

THE OLD TESTAMENT



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THE NEW TESTAMENT



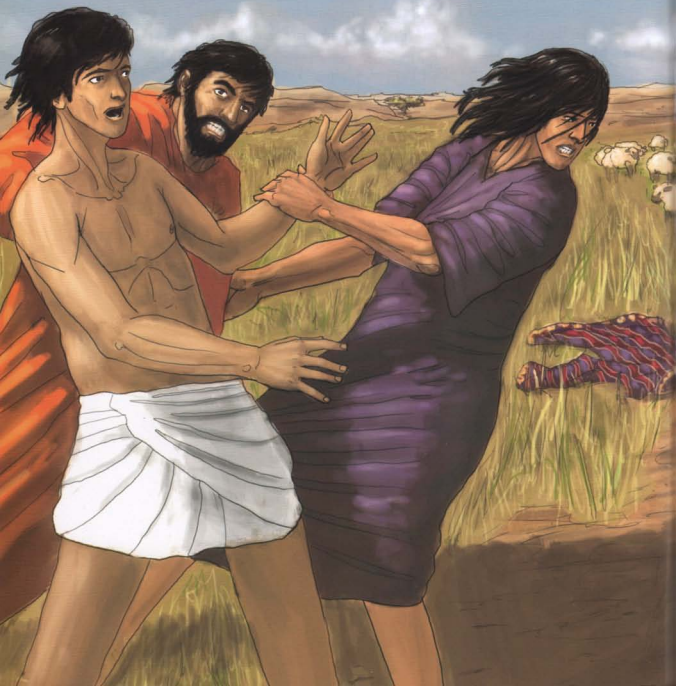
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JOSEPH AND THE DREAMS

(Genesis 37, 39–41)



JACOB lived with his family in Canaan. When his son Joseph was seventeen years old, he was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.

Jacob loved Joseph more than his brothers because he was born to him in his old age. He made Joseph a beautiful robe with long sleeves. When the brothers saw that Jacob favored Joseph, they hated him and could not speak to him with kindness.



Joseph had a dream. "Please listen to my dream," he said to his brothers. "We were binding sheaves of grain, when my sheaf stood up and your sheaves bowed down to my sheaf."

"Do you think that you will rule over us?" they asked, hating him even more.

Joseph had another dream. "Listen to my dream. This time the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

Now even Jacob said, "Do you think that your mother and I and your brothers will bow down to you?" The brothers became more jealous, but his father remembered what he had said.

Some time later, Jacob sent Joseph to his brothers in the field. When they saw him from a distance, they plotted to kill him. "Here comes that dreamer. Let's kill him and throw him in a cistern. We can say that a wild animal has devoured him. Then we will see what will become of his dreams," they said.

Reuben said, "Don't kill him. Just throw him in the pit. Don't shed his blood." Reuben was going to rescue him later and bring him back to his father.

When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped off the beautiful robe with long sleeves and threw him in an empty cistern. As they were eating their meal, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, taking spices and myrrh down to Egypt.

Judah said, "What will we gain if we kill our brother? Let's sell him to these Ishmaelites and not hurt him. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh."

The brothers agreed. They raised him up from the pit and for twenty pieces of silver sold him to the traders, who took him to Egypt. Then the brothers took his beautiful robe and tore it to shreds, dipping it in the blood of a goat they had slaughtered. They took the robe to Jacob. "We found this. Look carefully. Doesn't it look like your son's robe?" they asked.

"It is my son's robe! A ferocious animal must have devoured him! Joseph is, without a doubt, torn to pieces." Jacob cried in anguish. He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned many days. He refused to be comforted by his sons or daughters.

When the merchants arrived in Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guard for Pharaoh. The Lord was with Joseph and blessed him in all that he did. Joseph gained great respect in the eyes of Potiphar, who put him in charge of all his other servants. The Lord also blessed Potiphar for Joseph's sake, making his fields and household prosper. With Joseph in charge, Potiphar did not need to think about anything but his own food and drink.

