

# genesis

## God's Book of Beginnings

As the father of the twelve tribes of Israel <sup>Genesis 49</sup>, Jacob (Israel) is of critical importance; however, the story of Joseph's life of trials and triumphs is the focus throughout the remainder of Genesis. From here to the end of Genesis, watch for many symbolic parallels between Joseph and Jesus\*.

### Joseph and His Brothers (Genesis 37)

#### Joseph's Two Dreams

**37:1-4** Jacob (Israel) lived in Canaan. While helping to tend his father's flocks, Joseph brought a "bad report" <sup>1 Samuel 2:22-24</sup> to Israel about his brothers. Israel's favorite son was Joseph, and gave him a royal robe <sup>2 Samuel 13:18</sup>. As a result, all of Joseph's 11 brothers "hated" him.

Unfortunately, the NIV1984 mistranslated v.1: "Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed.", and as a result, the verse does not convey the intended meaning. The Hebrew word for "stayed" [māgôr] actually means "lived as an alien" or "stayed as a stranger". These better translations emphasize the fact that while all of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) lived in Canaan, the Israelite family had yet to receive the land as an inheritance. This would not occur until Joshua led the nation of Israel across the Jordan River and into the PL hundreds of years later <sup>Joshua 3-4</sup>.

Moses' assertion that "Joseph (was) a young man of seventeen" indicated it had been about 11 years since Joseph had departed Haran with his family and entered Canaan <sup>Genesis 30:22-24, 31:41</sup>.

The text explains that Joseph "was tending the flocks with his brothers" <sup>v.2</sup>, but who was missing?

It is unknown whether the reporting on his brothers was initially Joseph's or Jacob's idea <sup>v.14</sup>.

Joseph's coat has been called a "coat of many colors", "ornamented tunic" or "long-sleeved robe".

The obvious favoritism of Joseph by Jacob was a continuous outrage to his brothers <sup>v.4,5,8,11,18,20</sup>.

**37:5-11** Joseph had two prophetic dreams that he shared with his brothers and his father, resulting in the brothers' increased hostility toward Joseph and a quick criticism from Israel.

Joseph's first dream revealed 11 sheaves of grain (his brothers) bowing to 1 sheaf (him) <sup>2 Samuel 9:6a</sup>. The agricultural theme of the dream hinted at how Joseph later gained authority <sup>Genesis 41:39-40, 42:1-3</sup>.

## Genesis 37-39

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> dream, the sun (Israel), moon (Rachel), 11 stars (brothers) bowed to Joseph. The celestial theme of this dream symbolized Joseph's eventual reign over the house of Jacob <sup>Deuteronomy 33:16b</sup>.

The dream and Jacob's interpretation are keys to understanding some future symbols <sup>Revelation 12:1</sup>.

Jacob "rebuked" Joseph for his second dream, but he continued to reflect upon its meaning <sup>v.10-11</sup>.

Jacob's thoughts are similar to Mary's pondering the shepherds' words at the birth of Jesus <sup>Luke 2:19\*</sup>.

### Joseph Sold into Slavery

**37:12-22** Israel sent Joseph to Shechem where he believed his sons were tending the flocks.

As soon as they saw Joseph, the brothers "plotted to kill him" <sup>Psalm 37:12, Matthew 12:14\*</sup>.

However, despite his hate for Joseph, Reuben felt responsible for his life, told his brothers to throw him in a cistern without laying "a hand on him" and planned to take him home later.

Two brothers plotted and killed all the Shechemite men to avenge their sister's rape <sup>Genesis 34:24-29</sup>, but here they plotted to murder one of their own brothers simply due to jealousy <sup>Mark 3:5-6\*, Acts 7:9</sup>.



Joseph travelled to Shechem (50 miles north of Hebron), and then to Dothan (15 miles farther north).

**37:23-30** When Joseph arrived, his brothers "stripped his robe" and threw him in a dry cistern. As the brothers sat down to eat, they spotted an Ishmaelite caravan from Gilead approaching. At Judah's suggestion, they all agreed to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites. Returning to camp, Reuben "tore his clothes" upon finding the cistern empty and Joseph missing <sup>Genesis 42:22</sup>.

