



Joseph in Religious History and the Bahá'í Writings

Christopher Buck, PhD

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Host: Todd Lawson, PhD

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JOSEPH IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Highlights of this Presentation

Evaluative thesis:

**Just as the story of Joseph is the
“best of stories” (Qur’an 12:3),
the metaphor of Joseph is the
“best of metaphors.”**

Predicative thesis:

The Qur'anic Joseph is the single most comprehensive, extensive, pervasive symbol and allegory of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Bahá'í Writings.

He is the All-Glorious

O thou who art enamored of the Joseph of the divine realm! Joseph of Canaan appeared in the bazaar of the terrestrial Egypt with a certain handsomeness and charm, but the Joseph Who derived His beauty from the True One shed His splendor in the marketplace of revelation in the celestial Egypt with a radiant face, a heavenly comeliness, an indescribable divinity, a lordly sweetness, a godly attractiveness, a luminous appearance, and a rosy countenance. When He found the buyers to be pretenders and the seekers to be heedless, He concealed His resplendent visage with the veil of invisibility and hid His heavenly beauty behind the clouds of imperceptibility. How sad and regrettable that they remained shut out and deprived during the days of His manifestation and revelation, and became chilled and debarred in the time of His emanation upon the Mount!

Glory rest on thee and on all who have attained.

–'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás

(Provisional translation by Adib Masumian (Aug. 25, 2022), shared with permission.)

هوالابهی

ای مفتون یوسف مصر الهی، یوسف کنعان با صباحت و ملاحتی در بازار مصر ترابی جلوه نمود، ولی یوسف جمال حقیقی در مصر رحمانی رُخی نورانی و حُسنی رحمانی و آنی یزدانی و ملاحتی ربّانی و صباحتی سبحانی و مطلعی روشن و منظری چون گلشن در بازار ظهور تجلی فرمود و چون خریداران را مدّعیان و طالبان را غافلان یافت، روی نورانی در پرده غیب مستور فرمود و جمال رحمانی را در پس غمام پنهانی مخفی کرد. زهی حسرت که در ایام جلوه و ظهور محجوب و محروم شدند و در اوقات تجلی بر طور مخمود و ممنوع گشتند

و البهَاء علی کلّ فائز

عبدالبهاء ع

(*Makátib-i-Hadrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 9, p. 176. Original Persian text courtesy of Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir, Aug. 25, 2022.)

JOSEPH IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Joseph in Jewish Tradition & Scriptures

"No piece of prose elsewhere in the Bible can equal the literary standard attained by the Joseph story of Genesis 37–50."

– D. B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 423.

Brief Summary of the Joseph Biblical Tradition

- ❖ Joseph was one of Jacob's 12 sons. His father loved him more than any of the others and gave him a coloured cloak. His brothers were jealous of him and sold him into slavery. He was taken to Egypt and eventually became steward to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. Potiphar's wife tried unsuccessfully to seduce him and after false accusations were levelled at Joseph he was imprisoned. Due to his ability to interpret Pharaoh's dream he was made governor of Egypt. He wisely rationed the country's produce in preparation for a time of famine.
- ❖ During the famine Jacob's sons came to Egypt to plead with Joseph for supplies. They did not recognise him but after he was satisfied that they were reformed he identified himself with great joy. Joseph invited his father and brothers to come and settle in Egypt. The story is recounted in the Old Testament (Genesis 37, 39-45).
- ❖ Joseph is often seen as an Old Testament equivalent, or prefiguration, of Christ. Scenes from Joseph's story were painted by Pontorno and Bacchiacca for Pierfrancesco Borgherini. – The National Gallery, "[Joseph \(Old Testament\)](#)."

Joseph died, was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

²⁴ At length, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. God will surely take notice of you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." ²⁵ So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here."

²⁶ Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. (*The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 101.)

Genesis 50:24–25

“Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had exacted an oath”

19 And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had exacted an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will be sure to take notice of you: then you shall carry up my bones from here with you.”

(The Jewish Study Bible, p. 134.)

Exodus 13:19

**When Moses entered the royal tombs, he
smelled Joseph's coffin, which was as
fragrant as the Ark of the Covenant.
"Surely" he thought, "these are the bones
of Joseph."
(Perek R' Yishayhu, Beit HaMidrash 6:112)**

The bones of Joseph, brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem"

³² The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought for a hundred *kesitahs*• from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, and which had become a heritage of the Josephites.

(The Jewish Study Bible, p. 507.)

Joshua 24:32

Joseph in Classical Rabbinic Midrash (Oral Torah)

בלעדִי. אֵין הַחֲכָמָה מִשְׁלִי, אֶלָּא אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֵה - יִתֵּן עֲנִיָּה בְּפִי - לְשִׁלּוֹם
בלעדִי NOT I – (the word is compounded of בל and עדי, it does not extend to
me) The wisdom to interpret dreams is not my own, but God will answer – He will put in
my mouth an answer that will be for Pharaoh's welfare.

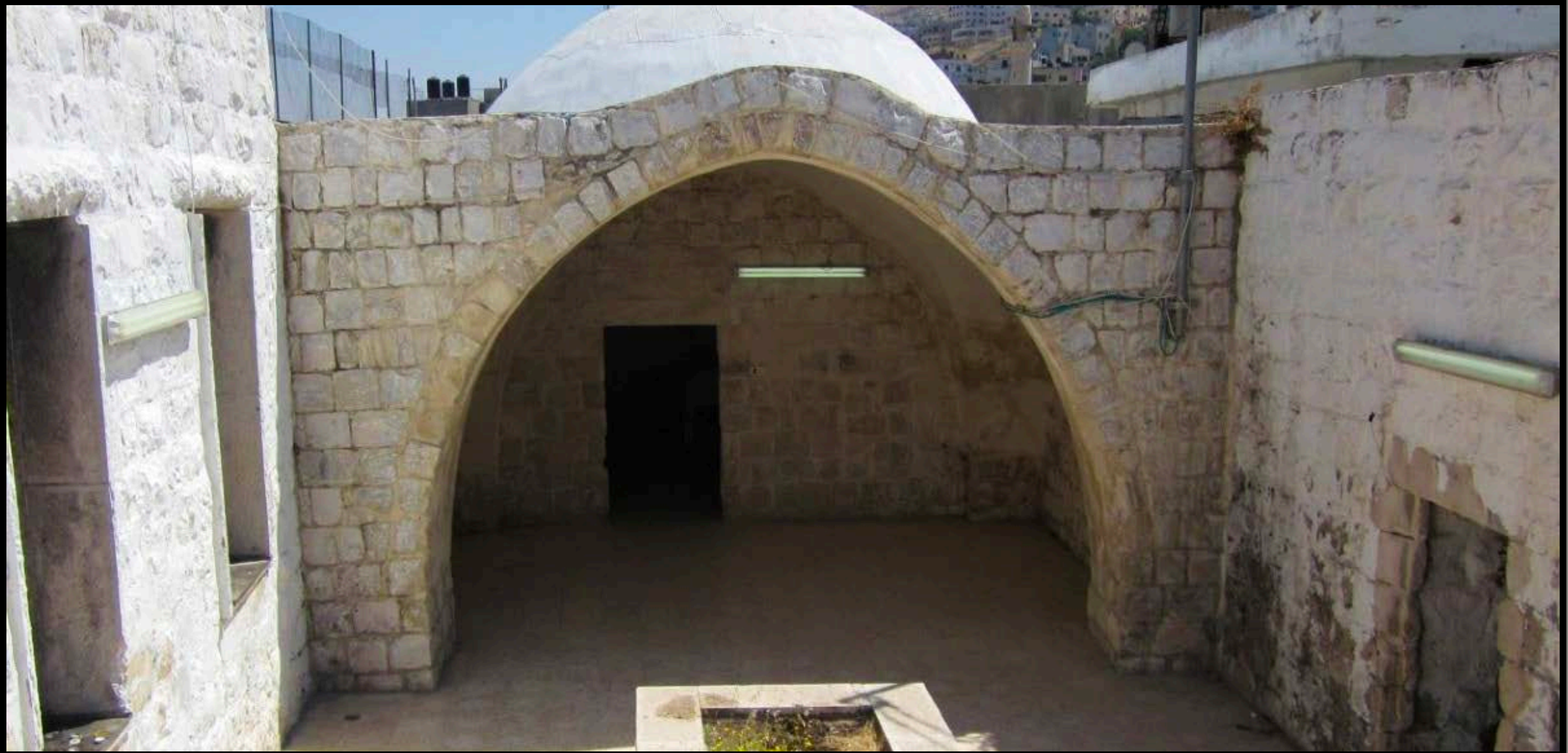
– Rashi on Genesis 41:16:1, <https://www.sefaria.org/topics/joseph?tab=sources>.

