

An Interview with Joseph

Genesis 37-50 August 16, 2020

Interviewer: Welcome to BNN, the Bible News Network. I've got a very special guest videoconferencing in with us this morning, Joseph, the son of Jacob, grandson of Isaac, and great-grandson of Abraham.

So my research team writes here that you are dreamy. ... I'm not seeing it.

Joseph: Well, you should talk to my wife.

Interviewer: I'm not sure how any wife of yours could see things differently than I do, but ... maybe when you were younger.

Oh, wait, it doesn't say here that you are the man of my dreams, but that you are a man of dreams. ... So you work a lot with dreams?

Joseph: I do.

Interviewer: Like (Martin Luther King) "I have a dream that one day little Hebrew boys and Hebrew girls will be able to join hands with little Egyptian boys and Egyptian girls as sisters and brothers." That kind of a dream?

Joseph: No.

Interviewer: Oh. Okay. Why don't you tell me about one of your dreams.

Joseph: I'm not sure I want to. My dreams usually get me into a lot of trouble.

Interviewer (to audience): Come on, we want to hear his dreams, right?

Joseph: Well, okay. It all started with a coat.

Interviewer: The dream did?

Joseph: No. The jealousy.

Interviewer: I thought we were talking about a dream.

Joseph: We are. But to understand what happened when I told the dream, you have to understand the jealousy. You remember Cain and Abel?

Interviewer: Sure, of course. (makes a Psycho stabbing motion)

Joseph: Model siblings compared to me and my brothers! But it wasn't my fault. Dad loved my mom Rachael the best of all of his four wives, and I was her only kid, at least until my brother Benjamin was born, so he doted on me.

Interviewer: So it was all about jealousy? You never did anything else?

Joseph: Well, I might have told on them once or twice when they were out in the field.

Interviewer: Uh huh. Younger brother stuff. So the main jealousy was because of a coat?

Joseph: Not any coat, but the most wonderful, spectacular, in your face brothers look what dad got me nah nah nah and you got nothing neener neener coat. It had many colors, and I was like a walking rainbow after the rain. And they didn't have one.

Interviewer: Well it's hard to see how *that* could have caused a rift with your brothers. (rolls eyes)

Joseph: I know, right?

Interviewer: So you had the coat. Now tell me about the dream.

Joseph: Two dreams, really. The first was about binding sheaves in the field. We were all out there, and their sheaves bowed down to my sheaf. The second was like it. The sun and the moon and eleven stars were all bowing down to me.

And they were all like, "Oh, the world just has to revolve around you, doesn't it? Everybody bow down to Joseph."

Interviewer: So you're saying they didn't like the dreams?

Joseph: Oh, they liked the dreams alright. They never stopped talking about the dreams. It was me they hated. "Look, up in the sky! It's the sun! It's the moon! It's Dream Boy! Here comes Dreamboat again."

Interviewer: So how old were you then?

Joseph: I was 17 years old. It was then that my father, Jacob, sent me to check on my brothers over by Dothan. That didn't go well.

Interviewer: It didn't go well?

Joseph: Or maybe it went too well from their point of view, because they threw me into one.

Interviewer: A well?

Joseph: Well, a cistern, but it was big and it might as well have been a well.

Interviewer: Well, well, that's quite a story. But at least you had water to drink.

Joseph: It was an empty cistern.

Interviewer: That must have been very frightening. How did you get out?

Joseph: They pulled me out. They said it would be a terrible waste of a life to kill me.

Interviewer: How touching! So brotherly love triumphed over hate in the end.

Joseph: No. They meant it would be a waste to kill me when they could sell me to some Midianite slave-merchants heading to Egypt and go home with some cash.

Interviewer: Oh. Wouldn't your father have become suspicious?

Joseph: He might've, but they took my rainbow robe and soaked it in goat's blood. I'm sure he thought it was mine. This was before DNA, so there was no way to tell. Except for the goat smell. But we all smelled like goats most of the time, so it didn't give them away.

Interviewer: So you're sold into slavery with the Midianites. What happened then?

Joseph: There was a narrative interlude.

Interviewer: A what?