Joseph was very handsome. Potiphar's wife tried to make Joseph fall in love with her, but he resisted. Finally she told lies about Joseph. She said, "Look, that Hebrew slave tried to attack me."

Potiphar had Joseph locked in the prison of Pharaoh, the king. Even in prison, the Lord was with Joseph. The warden put Joseph in charge of the other prisoners. The warden didn't worry about anything, because Joseph was in charge. The Lord gave success to Joseph in all that he did.

When Pharaoh's butler and baker were put in prison, Joseph was appointed to take care of them. One night, the butler and the baker each had a strange dream that troubled them. Joseph asked why they were so upset. "We have both had dreams and there is no one who can explain them to us," they said.

"Only God can tell the meaning of dreams," Joseph said. "Please tell me what you dreamed."

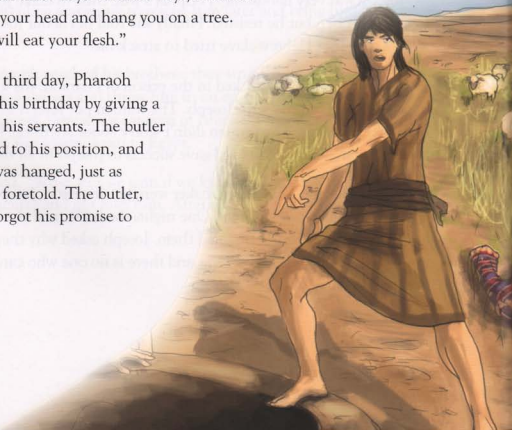
The chief butler told his dream first. "I saw a vine in front of me. On the vine were three branches. Suddenly, as it was budding, the blossoms turned into grapes. The cup of Pharaoh was in my hand. I squeezed the grapes into his cup and put it in his hand."

Joseph said, "The three branches mean three days. In three days you will be returned to Pharaoh's palace to serve him again. You will put his cup in his hand. When all is well with you, remember me. I was taken from the land of the Hebrews and have done nothing to deserve being in this dungeon."

The baker saw that the butler had a good interpretation. He said, "I, too, had a dream. On my head I carried three baskets of bread, baked goods for Pharaoh himself, but birds came and ate out of the top basket."

"This is what it means," said Joseph. "The three baskets mean three days. In three days, Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. The birds will eat your flesh."

On the third day, Pharaoh celebrated his birthday by giving a feast for all his servants. The butler was restored to his position, and the baker was hanged, just as Joseph had foretold. The butler, however, forgot his promise to Joseph.



When two whole years had passed, Pharaoh himself had a dream. He was standing by the Nile River as seven fat, beautiful cows came up out of the river to graze on the grass. Then out of the river came seven skinny, ugly cows. Next, the skinny, ugly cows completely ate up the beautiful, fat cows.

Pharaoh woke up. After he fell asleep again, he had another dream. This time, there were seven heads of grain, healthy and full, that sprouted on a stalk. Then there appeared seven more heads of grain on the stalk, but these were thin and scorched by the east wind. Suddenly the seven thin, scorched heads ate up the seven healthy, full heads of grain. Then Pharaoh awoke.



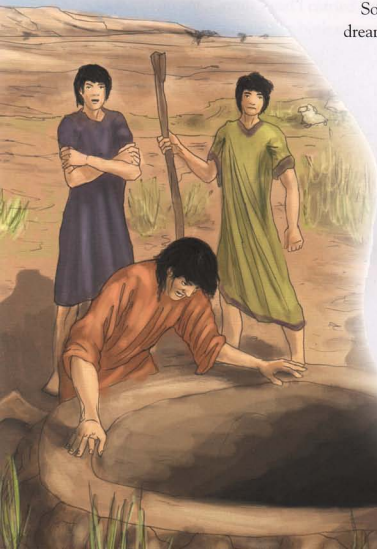
In the morning, Pharaoh was troubled. He called for all his magicians and wise men, but no one could interpret his dreams. The chief butler spoke up. "When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, the chief butler and chief baker, we were put in the dungeon. While we were there, we both had dreams. A young Hebrew slave told us the meaning of our dreams and it came to be just as he said: I was restored to my position and the chief baker was hanged."