Rabbi Rashi

Joseph in Classical Rabbinic Midrash (“Oral Torah”)

Another interpretation (of Gen. 39:1): WHEN JOSEPH WAS TAKEN DOWN TO EGYPT. There were three natures within him. < He was > a Torah scholar, a prophet, and one who nourished his brothers. [...] And where is it shown that he was prophet? Where it is stated (in Gen. 37:2): SINCE HE WAS A YOUTH WITH THE CHILDREN OF BILHAH.... [Note: Since prophets like Joshua and Samuel are called youths, the designation must mean that Joseph also was a prophet.] – Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Vayeshev 20, https://www.sefaria.org/Midrash_Tanchuma_Buber%2C_Vayeshev.20.1?lang=bi.

Midrash Tanchuma Buber

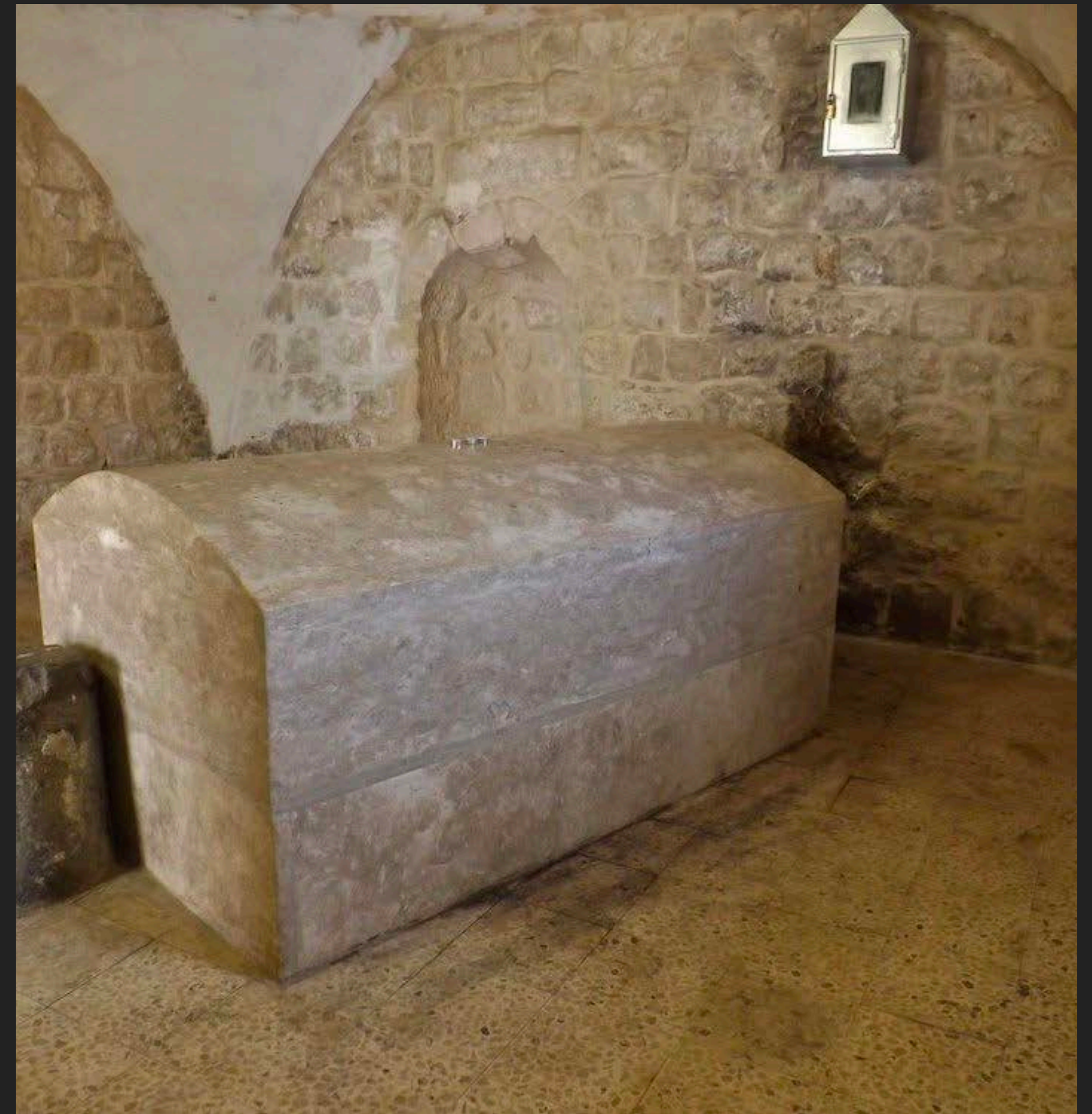


JOSEPH'S TOMB IN SHECHEM

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM MILLER (2014).

