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## From Scripture To Stage: An Adaptation Study Of “Joseph’s Journey: From Shepherd To Blessing”

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the process and implications of adapting the biblical account of Joseph (Genesis 37–50) into a one-act stage play titled *Joseph’s Journey: From Shepherd to Blessing*. Using the framework of adaptation studies, particularly theories advanced by Linda Hutcheon and Julie Sanders, it analyzes how narrative compression, dramatic structure, and performative elements reshape the ancient text for contemporary audiences. Special attention is given to how the adaptation foregrounds emotional arcs, suspense, and moral resolution while retaining theological resonance.

**KEYWORDS:** Genesis- Narrative compression- theological resonance

### INTRODUCTION

Adaptation studies investigate the transformation of stories across mediums, considering both fidelity to the source and the creative liberties taken in the reimagining process. Biblical narratives, due to their canonical authority, cultural familiarity, and moral weight, offer unique challenges and opportunities for adaptation. This paper explores how *Joseph’s Journey* reshapes the Genesis account for theatrical performance, balancing narrative faithfulness with the demands of modern stage drama.

### SCENE 1 – THE DREAMER

(Lights up on Jacob’s household. Joseph wears a bright, colorful robe. Sheep props scattered. Brothers tending sheep, talking among themselves.)

Narrator: In the land of Canaan, Jacob’s son Joseph was loved above his brothers. But love... can bring jealousy.

Jacob: Joseph, my son! Come here. (Holds the coat) Take this—it is yours. You are special to me.

Joseph: (smiling) Thank you, Father. Brothers, last night I dreamed—your sheaves of grain bowed to mine!

Reuben: (mocking) So, you will rule over us?

Judah: And I suppose next you’ll dream that the moon and stars bow to you!

Joseph: (earnestly) I did! The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed before me.

Simeon: (angrily, aside to others) I’ve had enough of this dreamer.

Narrator: Jealousy took root... and soon, the brothers plotted.

(Jacob exits. Joseph walks towards “fields” with bread.)

Reuben: Here he comes—let’s throw him into the pit!

(They grab Joseph, pull off his robe, throw him into “pit.”)

Judah: Wait! Let’s sell him. Here come Ishmaelite traders.

Merchant: How much for the boy?

Judah: Twenty pieces of silver.

Narrator: And so, Joseph's journey began—not toward home... but toward Egypt.

## SCENE 2 – POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

(Joseph now dressed plainly. Potiphar sits at a desk.)

Narrator: In Egypt, Joseph was bought by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh.

Potiphar: Joseph, you are skilled and honest. I place my whole household under your care.

(Potiphar's wife enters, whispers to Potiphar, acting upset. Guards seize Joseph.)

Potiphar: Joseph... I trusted you. But my wife accuses you. I must send you to prison.

Joseph: My lord, I am innocent. Yet I trust the Lord.

## SCENE 3 – FAITH IN THE SHADOWS

Setting: Egyptian prison. Dim lighting. Rough stone walls (suggested with cloth backdrops or dark panels). A wooden bench or stool for Joseph.

Narrator: Joseph, once the most trusted servant in Potiphar's house, now sat in chains—falsely accused. Yet even in the shadows, God's light did not leave him.

[Joseph sits on the bench, head bowed. A guard enters with two prisoners — the Cupbearer and the Baker. They sit apart, looking troubled.]

Joseph: (gently, noticing their faces)

Why do you look so sad today?

Cupbearer: We each had a dream last night... and there is no one to interpret them.

Joseph: (calm, steady)

Interpretations belong to God. Tell them to me, please.

Cupbearer: (steps forward)

In my dream, a vine was before me. On the vine were three branches. It budded, blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

Joseph: (pauses, then smiles slightly)

This is its meaning: The three branches are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position... and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand as before.

(Leans in)

But... when it is well with you, remember me. Speak of me to Pharaoh, for I was stolen from the land of the Hebrews, and I have done nothing to deserve this prison.

Baker: (hopeful)

And my dream? There were three baskets of white bread on my head, and in the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh... but birds were eating them from the basket.

Joseph: (hesitates — softer tone)

The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift your head... from you. And the birds will eat your flesh.

(A silence falls. The baker looks down, shaken. The cupbearer glances uneasily at Joseph.)

[Narrator steps forward.]

Narrator:

And so, it happened. On Pharaoh's birthday, the cupbearer was restored... and the baker was executed. But the cupbearer forgot Joseph.

(Lights dim further — Joseph sits back on the bench, alone.)

Joseph: (quiet prayer)

Lord... I do not understand Your plan. But I trust you still.

(A single warm spotlight falls on Joseph as the rest of the stage fades to black. Soft harp chord plays.)

