

JOSEPH

A four-part drama based on Genesis 37–50 (NIV).

Written by Paula Bowser and first performed at Glade Valley Church of the Brethren, Walkersville, MD.

STAGING: This was meant to be performed as a reader's theater, using scripts and very simple props.

SETTING: Canaan and the land of Egypt and parts in between.

CASTING SUGGESTIONS: It may involve too many people to cast all twelve brothers. The script calls for Joseph, Reuben, Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. Other regulars include a chorus, narrators, and Jacob.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

A ton of fun: At Glade Valley, the story of Joseph was told over four weeks (February 2003). Each week the attendance improved and excitement grew as the story unfolded. This was a super way to tell an old and thrilling story of God's grace operating despite tragedy, conflict, corruption, and deceit.

Whole church involvement: The worship team at Glade Valley had the Sunday school classes read the story, and all children and youth (and any adults who cared to) created original artwork for bulletin covers. We also made up a little gallery so that all of the art not used on bulletins could be displayed and enjoyed by everyone entering the sanctuary. The worship theme was built around the story and sermons were created to match the message of the biblical text.

Bible-based script: Attention to detail and faithfulness to the biblical story in Genesis were a high priority in creating the script. The children, and indeed all of us, experienced the story in powerful ways that will stick in the memory for a long time.

The use of a chorus: The use of a chorus was very effective in underlining aspects of the biblical text that aren't readily apparent on a first or casual reading. For instance, in Genesis 37:2 it says that Joseph brought his father a bad report on his brothers. In the script the chorus sing-songs "tattletale, tattletale," to underscore the behaviors of Joseph that exacerbated the brothers' resentment over Jacob's blatant and unwise demonstrations of favoritism. Holy humor was part of what made this so much fun and a hammy chorus was a major asset.

CASTING: Although there are twelve brothers, I used only five with speaking parts: Joseph (who stayed the same all four weeks), Reuben, Simeon, Judah, and Benjamin (in the last sketch). In a larger church, twelve could be used easily—though it would have been too crowded and confusing at Glade Valley.

Reading, not memorizing, involved more people: The drama was performed as a reader's theater, although some chose to memorize their parts. People put cheat sheets on laptops, inserted them in newspapers and magazines (Pharaoh had a book on interpreting dreams), and on tabletops, or just carried their scripts. We used lapel mikes on those who were most soft spoken and encouraged other actors to project so that everyone could hear.

Rehearsal: The cast was given scripts early in the week before the Sunday performance. We rehearsed one half hour before the worship service. Our time was limited because I created the scripts week to week, but you will have the scripts in hand in advance and may be able to provide more rehearsal time and more consistent casting.

Logistics: Of course, every sanctuary is different, but our chancel is wide, so one side was Egypt land and the other side was Canaan.

Costuming: Overall, costuming was very simple. Most actors wore their regular clothes. For a coat of many colors, Joseph had a beach towel draped around one shoulder. However, as the story progressed and the action moved to a wealthy court in Egypt, the youth insisted on using some fancier

props. In Part III Pharaoh wore a purple choir robe. Joseph and the Egyptian stewards and servants wore light-colored choir robes with some headdresses we had left over from the wisemen in the Christmas play.

My prayer: It's a joy to share this resource with other churches through the Living Waters website. I have a passion for the great stories in the Bible, and believe in the power of scripture to work in people's lives. It's my prayer that the story of Joseph, told through drama, will operate as salt, light, and leaven and transform lives for Christ. The related sermon texts are available on request.

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— P.B.

PART I. JOSEPH SOLD INTO SLAVERY

PROPS: Brightly striped beach towel for Joseph's "coat of many colors"
Burlap bag for money
The pit: black cloth cut into a round shape, surrounded by rocks

SETTING: Canaan

CAST: Narrator
Jacob
Joseph
Reuben
Judah
Brother 1
Brother 2
Chorus (made up of as many people as you like)
Ishamaelite trader

Narrator: Jacob settled down in Canaan in the land of his father and had twelve sons. Our story begins when things get ugly over Joseph, the favorite son, who was seventeen at the time.

Now Joseph was helping his brothers tend the flocks. And he brought his father bad reports on them.

Chorus: TATTLETALE! TATTLETALE!

Narrator: I say brothers, but they were really his half-brothers. Only Joseph and little Benjamin were born to Jacob's beloved Rachel. Because of this, the old man loved Joseph more than the others and made him a beautiful coat with rich, bright colors and long sleeves.

Joseph (*clueless, preening, full of himself*):
How do you like my new coat, guys?

Narrator: When his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than any of them, they hated Joseph with a passion.

Chorus: BOY, DID THEY EVER HATE HIM!

Brothers (*aside*):

BOY, DID WE EVER HATE HIM!

