches. Suddenly, bunches of grapes burst out of those branches. So I squeezed them into a cup and gave it to the king to drink.

I wonder what it means?'

Joseph listened to the dream. God listened too. Then he whispered the dream's meaning into Joseph's ear.

'I know what it means!' said Joseph. 'Before you were sent to prison you served wine to the king. Well, in three days, you will be set free and serve him wine once more.'

That's exactly what happened. And when the wine-server was set free, he promised to help Joseph get out too.

Two long years went by. Then, one morning, the king of Egypt said, 'I had a dream last night. A strange dream! And I can't work out what it means.'

'A dream?' said his wine-server. 'I know a man who can tell you all about your dreams.'

And straight away Joseph was brought from the prison.

'I was standing on the banks of the river,' the king told Joseph, 'when I saw seven fat cows walk up out of the water. They were chewing happily on the grass when seven other cows joined them. These cows were bony and thin and, instead of eating the grass, they ate the first seven cows. But they stayed as skinny as ever! What can it mean?'

God whispered in Joseph's ear. Joseph listened. Then he bowed and said, 'Your Majesty, for the next seven years Egypt will grow many good' crops and be as fat as those first cows. But after that, for another seven years, hardly any food at all will grow. So unless you want your people to look like those skinny cows, you must store up food in the good years and use it wisely later.'

The king was so impressed with Joseph's answer that he not only let him stay out of prison, he put him in charge of storing and saving and serving out Egypt's food.

Seven good years *were* followed by seven bad. And, after the king, Joseph became the most important man in Egypt. It was like a dream come true.

#### **WEEK 4: Joseph the Ruler**

One day there was a knock at Joseph's door. And when he answered it, his eleven brothers were standing there!

They bowed down before him. They kissed his feet. And they begged, 'Kind sir, we have come to Egypt all the way from the land of Canaan. We have no food. We are starving. May we please buy some from you?'

Joseph said nothing. He just stared at his brothers. He knew who they were, but they did not recognize him.

'All right,' said Joseph, in his sternest voice. 'I will sell you food.' And he ordered his servants to load his brothers' animals.

But that wasn't all he told them to do. 'Take one of my silver cups,' he said, 'and hide it in the sack of food tied to the youngest lad's donkey.' Joseph had a plan. He wanted to see if his brothers had changed.

When Joseph's brothers reached the edge of the city, his servants stopped them and searched through their sacks. What did they find? The silver cup, of course!

'We don't know how it got there!' the brothers exclaimed to Joseph. 'Your brother stole it, that's how,' Joseph answered. 'So he must stay

here in Egypt and be my slave.'

'No, please,' begged the brothers. 'That would break our father's heart.

Keep one of us instead.'

When Joseph heard that, he knew his brothers had changed. So he told them who he was, right then and there.

'I am Joseph,' he announced, 'your long-lost brother.'

This news did not make his brothers feel any better. They were so frightened, in fact, that they could hardly speak.

'Don't be afraid,' said Joseph, 'I forgive you. You meant to hurt me, but God used what you did to save us all from this terrible famine.'

Now, go. Fetch my father and the rest of our family to come and live in Egypt with me.'

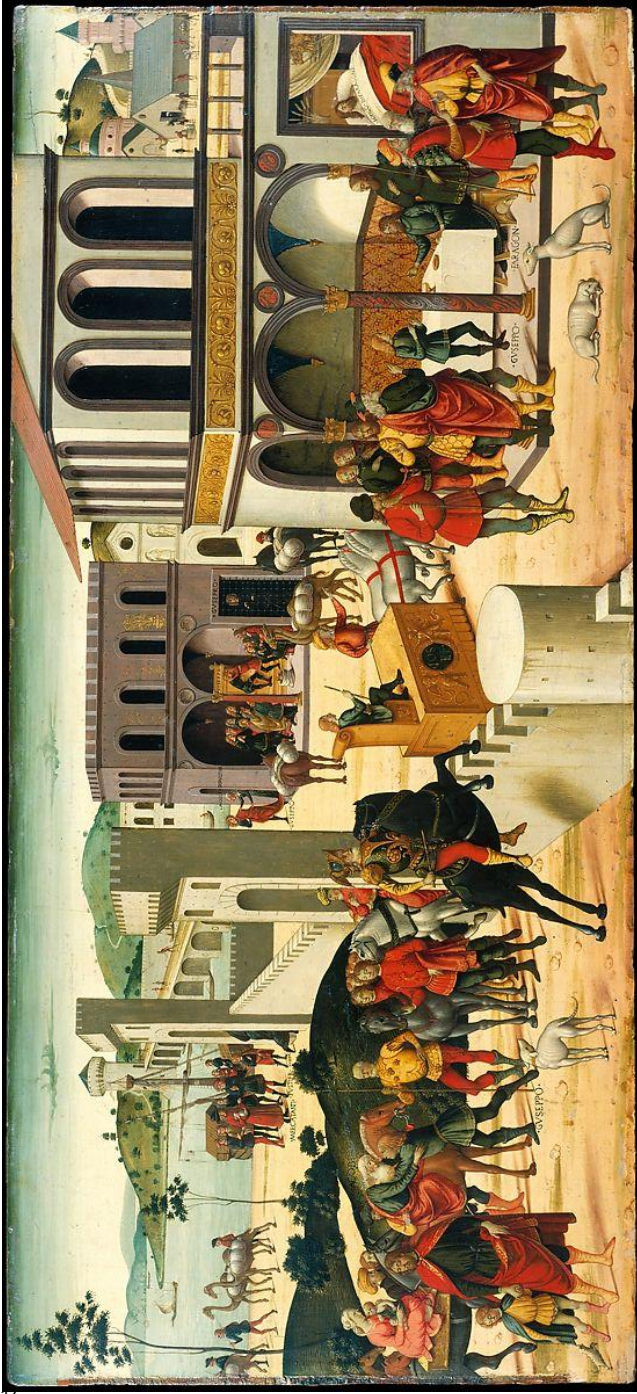
The brothers looked up.

The brothers grinned.

The brothers cheered!

And after a lot of hugging and hello-ing and handshaking, they set off for Canaan to tell Jacob the good news.

And Joseph? Joseph just sat back on his throne and smiled. And thanked God for making his dreams come true.



The Story of Joseph (second painting) – *Biagio d'Antonio* (1446-1516) ca. 1485  
Depicts the sale to Potiphar, Joseph fleeing the wife of Potiphar, the imprisonment of Joseph, the dream of Pharaoh, and Joseph interpreting it, Joseph greeting his father and family.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York