[Narrator's voice in darkness.]

Two more years would pass... before Pharaoh's dreams would call Joseph from darkness into destiny.

## SCENE 4 – PHARAOH’S COURT

Setting:

Pharaoh’s palace in Egypt. A grand throne, colorful drapes, servants standing on each side. Guards with spears. A golden cup or staff for Pharaoh. Joseph enters later, dressed plainly as a prisoner but cleansed and presentable (robe instead of rags).

Lighting: Bright golden hue for Pharaoh’s court; spotlight on Pharaoh’s throne.

[Narrator steps forward]

Narrator:

Two full years passed since Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh’s servants. Then one night, Pharaoh himself dreamed—dreams that troubled his spirit and robbed him of sleep. None in all Egypt could explain them. But the cupbearer remembered...

[Stage: Cupbearer runs in and kneels before Pharaoh.]

Cupbearer:

O Pharaoh, today I remember my faults. When you were angry with me and the chief baker, we were in prison with a Hebrew. He interpreted our dreams, and each came true exactly as he said.

Pharaoh:

Bring this Hebrew to me—at once!

[Guards exit, then return leading Joseph. Joseph bows deeply before Pharaoh.]

Pharaoh: I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one to interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can explain it.

Joseph: It is not in me, O Pharaoh. God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

Pharaoh: (leaning forward)

In my dream, seven fat cows came up out of the Nile and fed in the reeds. Then seven thin, ugly cows came up after them and devoured the fat cows—but even after eating them, they looked just as thin.

And in another dream, I saw seven full, healthy heads of grain on one stalk. Then seven thin heads, scorched by the east wind, sprouted after them and swallowed the seven full heads. None can tell me what it means.

Joseph: (calm but assured)

Pharaoh’s dreams are one. God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do: Seven years of great plenty will come throughout all Egypt. But after them will arise seven years of famine so severe that the abundance will be forgotten.

Let Pharaoh choose a wise and discerning man to set over the land. Appoint overseers to collect a fifth of the harvest during the seven plentiful years. Store the grain in cities under Pharaoh’s authority, and it will be food for the years of famine—so the land will not perish.

[Silence. Pharaoh rises slowly from his throne, steps down toward Joseph.]

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

(Turns to court.)

Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so wise and discerning as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall obey your command. Only in the throne will I be greater than you.

(Pharaoh removes his signet ring and places it on Joseph’s hand. He puts a gold chain around Joseph’s neck.)

Pharaoh: I set you over all the land of Egypt. Ride in my second chariot, and let them call before you, “Bow the knee!”

[Narrator steps forward as Joseph stands tall beside Pharaoh.]

Narrator: In one day, God lifted Joseph from the prison to the palace—from chains to authority—preparing him for the greatest mission of his life.

## SCENE 5 – BLESSINGS FOR THE FAMILY

Setting: Pharaoh’s palace, several years after Joseph became governor. Large sacks of grain stacked on the side. A richly decorated chair for Joseph. Egyptian servants stand at attention.

Lighting: Bright, golden tone.

[Narrator enters, stepping forward to address the audience]

Narrator:



Seven years of abundance came and went. Now, famine ruled the land. But in Egypt—thanks to God’s wisdom given to Joseph—there was grain. From far and wide, people came to buy food... including Joseph’s own brothers from Canaan.

[Enter Brothers, dusty clothes, looking weary. They kneel before Joseph without recognizing him.]

Joseph (seated, watching them):

Who are you? From where do you come?

Reuben:

My lord, we come from the land of Canaan to buy grain. We are your servants.

Joseph (pretending stern): Servants? You are spies!

Judah: No, my lord. We are twelve brothers, sons of one man. One is no more... and the youngest is with our father.

(Joseph turns away for a moment, hiding emotion.)

Joseph (aside, quietly):

They do not know me... yet here they bow, just as in my dreams.

Narrator: Joseph tested them—to see if their hearts had changed.

[Time passes in short acted montage: Brothers returning home, bringing Benjamin, showing fear when Joseph’s silver cup is found in his sack, Judah offering himself in Benjamin’s place.]

[Back in Joseph’s court — Brothers kneel again, fearful.]

Joseph (voice trembling):

Enough... I cannot hide it any longer. (He removes his headdress.)

Joseph: I am Joseph... your brother, whom you sold into Egypt!

[Brothers look up in shock, stepping back.]

Simeon: Joseph?! It cannot be...

Reuben: We... we did wrong to you. Please, punish us, my lord.

Joseph (stepping forward, voice breaking but warm):

Do not be afraid. Do you not see? It was not you who sent me here, but God. He sent me ahead to save lives—to save your lives.