Joseph: A narrative interlude. It's like a Bible cliffhanger, where the Bible authors put in another story, in this case a not so flattering one about my brother Judah, before picking back up with the main narrative. It builds tension and suspense while you wait to find out what happened. You know, an ancient cliffhanger.

Interviewer: There really is nothing new under the sun, is there! So you're with the Midianite slave dealers. Then what happened.

Joseph: I was sold as a slave.

Interviewer: I guess they hadn't invented the shocking twist yet, huh?

Joseph: Just wait! I was sold to one of Pharaoh's officials, Potiphar, the captain of the guard. I worked in his house. God was looking out for me, because everything I touched turned to gold and by 18 I was in charge of Potiphar's whole household.

Interviewer: So everything was working out beautifully for you.

Joseph: No. I had big problems! Potiphar's wife kept wanting me to check out the softness of the Egyptian cotton linens on her bed, if you know what I mean. It was a nightmare every time she said I was dreamy. This went on day after day.

Interviewer: Hashtag Me Too?

Joseph: Hashtag O M G.

Interviewer: But maybe it was partly your fault. Were you leading her on? What were you wearing?

Joseph: That's a ridiculous suggestion! I told her it was an outrage to God and her husband and I wasn't interested. She couldn't have had any doubt. It's completely irrelevant what I was wearing, but if you must know, I was even wearing a cloak, a cloak which she grabbed and tried to drag me into her bedroom with. I had to leave the cloak behind just to get out of there.

Interviewer: First a fancy rainbow coat, and now a plain old cloak. You seem to have a real problem with outerwear.

Joseph: It's not the clothes I was having a problem with. But next thing you know, she shows Potiphar the cloak, and Potiphar showed me the inside of Pharaoh's prison.

Interviewer: So now you're in prison, and everything's working out horribly for you?

Joseph: No. It was much better, because the Lord was with me. God granted me favor in the prison warden's eyes, and pretty soon I was in charge of the place. That's when the dreams started again.

Interviewer: You started having dreams in prison? Dreams of freedom?

Joseph: No. Other people started having dreams. Pharaoh's cupbearer was there. The rumor was he'd tripped on one of Pharaoh's sacred cats and spilled wine into Pharaoh's lap.

He had a dream about cutting three clusters of ripe grapes from a branch and squeezing them into Pharaoh's cup and placing it in his hand. He wanted me to interpret it for him.

I told him all interpretations come from God. Then I told him the three clusters meant three days, and in three days Pharaoh will restore you to your former position. I asked him to remember me when he was restored.

Pharaoh's baker was also in there. Something about a flan that hadn't worked out when Pharaoh was entertaining the Assyrian ambassador. In his dream, he had three baskets of bread on his head with baked goods for Pharaoh, but birds were eating out of the baskets.

I told him that in three days, Pharaoh would lift off his head and impale his body on a pole, and the birds would eat his flesh.

Interviewer: That's terrible.

Joseph: Well, it was an awful flan.

Interviewer: So what happened? Were your interpretations right?

Joseph: Three days later was Pharaoh's birthday party. The chief cupbearer got his job back. The chief baker – well, let's just say he won't be making Pharaoh's birthday cake next year, either.

Interviewer: So the cupbearer remembered you to Pharaoh, and you got out of prison?

Joseph: No. He totally forgot me.

But two years later, Pharaoh had a dream: he saw seven fat cows coming out of the Nile, followed by seven cows so gaunt you could see their ribs. The seven thin cows ate the seven fat cows. And then another dream, with seven healthy heads of grain, and seven lousy heads of grain, and the seven lousy heads swallowed up the healthy heads of grain.

In Egypt, they have dream interpretation books. You can still see some of them in museums today. They tell you what your dreams mean.

Interviewer: You mean like Freud, where it's always about you being in love with your mother?

Joseph: No, nothing like that. That's Oedipus and the Greeks. I was in Egypt. In Egypt each element had a very specific meaning which you could find in the dream interpretation books.

Interviewer: So they looked it up and the dream told Pharaoh to let you go?

Joseph: No. No one could tell Pharaoh what it meant because his dreams weren't in the big dream books kept by the magicians and wise men of Egypt.