Pharaoh called for Joseph. Joseph shaved and changed his clothing to be brought before him. "I have had a dream that no one can interpret, but I have heard that you can tell me what it means," said Pharaoh.

"I cannot tell you. God will give you the answer," explained Joseph.

So Pharaoh told Joseph about his dreams.

Joseph said, "The dreams have the same meaning. God has shown Pharaoh what he is planning to do. The seven good cows are seven years and the seven good heads of grain are seven years. Both have the same meaning. The seven thin cows and seven withered heads of grain are seven years of famine."



Joseph continued: "As I said, God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will be seven years of great abundance in Egypt. Seven years of famine will follow them. The abundance of the seven years will be forgotten because the famine will be so great. God gave two dreams to Pharaoh because he will surely do it and it will happen soon. Pharaoh should find a wise, discerning man who can help him store food, so the country will not be ruined by the famine."

Pharaoh liked Joseph's plan and said, "Since God has made this known to you, you shall be in charge of my palace and all people must obey your orders." He took off his ring and put a royal robe on Joseph. In all Egypt, only Pharaoh was greater than Joseph.

Joseph was thirty years old when he began to serve Pharaoh. During the seven years of abundance, Joseph collected and stored much grain. He married Asenath, daughter of the priest of On. They had two sons. He named the first Manasseh, which means "making to forget," and said, "God has helped me forget all my trouble." The second son he named Ephraim, which means "fruitful." "God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering," he said.

After the seven years of abundance, the years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. When the people of Egypt cried to Pharaoh for food, he sent them to Joseph. Joseph opened the storehouses to feed the Egyptians and those who came from other countries. The whole world came to Egypt to buy food.

JOURNEY TO EGYPT



(Genesis 42–50)

WHEN Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you keep looking at each other? I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go and buy some for us so that we may live and not die.”

Jacob sent ten of his sons from Canaan to Egypt to buy grain. Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, because he was afraid he would come to harm. When the brothers arrived, they bowed with their faces to the ground before Joseph. He recognized them at once. “Where do you come from?” he asked harshly.

“We have come from Canaan to buy food,” they replied. They did not recognize Joseph.

Joseph remembered the dreams he had about them. “You are spies coming to see how the land is unprotected!” he said.

“No,” they answered. “We are your servants, twelve sons of the same man who lives in Canaan. Our youngest brother is yet with our father and one brother is no more.”

“You are spies. I will test to see if you are telling the truth. As Pharaoh lives, you will not leave here until your youngest brother comes to Egypt. Send one brother to get him. The rest of you must stay in prison

until he is brought here.”
He kept them in custody
for three days.

On the third day, he had
his brothers released. Joseph
said, “I fear God. Do this and you
will live. If you are honest men, one
of you will remain here while the rest
return to your country with food for your
starving families. You must bring to me your
youngest brother to prove you are telling the truth;
otherwise, you will all die.”

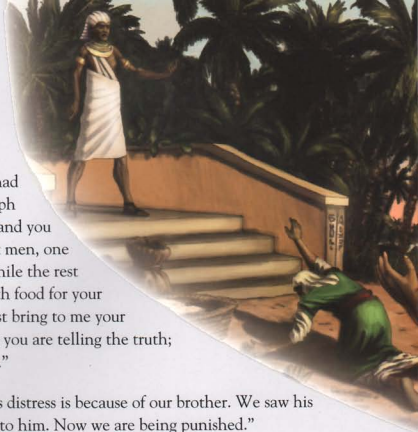
They said, “Surely this distress is because of our brother. We saw his
grief but would not listen to him. Now we are being punished.”

