

Saving Joseph

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Lesson 107

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Selling and Saving Joseph

- The story of selling and saving Joseph is an interleaved story
 - J and E versions are merged
 - P has very little to say about Joseph
 - Both J and E depict Joseph as an interpreter of dreams, and P abhors the idea of dreams, since they represent a direct communication from God to people, instead of going through a legitimate (Aaronid!) priest, so P has difficulty in talking about Joseph

Elements of the J Story

- Joseph describes two dreams foretelling his superiority over his brothers and father
 - Their sheaves bow down to his sheaf
 - Sun, moon, and 11 stars bow down to him
- The brothers throw him into a pit, and deceive their father by putting goat's blood on Joseph's *coat of many colors*
- Judah proposes to sell him to the Ishmaelites for *20 pieces of silver*
 - 20 portions of silver are given by Joseph when he is vizier of Egypt to his brothers before they know who he is
 - Nine brothers come the first time (without Benjamin and the one who was held hostage) in Genesis 42:28
 - All 11 come the second time in Genesis 44:1
 - Friedman lists a number of J stories where a deceiver's punishment is tied to elements of his deception

Elements of the E Story

- Joseph is despised by his brothers because their father loves him more than they
 - E has no dreams of Joseph here, but has the baker and butler dreams later, when Joseph is in prison
- Joseph seeks his brothers, first at Shechem, then at Dothan, finally finding them
- Reuben proposes to put him in a pit so he can later, secretly, save him
- Midianites (a.k.a. Medanites) take him from the pit and sell him to Potiphar in Egypt

Comparison

- Only J has the dreams in this story and the coat of many colors
- In J, Joseph is saved by Judah
- In E, Joseph is saved by Reuben

The J and E Versions

- J's version
 - Genesis 37: 2b, 3b, 5-11, 19-20, 23, 25b-27, 28b, 31-35
- E's version
 - Genesis 37: 3a, 4, 12-18, 21-22, 24-25a, 28a, 29-30, 36

J: Genesis 37: 2b, 3b, 5-11

Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report and he made him a coat of *many* colours.

5And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told *it* his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. 6And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: 7For, behold, we *were* binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. 8And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. 9And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. 10And he told *it* to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What *is* this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? 11And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying

J: Genesis 37: 19-20, 23, 25b-27, 28b, 31-35

And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. 20Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.

And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, *his* coat of *many* colors that *was* on him; and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry *it* down to Egypt. 26And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit *is it* if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? 27Come, 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 brethren were content and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty *pieces* of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

31And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; 32And they sent the coat of *many* colors, and they brought *it* to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it *be* thy son's coat or no. 33And he knew it, and said, *It is* my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. 34And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. 35And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.

E: Genesis 37: 3a, 4, 12-18, 21-22

3Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age. 4And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

12And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. 13And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed *the flock* in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here *am I*. 14And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. A 15And a certain man found him, and, behold, *he was* wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? 16And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed *their flocks*. 17And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. 18And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.

21And Reuben heard *it*, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. 22And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit that *is* in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.

E: Genesis 37: 24-25a, 28a, 29-30, 36

24And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit *was* empty, *there was* no water in it. 25And they sat down to eat bread.

28Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit,

29When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes 30and returned to his brothers and said, “The boy **his** gone, and I, where shall I go?”

36Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Contradiction

- In J, Joseph is taken by the Ishmaelites, but in E, he is taken by the Midianites
 - The Redactor tries (but is not entirely successful) to make it appear that the Midianites sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites by using the ambiguous “they” in verse 28, but “they” really refers to Joseph’s brothers
 - In verse 36, it says that the Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar (not the Ishmaelites)
 - Genesis 39:1, which is J, says the Ishmaelites sold Joseph to Potiphar, which contradicts verse 36 above
- So each story is internally consistent, but contradicts the other

J: Payback for Deception

- J has several stories in which a character who acts badly later becomes the victim of similar iniquity
 - Jacob deceives his father Issac using a cloak and meat and hide from a goat to steal his brother Esau's blessing
 - Now Jacob is the victim: his own sons deceive him regarding his favorite son (Joseph) by using a coat dipped in the blood of a goat
 - In Genesis 38, Tamar, daughter-in-law to Judah, gets her payback against him
 - And later still, Joseph gets payback against his brothers for selling him into slavery
- The exception that proves the rule is that E has a story in which Esau warmly greets his brother Jacob when Jacob returns from serving Laban, but J has no such story!

