

Joseph - Yusuf

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SARS-1000: The Qur'an: Origin, Application, Interpretations

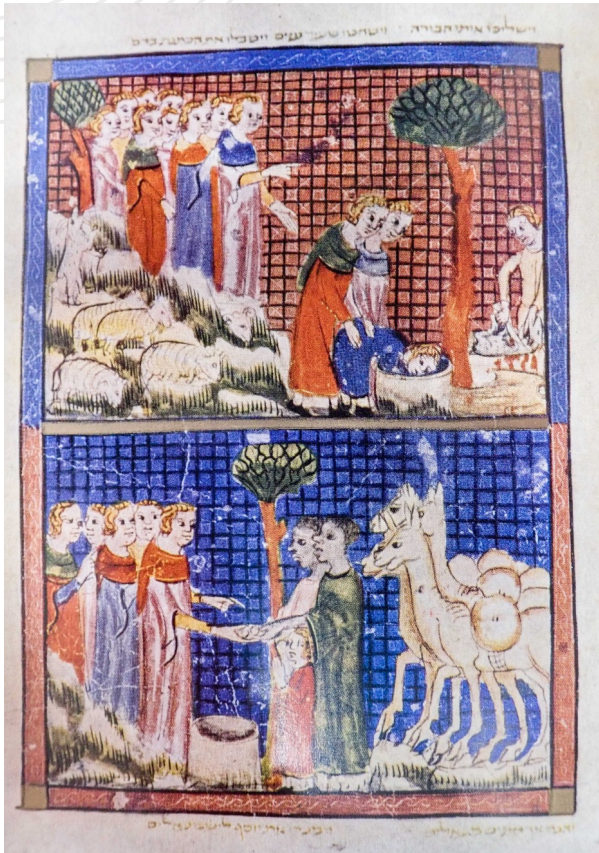
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Joseph / Yusuf: A Unique Story

- Torah / Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: Genesis 30 through Genesis 50
- Qur'an: Surah 12 "Yusuf"
- The patriarch / prophet's biography is a long, inspiring, unique story:
 - The story of Joseph – Yusuf may be set as early as Egypt's 18th Dynasty, around 1400 BCE. The story's current form is from the 5th century BCE.
 - In the Torah, Joseph is the first man to be called "handsome," one of only five. His story in Genesis is so long and personal that it is called a Wisdom novella.
 - In the Qur'an, the prophet Yusuf's is called the "best of stories," about a man of stunning beauty, who looked like "a precious angel." Yusuf's life is presented in chronological order in a single surah.
 - "No patriarch was the subject of so many Midrashic legends." (Jewish Encyclopedia, "Joseph")
 - Inspired major creative interpretations from many cultures and times:
 - "Yusuf and Zulaikha" was the subject of many medieval Islamic romances, including creations by Jami (Persian poem, 1483), Shah Muhammad Sagir (Bengali poem, 15th c.), Bustan of Sa'di (Uzbek paintings, 1257)
 - *Joseph and His Brethren*, oratorio by George Frideric Handel (1743)
 - *Joseph and His Brothers*, 4-part novel by Thomas Mann (1926-1943)
 - "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," often-revived musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber (1972)
 - "Prophet Joseph," 45-part costume drama by Salam Media, YouTube (2022)