Reuben (*muttering*):

Twerp!

Narrator: One day Joseph had a dream. And when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

Chorus: THEY HATED HIM EVEN MORE!

Brothers: WE HATED HIM EVEN MORE!

Narrator: He said,

Joseph: Hey, guys . . . listen to this dream I had. We were all, like, out in the field binding up sheaves of wheat. And get this! All of a sudden my sheaf stood straight up and your sheaves circled around it and bowed down to mine.

Narrator: His brothers said,

Brother 1: So! You're going to rule us? Is that it?

Brother 2: What are you saying? That you're going to boss us around?

Narrator: And they hated him more than ever because of his dreams and the way he talked.

Chorus: THEY HATED HIM EVEN MORE!

Brothers: WE HATED HIM EVEN MORE!

Reuben (*muttering under his breath*):

Jerk!

Narrator: He had another dream and told it as well:

Joseph: And you know what? I dreamed another dream too. In this one, the sun and moon and eleven stars bowed down to me!

Narrator: When he told it to his father and brothers, even his father reprimanded him.

Jacob: What is it with this dream? Are your brothers and your mother and I *all* supposed to bow down to you?

Narrator: Now his brothers were *really* jealous.

Brothers: WHAT? US JEALOUS?

Narrator: But his father, Jacob, brooded over the whole business.

(*Jacob strokes his beard.*)

Narrator: One day Jacob sent Joseph off to check on his brothers, who were grazing the flocks in Shechem.

Jacob: Go find your brothers, Joseph, and bring me a report.

Joseph (*eagerly*):
Sure, Dad.

Chorus: AWWW . . . DADDY'S LITTLE SPY!

Narrator: They wandered off to a field near a neighboring town, and Joseph had to track them down. They could see him coming from a country mile. And as he walked toward them, they cooked up a plot to take his life.

Brother 1: Well, look who's coming—Joseph the Dreamer!

Chorus: HERE COMES THAT DREAMER!

Brother 1: Let's cook his goose. Look . . . we'll throw him into that old well shaft.

Brother 2: Yeah. We'll say a wild animal had him for an entree. Chuck him in the hole, I say. Then we'll see what comes of his stupid dreams.

Narrator: When Reuben heard of this, he tried to rescue the boy.

Reuben: Let's don't spill any blood here, boys. He's not worth the effort. And murder's a capital crime.

Narrator: Reuben said this because he planned to double back later and rescue the boy and hand him over to his father. When Joseph finally reached them, they ripped off his fancy coat and threw him into the well.

Chorus: IF LIFE IS A BOWL OF CHERRIES, WHAT IS JOSEPH DOING IN THE PIT?

Narrator: He didn't drown, of course. It was a dry well . . . just a lot of smelly mud in the bottom.

Chorus: CENTIPEDES! SPIDERS! AND SNAKES. OH MY!

Narrator: Then they sat down under a nearby tree and ate their lunch.

(Reuben slips out quietly.)

Brother 1: Bologna sandwich?

Brother 2 (*with elaborate courtesy*):
Why thank you, I will.

Narrator: But one of the brothers, named Judah, said,

Judah: Look, what are we going to gain by killing our brother? I don't see a profit here. We're setting ourselves up for a murder rap, and if we cover it up, there's perjury, obstruction of justice . . . it's a mess. I'm not doing time for this turkey, even if he *is* my brother.

(Enter the Ismaelite trader carrying a bag of money.)

Narrator: Just then a caravan of traders was passing by on their way to Egypt to peddle their wares. Their camels were loaded down with spices, balm, and myrrh. The brothers hauled Joseph up out of the well and sold him to the sons of Ishmael for twenty pieces of silver.

Since Ruben wasn't in on the sale, he came back that night, went to the cistern, and discovered that Joseph was gone. Reuben cried out in sorrow and went back to the others saying:

Reuben *(in despair)*:

The boy isn't there! What am I going to do?

Narrator: Then the brothers slaughtered a goat.

Chorus: POOR KID!

Narrator: They took up the fancy coat and dipped it in the blood and brought it to their father, Jacob.

Brother 1 *(casually slinging the bloodstained coat at his feet)*:

We found this, Dad, look it over.

Brother 2: Yeah, see if it's your son's robe.

Narrator: Jacob knew at once what it was.

Jacob: It *is* my son's robe! Some wild animal has devoured him! Surely he's torn to pieces.

Narrator: He tore his clothing and put on sackcloth and mourned for his son for many days.

Narrator: His sons and daughters, every one of them, came to his tents to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, saying,

Jacob: Never! *Never!* I'll go down to my grave mourning my son.

Narrator: And Joseph's father wept for him. Meanwhile, the traders sold Joseph in the land of Egypt to a man named Potiphar, who was one of Pharaoh's high officials, the captain of the guard.

