

Toledot of Jacob (1899 BC)

Genesis 37

The Toledot of Jacob

1 And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.

2 These *are* the generations of Jacob. Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.

3 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* colors.

4 And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

Joseph's Dream

5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told *it* his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.

6 And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed:

7 For, behold, we *were* binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.

8 And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.

9 And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.

10 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?

11 And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

Joseph's Brothers Conspire to Kill Him

12 And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.

13 And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed *the* flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here *am* I.

14 And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

15 And a certain man found him, and, behold, *he* was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou?

16 And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed *their* flocks.

17 And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan.

18 And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.

19 And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.

20 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.

21 And Reuben heard *it*, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.

22 And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit that *is* in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.

23 And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, *his* coat of *many* colors that *was* on him;

24 And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit *was* empty, *there* was no water in it.

Judah Sells Joseph Into Slavery

25 And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spices and balm and myrrh, going to carry *it* down to Egypt.

26 And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit *is* it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?

27 Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh. And his brethren were content.

28 Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty *pieces* of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Reuben Returns to Rescue Joseph

29 And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he rent his clothes.

30 And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child *is* not; and I, whither shall I go?

31 And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood;

32 And they sent the coat of *many* colors, and they brought *it* to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it *be*

thy son's coat or no.

33 And he knew it, and said, *It is* my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.

34 And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

35 And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.

36 And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, *and* captain of the guard.

Judah Marries a Canaanite (c. 1899 – c. 1897 BC)

Genesis 38:1–5

1 And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name *was* Hirah.

2 And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name *was* Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her.

3 And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er.

4 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan.

5 And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him.

Joseph Serves Potiphar (1899 – c. 1889 BC)

Genesis 39:1–20

God Blesses Joseph

1 And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither.

2 And the LORD *was* with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

3 And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

4 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.

5 And it came to pass from the time *that* he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD *was* upon all that he had in the house, and in the field.

6 And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat.

Potiphar's Wife Tries to Seduce Joseph

6b And Joseph *was* a goodly *person*, and well favored.

7 And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.

8 But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master knoweth not what *is* with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;

9 *There is* none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou *art* his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

10 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.

11 And it came to pass about this time, that *Joseph* went into the house to do his business; and *there was* none of the men of the house there within.

12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.

Joseph is Thrown into Prison

13 And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth,

14 That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice:

15 And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out.

16 And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.

17 And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me:

18 And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.

19 And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath *was* kindled.

20 And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners *were* bound: and he was there in the prison.

Chronological Notes

1) Joseph in Egypt.

A) The dates I use for Egyptian chronology will follow the “high” chronology as given by Hayes.¹ These dates are also used by Eugene Merrill in *Kingdom of Priests*. Andrew Steinmann does not specify which system he uses in *From Abraham to Paul*—sometimes the dates correspond to the “high” chronology; sometimes to the “low” (the same can be said of Jack Finegan in *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*).

(1) One of the important differences between the high, middle and low chronologies is seen in the reign of Thutmose III.² The high chronology sets the reign at 1504–1450 BC, the middle at 1490–1436 BC, and the low at 1479–1425 BC. The current trend among Egyptologists, especially from Germany, has been in the direction of the low chronology.

B) Joseph’s life “was contemporaneous with the magnificent Twelfth Dynasty of Middle Kingdom Egypt, a dynasty that commenced in 1991 and ended in 1786. Although the chronology of this period is notoriously difficult to reconstruct, the Cambridge Ancient History dates used here cannot be far off. By this system of reckoning, Joseph was sold into Egypt in the closing years of the reign of Ammenemes II (1929–1895). His was a peaceful reign characterized by an improved agricultural and economic life and by the fostering of close relationships with western Asia. Joseph would not be unwelcome on the basis of his ethnic background. His imprisonment would have occurred under Sesostri II (1897–1878), about a decade after his arrival in Egypt (i.e., in 1889); it was Sesostri whose dreams he interpreted and whom he served as a high government official. It is significant that Sesostri II was in power at the time the nomarch of Beni Hasan welcomed the Semitic chieftain Abisha to his city, an event celebrated in the famous murals of Beni Hasan. Sesostri also imported and employed great numbers of Asiatic slaves and mercenaries, a policy that shows anything but an anti-Semitic bias. Most striking of all perhaps were the massive land reclamation and flood control projects undertaken under the administration of this enlightened monarch. A principal feature of these was a canal dug to connect the Fayyum Basin with the Nile, a canal whose ruins to this very day bear the name Bahr Yusef (“River of Joseph”). Can it be that this name survives as a testimony to the contribution of Joseph to the public-works projects of Sesostri II?”³