It was then that the cupbearer remembered me. He told Pharaoh he knew a guy when he was in the pen who had a knack for interpreting dreams and he probably should have mentioned it before, but he was mentioning it now.

Before I knew it, I was clean shaven with a new set of clothes and standing in front of Pharaoh. He asked me to interpret his dream.

Interviewer: And you said you could do it, and he freed you! What a triumphant, heartwarming story!

Joseph: No. I told him I couldn't interpret his dream.

Interviewer: That might not have been the answer I would have given.

Joseph: But I told him God could interpret the dream. The seven fat cows were seven years of plenty in Egypt, and the seven skinny cows were seven years of famine in Egypt. Pharaoh was so impressed he made me the vizier of Egypt.

Interviewer: The brassiere of Egypt? Outerwear problems weren't enough for you? Now you have to try underwear, too?

Joseph: Not the brassiere of Egypt, the vizier. It's the guy who's in charge of everything under Pharaoh. By that time, I had just turned 30.

Interviewer: So you're the number 2 guy in Egypt. Is that when you built the pyramids as storehouses for grain?

Joseph: No. The pyramids are tombs for Pharaohs, and they were already a thousand years old when I was there. But we did build storehouses and we filled them with grain so when the famine came, we were ready. And that's when it happened.

Interviewer: What happened?

Joseph: I saw my brothers again, all except for my baby brother, Benjamin. They came down from Canaan to get grain during the famine.

Interviewer: Were you still angry with them? Now you were the brassiere of Egypt, what did you do?

Joseph: Vizier. I wept when I saw them. But I wanted to teach them a lesson about not being sneaky and deceitful.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Joseph: I did it by being sneaky and deceitful.

Interviewer: Um.

Joseph: I think we get it from our father.

I first accused them of being spies. Then I told them they could have the grain, but they had to leave one of their brothers there as a prisoner until they returned with their youngest brother. I spoke Egyptian, so they had no idea it was me. Then I gave them the grain, but I secretly put their money back in their sacks.

Interviewer: So when they got home it would look like they had stolen money from you?

Joseph: Hey, I'd been sweating it for 13 years. I wanted them to sweat it for a change—and all that silver in their sacks was no small change!

They didn't want to come back again, but the famine went on, and a hungry stomach made it impossible not to return. And they brought Benjamin.

Interviewer: And that's when you revealed yourself, and you had a great reunion!

Joseph: No. I feasted with them, gave them grain, and sent them on their way. But I secretly hid a silver cup in Benjamin's sack. They left, I sent soldiers after them, the cup was discovered and they all came back, accused as thieves.

Interviewer: So you didn't forgive them?

Joseph: I told them they were free to go, and only Benjamin had to stay. They wept and begged and told me it would kill their father. That's when I decided they'd learned their lesson. I revealed myself to them.

Interviewer: Were they frightened to see you again?

Joseph: Terrified. But I said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

Interviewer: So what lesson did *you* learn through all of this?

Joseph: I learned to trust in God. I remained faithful even when things weren't going my way, and God helped me. I had my ups and downs, but God was with me through it all. Sometimes it's hard to see God's plan for yourself, or even for your country, but God's the one in control in the end, and you have to trust God, even when things aren't going your way.

Interviewer: What did Pharaoh do when you told him about your brothers?

Joseph: He gave my whole family some great land to settle on, and my father and brothers all came down to Egypt to live.

Interviewer: So that's how all the Hebrews ended up in Egypt! All because of a special coat, and your brothers' decision to sell you as a slave.

Joseph: That's right. I know that I will be forgotten one day, and a Pharaoh may arise who doesn't remember me, and it may be trouble for my family. But for now we are safe, and I know I can safely leave the rest to God. God has been good to us thus far, and if need be, God can raise up someone else to take my place and lead our people out of Egypt.

Interviewer: So "trust in God, God's got this" is your message to our viewers?

Joseph: That's my dream, anyway.

Interviewer: Well, thank you for coming on today's show, Joseph. Joseph, the brassiere of Egypt everyone!

Joseph: Vizier! Vizier!!!