Chorus: TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK!

PART II. JOSEPH IN THE HOUSE OF POTIPHAR

PROPS: A small zippered tool bag
A flat, bedlike couch with a bottle of fancy perfume on the floor by the leg (“Obsession” if available)
Kitchen table with two chairs.
On Potiphar’s side: an open laptop computer, a *Wall Street Journal*, a coffee cup with a carafe or jar of coffee. Bagels, cream cheese, and fruit in the middle of the table.
On Mrs. Potiphar’s side: nail polish and a hand mirror or compact; a magazine such as *Vanity Fair*, *Us*, or *Self* (or some other frivolous contemporary magazine)

SETTING: The house of Potiphar in Egypt

CAST: Narrator
Potiphar (a high Egyptian official, dressed in CEO-type clothing (suit and tie) with briefcase
Velma Potiphar (red dress, not exactly trashy or low cut [this *is* church], but definitely not a frumpy house dress. Spikey heeled shoes. OR a fancy bathrobe and high-heeled slippers.)
Joseph (simply dressed in khakis or chinos with nice sweater or polo shirt. Tie optional. A dress-down Friday look. Must have some kind of coat or jacket.)
Servant 1 (black pants or jeans and white shirt)
Servant 2 (black pants or jeans and white shirt)

SCENE ONE

Breakfast time in the Potiphar household. Potiphar hurries in and starts working on his laptop. Very intent, absorbed and distant, classic workaholic. He hardly looks up at his wife; he answers her without making eye contact most of the time.

Narrator: After he was sold by his brothers, Joseph was brought down to Egypt to the house of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard. And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man in the service of this Egyptian.

Velma Potiphar:

So, lovecake, you gonna be home early tonight? (*She licks some cream cheese off her index finger. Potiphar is oblivious.*)

Potiphar (*staring at the screen, doesn't look up*):

Early? Are you kidding! Big meeting after the banquet tonight. Pharaoh wants a whole new security detail—totally revamped. I’ve got the plans right here (*points to laptop*)—state of the art weapons, buff new guards with body armor, alternate escape routes, poison experts. And look! This is Joe’s idea: body doubles. I’m presenting the plans tonight. Joe worked it all out. It’s going to cost a bundle to make it happen, but “Joe Miracle” will find the cash. God is on his side, I’m tellin’ ya. You just watch.

Velma Potiphar (*purring*):

Joe? That Hebrew slave you picked up last summer?

Potiphar: That's the one, baby. He's my right hand. Whatever he touches turns to gold. I used to stress over the details, but since Joe's in the saddle, I put it on his plate and it's as good as done.

Mrs. Potiphar:

Is he married? (*Covering quickly*) I mean I'm just curious. The maids keep drooling over him.

Potiphar: Married? Not on your life—not if I can help it. He's a workhorse. He spends 24/7 making me look good. He should too. I'm many things, but I'm not a selfish man. He's got a great salary, carte blanche, and more perks than any slave should ever have. (*He finally looks at her, but casually.*) The only thing he can't touch is *you*, my pet!

Velma Potiphar (*hopeful*):

Babe, why can't you stay home this morning? You've worked late every night this week . . . I get lonely.

Potiphar (*gets up and moves to the door*):

Nice try, sweetheart, but it's not going to happen. How else can I keep you in gold and feathers, my dear? That dress would cost a year's wages for some poor saps, and those Arabian horses out in the barn . . . they don't come cheap, my chickadee.

Velma Potiphar (*pouty; comes closer, trying one last time to capture his attention*):

But, baby . . .

Potiphar (*backing away, hands up, almost like dodging*):

No. I can't, really. Pharaoh gets nervous when I'm not there. I honestly think the man's paranoid.

Mrs. Potiphar (*turning sulky and angry*):

But . . .

Potiphar: Gotta go! (*gives Velma a quick, chaste peck on the cheek*) Don't wait up for me, pet. (*He's out the door.*)

Narrator: And Joseph found grace in the sight of God and of his master. He served both well, and Potiphar gave him authority over all his affairs. And the Lord blessed the house of the Egyptian for Joseph's sake—and the blessing of God was upon all that he had in the house and in the field. After a while, Potiphar delegated everything to Joseph. And the only decision he had to make was to what food to put in his own mouth (*pause for effect*). Now Joseph was a good looking man—well favored, well built, and handsome. And it came about after these things that the master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and she became obsessed with him. She propositioned him directly, saying "Lie with me." But he refused. This went on day after day, and Joseph consistently refused her advances.

SCENE TWO

It is breakfast time again in the Potiphar household some months later. The servants are puttering around the kitchen table where Mrs. Potiphar is seated and eating daintily..