J: Genesis 38: Tamar

And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her. And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him. And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him. And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled *it* on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also. Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren *did*. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah's wife died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep. And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which *is* by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife. When Judah saw her, he thought her *to be* an harlot; because she had covered her face. And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she was his daughter in law.) And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me? And he said, I will send *thee* a kid from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give *me* a pledge, till thou send *it*?

J: Genesis 38: Tamar

And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that *is* in thine hand. And he gave *it* her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him. And she arose, and went away, and laid by her vail from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood. And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive *his* pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not. Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where *is* the harlot, that *was* openly by the way side? And they said, There was no harlot in this *place*. And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, *that* there was no harlot in this *place*. And Judah said, Let her take *it* to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her. And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she *is* with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt. When she *was* brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these *are*, *am* I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose *are* these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff. And Judah acknowledged *them*, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.

Joseph

- Genesis 39 (entire chapter is J)
 - Potiphar buys Joseph from the Ishmaelites (consistent with J's Gen 37:28, but inconsistent with E's Gen 37:36)
 - Joseph does very well managing Potiphar's house
 - Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph, but he refuses
 - She then turns on him and claims he tried to force himself on her, so Joseph is imprisoned
 - Joseph does well in prison, pleasing the warden
- Gen 40 and 41 – all E except one verse - Gen 41:46 (P &R)
 - Joseph interprets dreams in prison, then Pharaoh's dreams
 - Some J text has been discarded in favor of keeping E's version of the story

J: Genesis 39

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptians house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Josephs charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his masters wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his masters wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

Genesis 39

But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house.” Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.”

As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. And Josephs master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Josephs charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

Joseph

- Gen 40-41 are by E except one verse (42:46 is by P and R)
- Gen 40:
 - The king's steward and baker are thrown into prison, and both are put under Joseph's watch; each has a bad dream on the same night and Joseph asks to hear their dreams; first the steward tells his dream of a vine with three branches which bloomed and produced grapes, which the steward then pressed into wine in the king's cup, and he gave it to the king; Joseph says the three branches refer to three days, and then the steward will be restored to his former position; Joseph tells the steward to mention him (Joseph) to the king when this happens, and tell him that that he is falsely imprisoned
 - The baker is then anxious to tell his dream and he does; in his dream he has three baskets of bread, with birds eating from them; Joseph says the three baskets represent three days, but then the king will hang the baker and birds shall eat his flesh
 - On the third day, which was the king's birthday, the steward is restored to his former job and the baker is hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted their dreams
 - But the steward forgot to tell the king about Joseph

Genesis 41

- The king has a dream two years later; in his dream, he is by the Nile, and seven cows come out of the Nile; they were beautiful and fat; then seven more cows came from the Nile, but they were thin and ugly; the seven thin cows ate the seven fat cows; and the king (Pharaoh) wakes up
- Then he falls asleep and has a second dream in which seven good and fat ears of grain grow, followed by seven thin ears of grain; the seven thin ears swallow up the seven fat ears of grain, and Pharaoh wakes up
- In the morning, Pharaoh tells his dreams to his magicians, but none are able to interpret them; his steward then remembers Joseph and tells Pharaoh how Joseph interpreted his dream, so Pharaoh has Joseph brought out of prison and presented to him; Joseph says God will interpret his dreams
- Pharaoh tells his two dreams to Joseph, who says both dreams are one; the seven fat cows and seven good ears of grain represent seven years of bountifulness to be followed by seven years of famine, as represented by the seven thin cows and seven scrawny ears of grain
- Joseph tells Pharaoh he should appoint men to oversee the storage of food during the first seven years to prepare for the famine to come afterward
- Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge of all of Egypt, second only to himself, so that Joseph can carry out his own recommendation to store food for the famine
- Joseph was given a priest's daughter (Asenath) as a wife, and she bears him two sons (Manasseh and Ephraim); Joseph stores up plenty of food