A cistern is a deep cavern dug in arid regions, designed to gather and hold rain water for dry times.

Ishmaelites <sup>v.27</sup> were considered to be both the descendants of Ishmael <sup>Genesis 17:20</sup> and of

Abraham/Keturah <sup>Genesis 25:1-2</sup> (the Midianites <sup>v.28,36</sup>). Intermarriages resulted in one larger group.

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## Genesis 37-39

The twenty shekels of silver paid for Joseph was the price for a slave of that day, but less than the thirty pieces of silver the Mosaic Law demanded to be paid when a “bull gores a slave” Exodus 21:32, offered to Zechariah symbolically for the Messiah (the “shepherd”) Zechariah 11:12-13 and paid to Judas by the “the chief priests and the elders” for his betrayal of Jesus Christ Matthew 26:14-15\*, 27:1-10.

**37:31-36** By dipping Joseph’s robe in goat’s blood Revelation 19:13\*, the brothers convinced Jacob a “ferocious animal...devoured” him. Jacob was heartbroken, grieving many days Genesis 50:10.

Earlier, Jacob had deceived his father, Isaac, using Esau’s clothes and a goatskin Genesis 27:18-27.

Here Israel’s sons deceived him with Joseph’s (their brother’s) coat and the blood of a goat.

The Hebrew word translated “grave” is *sheol* (šē’ôl: realm of the dead) (Greek: *hadēs* Revelation 20:14).

The text indicates Jacob was fully expecting to see his beloved son later in “the grave” 2 Samuel 12:23.

The chapter ended with the note that, after reaching Egypt, the Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar, who was a high-ranking Egyptian officer (“the captain of the guard” Genesis 39:1). Potiphar was possibly also the “captain of the guard” who later had Joseph in custody in his “house” Genesis 40:1-4.

### Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38)

The following unusual story is tucked into its proper chronological place, and is meant to illustrate: (1) Judah’s assumed rise to firstborn status, because Reuben, Simeon and Levi were out of favor for their incest and treachery and (2) a contrast in the immorality of Judah and the virtue of Joseph.

**38:1-11** Judah moved to Adullam, married a Canaanite and they had 3 sons: Er, Onan, Shelah. Judah found a wife for Er named Tamar, but since Er was “wicked”, God “put him to death”. After a custom, Judah told Onan to give Tamar an offspring Matthew 22:24, but Onan “spilled his semen on the ground” so a child could not be conceived. God also killed the disobedient Onan. Afraid Shelah “may die too”, Judah told Tamar to stay with him until Shelah grew up Ruth 1:13.

Judah’s initial mistakes were: (1) going to Adullam (NW of Hebron) and (2) marrying a Canaanite.

Judah invoked a custom that later became part of the Mosaic Law Deuteronomy 25:5-10, referred to as the levirate marriage (from the Latin *levir*, meaning “brother-in-law”)(*gā’al* = Kinsman-Redeemer Ruth 1-4).

## Genesis 37-39

**38:12-23** Time passed, and after his wife died Judah's grief subsided. He and his friend Hirah left to go to the sheep shearing and celebration in Timnah <sup>Judges 14:1-5</sup>. By this time Shelah was fully grown and Tamar realized she was not going to be given to him, so she went to Timnah, dressed like a prostitute <sup>Joshua 2:1</sup> and waited beside the road to Timnah for Judah to pass by. After Judah slept with her, Tamar convinced him to give her his most important identification objects (his seal & cord and his staff) as a pledge to pay a young goat for sleeping with her. Later, his friend took the goat back to pay Tamar and retrieve Judah's items, but she was not there, because Tamar had returned to their home, keeping Judah's seal, cord and staff.

The sheep shearing season (a time of celebration) occurred at the end of March in Palestine.

At that time, there was a Hittite inheritance practice of including the father-in-law in the levirate marriage, if there were no sons available. Tamar may have used this to justify her devious actions.

The custom of using three pieces of identification is documented in Ugaritic (Canaanite) literature.

Prosperous men in the ancient Near East endorsed contracts using a seal <sup>Esther 8:8, Ephesians 1:13</sup>.