2) The Story of Tamar and Judah.⁴

A) The expression “at that time” in Genesis 38:1 indicates that “immediately after the selling of Joseph, at that very time, Judah went down from his brothers and married the daughter of Shua.”⁵ The following verses relate the births of Judah’s three sons, “and we shall certainly not be far from the author’s true intent if we assign Er’s birth to the first year after the selling of Joseph, that of Onan to the second year, and that of Shelah to the third year, when Joseph was twenty years old.”⁶

B) Following v. 5, there is a space of time of around 15 or 16 years where Judah’s sons grow into manhood. For this reason, I have placed Genesis 38:1–5 in today’s reading (c. 1899 – c. 1897), and Genesis 38:6–30 in a later reading (c. 1880 – c. 1877).

C) “If we suppose that Er was eighteen when he married Tamar (it is probable that in the author’s time, too, it was customary ‘to marry at the age of eighteen’), from which it follows, according to our calculation, that Joseph was then thirty-six years old, in other words, that it was the sixth year of the years of plenty. Er died immediately after his marriage, in the very same year, and that Onan married his sister-in-law Tamar also in that year, when he was seventeen years old, and that he, too, died in the selfsame year, then the age of Shelah will accord well with the statement concerning him in v. 11.”⁷

D) “According to this verse Shelah, at the time of Onan’s death, was still so young that it was possible for his father to say, ‘till

¹ William C. Hayes, “Chronological Tables,” *Cambridge Ancient History* (3rd ed.; Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971) 818–819.

² For more detail, see William A. Ward, “The Present Status of Egyptian Chronology,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* No. 288 (Nov 1992): 53–66.

³ Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Second Edition, (Baker Publishing, 2008), 51.

⁴ For the most complete and satisfying examination of the chronological issues of Genesis 38, see Umberto Cassuto, “The Story of Tamar and Judah,” *Biblical & Oriental Studies, Volume 1: Bible*, (Magnes Press, 1975), 29–40.

⁵ Cassuto, 39.

⁶ Cassuto, 39.

⁷ Cassuto, 39–40.

Shelah my son grows up'; nevertheless, he was not of such a tender age as to exclude completely the possibility of his marrying, for it was only out of fear that he might also die like his brothers that Judah was unwilling to let him marry Tamar, and since, according to our calculation and conjectures, Shelah was then sixteen, it is clear that we have so far correctly interpreted the intent of the author."⁸

- E) "From this moment the rhythm of the narrative becomes less intense and broader; the situation remains unchanged for a long time. 'And the days multiplied' [this is the literal rendering of v. 12]: a complete year passed and Shelah reached the age of seventeen (at which age Onan married Tamar according to the law of Levirate), and she was not married to him; another year passed and Shelah was eighteen years old, that means, 'Shelah was grown up' and was a man old enough to marry, nevertheless 'she had not been given to him in marriage'. Then Tamar was convinced that Judah intended to put her off with mere words, and she took such steps as she could to perpetuate the name of the deceased in Israel. That year, according to our argument thus far, Joseph reached the age of thirty-eight, which coincided with the first year of the period of famine. If this be so, everything is easily explained. In the second year of famine Tamar gave birth to Perez and Zerah, and in the selfsame year (45:6 'for the famine has been in the land these two years') the children of Israel went down to Egypt, and with the rest of the family the two children, Perez and Zerah, who were a few months old, were also transported to Egypt."⁹
- F) One last issue remains to be resolved—what of Genesis 46:12 which seems to indicate that Perez's sons "Hezron and Hamul" came to Egypt with Jacob? There is simply not enough time in the narrative for Perez to have grown up and fathered two sons. Cassuto answers this question in detail (see pages 34–38) and I will give only the summation here: "We also understand why Hezron and Hamul are listed in Genesis 46:12 although at the time of the immigration into Egypt they had not yet been born; it was necessary to inform us at this stage that these two sons, who represented Er and Onan, were born to Perez, in order to justify the inclusion of the names of the deceased in the roll. The meaning of the passage in Genesis 46:12, which appeared, at the first blush, obscure and surprising, now becomes self-evident in all its details: 'The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez and Zerah,' that is to say, these five were born to Judah, before he went down to Egypt; 'but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan,' that is, although these two sons, Er and Onan, died in the land of Canaan, and consequently were not among those who emigrated to Egypt, nevertheless, 'there were the sons of Perez, Hezron and Hamul,' who represented Er and Onan, and consequently they retained their place among the sons of Judah."¹⁰

⁸ Cassuto, 40.

⁹ Cassuto, 40.

¹⁰ Cassuto, 38–39.