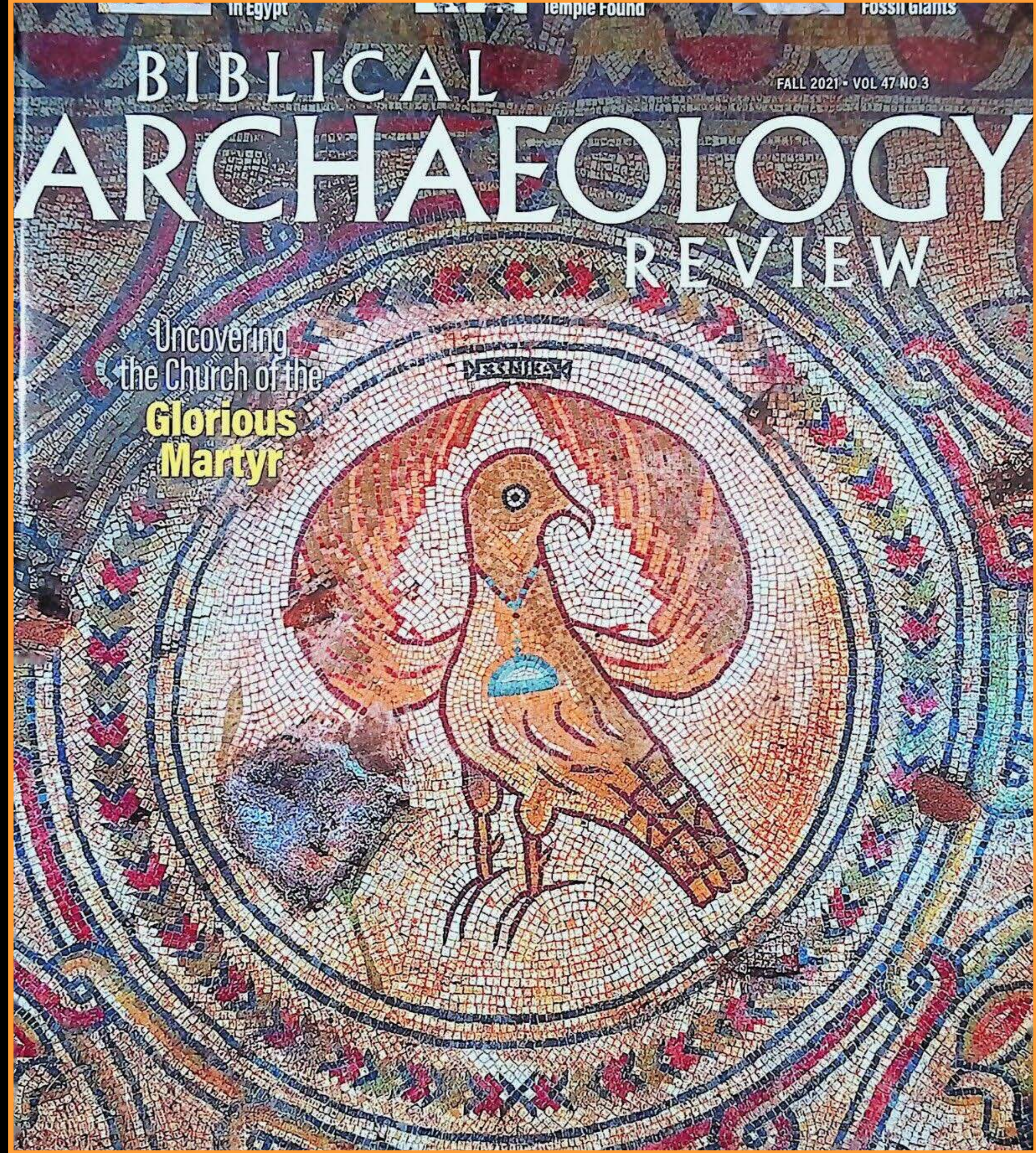
The Historicity of Joseph Debate

- ❖ Did Joseph exist historically? This has led to a vigorous debate.
- ❖ Rachel Hallote, "Does Archaeology Confirm Joseph's Time in Egypt?" *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Fall 2021): pp. 40–47. <https://www.baslibrary.org/biblical-archaeology-review/47/3/5>. (Scan of published article, in full, courtesy of Todd Lawson, 16 August 2022.)
- ❖ An excerpt from the article is online here:
- ❖ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/magazine/does-archaeology-confirm-josephs-time-in-egypt/>
- ❖ Reference courtesy of Larry Marquardt (Aug. 14, 2022).



Rachel Hallote, Professor of History, Purchase College, State University of New York, states:

When one leaves off the details of the “plot” of the Bible, **ignoring the personal conflicts between Joseph and his brothers, the biblical storyline aligns with the Egyptian sources.** In both versions, we have people from Canaan who move down to live and rule in Egypt. In the biblical version, the people from Canaan are Joseph and his brothers. In Egyptian history, the people from Canaan are the Canaanites who trickled into Egypt, set up permanent cities, and eventually became known as Hyksos rulers. **The stories are identical in their larger narratives, if not in their particulars.**

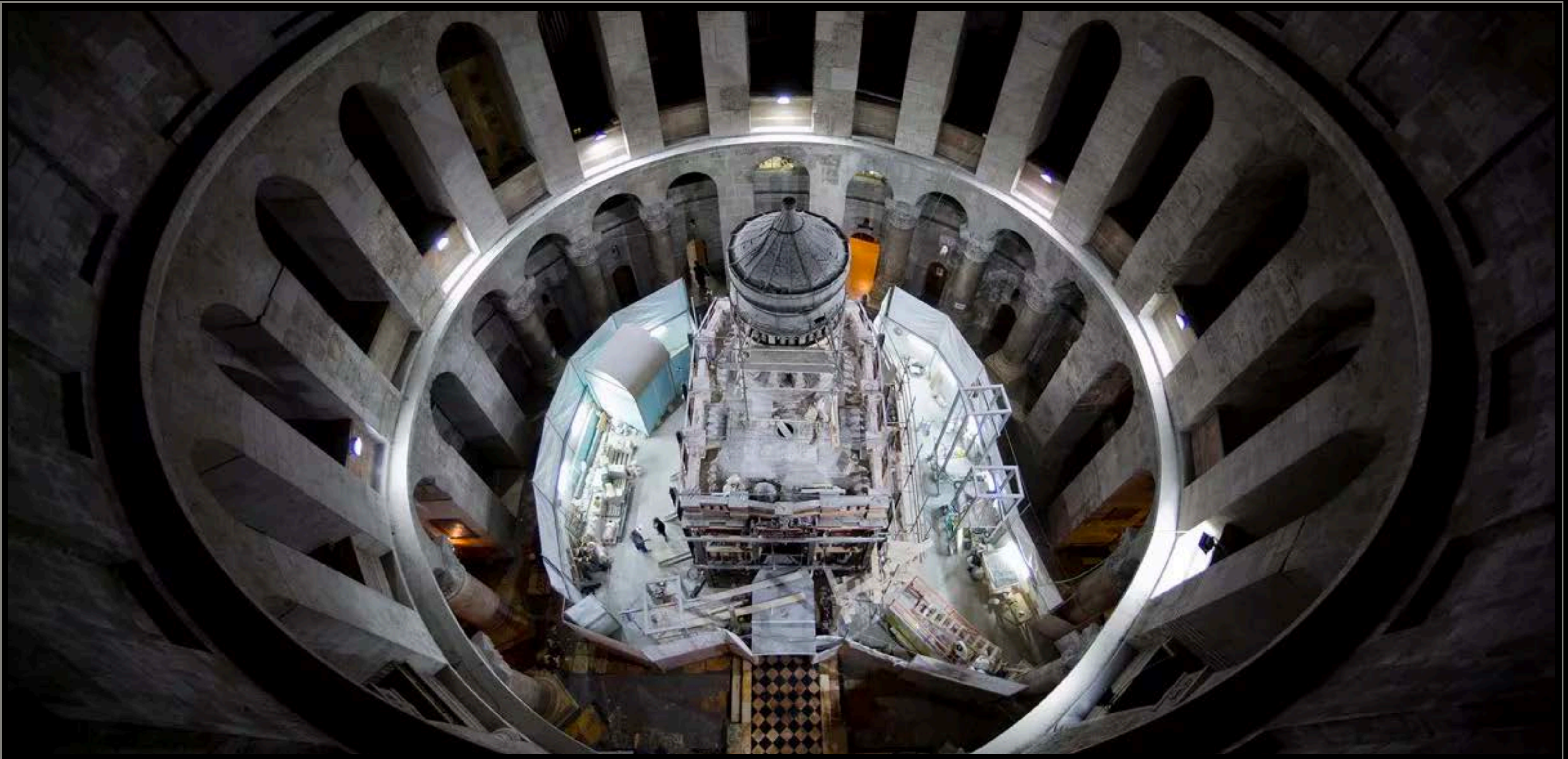


Egypt during the first Persian domination (Twenty-Seventh Dynasty)

- ❖ "In sum, Egyptian background of the Joseph story does not point to the New Kingdom but to Late Period Egypt. The Joseph story displays not only striking similarities to Papyrus Berlin 23071vs and the Ahiqar narrative from Elephantine, but receives its deeper meaning from the aforementioned situation in Egypt during the first Persian domination (Twenty-Seventh Dynasty)."
- ❖ Bernd U. Schipper, "Joseph in Egypt. A Critical Evaluation of the Classical Parallels and a New Interpretation," in *The Joseph Story between Egypt and Israel*, edited by Thomas Römer, Konrad Schmid, and Axel Bühler (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), pp. 139–163 [162–163].
- ❖ Reference courtesy of Steve Cooney (Aug. 25, 2022).