Potiphar (*coming through at top speed, shrugging on a coat. He does not look at his wife or touch her*):

I'm headin' out, baby I'll be checking the fields this morning, and then I'm working late at the palace tonight. I had the servants make a lunch, so this is goodbye for the day. Don't wait up (*gulps down a swig of coffee*). Listen, Joe's coming by this morning to look at that laptop. It keeps shutting down on me. Take care of him, will ya? (*He's gone.*)

Velma Potiphar (*smiling wickedly*):

You bet I will . . .

(The servants look at each other when she says this, because they know what's been going on.)

Velma Potiphar (*suddenly very cold and authoritative*):

Leave me at once. I'll take care of these things. Go out into the garden and work over the rows. Do it now.

(The servants look scared and vanish.)

Servant 1: Right.

Servant 2: Sure, whatever you say, Mrs. P. I'm outta here.

(Velma primps a bit, checks a mirror, fluffs her hair, sprays on some Obsession, and waits for Joe. Joseph comes in with a zippered bag containing some small tools. He's on his guard, very uneasy, and looks around the room. Mrs. Potiphar sits on the divan like a spider awaiting its prey.)

Joseph (*unbuttons his jacket and concentrates on the laptop, not looking at her*):

Where are the servants?

Velma Potiphar:

They're gone, Joe, and so is my husband. (*She approaches Joe.*) It's just you and me.

Joseph (*rises from the chair and backs up*):

Look, we've been through this before. I know what you're thinking, but I can't do it. It's just wrong.

Velma Potiphar:

Oh, come on, Joe! Is there really such a thing as right and wrong? We're both adults here. No one will ever know.

Joseph: No. Look, what part of NO don't you understand?

Velma Potiphar:

What's the matter? Don't you find me attractive?

Joseph: It's not that . . . really . . . you're (*tries to think of a good word*) . . . fine.

Velma Potiphar:

Then what's stopping you?

Joseph: Don't you get it? Your husband has put me in charge of everything . . . at the palace and here too. I'm honored to serve him, and he sees that there's nothing he wouldn't give me except for you—and that's because you're his wife. How could I betray his trust and do this wicked thing and sin against God?

Velma Potiphar:

It's always about your God, isn't it? Look let's stop this charade (*she grabs his jacket*). I'm serious. I'm tired of waiting.

Joseph: No.

Velma Potiphar (*getting steely*):

Don't forget, I can make things difficult for you if I want. I could have you sold to a common farmer who would treat you like dirt. Potiphar would be furious, but he'd get over it. I'm his wife, after all.

Joseph: I'm glad you remembered that! Look, I'm out of here (*runs out, leaving jacket, which Velma carries to the couch/divan*).

(*Velma yells for help.*)

Narrator: Joseph's accuser called the servants to return to the house. She cooked up a lie, saying that Joseph had assaulted her. She used the jacket as proof. The servants arrive and she shows them the jacket.

(*Velma mimes telling her story as one of the servants runs to get Potiphar while the other one pretends to comfort her. Potiphar comes in. The servants gingerly bring her to her husband, as though she's been violated.*)

Potiphar: What is it? What's happened?

Velma Potiphar:

I can't believe it. I just can't believe it! The Hebrew servant, Joseph, has assaulted me. Look, here is his jacket. He left it here when I screamed for help.

Potiphar (*quiet for a minute . . . then very angry*):

JOSEPH!!!

Narrator: Joseph's master found him and put him in Pharaoh's prison, where he remained for thirteen years. But the story doesn't end here.

Servants: TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK!

PART III. JOSEPH'S RISE TO POWER

PROPS: A cup for the cupbearer
Burlap bags for grain (or book bags)
Pieces of rope
A ring and a necklace (opt.)

SETTING: Canaan and Egypt

CAST: Narrator 1
Narrator 2
Narrator 3
Chorus (can be the three narrators)
Joseph
Cupbearer
Baker
Pharaoh
Magician
Wise Man
2 Attendants
Jacob
Simeon
Judah
Reuben
Other brothers

Narrator 1: Joseph's master put him in prison, into the very place where Pharaoh's prisoners were kept. But even in prison, the Lord was with him and showed him kindness. God granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden, so that he put Joseph in charge of all prisoners. Before long, Joseph was made responsible for all that was done there. Soon the warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Chorus: GO JOE!

Narrator 2: Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master. Pharaoh was angry with them and jailed them in the place where Joseph was confined. The warden assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them.

Narrator 3: After they had been in custody for a long time, each of the two had a dream—both on the same night. When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected.

Joseph: What's wrong with you two? Why are your faces so sad today?

Cupbearer: We both had dreams, but there is no one to interpret them.

Joseph: God sends dreams. And God is able to interpret them. Tell me what you dreamed.