Joseph could understand them, but spoke using an interpreter, so they
did not know him. He had Simeon bound before them and taken away.

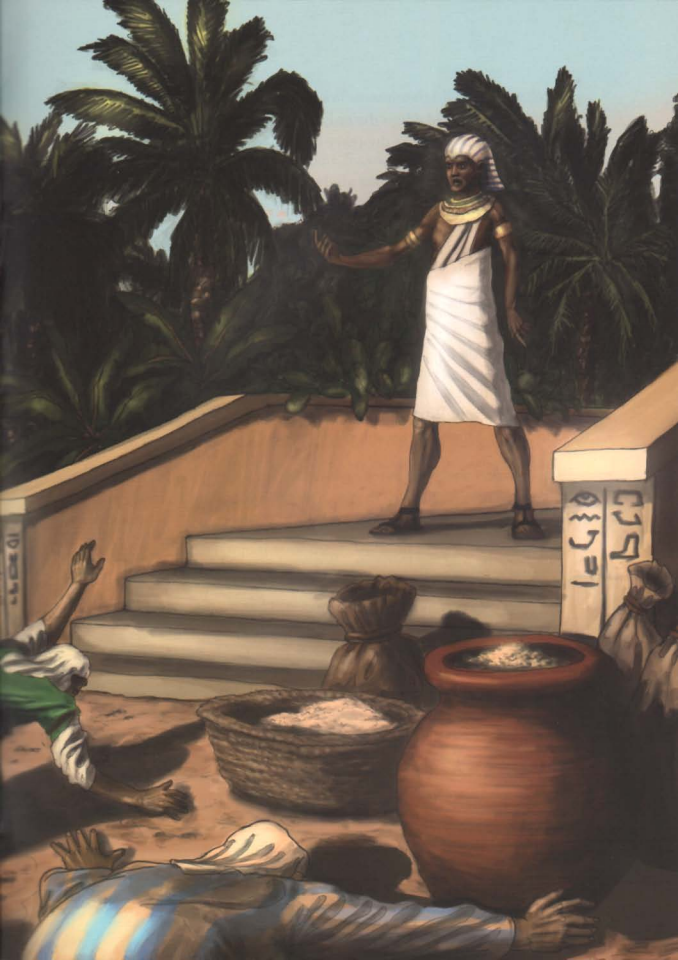
Joseph gave orders for their bags to be filled with grain. He had
their payment in silver coins put back into their sacks secretly. With
provisions for the way, they loaded their donkeys and left. When they
stopped for the night, one brother saw the silver in the mouth of his sack.
They asked each other, trembling, “What has God done to us?” As they
emptied their sacks at home, they found the money had been put back
into each of their sacks.

Jacob was deeply saddened as they told him of the trip to Egypt.
“Joseph is no more; Simeon is no more. Now you want to take Benjamin
from me also. Everything is against me.”

Reuben said, “You may kill my two sons if we do not return. Trust
me. I will bring him back.”







Jacob refused to listen to them. "My son will not go down there with you. His brother is dead. He is the only one left. If harm comes to him, my gray hair will go down to the grave in grief."

The famine continued. When all the grain had been eaten, Jacob said, "Go, buy more food."

Judah reminded his father, "The man said that we could not buy more food unless we bring our brother."

Their father told them, "Take some of our best products as a gift. Take double the amount of silver. Perhaps it was a mistake that it was found in your sacks."

They took their gifts, twice as much silver, and their brother Benjamin to Joseph. When he saw Benjamin, he told his steward, "Take these men to my house. They will dine with me."

The brothers were frightened as they entered Joseph's house. "They know that we haven't paid for the grain we took last time. They will attack us and make us slaves," they reasoned.

The brothers told the manager, "We want you to know that when we returned home we found our money in our sacks after we bought grain the last time. We don't know how it happened but we have brought twice the money to repay you."

