

Joseph Dreams of Greatness

Genesis 37:3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. 1

It marked the owner as the one whom the father intended to be the future leader of the household, an honor normally given to the firstborn son.1

Genesis 37:4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

Genesis 37:5 Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more.

Genesis 37:6 So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: :7 There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf."

Genesis 37:8 And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Genesis 37:9 Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me."

Genesis 37:10 So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?"

Genesis 37:11 And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind. 1

Unlike the brothers, who immediately rejected any meaning to Joseph's words yet still allowed the dream to sorely irritate them into greater resentment of their brother (v. 19), the father, notwithstanding his public admonishment of Joseph, continued to ponder the meaning of the dreams.1

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

Genesis 37:12 Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. :13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." So he said to him, "Here I am."

Genesis 37:14 Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.

Genesis 37:15 Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?" :16 So he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks." :17 And the man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

Genesis 37:18 Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him.

Genesis 37:19 Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! :20 Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"

Genesis 37:21 But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him."

Genesis 37:22 And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

Genesis 37:23 So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him.

Genesis 37:24 Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Genesis 37:25 And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. 1

Also known as Midianites. The descendants of Ishmael and of Abraham through Keturah and Midian (25:1, 2) were sufficiently intermarried or were such inveterate travelers and traders, that they were viewed as synonymous groups. These were coming W from Gilead. **Gilead.1**

Genesis 37:26 So Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is there if we kill 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 brothers listened. 1

This criminal behavior would later be prohibited by the Mosaic legislation. Exodus 21:16 “He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death. Deuteronomy 24:7 “If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil from among you. 1

Genesis 37:28 Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt. 1

This was the average price of a slave at that time in the second millennium b.c. Although most slaves were part of the booty of military conquest, private and commercial slave-trading was also common. Joseph was sold into slavery ca. 1897 b.c. 1

Genesis 37:29 Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. 1

Although he was absent at the time of the sale, he would be held responsible for the treachery, and so joined in the cover-up (vv. 30–35). His grief manifested how much he had actually wanted to rescue Joseph (see 42:22).

Genesis 37:30 And he returned to his brothers and said, “The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?”

Genesis 37:31 So they took Joseph’s tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. 1

Genesis 37:32 Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, “We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son’s tunic or not?”

Genesis 37:33 And he recognized it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.”

Genesis 37:34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. 1

Genesis 37:35 And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, “For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.” Thus his father wept for him. 1

This is the first OT use of this term for the abode of the dead (in 35:20 the word “grave” is used to refer to an earthly burial plot). It is a general Hebrew term meaning the place of the dead (used 65 times in the OT), referring to either the body in its decaying form or the soul in its conscious afterlife.

Genesis 37:36 Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard. 1

He was a prominent court official and high-ranking officer in Egypt, perhaps captain of the royal bodyguard (cf. 40:3, 4). His name, a most unusual grammatical form for that period, either meant “the one whom the god Ra has given” or “the one who is placed on earth by Ra,” making it a descriptive epithet more than a personal name.

[Judah and Tamar](#)

Genesis 38:1 It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. :2 And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and went in to her. :3 So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. :4 She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. :5 And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him. :6 Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. :7 But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord killed him. 1

Judah’s first mistake was in marrying a Canaanite woman, the **daughter of ... Shua**. She bore him three sons—**Er, Onan, and Shelah**. **Er** married a Canaanite woman named **Tamar**, but was slain by **the Lord** for some unspecified wickedness. 1

Genesis 38:8 And Judah said to Onan, “Go in to your brother’s wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother.” :9 But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother’s wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. :10 And the thing which he did displeased the Lord; therefore He killed him also. :11 Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, “Remain a widow in your father’s house till my son Shelah is grown.” For he said, “Lest he also die like his brothers.” And Tamar went and dwelt in her father’s house. 2

It was the custom at that time for a brother or other near relative to marry the widow and raise children for the one who had died. **Onan** refused to do this because the first child born as a result would be the legal **heir** of Er, not his own legal child. His sin was not so much sexual as it was selfish.