Cupbearer: In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, and on it were three branches. The vine budded and blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and put the cup in his hand.

Joseph: This is what it means. The three branches are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position. You will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer.

Cupbearer: Fantastic!

Chorus: WHOOPEE!

Joseph: But when all goes well with you, remember me. Mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.

Narrator 1: The baker was thrilled that Joseph gave a favorable interpretation to the cupbearer's dream.

Baker: Listen, I had a dream too. On my head were three baskets of bread. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.

Joseph: This is what it means. The three baskets are three days. (*Sympathetically puts his hand on the baker's shoulder*) I'm sorry to tell you this, but your dream is tragic.

Chorus: UH, OH!

Joseph: Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh. (*The baker dejectedly puts his hands over his face, runs his fingers through his hair, and goes off.*)

Narrator 2: Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials.

Chorus: HAPPY BIRTHDAY, PHARAOH!

Narrator 2: He lifted up the heads of the cupbearer and the baker all right—and in the presence of all his officials. He restored the cupbearer to his position (*cupbearer smiles and bows and hands Pharaoh a cup*) so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand. But Pharaoh hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had said he would.

Baker (*offstage*):

I regret that I have but one life to give for my Pharaoh!

Chorus: TELL IT TO THE MARINES!

Narrator 3: The cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

Chorus: THANKS A LOT!

Narrator 3 (*murmuring*):

Ungrateful wretch!

Narrator 1: After two full years had passed, Pharaoh had two dreams—vivid, wild, and disturbing dreams. In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt and told them every detail about his dreams.

(*Enter wise man and magician*)

Pharaoh: Well, seven cows. Seven stalks of grain. What can you make of it? What does it all mean?

Magician: I'm sorry, my Lord. I have no idea.

Wise Man: The dreams are so strange. I'm afraid no one in our camp can make heads or tails of them.

Pharaoh: Why in the world do I pay you such lavish salaries? You know nothing. Get out of my sight!

(*The magician and wise man scurry off.*)

Cupbearer: Ahem. A word, my king? Today I am reminded of my shortcomings.

Chorus: IT'S ABOUT TIME!

Cupbearer: You see, sire. Pharaoh was once angry with his servants and imprisoned me and the baker. Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Now a young Hebrew was there with us—Joseph. He used to be a servant to the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, and things turned out exactly as he predicted. I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged.

Pharaoh: Finally! Someone with a clue! Send for this Hebrew at once! (*Joseph comes in.*) I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.

Joseph: I cannot do it on my own, but God is able to give Pharaoh the answer he desires.

Pharaoh: Listen to this: I was standing by the Nile, when suddenly out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and starved ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then I woke up.

But that's not all. I fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the healthy ones. It

was all so real, but then I woke up again and realized I had been dreaming. What does it mean? Can your God tell me?

Joseph: The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows and heads of grain are seven good years. The skinny cows and the worthless heads of grain are seven years of famine.

Here's what it means: Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

Pharaoh: How terrible! What's to be done?

Joseph: Well, you'll want to look for a wise and discerning man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.

Pharaoh: Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God?

Cupbearer: Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God ?

2 Attendants:

Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God ?

Chorus: JUST JOE!

Pharaoh: Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.

Chorus: GO JOE!

Narrator 2: So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of the whole land of Egypt. He took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. (*Pharaoh mimes these things.*) He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. (*Shakes his hand and pats him on the back. There is lots of smiling.*)

Narrator 1: Now Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, and he managed the food supply for all of Egypt, so that when the seven years of famine began, all was well. When the people cried to Pharaoh for food, he told them, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you."

Narrator 2: When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians. And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world.

Chorus: EVERYTHING WORKS TOGETHER FOR GOOD FOR THOSE WHO LOVE GOD AND ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO GOD'S PURPOSE!

Scene moves to land of Canaan.

Narrator 3: Now Jacob, Joseph's father, learned that there was grain in Egypt, but no one wanted to make the trip.

Jacob: Why are you all just standing around looking at each other? You know the score. There's grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.

Narrator 2: Only ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. Jacob wouldn't send Benjamin with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him.

Chorus: REMEMBER BEN? RACHEL'S SON—THE YOUNGEST, AND FULL BROTHER OF JOSEPH.

Narrator 3: When Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

Chorus: REMEMBER THE DREAMS?

Narrator 1: As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.

Joseph (*walking around them in a haughty manner*):

Where do you come from?

(*In a very hammy aside to the audience*) Hmm . . . looks like a bunch of riff-raff to me.

Simeon: We're from the land of Canaan, sir. Our family is starving. We're here to buy food.

Joseph: I don't believe it! You're spies! Clearly you've come to see where our land is unprotected.

Simeon: No, my lord. Your servants have come to buy food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.