Images Inspired by Joseph - Yusuf



Yusuf and Zulaikha,
Persian miniature by Behzād, 1488



Joseph's Bloody Coat Brought to Jacob,
Diego Velázquez, Spain, 1630

Joseph Sold by His Brothers,
Sarajevo Haggadah, Spain, 1350

Joseph - Yusuf, by Katy Dickinson, 7 March 2023

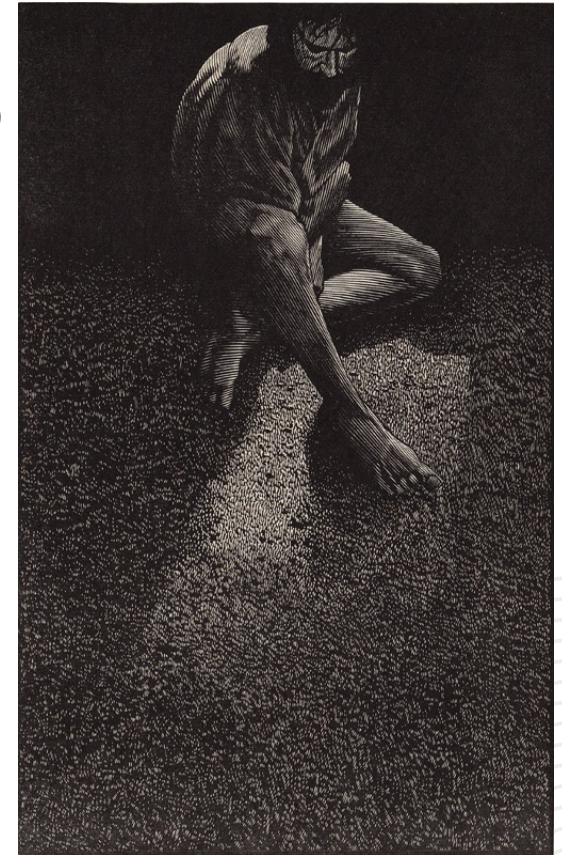


More Images Inspired by Joseph / Yusuf



Joseph Explains Pharaoh's Dream,
Marc Chagall,
France, 1939

Joseph in Prison,
Barry Moser,
USA, 1999



*Joseph Interprets the
King's Dream, Jami and
Muhammad Mirak,*
Persia, 1776



Joseph, Overseer of Pharaoh's Granaries,
Lawrence Alma-Tadema, England, 1874

Joseph - Yusuf, by Katy Dickinson, 7 March 2023

Joseph – Yusuf Story Elements

Element	Qur'an	Torah / Bible	Notes
Backstory: Jacob & Rachel, 12 sons/tribes			Loved/barren wife theme
Evil brothers, selling Joseph as a slave			Satan blamed in Qur'an
Young Joseph in Egypt, Zulaikha / Potiphar's wife seduction attempt			Zulaikha story in both the Midrash, Islamic tradition
Dreams & Interpretation			Prophetic / true dreams
Loyal manager: "Truthful Joseph"			To Potiphar, Chief Jailer, & Pharaoh (the King)
Joseph in prison, forgotten			Satan blamed in Qur'an
Joseph preaches, witness for God			More preaching in Qur'an
Joseph as royal overseer / governor			
Satan			"Sin" in Qur'an and Torah
Joseph & family in Egypt, famine			
Older Joseph, marriage to Asenath, kids			Psalm 105:16-25



Why Joseph - Yusuf?

- 3 scriptures that have guided my thinking in jail ministry and the development of my Doctor of Ministry project are, Jesus's parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) including his exhortation to visit prisoners, the story of **Joseph** in prison in Egypt (Genesis 39-41), and the account of Paul in prison in Philippi (Acts 16:22-40).
- Of particular interest in depictions of lived experience in prison are how **Joseph** and Paul interact with other prisoners and with those in authority. Joseph's story is known and honored by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. His story has the power to inspire prisoners to persevere during hardship and to remain faithful to God.



Yūsuf, Model of Muslim Chaplaincy

“I came across the story of Yūsuf (Joseph) in the Qur’an. Its *tafsīr* (exegesis) highlighted the tradition of a prophet of God who, dreading the strife of seduction in society, sought refuge in prison, where he was divinely bestowed with knowledge, especially dream interpretation...the ‘Yūsuf Model of Muslim Chaplaincy’ became my guide in implementing an individualized ministry plan that reflected my Islamic ethos, having three layers of the proverbial pastoral cloak – (1) deep knowledge of Islam (*‘ilm*), (2) good character (*husn al-khuluq*), and (3) doing good to others (*al-iḥsān*) – tailored to suit the needs of inmates in general and Muslim inmates in particular.”

- Fiazuddin Shuayb, “Islam at the ‘Alcatraz of the Rockies,’” in *Mantle of Mercy: Islamic Chaplaincy in North America* (Templeton Press, 2022).



Yusuf in Prison

In the Qur'an, Yusuf is innocent but asks to go to prison to get away from the temptation of treacherous women.

Yusuf has always had prophetic dreams. In prison, God teaches him to interpret other people's dreams.

Joseph preaches to his fellow prisoners about the grace of the one true God.

He is forgotten in prison for years, even by those whom he has helped, until Yusuf's gift for dream interpretation is needed by Egypt's King.