(Joseph embraces Benjamin tightly, then Reuben, then the others. They slowly begin to cry and hug him back.)

Joseph: Go, bring my father quickly. Tell him that I am alive, and that I rule over all Egypt by Pharaoh’s command. You will live in Goshen, and there will be no hunger for you or your children.

Narrator: What man meant for evil... God turned to good.

[Servants bring bread and wine; Joseph personally hands bread to each brother.]

Joseph: You are my brothers—my family. And today, you are forgiven.

All Cast (together, looking upward):

What man meant for evil, God used for good!

(Lights fade to warm glow. Curtain falls.)

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 ADAPTATION THEORY

Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation* defines adaptation as both “a product and a process,” emphasizing that each adaptation is “an announced and extensive transposition” of a work from one medium to another. Julie Sanders’ *Adaptation and Appropriation* further distinguishes between adaptation (direct engagement with a source) and appropriation (more radical transformation), highlighting how cultural context shapes reception. This theoretical foundation frames the discussion of *Joseph’s Journey* not as a “replacement” of the biblical text but as an interpretive performance.

Robert Stam’s work on intertextual dialogism is also relevant here, as biblical adaptations often engage not only with the original scripture but also with centuries of artistic reinterpretation. Stam’s argument that adaptations are “readings” rather than mechanical translations provides a framework for understanding the creative liberties taken in the play.

## 2.2 ADAPTATION OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVES FOR STAGE

Scholarly work on biblical drama demonstrates the tension between theological fidelity and theatrical engagement. Jeffrey St. Clair's *Sacred Stages: The Bible in Performance* notes that biblical dramas often condense narratives to create emotional intensity while maintaining recognizable theological themes. Meanwhile, Adele Reinhartz explores how performance media inevitably "filter" biblical stories through the lens of contemporary performance conventions. This suggests that *Joseph's Journey*—with its focus on heightened emotional climaxes and interpersonal drama—stands in a long tradition of interpretive performance rather than mere illustration.

## 2.3 THEATRICAL STRATEGIES IN RELIGIOUS ADAPTATION

Margaret Rogerson's research on medieval mystery plays reveals that dramatizations of scripture often use suspense, repetition, and visual symbolism to engage audiences. Although the medieval plays were communal religious events and *Joseph's Journey* is a modern one-act, both rely on familiar audience knowledge of the biblical plot, freeing the playwright to focus on pacing, tension, and characterization rather than exposition.

Hutcheon also stresses the importance of medium-specific affordances: theatre allows for silence, gesture, and live audience feedback in ways that textual narrative cannot. This is reflected in *Joseph's Journey's* inclusion of short, suspense-building pauses that create a visceral connection between performer and viewer.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs textual analysis, comparing key scenes from Genesis 37–50 with their counterparts in the one-act adaptation. Attention is given to omissions, additions, and re-sequencing, as well as to performance elements such as dialogue pacing and stage directions. The analysis follows Hutcheon's model, considering both the "product" (final script) and "process" (creative transformation).

## 4. ANALYSIS OF THE ADAPTATION

### 4.1 COMPRESSION AND STRUCTURE

The Genesis account spans decades, whereas *Joseph's Journey* condenses the story into five core scenes: (1) Shepherd life and dreams, (2) betrayal by brothers, (3) slavery and trials, (4) suspenseful reunion, and (5) blessing and reconciliation. This compression necessitates the removal of subplots (e.g., Judah and Tamar) while preserving the emotional and theological arc of betrayal, testing, and redemption.

### 4.2 HEIGHTENED EMOTIONAL CLIMAX

Scenes 4 and 5 in the adaptation merge the revelation of Joseph's identity with the conferral of blessing. Suspense-building pauses replace narrative description, creating a sense of shared anticipation with the audience. Where Genesis narrates Joseph's revelation directly ("I am Joseph, your brother..."), the play draws out the moment with incomplete sentences, shifts in tone, and non-verbal acting beats, intensifying the catharsis.

### 4.3 CULTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL RESONANCE

The adaptation maintains the biblical message of divine providence but frames it within a modern performance vocabulary. For instance, stage directions emphasize physical distance and gradual approach, visually representing reconciliation before it is spoken. This aligns with Sanders' observation that adaptations often "translate" abstract themes into tangible performance moments.

## 5. CONCLUSION

*Joseph's Journey* demonstrates how biblical narratives can be reshaped through theatrical adaptation without losing theological substance. By applying adaptation theory, this study reveals how compression, suspense, and performative embodiment transform scripture into a live emotional experience. The process is not one of replacement but of re-interpretation, placing an ancient narrative in dialogue with contemporary performance practice.

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