Joseph: Nice try, shepherd boys. You're enemies looking for the soft underbelly of Egypt. You want to exploit it! I know your kind.

Simeon: No, my lord. You see, we were a band of brothers—twelve in all—the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one, well, one of us is no more.

Chorus: THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK.

Joseph: Well, I don't buy it. But I'm a fair man. I'll tell you what. I'll put you to the test. Here are my terms: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison. We'll soon see if you're telling the truth. If you can't produce this imaginary brother, it surely proves you are spies!

Narrator 1: Joseph let them stew in the slammer for a couple of days. (*The brothers sit on the bottom of the steps in the center of the stage area.*)

Chorus: HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE IN THE PITS, BOYS? IT'S YOUR TURN NOW!

Narrator 2: On the third day, Joseph relented and gave them a break.

Joseph: Look here, guys, I'll give you a break. I'm a God-fearing man after all. I'll keep just one of you as a hostage. If you do as I say, you will live.

Chorus: SAVE ON THE FOOD BILL!

Joseph: The rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But know this: you must bring your youngest brother to me so that your words may be verified, or it's all over for the hostage.

Judah: Surely we are being punished because of Joseph. Don't you remember that terrible day? How miserable he was when he pleaded with us for his life. We didn't listen; that's why this disaster has come upon us.

Reuben: You see? Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But nooooo! Now it's payday.

Chorus (*sing-songy*):
I TOLD YOU SO, I TOLD YOU SO!

Narrator 3: All this time, they didn't realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

(*Joseph turns away from them, starting to lose it, but then steels himself, turns back, and speaks with authority.*)

Joseph: Take this one here and tie him up. Put him in Pharaoh's prison. (*An attendant binds Simeon's hands and takes him away.*)

Joseph (*turning to speak to the other attendant*):
Now, fill their bags with grain, put the full measure of silver back in every sack, and give them provisions for their journey home.

Narrator 1: After this was done for them, the brothers loaded their grain on their donkeys and left. After a long, weary day, they stopped to camp for the night. One of the brothers opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw the moonlight gleam on a mound of silver in the mouth of his sack.

Reuben: Look! Come here!

Judah (*wearily*):
What is it, Reuben? You have heartburn? You stubbed your toe? You're such a whiner!

Reuben: No! Look! My silver has been returned . . . everything we paid for the grain. Here it is in my sack. It's a trap! It's a frame job! He'll say we took it? Don't you see? He's out to get us!

Narrator 2: Their hearts turned to ice. And they turned to each other trembling and said,

All the Brothers: WHAT IS THIS THAT GOD HAS DONE TO US?

(Beat of silence)

Narrator 3: Don't miss next Sunday for the conclusion to the Joseph story.

Chorus: GO JOE!

PART IV. JOSEPH IS RECONCILED TO HIS BROTHERS

PROPS: Mini-bagels
Sacks of grain (book bags)
A silver cup
Hand towel and basin
Armchair for Jacob
Table with enough chairs for the brothers, set with plates and cups and something special for Benjamin

SETTING: Canaan and Egypt

CAST: Narrator 1
Narrator 2
Narrator 3
Joseph
Jacob
Reuben
Judah
Simeon
Benjamin
More brothers (optional)
Steward
Servant

Narrator 1: Nine of Joseph's ten half-brothers have returned from Egypt with food. In Egypt they encountered Joseph himself, who immediately recognized them as his brothers. But they never guessed that the powerful Egyptian lord was the boy they sold into slavery so many years ago.

Narrator 2: At that time Joseph did not reveal his identity. Instead, he closely questioned them to find out about his father and any other brothers. Pretending to view them as spies, Joseph seized Simeon as a hostage, whom Joseph said he would release only when they returned with their youngest brother. Joseph longed to see the boy, Benjamin, his full blood brother, the son of Rachel.

Narrator 3: Jacob was furious when he learned that Simeon was a prisoner in Egypt. He refused to let them make a second trip. And he refused to let them take his youngest son.

Jacob: You want to take Benjamin? That's rich. You better think again. Look at your track record! You've robbed me of two children already! Joseph is dead; Simeon's in the slammer. Forget it! (*He looks up and raises his hands to heaven.*) Why God? Why do these things happen to me? Everything is against me!

Reuben: Please, Dad, you have to trust us just once more. It's our only hope. You want proof of my good intentions? You can take both of my sons if we don't bring Benjamin back. Kill them if you must. But believe me, I'll guard him with my life. He'll come home, I promise.

Jacob: Forget it, Reuben. My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he's the only one I have left. If anything happens to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.

