

Toledot of Jacob (1899 BC)

Genesis 37

The Toledot of Jacob

1 Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan.

2 These are *the records of* the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was *still* a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic.

4 His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

Joseph's Dream

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

6 He said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had;

7 for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."

8 Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

9 Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

10 He related *it* to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?"

11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying *in mind*.

Joseph's Brothers Conspire to Kill Him

12 Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem.

13 Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing *the flock* in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "I will go."

14 Then he said to him, "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

15 A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?"

16 He said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing *the flock*."

17 Then the man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard *them* say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

18 When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer!

20 Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!"

21 But Reuben heard *this* and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life."

22 Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him" — that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.

23 So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him;

24 and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

Judah Sells Joseph Into Slavery

25 Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring *them* down to Egypt.

26 Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood?

27 Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our *own* flesh.” And his brothers listened *to him*.

28 Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled *him* up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Reuben Returns to Rescue Joseph

29 Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments.

30 He returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is not *there*; as for me, where am I to go?”

31 So they took Joseph’s tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood;

32 and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, “We found this; please examine *it* to see whether it is your son’s tunic or not.”

33 Then he examined it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!”

34 So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.

35 Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, “Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son.” So his father wept for him.

36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh’s officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

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

Genesis 38:1–5

1 And it came about at that time, that Judah departed from his brothers and visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

2 Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; and he took her and went in to her.

3 So she conceived and bore a son and he named him Er.

4 Then she conceived again and bore a son and named him Onan.

5 She bore still another son and named him Shelah; and it was at Chezib that she bore him.

Joseph Serves Potiphar (1899 – c. 1889 BC)

Genesis 39:1–20

God Blesses Joseph

1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.

2 The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

3 Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.

4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge.

5 It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD’s blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.

6a So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him *there* he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Potiphar's Wife Tries to Seduce Joseph

6b Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

7 It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me *here*, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge.

9 There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"

10 As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her *or* be with her.

11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside.

12 She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

Joseph is Thrown into Prison

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

14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed.

15 When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside."

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

17 Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me;

18 and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

19 Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned.

20 So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.

Joseph in Prison (c. 1889–1886 BC)

Genesis 39:21–23

21 But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.

22 The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*.

23 The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

Joseph Interprets the Cupbearer's and Baker's Dreams (1888 BC)

Genesis 40

1 Then it came about after these things, the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt.

2 Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.

3 So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the *same* place where Joseph was imprisoned.

4 The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time.

5 Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his *own* dream *and* each dream with its *own* interpretation.

6 When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected.

7 He asked Pharaoh’s officials who were with him in confinement in his master’s house, “Why are your faces so sad today?”

8 Then they said to him, “We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *it* to me, please.”

9 So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “In my dream, behold, *there was* a vine in front of me;

10 and on the vine *were* three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, *and* its clusters produced ripe grapes.

11 Now Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand.”

12 Then Joseph said to him, “This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days;

13 within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh’s cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer.

14 Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house.

15 For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.”

16 When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, “I also *saw* in my dream, and behold, *there were* three baskets of white bread on my head;

17 and in the top basket *there were* some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.”

18 Then Joseph answered and said, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days;

19 within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you.”

20 Thus it came about on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.

21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand;

22 but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.

23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

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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

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

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

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.

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 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

⁷ Cassuto, 39–40.

⁸ Cassuto, 40.

⁹ Cassuto, 40.

¹⁰ Cassuto, 38–39.