Joseph in Prison

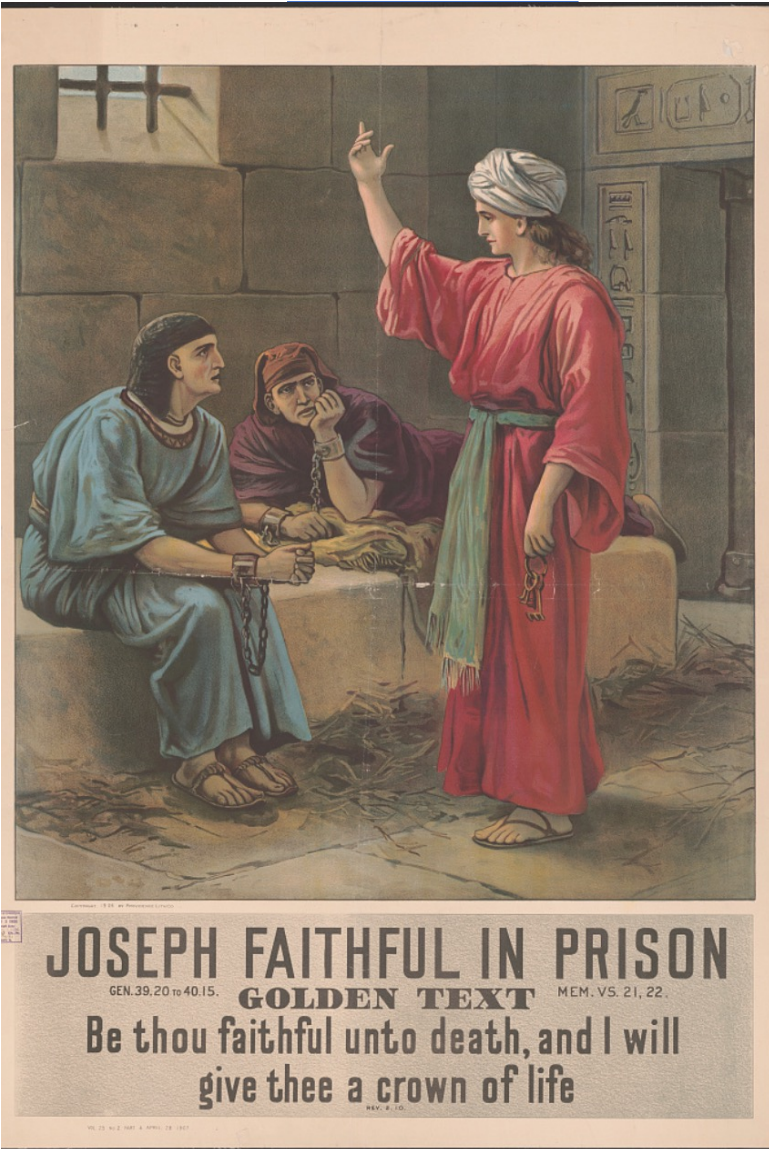
In the Torah, Joseph is innocent but is sent to prison after his master's wife tries to seduce him and when he refuses, she accuses him of attempted rape.

Joseph is so capable that the chief jailer puts him in charge of all the other prisoners.

Joseph has always had prophetic dreams. In prison, God lets him interpret other people's dreams.

He is forgotten in prison for two years, even by those whom he has helped, until Joseph's gift for dream interpretation is needed by Egypt's Pharaoh.

Joseph Faithful in Prison,
USA, 1906



Comparisons with Real Life

There are many similarities in Joseph - Yusuf's story to what I have observed in jail and heard from prisoners:

- The chief jailer used Joseph's intelligence and management skills to his advantage. Joseph's role in the prison seems to be like that of a modern *Trusty*, an inmate who is given small privileges and out-of-cell time in exchange for unpaid labor on behalf of jail management
- Joseph is accused of rape. Rape accusations are common in trials.
- Like Yusuf, many prisoners are deeply faithful and preach to the others about God's grace and authority.
- Like Joseph and Yusuf, modern prisoners also lose social status and wealth, endure long incarceration with no clear end date, and are forgotten or ignored by their family and community.
- Prisoners can find in Joseph – Yusuf's powerful story a role model of faith, perseverance, faithfulness and service, and ultimate success and restoration despite long incarceration.

Questions to Discuss

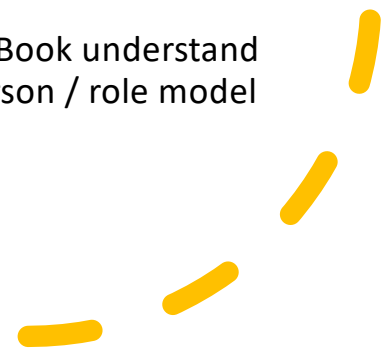
1) Ingrid Mattson writes in *The Story of the Qur'an*, "The Qur'an does not promise the believers that they will not suffer for their faith, nor does the Qur'an promise that they can always expect justice on earth...The Prophet and the believers are told by the Qur'an to find courage and hope in the struggles of the earlier prophets." (p.58).

How does the story of Joseph – Yusuf exemplify this?

2) Daniel Madigan writes in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an* (p.85) that God's revelations in nature are signs "to challenge those who encounter them to reflect and respond in faith."

How could Joseph's unearthly beauty and the favor shown him by God be understood as signs? (How is this an ableist cultural understanding?)

3) Interreligious relations: how do the People of the Book understand Joseph the same, and differently? Is he the same person / role model for Jews, Christians, and Muslims?



Images

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- Marc Chagall, “Joseph Explains Pharaoh’s Dream,” *MoMA – Museum of Modern Art*, Etching 1939, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/64403>.
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- Diego Velázquez, “Joseph’s Bloody Coat Brought to Jacob,” *WikiArt Visual Art Encyclopedia*, 1630 painting, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/diego-velazquez/joseph-s-bloody-coat-brought-to-jacob-1630>.

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- M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
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- "Prophet Joseph" *Salam Media*, 45-part Video series 2022, accessed 6 March 2023, https://www.youtube.com/hashtag/prophet_joseph.
- *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989).