"Do not worry. The God of your father has given the money back to you. We have received what is ours," the manager explained. He brought Simeon out to them, gave them water to wash their feet, and feed for their donkeys. The brothers quickly prepared the presents for Joseph.

The brothers bowed down as they gave their gifts to Joseph. "How is your old father? Is he still living?" Joseph asked.

"Your servant, our father, is still alive and well," they replied, bowing low.

Joseph looked and saw Benjamin, his own mother's son. "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" Turning to Benjamin, he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." Joseph, deeply moved by the sight of his youngest brother, quickly found an inner room where he could weep without being seen. Then he washed his face, controlled himself, and rejoined them. "Serve the food," he ordered.

When it was time for them to depart, Joseph gave orders for their sacks to be filled as full as possible and for the money to be put back into their sacks. He ordered that his silver cup was to be placed in Benjamin's sack.

The brothers left in the morning. Then Joseph sent his steward after them to accuse them of stealing the silver cup. "We would never do such a thing. We returned the silver we found in our sacks last time. If anyone of us has the cup, he must die. The rest of us will be your slaves," the brothers said.

"Only the one who has the cup will be a slave," the manager said. He searched each sack, from that of the oldest brother to the youngest. In Benjamin's sack the silver cup was found. They all tore their clothing in grief. They loaded their camels and returned to the city.

Joseph's brothers threw themselves on the ground before him. Joseph said, "Don't you know that I see the unknown? What have you done?"

The brothers pleaded, "How can we prove that we are innocent? God has shown that we are guilty. We will all be your slaves, not just the one who was found to have the cup."

Joseph said, "Only the one who had the cup must remain. The rest of you go back to your father in peace."

Reuben said, "Please listen and do not be angry. You asked about our father and discovered that we had a brother. We told you that he cannot leave his father, but you said that we could not return unless we brought him. Our father said, 'My wife bore me two sons. One of my sons went away from me and was surely torn to pieces. If you take this one away from me, it will bring my gray head down to the grave.' My father loves the boy so much that if he does not return, my father will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. I guaranteed the boy's safety. Please let me remain here in place of the boy. I cannot bear the misery that will come to my father."

Joseph was unable to control himself. He commanded all his servants to leave his presence. All of his household and Pharaoh's servants heard him weep. He wept loudly, saying, "I am Joseph. Is my father still living?" The brothers were terrified. "Come near," he said. "I am Joseph, the brother that you sold into slavery. Do not be distressed. God sent me here ahead of you to keep you and your descendants alive by a great deliverance. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and ruler of this whole land. Hurry back to our father. Tell him to come to Egypt. You shall live near me in Goshen, your children and grandchildren, your livestock and all that you have." He wept, kissing Benjamin. He embraced and kissed all his brothers, weeping.

Jacob could not believe the news about Joseph when they told him, "Joseph is still alive. He rules all Egypt." Finally, when he saw the wagons from Egypt, his soul was revived. He believed. So Israel brought all he had.

At Beersheba, he offered sacrifices, as had Abraham and Isaac. God spoke to Israel in a vision, "Jacob, Jacob."

"Here I am, Lord," answered Jacob.

"I am the God of your fathers. Do not be afraid. I will make you a great nation while you are in Egypt. I will go to Egypt with you and I will bring you back again. Your own son, Joseph, will close your eyes."

When they arrived in Goshen, Joseph threw his arms around his father's neck. They wept a long time. Israel said, "Now I am ready to die, because I have seen that you are alive." Israel and his entire household settled in Goshen, the best part of the land.

Israel blessed Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Then he called to his sons and blessed each of them as well. At the age of 147 years, Jacob died.

Now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers grew afraid that he would take revenge upon them. But he reassured them, saying, "Do not be afraid. I will provide for you."

Joseph lived to be 110 years old. He said to his brothers and their families, "God will surely come to help you. He will take you out of this land to the land that he promised to our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