JOSEPH IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Joseph in Christian Tradition & Scriptures

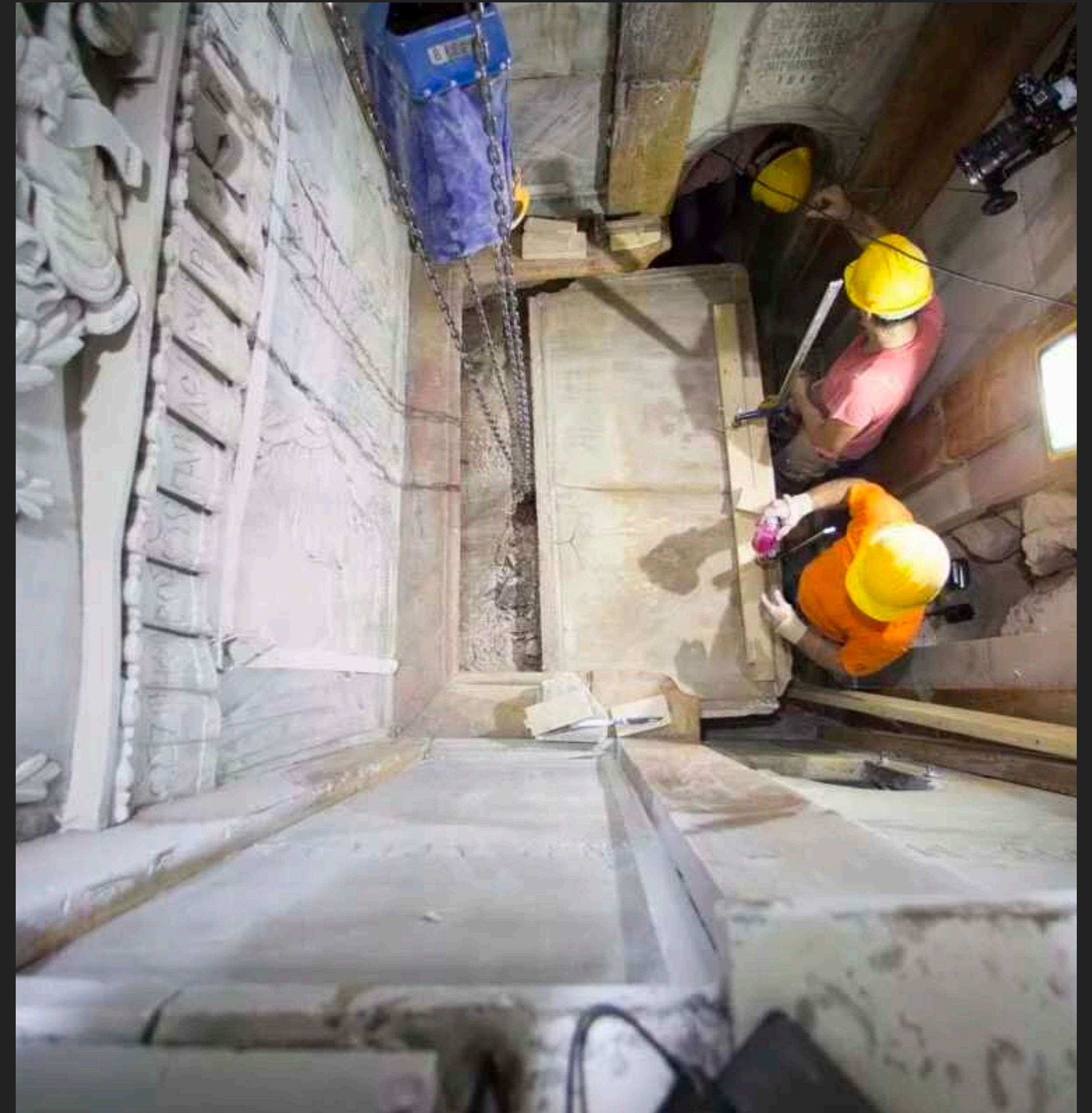


THE HOLY EDICULE (TOMB OF JESUS) IN CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE (JERUSALEM)

(IMAGE CREDIT: ODED BALILTY / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC)

Joseph in Early Syriac (Persian Christian) Tradition

- ❖ "Among early Christian writings about the Old Testament patriarch Joseph, it is works from the early Syriac tradition which explore this figure most extensively. Joseph appears prominently among biblical characters used in Aphrahat's demonstrations, and of course Ephrem retells the narrative, with expansions, in his Genesis commentary. Yet the genre in which the story is most fully explored is the dramatic dialogue poem." – Kristian S. Heal (2008).
- ❖ Photo (Oct. 2016): "Workers remove a marble slab covering the original stone 'burial bed' where Jesus Christ is said to have been laid to rest after being crucified." See ["Images: The Church of the Holy Sepulchre."](#)



The Syriac History of Joseph

A new translation and introduction

by Kristian S. Heal

The *Syriac History of Joseph* is a dramatic prose retelling of the story of the Old Testament patriarch Joseph, beginning with his dreams and ending with his death (Gen 37, 39–47, 50), but omitting Jacob's blessing upon both Joseph's and his own children (Gen 48–49). The narrative is rich in expansions, many of which contain Jewish elements. The work is attributed to Basil of Caesarea in each of its five known manuscript witnesses (CPG 2987). This attribution is certainly spurious.¹ However, the work is no less important for not coming from the pen of the famous Cappadocian since it embodies an influential and early stratum of the significant corpus of Syriac Joseph texts.

Editions and Manuscripts

The *editio princeps* of the *Syriac History of Joseph* was published in two parts, the first in 1893 by Magnus Weinberg and the second in 1895 by Samuel Wolf Link.² This edition was based on Berlin Syriac 74 (Sachau 9), a parchment codex written in an East Syriac hand dated to A.D. 1695. Pages are wanting at both the beginning and end, and elsewhere throughout the manuscript. The "History of Joseph," which begins on folio 24r and comprises twenty-eight leaves, is the seventh item in this miscellany of apocryphal and hagiographical works.³ The loss of a single leaf after the current folio 37 caused a lacuna to the most important narrative expansion in the text, and thus to the published edition of this work. This gap has now been filled, and the complete episode is found in the present translation.⁴

Four additional manuscript witnesses of this work have been identified since it was

who bought him from you, God sent them to be your accusers." ¹⁸And Joseph brought a man and said to him, "Read the document (II.23) in their presence." ¹⁹And he read what was written in it as follows, "We, Reuben, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Gad, and Issachar, and Zebulon, and Dan, and Naphtali, and Asher, we ten brothers sold the slave called Joseph to the Arab merchants for twenty pieces of silver." ²⁰And Joseph shouted at them in a harsh voice, and said to them, "The men deserving to die are you." ²¹And their arms became feeble, and they fell upon their faces before him, and collapsed as if dead from their fear.

Gen 45:11-15

Joseph reveals himself to his brothers

46 ¹And when Joseph saw them sprawled in front of him like dead men, he was moved with compassion over them, and more especially because of his brother Benjamin. ²And he commanded and had them arise from the ground, and he comforted them and said to them, "Take courage, and don't be afraid, for I am your brother Joseph, and I saw the dreams and related (them) to you. ³And behold, you have seen with your own eyes that my dreams were true. ⁴Behold, you are in the place of your sheaves and you have bowed down to me; and the sun is our father Jacob, who will come down and see me; and the moon is Pharaoh the king; and the eleven stars are you. ⁵I am he whom you threw in the dried-out cistern, and I am he whom you sold to the Arabs." ⁶Joseph was relating (these things), and they were reeling from their fear and their terror. ⁷And he embraced Benjamin and kissed him and caressed him, and said to him, "Is our father Jacob, my beloved, alive, for how long is the time that he mourned over me!"

