

Toledot of Jacob (1899 BC)

Genesis 37

The Toledot of Jacob

1 And Jacob settled in the land of the sojourning of his father, in the land of Canaan.

2 These *are* the generations of Jacob. Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers. Now he *was* a helper with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, the wives of his father. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, for he *was* a son of his old age. And he made a robe with long sleeves for him.

4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and were not able to speak peaceably to him.

Joseph's Dream

5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers. And they hated him even more.

6 And he said to them, "Listen now to this dream that I dreamed.

7 Now behold, we were binding sheaves in the midst of the field and, behold, my sheaf stood up and it remained standing. Then behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."

8 Then his brothers said to him, "Will you really rule over us?" And they hated him even more on account of his dream and because of his words.

9 Then he dreamed yet another dream and told it to his brothers. And he said, "Behold, I dreamed a dream again, and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

10 And he told *it* to his father and to his brothers. And his father rebuked him and said to him, "What *is* this dream that you have dreamed? Will I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the ground to you?"

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

Joseph's Brothers Conspire to Kill Him

12 Now his brothers went to pasture the flock of their father in Shechem.

13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing in Shechem? Come, let me send you to them." And he said, "Here I *am*."

14 Then he said to him, "Go now, see if it goes well for your brothers and for the flock, then return word to me." And he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he arrived at Shechem.

15 And a man found him, and behold, he was wandering about in a field. And the man asked him, "What do you seek?"

16 And he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Tell me, please, where they are pasturing."

17 And the man said, "They have moved on from here, for I heard *them* saying, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" Then Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

18 And they saw him from a distance. And before he drew near to them, they conspired against him to kill him.

19 And each said to his brothers, "Look, this master of dreams is coming.

20 Now then, come, let us kill him and throw him in one of the pits. Then we will say a wild animal devoured him. Then we will see what his dreams become."

21 And Reuben heard *it* and delivered him from their hand and said, "We must not take his life."

22 And Reuben said to them, "You must not shed blood. Throw him into this pit that *is* in the desert, but do not lay a hand on him"—so that he might rescue him from their hand to return him to his father.

23 And it happened *that* as Joseph came to his brothers they stripped Joseph of his robe, the robe with long sleeves, that *was* upon him.

24 And they took him and threw him into the pit (the pit *was* empty; there was no water in it).

Judah Sells Joseph Into Slavery

25 Then they sat down to eat *some* food. And they lifted up their eyes and looked, and behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead. And their camels were carrying aromatic gum and balm and spices on the way to Egypt.

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

27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but our hand shall not be against him, for he *is* our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed.

28 Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and brought *him* up from the pit, and they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty *pieces of silver*. And they brought Joseph to Egypt.

Reuben Returns to Rescue Joseph

29 Then Reuben returned to the pit and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit. And he tore his clothes.

30 And he returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone! Now I, what can I do?"

31 Then they took the robe of Joseph and slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood.

32 Then they sent the robe with long sleeves and they brought *it* to their father and said, "We found this; please examine *it*. *Is it the*

robe of your son or not?”

33 And he recognized it and said, “The robe of my son! A wild animal has devoured him! Joseph *is* surely torn to pieces!”

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

35 And all his sons and daughters tried to console him, but he refused to be consoled. And he said, “No, I shall go down to my son, to Sheol, mourning.” And his father wept for him.

36 And the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, a court official of Pharaoh, a commander of the imperial guard.

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

Genesis 38:1–5

1 And it happened *that* at that time Judah went down from his brothers and pitched his tent near a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

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

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

4 And she conceived again and bore a son, and he called his name Onan.

5 And once again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. And he was in Chezib when she bore him.

Joseph Serves Potiphar (1899 – c. 1889 BC)

Genesis 39:1–20

God Blesses Joseph

1 Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, a court official of Pharaoh, commander of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the hand of the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

2 And Yahweh was with Joseph, and he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

3 And his master observed that Yahweh *was* with him, and everything that *was* in his hand to do Yahweh made successful.

4 And Joseph found favor in his eyes and he served him. Then he appointed him over his house and all that he owned he put into his hand.

5 And it happened *that* from the time he appointed him over his house and over all that he had, Yahweh blessed the house of the Egyptian on account of Joseph. And the blessing of Yahweh was upon all that he had in the house and in the field.

6a And he left all that he had in the hand of Joseph, and he did not worry about anything except the food that he ate.

Potiphar’s Wife Tries to Seduce Joseph

6b Now Joseph was well built and handsome.

7 And it happened *that* after these things his master’s wife cast her eyes on Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.”

8 But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not worry about what *is* in the house, and everything he owns he has put in my hand.

9 He has no greater *authority* in this house than me, and he has not withheld anything from me except you, since you *are* his wife. Now how could I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

10 And it happened *that* as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not heed her to lie beside her or to be with her.

11 But one particular day he came into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house were there in the house,

12 she seized him by his garment *and* said, “Lie with me!” And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and he went outside.

Joseph is Thrown into Prison

13 And it happened *that* when she saw that he left his garment in her hand and fled outside,

14 she called to the men of her house and said to them, “Look! He brought a Hebrew man to us to mock us! He came to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.

15 And when he heard *me*, that I raised my voice and called out, he left his garment beside me and fled, and he went outside.”

16 Then she put his garment beside her until his master came to his house.

17 Then she spoke to him according to these words, saying, “The Hebrew slave that you brought to us came to me to make fun of me.

18 And it happened *that* as I raised my voice and called out, he left his garment beside me and fled outside.”

19 And when his master heard the words of his wife that she spoke to him, “This is what your servant did to me,” he became very angry.

20 And Joseph’s master took him and put him into prison, the place that the king’s prisoners were confined. And he was there in 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.