**38:24-30** Months later, Judah was told that Tamar was pregnant resulting from prostitution. He quickly pronounced she should be burned to death, but when she produced Judah's items, he recognized them instantly and admitted her actions were better than his <sup>1 Samuel 24:15-17</sup>. Later, Tamar had twins <sup>Genesis 25:21-24</sup>: Zerah's hand came out first, but Perez was born first.

Both Jews <sup>Leviticus 21:9</sup> and pagans <sup>Judges 15:6</sup> of the time burned people for extreme immoral crimes.

The name Perez means "breaking out" or "pushing through" and Zerah can mean "scarlet".

Despite immorality/treachery, Judah, Tamar and Perez are all in the genealogy of Jesus <sup>Matthew 1:3</sup>.

The line of Judah/Perez to Jesus goes through Boaz & Ruth, then later to King David <sup>Ruth 4:18-22</sup>.

## Joseph and Potiphar's Wife (Genesis 39)

**39:1-6a** Returning to the story of Joseph, the fact that he was sold to Potiphar by the Midianite caravan in Egypt was repeated <sup>Genesis 37:36</sup>. Potiphar was the Egyptian captain of the guard. Despite his being a slave, Joseph had God's "favor" <sup>Genesis 6:8</sup> and "gave him success in everything he did". As a result, Potiphar "entrusted to [Joseph's] care all that he owned" <sup>v.22</sup>.

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## Genesis 37-39

Every time God is “with” someone in the Bible, they have success in their lives just like Joseph <sup>v.2</sup>.

Other examples: David <sup>1 Samuel 18:14</sup>, Hezekiah <sup>2 Kings 18:5-8</sup>, John the Baptist <sup>Luke 1:66</sup>, Jesus <sup>Acts 10:37-38</sup>.

The name Potiphar meant “the one who is placed on earth by Ra” (Ra being the Egyptian sun god).

**39:6b-18** Joseph was a muscular/handsome young man. Potiphar’s wife was attracted to him, and she tried to seduce him day after day, but Joseph consistently “refused”. One day when he was the only other person in the house, Potiphar’s wife “caught him by his cloak”, but Joseph “ran” <sup>2 Timothy 2:22</sup>, leaving the cloak behind. In her anger (embarrassment?), she used the cloak to accuse Joseph of an attack, first to the household servants and then to Potiphar.

In all the advances by Potiphar’s wife, Joseph made it clear he (1) would not violate the trust and respect his “master” (Potiphar) had placed in him and (2) would not “sin against God” <sup>Psalm 51:3-4</sup>.

In accusing Joseph of immorality, Potiphar’s wife <sup>v.17</sup> (1) showed her racism, by calling Joseph a “Hebrew slave” and (2) tried to blame Potiphar by saying the “slave you brought us” <sup>Genesis 16:1-5</sup>.

This was the second time a coat (cloak) of Joseph’s was used to justify a false report <sup>Genesis 37:31-35</sup>.

Running within the sanctification process <sup>1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Hebrews 12:1</sup> and running (or fleeing) away from sin <sup>v.12, 1 Corinthians 10:14, 2 Timothy 2:22</sup> both honor God, but running ahead of God is sinful <sup>2 John 1:9</sup>.

**39:19-23** After hearing his wife’s “story”, Potiphar became “burned with anger” <sup>Esther 1:10-12</sup>, arrested Joseph and had him thrown into the king’s prison. Nevertheless, the LORD again “granted him favor”, and this time “in the eyes of the prison warden”. As a result, Joseph was placed in a position of complete responsibility over all of the other prisoners and prison tasks

Potiphar must have suspected the evidence against Joseph was suspicious, because he put him in the king’s prison (likely the mildest of prisons) instead of having him killed, as he could have done.

Losing his trusted overseer, perhaps Potiphar’s anger was directed at his wife, as well as Joseph.

This chapter shows Joseph was a faithful servant of the LORD. Despite rising to positions of power, he did not yield to temptation, choosing instead to live an obedient life in God’s service <sup>John 6:38\*</sup>.

Joseph, Daniel and Jesus are the only three people in the Bible who never are associated with evil.

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