

## **JOSEPH Old testament**

Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel, was one of the great heroes of the Old Testament. Despite the jealousy of his brothers and some very bad luck, Joseph triumphed. He had a high opinion of himself and did not know when to keep his mouth shut, but he also had superlative administrative skills, quick intelligence and the ability to impress the right people. In other words, a man who was bound to succeed.

### **JOSEPH AS A BOY**

Joseph was the elder son of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel. He seems to have been Jacob's favorite son too. From an early age he showed promise. He was clever, sensible, trustworthy. But he was also spoiled and cosseted, so that his brothers became furiously jealous of the favor he was shown. One example of this cossetting was the long-sleeved coat his father gave Joseph - a coat designed so that the wearer could not do any heavy work. This meant his brothers had to carry Joseph's share of the work as well as their own, and they could not have been happy about this. He also told tales about them to their father, and got them into trouble.

Joseph had dreams, and he was always interested in the meaning of these dreams. Twice he dreamt that he dominated his whole family, including his father and mother. Unfortunately he did not keep quiet about these dreams, but shared them with his brothers, who became increasingly irritated by what they saw as his conceit and arrogance.

One day his father Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were in the fields shepherding their flocks. The brothers saw him coming in the distance, and before he had reached them they had determined to kill him. Reuben, the eldest, tried to head them off. He was successful insofar as they did not kill Joseph, but instead threw him down into an empty water cistern.

Then the brothers sat down to eat, but as they ate they saw a caravan of camels approaching. Judah, another of the brothers, suggested they sell Joseph to these traders, instead of killing him - he was, after all, their brother.

This was what they did. They sold their young brother for twenty pieces of silver, the going rate for a male slave. To cover up what they had done, they killed a goat and smeared its blood on Joseph's coat. Then they took it to Jacob and told him Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. Jacob was distraught, and could not be comforted at the loss of his beloved son.

### **JOSEPH AS A SLAVE IN EGYPT**

The traders had taken Joseph to Egypt, where they sold him to a wealthy official called Potiphar. It was a good buy, Potiphar found. Joseph had great talent as an administrator, and soon rose to a position of importance in the household. He was so good at what he did that quite soon Potiphar was able to leave the running of his estates to Joseph, and divert himself with other pleasures - notably, food.

Joseph was young, clever and handsome. Potiphar had a wife who was rich, bored and lonely. Before long, the inevitable happened. She fell violently in love with Joseph, and could think of nothing else but him - the Egyptians had a frank and uninhibited interest in sexual love, as their poetry shows.

'Lie with me', she said.

Joseph was in a dilemma: he could not betray his master, but he could not avoid his master's wife.

One day she cornered him and pulled the loose cloak off his body, leaving him naked. He ran away, but she was furious at the rebuff - a woman scorned. So she shouted 'Rape!' and told the other members of the household that Joseph had attacked her. She pointed to the cloak as proof.

When her husband came home, she told him the same story. He was enraged, and had Joseph put in prison.

But even in prison Joseph prospered. The jailer saw how capable Joseph was, and entrusted the prisoners to him.

### **JOSEPH AS A PRISONER**

Now Joseph administered the prison, and while doing so he made friends with some of the prisoners. Among them were two important officials, Pharaoh's cup-bearer and his baker. They had each had a strange dream, and Joseph was able to successfully interpret their dreams, telling the men what was about to happen to them. One of them was freed and restored to his former position. The other was sentenced to death and executed. Joseph had been right about the future of each man.

Two years later Pharaoh himself had a dream, and asked his wisest men to interpret it. They could not. Then the cupbearer remembered Joseph, and told Pharaoh about this Hebrew man who could interpret dreams. Pharaoh sent for Joseph and told Joseph the dream he had had. Joseph immediately knew what it meant, and told Pharaoh. It was a warning of a famine that was soon to happen. But there would be seven good years first, giving Pharaoh time to prepare stores of food for the seven bad harvests that would follow.

Pharaoh was impressed by Joseph's interpretation, and believed it. He decided to organize food storage on a grand scale, and looked round for someone who could supervise this immense task. His eye fell on Joseph, who was given the task. They would collect all the surplus from the good years and keep it in reserve against the seven years of famine that were to follow.

Pharaoh took off his signet ring and gave it to Joseph. Now only Pharaoh was more powerful than Joseph.

### **JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS REUNITED**

The seven good years followed, and then came the seven years of famine, just as Joseph had predicted. It hit not only Egypt, but Israel as well. Joseph's family were affected as much as the Egyptian were, and Jacob sent the ten older brothers down into Egypt to see if they could find grain there.

Unknown to them, Joseph was now in charge of selling grain, and when he saw them he recognized them immediately. They did not recognize him.

He was not friendly to them, accusing them of being spies come to reconnoiter the land. They groveled, insisting on their innocence. He repeated the accusations, and put them in prison. Only if they brought the youngest brother, who had been left at home with Jacob, would he believe them. He harried and tormented them before he finally revealed his identity - and then he wept so loudly that Pharaoh was informed of what was happening.

The reconciliation was complete. They sent for their father Jacob, who hardly believe his son Joseph was still alive. Jacob came to Egypt, reunited with the son he had loved so much, and met Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manasseh.

It was a wonderful moment. He spoke to all his children, told them he wished to be buried in the field that Abraham had bought as a burial site for his descendents. Then he 'drew up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people'. Joseph was overcome with grief. He had had so little time with his father. Then he had his father's body embalmed, and he and a great company of relatives and servants accompanied the body on the journey.

When Jacob had been buried, Joseph and his brothers all moved back to Egypt, where they settled, and where eventually Joseph died.