Gen 45:16-20

Joseph presents his brothers to Pharaoh

47 ¹And Joseph went in to Pharaoh and said to him, "My lord, my eleven brothers have come to me." ²And Pharaoh rejoiced greatly when he heard that he was Joseph the son of Jacob, because Pharaoh had heard of the fame of Jacob the Hebrew a long time ago. ³And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Send trustworthy men immediately, and they shall take wagons and beasts with them, and they shall load upon them your father and all the people of his house (II.24) and they shall come down to us."

Aphrahat, the Persian Sage, Demonstration 21:9 (“Joseph and Jesus”)

- ❖ See: Aphrahat, the Persian Sage (“Farhād” in Persian, fl. 337–345 CE), Demonstration 21 (“On Persecution”), Section 9 (“Joseph and Jesus”): Adam Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), pp. 437–458 (esp. pp. 435–436). (See text below.)
- ❖ See also Kristian S. Heal, “Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature,” *Brigham Young University Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2002), pp. 29–49. Chart on pp. 39–45, reproduced below. Text online: <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/joseph-as-a-type-of-christ-in-syriac-literature/>.

Demonstration 21.9, “On Persecution” (Joseph and Jesus)

9. Jacob was persectued [sic: persecuted] and Esau was the persecutor. Jacob received the blessings and the birthright, but Esau was rejected from both. Joseph was persectued [sic: persecuted] and his brothers were the persecutors. Joseph was elevated and his persecutors bowed down to him; his dreams and visions were fulfilled. The persecuted Joseph was the image of the persecuted Jesus: the father of Joseph clothed him in a long-sleeved tunic,³⁹ (³⁹ Genesis 37:3) and the Father of Jesus clothed him in a body from the Virgin.

Aphrahat, the Persian Sage

Demonstration 21.9, "On Persecution" (Joseph and Jesus)

The father of Joseph loved him more than his brothers,⁴⁰ (⁴⁰ Genesis 37:3) and Jesus was his Father's Loved and Cherished One. Joseph saw visions and dreamed dreams, and Jesus fulfilled the visions⁴¹ (⁴¹ B: "vision") and the prophets. Joseph was a shepherd, along with his brothers, and Jesus is the Chief of the Shepherds. When Joseph's father sent him to visit his brothers, they saw that he was coming and they made plans to kill him. When his Father sent Jesus to visit his brothers, they said, "This is the heir. Let us kill him!"⁴² (⁴² Matthew 21:38.)

Aphrahat, the Persian Sage

Demonstration 21.9, “On Persecution” (Joseph and Jesus)

The brothers of Joseph threw him into a pit,⁴³ (43 Genesis 37:24) and the brothers of Jesus sent him down among the dead. Joseph came up from the pit, and Jesus rose from among the dead. After he came up from the pit, Joseph ruled over his brothers. After he rose from among the dead, the Father of Jesus gave him a great and excellent name,⁴⁴ (44 Philippians 2:9) so that his brothers might be in subjection to him and his enemies placed under his feet.⁴⁵ (45 Ephesians 1:22.) When Joseph made himself known to his brothers, they were ashamed and afraid and amazed at his majesty.

Aphrahat, the Persian Sage

Demonstration 21.9, “On Persecution” (Joseph and Jesus)

When Jesus comes at the end of time so that his majesty will be revealed, his brothers, who previously crucified him, will be ashamed and afraid and troubled. By the counsel of Judah, Joseph was sold into Egypt, and by Judas Iscariot, Jesus was betrayed to the Jews. When they sold him, Joseph gave no response to his brothers, and Jesus did not speak or give a response to the judges who were judging him.⁴⁶ (⁴⁶ Matthew 27:14; Mark 15:5; Luke 23:9.) Joseph's master wickedly put him in prison, and Jesus was condemned by his own people.

Aphrahat, the Persian Sage

Demonstration 21.9, “On Persecution” (Joseph and Jesus)

Joseph gave up two garments, one to his brothers and one to his master's wife. Jesus gave up his garments, and the soldiers divided them among themselves.⁴⁷ (⁴⁷ Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24.) Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharoah [sic: Pharaoh] and became lord of Egypt.⁴⁸ (⁴⁸ Genesis 41:46.) Jesus was about thirty years old⁴⁹ (⁴⁹ Luke 3:23) when he came to the Jordan to be baptized, received the Spirit, and went out to preach. Joseph supplied the Egyptians with bread, and Jesus supplied the whole world with the bread of life.

Aphrahat, the Persian Sage

Demonstration 21.9, “On Persecution” (Joseph and Jesus)

Joseph married the daughter of the wicked and unclean priest, and Jesus brought the Church to himself from the unclean peoples. Joseph died and was buried in Egypt, and Jesus died and was buried in Jerusalem. The brothers of Joseph brought his bones up from Egypt, and the Father of Jesus raised him up from among the dead, and brought his body up with him to heaven uncorrupted.

Aphrahat, the Persian Sage

“Syriac Comparisons of Joseph and Jesus”

- ❖ Kristian S. Heal, “Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature,” *Brigham Young University Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2002), pp. 29–49, surveys the early Syriac writings on Joseph and Jesus.
- ❖ See “Table 1”: “Syriac Comparisons of Joseph and Jesus” (pp. 39–45), reproduced below.
- ❖ Text of chart online: <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/joseph-as-a-type-of-christ-in-syriac-literature/>.

Numerous hints have been made in this article to the centrality of typology in Syriac literature, particularly of the early period. For early Syriac writers such as Aphrahat and his younger contemporary Ephrem, typology was a central mode of expression. God revealed his mysteries through the types and symbols found in scripture and nature, and their apparent abundance led Ephrem to exclaim, “Lord, Your symbols are everywhere.”³¹ In this and other respects, early Syriac Christianity demonstrates its affinity with its Jewish heritage. In both literatures, we find the use of “testimonia, typology, periphrastic quotation, [and] haggadic expansion,”³² and in many instances there is a clear relationship between the Syriac and the Jewish traditions.³³ We find, then, in the literature of this early period of Syriac Christianity one of the few examples of a “genuinely Semitic-Christian literature.”³⁴ For this and numerous other reasons, Syriac literature is a great storehouse of treasures that are worthy of pursuit.

In the following table, A. stands for Aphrahat, as quoted in Ioannes Parisot, ed., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*; A. C. is from Edward G. Mathews, *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian*;³⁵ N. refers to Paul Bedjan, ed., *Homilae Mar Narsetis in Joseph*; and E. is from Stephanus Evodius Assemani, *Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri opera omnia*.³⁶ Except for the passages from Mathews and Assemani, the translations in the table are the author’s own. In some cases, Mathews and Assemani have been quoted and in others paraphrased.

