

**Toledot of Jacob (1899 BC)****Genesis 37****The Toledot of Jacob**

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

2 This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, his seventeen-year-old son, was taking care of the flocks with his brothers. Now he was a youngster working with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons because he was a son born to him late in life, and he made a special tunic for him.

4 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated Joseph and were not able to speak to him kindly.

**Joseph's Dream**

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him even more.

6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had:

7 There we were, binding sheaves of grain in the middle of the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose up and stood upright and your sheaves surrounded my sheaf and bowed down to it!"

8 Then his brothers asked him, "Do you really think you will rule over us or have dominion over us?" They hated him even more because of his dream and because of what he said.

9 Then he had another dream, and told it to his brothers. "Look," he said. "I had another dream. The sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

10 When he told his father and his brothers, his father rebuked him, saying, "What is this dream that you had? Will I, your mother, and your brothers really come and bow down to you?"

11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept in mind what Joseph said.

**Joseph's Brothers Conspire to Kill Him**

12 When his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem,

13 Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I will send you to them." "I'm ready," Joseph replied.

14 So Jacob said to him, "Go now and check on the welfare of your brothers and of the flocks, and bring me word." So Jacob sent him from the valley of Hebron.

15 When Joseph reached Shechem, a man found him wandering in the field, so the man asked him, "What are you looking for?"

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

17 The man said, "They left this area, for I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

18 Now Joseph's brothers saw him from a distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

19 They said to one another, "Here comes this master of dreams!

20 Come now, let's kill him, throw him into one of the cisterns, and then say that a wild animal ate him. Then we'll see how his dreams turn out!"

21 When Reuben heard this, he rescued Joseph from their hands, saying, "Let's not take his life!"

22 Reuben continued, "Don't shed blood! Throw him into this cistern that is here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him." (Reuben said this so he could rescue Joseph from them and take him back to his father.)

23 When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped him of his tunic, the special tunic that he wore.

24 Then they took him and threw him into the cistern. (Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.)

**Judah Sells Joseph Into Slavery**

25 When they sat down to eat their food, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were carrying spices, balm, and myrrh down to Egypt.

26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?"

27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let's not lay a hand on him, for after all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed.

28 So when the Midianite merchants passed by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. The Ishmaelites then took Joseph to Egypt.

**Reuben Returns to Rescue Joseph**

29 Later Reuben returned to the cistern to find that Joseph was not in it! He tore his clothes,

30 returned to his brothers, and said, "The boy isn't there! And I, where can I go?"

31 So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a young goat, and dipped the tunic in the blood.

32 Then they brought the special tunic to their father and said, "We found this. Determine now whether it is your son's tunic or

not.”

33 He recognized it and exclaimed, “It is my son’s tunic! A wild animal has eaten 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 stood by him to console him, but he refused to be consoled. “No,” he said, “I will go to the grave mourning my son.” So Joseph’s father wept for him.

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

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

Genesis 38:1–5

1 At that time Judah left his brothers and stayed with an Adullamite man named Hirah.

2 There Judah saw the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. Judah acquired her as a wife and had marital relations with her.

3 She became pregnant and had a son. Judah named him Er.

4 She became pregnant again and had another son, whom she named Onan.

5 Then she had yet another son, whom she named Shelah. She gave birth to him in Kezib.

### Joseph Serves Potiphar (1899 – c. 1889 BC)

Genesis 39:1–20

#### God Blesses Joseph

1 Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt. An Egyptian named Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh and the captain of the guard, purchased him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there.

2 The LORD was with Joseph. He was successful and lived in the household of his Egyptian master.

3 His master observed that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made everything he was doing successful.

4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal attendant. Potiphar appointed Joseph overseer of his household and put him in charge of everything he owned.

5 From the time Potiphar appointed him over his household and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s household for Joseph’s sake. The blessing of the LORD was on everything that he had, both in his house and in his fields.

6a So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph’s care; he gave no thought to anything except the food he ate.

#### Potiphar’s Wife Tries to Seduce Joseph

6b Now Joseph was well built and good-looking.

7 Soon after these things, his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Have sex with me.”

8 But he refused, saying to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not give any thought to his household with me here, and everything that he owns he has put into my care.

9 There is no one greater in this household than I am. He has withheld nothing from me except you because you are his wife. So how could I do such a great evil and sin against God?”

10 Even though she continued to speak to Joseph day after day, he did not respond to her invitation to have sex with her.

11 One day he went into the house to do his work when none of the household servants were there in the house.

12 She grabbed him by his outer garment, saying, “Have sex with me!” But he left his outer garment in her hand and ran outside.

#### Joseph is Thrown into Prison

13 When she saw that he had left his outer garment in her hand and had run outside,

14 she called for her household servants and said to them, “See, my husband brought in a Hebrew man to us to humiliate us. He tried to have sex with me, but I screamed loudly.

15 When he heard me raise my voice and scream, he left his outer garment beside me and ran outside.”

16 So she laid his outer garment beside her until his master came home.

17 This is what she said to him: “That Hebrew slave you brought to us tried to humiliate me,

18 but when I raised my voice and screamed, he left his outer garment and ran outside.”

19 When his master heard his wife say, “This is the way your slave treated me,” he became furious.

20 Joseph’s master took him and threw him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined. So 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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?”<sup>3</sup>

2) The Story of Tamar and Judah.<sup>4</sup>

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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup>

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.”<sup>7</sup>

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 Shelah my son grows up’; nevertheless, he was not of such a tender age as to exclude completely the possibility of his

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Cassuto, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Cassuto, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Cassuto, 39–40.

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.”<sup>8</sup>

- 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.”<sup>9</sup>
- 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.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cassuto, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Cassuto, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Cassuto, 38–39.