Reuben: Well, what am I, chopped liver? (*Disgusted, he exits, shaking his head.*)

Narrator 1: Fast-forward one year. The grain they brought home from Egypt is dwindling and will soon be gone. The famine is at its height and starvation is a very real possibility. The crisis pushes old Jacob to at last consider releasing Benjamin so that the family can survive.

(*Reuben re-enters with Judah and brings Jacob a mini-bagel.*)

Jacob: What's this? You call this a bagel? It's no bigger than a fig! And I only get one?

Reuben: Well, what do you expect? It hasn't rained for two years. We brought home a lot of grain, but we're big eaters. Nothing lasts forever.

Jacob: I'm a rich man. How can this happen? (*Looks heavenward*) God what are you doing to me?

Reuben: It doesn't matter how much silver you have. The land can't produce without water. There's only one solution and you know it. We have to go back to Egypt.

Jacob (*angrily*):

Fine! Go! But don't expect me to send Benjamin with you.

Judah: Then it's no use going. The trip would be a waste of time. You didn't see the man's face, Dad. I did. He said, "Don't bother coming back without this imaginary brother. If you don't have him, you'll be out in the cold. My doors will be closed. I won't even see you."

Jacob: You know it's all your fault that we're in this pickle! Brainless—the whole bunch of you! Why did you even tell the guy you had a brother?

Reuben: You weren't there, Dad. He was relentless. He questioned us about you and demanded we tell him about any brothers at home. How were we supposed to know he'd blackmail us into bringing Ben?

Judah: Well, I think we should pack up and go right now. We could have been there and back again twice by now if you hadn't put it off. (*more gently to Jacob*) I'll make myself personally responsible for Benjamin. If he doesn't come back, you can throw it in my face 'til the day I die.

Jacob (*holding up a hand, thinking hard*):

Not so fast, boys. Think it through carefully. Bring an offering of our very best produce, a gift for this man—a little balm and a little honey. Take some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. And don't forget the silver he put in your sacks. We can't afford to be framed. Bring double the silver in case he wants to accuse you of theft.

Judah: What about Ben?

Jacob: What can I do? Do I have a choice? Take him and go! May God Almighty give you mercy in the sight of this man. If it has to be, it has to be. If he dies, what can I do?

(The brothers sling on some backpacks and wander around the stage. They settle on one side as Joseph enters from the opposite side with a steward.)

Narrator 2: Joseph had been waiting for the day his brothers would return. Looking out of the window, he saw them coming, and his heart gave a leap when he saw that Benjamin was with them.

Joseph: It's them! Look, receive them at the palace and put the kitchen staff into high gear. There will be a banquet for all of us at noon. Only the best. Hurry! *(He exits.)*

Steward *(greeting the brothers)*:

Ah, the sons of Jacob! I've been expecting you. Come into the palace of my Lord.

Reuben *(scared, holding back)*:

No, no. Sir, I know what you're thinking. You think we stole your money, but it's not true. I know we had your silver in our sacks when we left here. We found it the first night. It was the full price of the wheat, but believe me, someone put it there. Look, we've brought double the price. *(hanging his head)* You see, we have to buy more food or we'll starve.

Steward: Lighten up, boys. You worry too much. The master is expecting you and everything's fine. I know you paid for the grain. The God of your father, Jacob, just blessed you with some extra silver. It's all taken care of . . . really. And look *(crooks a finger for Simeon, who comes in smiling)*, here's your brother Simeon. *(Claps hands and another servant enters)* My servant here is yours to command. Wash up. We'll see to your donkeys.

Narrator 3: When Joseph arrived, the brothers bowed low to the ground. In this way, as before, Joseph's dream of the bowing sheaves of grain was fulfilled. As they bowed they presented their packs with the gifts of produce and spices, but Joseph hardly looked at them.

Joseph: Please, get up. Tell me, how are you? And what about your old father? Is he alive still? Is he well?

Judah: Yes, my lord, your servant, our father, is alive and well.

Joseph *(seeing Benjamin for the first time)*:

Is this your youngest brother? The one you told me about?

Reuben: Yes, this is Benjamin, son of Rachel.

(Joseph is deeply moved and puts his hands on the boy's shoulders. He can barely contain his emotions.)

Joseph *(very tenderly)*:

May God be gracious to you, my son.

(Joseph leaves and cries, then washes and dries his face. He returns and claps his hands to summon the servant. Brothers should sit down at the table in birth order; at least, be sure that Benjamin is at the end.)

Joseph: Come. Serve the food.

Narrator 1: Joseph asks the servant to bring Benjamin five times as much food as the others. Though many of them were grown and close in age, Joseph had them seated in order, from the youngest to the oldest. They thought it was too odd to be a coincidence, but they still didn't guess that the master was their brother, Joseph.

Reuben (*talking with food in his mouth*):

Wow, this is great!

Judah: It is! First rate!