TABLE 1
Syriac Comparisons of Joseph and Jesus

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. 21:9	Joseph was a shepherd with his brothers (cf. Gen. 37:2).	Jesus was the chief of the shepherds.
A. 21:9	His father clothed Joseph with the long-sleeved coat (cf. Gen. 37:3).	His Father clothed Jesus with a body from the virgin.
A. 21:9	Joseph’s father loved him more than his brothers (cf. Gen. 37:3).	Jesus was the Friend and Beloved of his Father.
A. C. 143:18–20; 143:20–21	Before Joseph came to the land of the Egyptians, he was with his father in splendor and honor (cf. Gen. 37:2–4).	Our Lord, before he came to this earth, was with the One who sent him in glory and praise.
A. 21:9	Joseph saw visions and dreamed dreams (cf. Gen. 37: 5, 9).	Jesus fulfilled the visions and words of the prophets.
N. 43:21–44:1; 44:2–3	Joseph dreamed dreams of his brothers, but they did not believe it; rather, they hated him (cf. Gen. 37:5–11).	Our Lord spoke with the crucifiers in parables, and the more he spoke, the more they envied him.
E. 31–32; 33–34	The youth Joseph from Jacob’s bosom was sent to inquire about his own brothers (cf. Gen. 37:13–14).	The Lord was sent to us from the Father’s bosom to save us all.
A. 21:9	When Joseph’s father sent him to visit his brothers, they saw him coming and planned to kill him (cf. Gen. 37:18).	When his Father sent Jesus to visit his brothers, they said, “This is the heir, come, let us kill him” (cf. Matt. 21:38).
A. C. 143:8–11; 143:11–13	When the brothers of Joseph saw him, they said, “Behold, here is the dreamer coming toward us; come, let us kill him, and let us see whether his	And when the husbandmen saw our Lord, they said, “This is the heir to the vineyard. Come, let us kill him, and henceforth the inheritance

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
	dreams come of anything” (cf. Gen. 37:18–20).	will be ours” (cf. Mark 12:7; Luke 20:14).
E. 35–39; 39–42	Joseph’s harsh brothers, as soon as they saw him approaching, began to devise evil against him, though he was bringing them peace from their father (cf. Gen. 37:18).	The Jews also, ever hard of heart, as soon as they saw the Savior, said, “This is the heir, let us kill him, and all will be ours.”
N. 8:11–19; 8:20	Reuben petitioned for the life of Joseph (cf. Gen. 37:22).	Pilate petitioned for the life of Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:2–26, 58–66; Mark 15:1–15, 42–47; Luke 23:1–25, 50–53; John 18:28–19:22, 31, 38).
E. 43–45; 46–47	Joseph’s brothers said, “Let us do away with him, and let us be set free of his dreams” (cf. Gen. 37:20).	The Jews said, “Come, let us kill him and lay hold on his inheritance.”
A. C. 143:13–14; 143:14–16	Joseph fell into two pits: into one because of his dreams and into the other for the sake of victory over desire.	Our Lord was enclosed in two pits: in the flesh because of his mercy and in Hades for the sake of his victory over death.
A. 21:9	Joseph’s brothers cast him into the pit (cf. Gen. 37:24).	The brothers of Jesus sent him down into the grave.
A. 21:9	Joseph came up from the pit (cf. Gen. 37:28).	Jesus arose from the grave.
A. C. 143:6–7; 143:7–8	Joseph rose from the pit to rule the kingdom and from disgrace to glorious honor.	Our Lord rose from the cross into the heavens, and from Hades into the throne of glory.
A. 21:9	After Joseph came up from the pit, he ruled over his brothers.	After Jesus arose from the grave, his Father gave him an excellent and great name so that his brothers were subject to him and his enemies were laid beneath his feet.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. 21:9	Joseph was sold into Egypt at the advice of Judah (cf. Gen. 37:26–27).	Jesus was delivered to the Jews by Judas Iscariot.
E. 48–49; 50–51	Joseph’s brothers, while eating, sold him, slaying him in intent (cf. Gen. 37:25–27).	In the same way, the “abominable” Jews, while eating the Passover, slew the Savior.
A. 21:9	When they sold Joseph, he did not speak or give a word (cf. Gen. 37:28).	Jesus did not speak or give a word to the judges who judged him (cf. Acts 8:32–35).
A. C. 144:11; 143:12–13	The kid was slain, and Joseph lived (cf. Gen. 37:31).	Our Lord gave his flesh to the cross for the salvation of his Church.
A. C. 144:13–14; 144:14–15	Joseph’s cloak was soaked with blood, but his flesh was not harmed at all (cf. Gen. 37:32).	They seized the flesh of our Lord, but not his divinity.
E. 52; 53	Joseph descended into Egypt.	Our Savior descended to Earth.
A. C. 143:26–27; 143:27–28	Joseph entered the land of the Egyptians, and his mistress desired him (cf. Gen. 39:7).	Our Lord entered into the tomb, and Hades desired him.
A. C. 143:28; 143:29	His mistress hastened to corrupt Joseph (cf. Gen. 39:7).	Hades hastened to corrupt our Lord.
E. 54–57; 58–61	Joseph, within the marriage chamber, trampled down all the strength of sin, putting on the bright prizes of victory against the Egyptian woman, his mistress (cf. Gen. 39:11–12).	The Lord, the Savior of our souls, descended into hell, destroying there all the power of the dread and near invincible tyrant.
A. C. 143:29–30; 143:30–31	The woman was unable to overcome the strength of Joseph (cf. Gen. 39:11–12).	Hades was unable to overcome the strength of our Lord.
A. C. 143:31–32; 143:32–144:1	Joseph’s mistress grabbed his clothes, but Joseph escaped (cf. Gen. 39:11–12).	Hades grabbed the garment of our Lord, but his flesh ascended and rose up.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. 21:9	Twice Joseph gave up his garments, once by the hands of his brothers and once by the hand of his master's wife (cf. Gen. 39:11-12).	Jesus yielded up his garments, and the soldiers divided them among themselves.
N. 44:8; 44:9	His mistress confined Joseph the just in prison (cf. Gen. 39:16-20).	Zion confined our Savior in the tomb.
A. 21:9	Joseph's master delivered him unjustly to prison (cf. Gen. 39:20).	The sons of his people condemned him unjustly.
E. 62-63; 64-65	When Joseph had conquered sin, he was put in prison until the hour of his crowning (cf. Gen. 39:20).	So, too, the Lord, that he might take away every sin of the world, was placed in a grave.
A. C. 143:23-25; 143:25-26	Joseph stood in shame in prison like an evildoer although he was clothed with every meekness and chastity (cf. Gen. 39:20).	Our Lord came to the cross like a sinner although he had overcome the world.
A. C. 144:2-3; 144:3-4	Joseph entered into prison and comforted those who were captive (cf. Gen. 39:20-23).	Our Lord entered into Hades and comforted the dead.
E. 66-67; 68-69	Joseph in prison spent two whole years in great freedom (cf. Gen. 41:1).	The Lord, as powerful, remained in the tomb for three days, not undergoing corruption.
A. C. 144:4-6; 144:7-9	Joseph interpreted the dreams for the servants of Pharaoh—the first one he enabled to return to his job as chief butler, while the other, Pharaoh hanged on a cross (cf. Gen. 40:1-23).	Our Lord led one thief into the garden of delights because of his faith, while upon the other he set a decree of punishment because of his doubt.
N. 44:10; 44:11	Joseph went out from prison and took off his outer garments (cf. Gen. 41:14).	Our Lord went out from the tomb and put on glory.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. C. 144:15-16; 144:17-18	Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh (cf. Gen. 41:46).	Our Lord was thirty years old when he was baptized in the Jordan River.
A. 21:9	Joseph, as a thirty-year-old, stood before Pharaoh and became a lord of Egypt (cf. Gen. 41:46).	Jesus, as a thirty-year-old, came to the Jordan to be baptized, and he received the Spirit and went out to preach.
E. 70-73; 74-77	Joseph, on Pharaoh's order, was brought out graciously from prison, as a true type, when he easily interpreted the meaning of the dreams indicating the abundance of grain that was going to be (cf. Gen. 41:14-37).	Our Lord, Jesus Christ, was raised from the dead by his own power, despoiling hell, offering to the Father our liberation, proclaiming resurrection and everlasting life.
N. 44:4; 44:5	Joseph interpreted for the Egyptians, and they believed (cf. Gen. 41:14-37).	The Gentiles believed in our Lord and his parables.
N. 44:12-13; 44:14-15	Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams just as they were, and he sat upon the throne and was a king of the whole of Egypt (cf. Gen. 41:14-43).	Our Lord revealed and made himself known to his disciples and ascended and sat on the right hand of the Father, who sent him.
E. 78-79; 80-83	Joseph took his seat in Pharaoh's chariot, having received authority over the whole of Egypt (cf. Gen. 41:43).	Our Savior, king before the ages, ascending into heaven on a cloud of light, took his seat with glory at the Father's right hand, above the cherubim, as the Only Begotten Son.
A. 21:9	Joseph took the daughter of a wicked and foul priest to wife (cf. Gen. 41:45).	Jesus took to himself the church from the unclean nations.
A. C. 143:16-17; 143:17-18	Joseph, instead of his licentious mistress, took Asenath as his wife (cf. Gen. 41:45).	Our Lord, instead of that first murderous congregation, chose for himself the holy Church.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. 21:9	Joseph provided food for the Egyptians with bread (cf. Gen. 41:55–56).	Jesus provided for the whole world with the bread of life.
N. 44:16; 44:17	Joseph purchased the whole of Egypt with ordinary bread (cf. Gen. 41:56).	The Lord of Joseph purchased the whole of creation with his body and his blood.
A. 21:9	When Joseph saw his brothers, they were ashamed and afraid and marveled in his majesty (cf. Gen. 45:3).	When Jesus comes in the latter time, when he is revealed in his majesty, his brothers will be ashamed and afraid and greatly alarmed, for they crucified him aforetime.
A. C. 144:1; 144:2	Joseph fed those who were captive (cf. Gen. 43:31–34).	Our Lord was a light-giver to the dead in Hades.
A. C. 144:9–10; 144:10–11	Joseph judged his judges and cast into prison those who had put him to shame in the pit (cf. Gen. 42:24).	Our Lord is the judge of those who crucified him.
E. 84–100; 101–110	When ruling over Egypt, Joseph received authority against his enemies, and his brothers were brought willingly before the tribunal of the one who had died through them; they were brought to prostrate themselves with fear and trembling before the one who had been sold by them to death, and with fear they prostrated themselves before Joseph, whom they had not wanted to be king over them. But Joseph, recognizing his brothers, revealed them as murderers by a single word. They, when they realized, stood dumbfounded in great shame, not daring to utter,	So, too, on that fearful day when the Lord comes on the clouds of the air, he will take his seat on the throne of his kingdom, and all his enemies will be brought, bound by fearsome angels, before the judgment seat— all those who did not want him to rule over them. For the lawless Jews thought then that if he were crucified he would die as a human, the wretches not being persuaded that God had come, for salvation, to save our souls.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
	not having anything at all to say in their defence, knowing exactly their own sin at the moment when they sold him, while he, who seemed to have been destroyed by them in Hades, was suddenly found to be ruling over them.	
N. 43:11; 43:12	And they knelt down upon their faces and worshipped before the son of Rachel (cf. Gen. 42:6).	The crucifiers will kneel before our Lord on the day of resurrection.
E. 111–114; 115–118	Joseph said quite openly to his brothers, making them fear and tremble, “I am Joseph, whom you sold [into slavery], but now I rule over you, though you did not want it.”	The Lord showed the cross in an image formed of light to those who crucified him, and they recognized the cross itself and the Son of God, who was crucified by them.
N. 44:6; 44:7	Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in the inner chamber (cf. Gen. 45:1).	The Lord of Joseph revealed himself to his disciples in the upper room.
A. C. 144:18; 144:19–21	The brothers recognized Joseph on the second occasion.	At the Second Coming of our Lord will the congregation recognize and know that he is the Christ.
A. 21:9	Joseph died and was buried in Egypt (cf. Gen. 50:26).	Jesus died and was buried in Jerusalem.
A. 21:9	Joseph’s brothers took his bones up from Egypt (cf. Ex. 13:19).	The Father raised Jesus up from the grave/sheol and took his body with him to heaven without corruption.

“An epic poem in twelve books is attributed either to Ephrem or to Balai”

- ❖ “Syriac literature is particularly rich in poems on Joseph.² **An epic poem in twelve books is attributed either to Ephrem or to Balai,**³ and there are mimre on him by both Narsai and Jacob of Serugh.⁴ Besides these there is a prose narrative falsely attributed to Basil,⁵ several anonymous narrative poems,⁶ and some dialogue *sughyotho*.” – Sebastian Brock, **“A Syriac Dialogue between Joseph and Benjamin,”** *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 18 (2021): 7–19 (pp. 7–8).

Narsai, "On Joseph and Benjamin, sons of our father Jacob"

11. **[Joseph]** Recount it to me rightly; reveal the truth and tell me: Whom did Joseph resemble? (My) boy, reveal and explain to me.
12. **[Benjamin]** Joseph has no resemblance either among kings or among slaves. There is one person to whom I would liken him, but I am afraid to tell you.
13. **[Benjamin]** My lord king, he resembles you, and his face is like your face; the scent that comes to me from you is like the scent of my brother Jacob.
14. Weeping befell between them and they began to embrace one another. They were asking each other all that had happened to them. ...
19. **[Joseph]** Arise, (my) boy, and go and take my garments to the old man Jacob; show him my likeness and tell him that Joseph is alive.
20. He had breathed the scent of the dead, (but now) the old man **Jacob said**, '(It is) the scent of a dead man who has come alive; (my) boy, reveal to me the truth.'

– Narsai, "On Joseph and Benjamin, sons of our father Jacob."

Translated by Sebastian Brock, "A Syriac Dialogue between Joseph and Benjamin," *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 18 (2021): 7–19 (p. 16).



INTERIOR OF THE AL-MASJID AL-NABAWI (MOSQUE OF THE PROPHET)

WHERE THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD IS BURIED, ALSO CALLED HAJRA AL-MUATTARA (THE FRAGRANT ROOM)

Joseph in Islamic History of Ideas

- ❖ "The story of Joseph in the Qur'an is among the favorites of Muslims in general. It is considered the 'best of stories' (Q 12:3), because it is a more or less extended and consistent narrative, unlike other suras of the Qur'an. According to al-Tha'labī (d. 428/1036), the author of a *qisas l-anbiya*, the story of Joseph is the most beautiful 'because of the lesson concealed in it, on account of Yūsuf's generosity and its wealth of matter, in which prophets, angels, devils, jinn, men, animals, birds, rulers, and subjects play a part.'" (p. 227)
- ❖ Todd Lawson, "Typological Figuration and the Meaning of 'Spiritual': The Qur'anic Story of Joseph," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 132, No. 2 (April-June 2012), pp. 221-244 (24 pages). [JSTOR]



Joseph is on par with other Quranic Prophets

And We gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – all [of them] We guided. And Noah, We guided before; and among his descendants, David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the doers of good.

– Qur'ān 6:84 (Sahih International), <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=6&verse=84>.

Qur'ān 6:84

“God will never send forth a Messenger after him” [Joseph].

Joseph brought you the clear signs before, yet you continued in doubt concerning that he brought you until, when he perished, you said, “God will never send forth a Messenger after him.” Even, so God leads astray the prodigal and the doubter.’

– Qur’ān 40:34 (Arberry), <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=40&verse=34>.

Qur’ān 40:34

“Send him [Joseph] forth with us tomorrow”

¹¹ They said, ‘Father, what ails thee, that thou trustest us not with Joseph? Surely we are his sincere well-wishers. ¹² Send him forth with us tomorrow, to frolic and play; surely we shall be watching over him.’

– Qur’ān 12:11–12 (Arberry), <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=12&verse=11>; <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=12&verse=12>. See the Báb’s commentary, *Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’* 13:29, below.