Reuben: Can you pass the hotcakes? I'm sick of lamb chops and goat's cheese. Ummm, can we go now?

Servant: Please, stay the night. It's too dark to travel. You can leave in the morning.

Reuben: Forget it. We need to get outta here.

Joseph (*aside to the steward*):

Okay. Here's the drill. Put the silver back in the sacks of grain as before. (*The steward nods*) But this time, take this cup and put it in the sack of the youngest. (*The steward takes the cup and obeys.*)

Judah: Well, it's been real, as the hippies say. You really know how to tie on the feedbag. But it's time for us to get on the road. Thanks for everything. (*The brothers wave and wander around the stage for a bit.*)

Steward (*comes running up*):

Stop you thieves! ! Why have you stolen the master's cup? It's the one he uses to tell the future, his favorite cup! Where is it ? (*rummages in one of the bags*)

Judah: Listen to me. Why would we do such a thing? It's not logical. We brought double the silver, if you remember.

Reuben (*angry and rash*):

This is crazy. Not one of us has anything except the grain we paid for. If someone has that cup, you can take him as your slave.

Steward: I can live with that. It's a deal. I'll take as a slave the one who has the cup in his bag. The rest can go free. (*He reaches for Ben's bag.*) Ha! Here it is. It's always the one you least suspect.

Reuben and Judah and Simeon:

NO!!

Judah: He's not going alone. (*They cross the stage and bow low before Joseph who is haughty and fierce now.*)

Joseph: Well, well, well. If it isn't the sons of Jacob. You must have been in the sun too long to pull such a trick. Haven't you heard? A man like me knows things—I can divine the future and read the past in a man's eyes. Did you really think you'd get away with this?

Judah: What can we say to you, my lord? The evidence is against us. God has uncovered our guilt. We'll all be your slaves along with the one who took your cup.

Joseph: Forget it. That wouldn't be cricket, now, would it? I'll keep the boy. The rest of you can go.

Judah (*rising and coming forward to plead with Joseph*):

Please, my lord, if you keep this boy, it will kill my father. His first love, his wife Rachel, only gave him two sons. He believes that the one son was torn apart by a wild animal, and to this day he mourns. Only Ben is left for him now. If we walk into our tents without this boy, our father will die. I know it. I promised him that I'd be personally responsible for the boy. Take me instead. I'll be your slave willingly if you'll spare my father this terrible grief.

Joseph (*to the servants*):

Leave me! All of you. (*Joseph breaks down and cries.*) Look at me, all of you, come close. Don't you know me? (*They look at him and then at each other and then back at him.*) It's me, Joseph. The one you sold into slavery so many years ago.

Benjamin: You're Joseph? But I . . . we thought you were dead.

Reuben: Oh my God!

Joseph: Exactly!

Judah: I thought it was so odd the way you kept asking about a brother at home . . . and how your servants seated us at the table according to our age. And Benjamin's portion . . . I should have known.

Reuben: So, is this it? Are you going to kill us now? I *knew* it!

Joseph: No, no. Look how it all turned out! In the end, you didn't send me here. God did! To save us from starvation. But we can't stand here talking. Go back to our father. Tell him I'm still alive. Tell him about my position with Pharaoh. Bring him here . . . and your families too. The famine will last five more years. You can stay in Egypt 'til it's over. (*He kneels before Benjamin.*) Goodbye, little brother (*and hugs him*).

Reuben: You heard the man! Let's go!

Benjamin: Goodbye, Joseph!

Joseph: Goodbye! Try not to fight on the way!

(*They "travel away" and approach Jacob on the other side of the stage, appearing to tell him of what has transpired.*)

Narrator 2: So Jacob made the journey to Egypt and lived there in joy 'til the end of his days. He lived to be one hundred and forty-seven years old. Before he died he met the king of Egypt and blessed him.

Narrator 3: After their father died, Joseph's brothers began to worry. Especially Reuben.

Reuben: Well, ya know all that sweetness and light could be an act for our father. Joseph could still be holding a grudge. What if he means to pay us back for what we did?

Judah: I don't know, Reuben. The man cried like a baby. And anyway, what can we do about it? We can't undo the past.

Reuben: Let's write him a letter. Let's tell him that the dying wish of Jacob was that he forgive his brothers for the wrongs they did to him. What can it hurt?

Narrator 1: So they sent word to Joseph, and when he read their letter, he was moved to tears and sent for them. They came at once and bowed low to the ground, promising to be his slaves.

Joseph: Get up . . . please don't be afraid. I forgive you, already. Am I in the place of God? Look how many lives were saved. You sold me, it's true. But look here: You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Go home now and be at peace with your children.

Narrator 1: And he assured them of his love and spoke kindly to them.

Narrators 1, 2 and 3:
THE END.

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