Qur’ān 12:11–12

The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. II: Prophets and Patriarchs

See also: al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. II: Prophets and Patriarchs (Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk)*. Translated and annotated by William M. Brinner, Bibliotheca Persica, edited by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York ("SUNY") Press). Pp. 148–185.

al-Ṭabarī

Commentary

- ❖ "In the course of telling the story of Joseph and the relationship implied for the current audience, Muḥammad himself is seen, by virtue of his spiritual/typological kinship with all of the prophets and messengers, as being reunited with his true family, who in the very act of reunion/recognition (cf. *ʿirfān, maʿrifa*) are given a new measure of divine guidance, another revelation." (p. 226)
- ❖ Todd Lawson, "Typological Figuration and the Meaning of 'Spiritual': The Qur'anic Story of Joseph," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 132, No. 2 (April–June 2012), pp. 221–244 (24 pages). [JSTOR]

JOSEPH IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Joseph in the Writings of the Báb



SHRINE OF THE BÁB

MT. CARMEL (HAIFA, ISRAEL) — A UNITED NATIONS WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Joseph in the Writings of the Báb

- ❖ It is to the covenant of this Promised One that the Báb alludes in chapter 38 of the *Qayyúm al-Asmá'*: 'God, in his Greatest Day (*Yawmihi al-Akbar*), will enter into a strong covenant with the people.' In the same chapter he says: 'Be watchful for the Greatest Day of God (*Yawm Alláh al-Akbar*).' This Greatest Day is the day of the advent of Yúsuf (Joseph) as the Qayyúm, for whom the *Qayyúm al-Asmá'* is titled. **The Báb was the Qá'im while the Promised One of the Bábí dispensation would be the Qayyúm.**
- ❖ Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini, "The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph," *A Most Noble Pattern: Collected Essays on the Writings of the Báb, 'Alí Muhammad Shirazi (1819–1850)*, edited by Todd Lawson and Omid Ghaemmaghami (Oxford: George Ronald, 2012), pp. 6–27 (p. 17).



**The Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'
As "the same Qur'án"**

The Qayyúmu'l-Asmá' "is verily the same Qur'án which was sent down in the past"

O YE concourse of the believers! Utter not words of denial against Me once the Truth is made manifest, for indeed the mandate of the Báb hath befittingly been proclaimed unto you in the Qur'án aforesaid. I swear by your Lord, this Book is verily the same Qur'án which was sent down in the past.

– The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, Chapter LXXXI, *Selections From the Writings of the Báb*, p. 49, www.bahai.org/r/926008802. (Emphasis added. Reference courtesy of Todd Lawson, 17 Aug. 2022.)

The Báb

Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam

Qur'an, exegesis, messianism, and the literary origins of the Babi religion

Todd Lawson

Reviews

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***Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur'an, Exegesis, Messianism, and the Literary Origins of the Babi Religion.* Todd Lawson.¹ (2011)**

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Reviewed by Christopher Buck, Pennsylvania State University
Email: BuckPhD@gmail.com

Structure and Overview

The spirit is willing, but the text is deep. To plumb its depths, an extended review of *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam* is needed to explore Todd Lawson's analysis of the early work of Sayyid 'Alī-Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–50), known as the Bab ('the Gate'), prophet-founder of the Babi religion (which later evolved into the Baha'i Faith). According to Lawson, the Bab's 'first public heretical act was to compose/reveal a new Qur'an – "the true Qur'an"' (21), which is the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf ('Commentary on the Sura of Joseph') – also known as the Qayyūm al-Asmā' (10) and the Aḥsan al-Qiṣaṣ ('Best of Stories'), the name that the Qur'an itself gives to the Sura of Joseph (Q. 12:3). This 'public heretical act' – and others – was as brazen as it was brilliant, and ultimately cost the Bab his life, with his public execution on 9 July 1850 in Tabriz, Persia (Iran). The Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf, composed/revealed in 40 consecutive days (29) in mid-1844, when the Bab was 25 years old (28), is thus the subject matter of Lawson's monograph.

**Joseph “symbolizing”
“a progression of historical figures”**

The Symbolism of Joseph in the Writings of the Báb

- ❖ The Súrih of Joseph, in contrast, relates the story of the life of one person, Joseph. But the Báb's commentary interprets Joseph's life as symbolizing major turning points in sacred history and **Joseph himself as a progression of historical figures: in addition to representing himself, Joseph also symbolizes Imám Ḥusayn, the Báb, and the Promised One of the Bábí Dispensation.**
- ❖ In this way, we can see, the truth of the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá' becomes manifest in the Persian Bayán. The station of Joseph symbolizes the divinity of the Point, the station of the sheer revelation of God and of absolute Divine Unity. The martyrdom of Ḥusayn also symbolizes the same station; **thus the Báb is Joseph and Ḥusayn, and will return as Ḥusayn (that is, Bahá'u'lláh) in His next Revelation.**
- ❖ – Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb* (Ottawa and Waterloo, ON: Association for Bahá'í Studies and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), pp. 119 and 272 (emphasis added).

Joseph as Joseph himself

“in addition to representing himself, Joseph”

Verse 2:

GO, TAKE THIS SHIRT OF MINE, AND DO THOU CAST IT ON MY FATHER'S FACE, AND HE SHALL RECOVER HIS SIGHT; THEN BRING ME YOUR FAMILY ALL TOGETHER. (Qur'an 12:93)

– The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, Qur'an translation by Todd Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam* (2012), p. 106.

The Báb

“in addition to representing himself, Joseph”

¹¹ They said, 'Father, what ails thee, that thou trustest us not with Joseph? Surely we are his sincere well-wishers. ¹² Send him forth with us tomorrow, to frolic and play; surely we shall be watching over him.'

– Qur'ān 12:11–12 (Arberry), <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=12&verse=11>; <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=12&verse=12>. See the Báb's commentary, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* 13:29, below.

Qur'ān 12:11–12

“in addition to representing himself, Joseph”

And when THEY SAID: O OUR FATHER! ... SEND HIM WITH US TOMORROW SO THAT HE MAY abide in the point of ice of the frozen mountain around the point of union, and that he might cause the point of fire to appear from the mountain of justice around the water of virtue.

– The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* 13:29, provisional translation by Todd Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam* (2012), pp. 77–78.

The Báb

Joseph as Muhammad (“Seal”) and as Moses

“Joseph also symbolizes” the Prophet Muhammad (and Moses)

O Qurratu'l-'Ayn! Soon the people of the Supreme Cloud of Subtlety shall utter: “Thou assuredly art the Joseph of Divine Unity. Say! Yea, by My Lord! I, in the shape of a square, am the Joseph of the Supreme Origin, and here is My Brother in the shape of a triangle, the form of the Seal. Verily, God hath favoured Me with the Twin Mysteries within the Twin Sinais, and the Twin Names in the Twin Luminaries.

The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* (Súrih of Tathlíth), INBA 3:184, provisional translation by Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, pp. 108 and 388, n. 75. [Here, I read “Seal” as a reference to Muhammad, and “Sinai” as Moses.]

The Báb

Joseph as Imam Husayn

“Joseph also symbolizes Imám Husayn” . . . “the true Joseph”

Verily God hath deprived of His grace him who martyred Ḥusayn, Our forefather, lonely and forsaken as He was upon the land of Táff [Karbilá]. Yazíd, the son of Mu'áviyah, out of corrupt desire, bartered away the head of the true Joseph to the fiendish people for a trifling price and a petty sum from his property.

– The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, Chapter XXI, *Selections From the Writings of the Báb*, p. 49, www.bahai.org/r/975616563.

The Báb

“Joseph also symbolizes Imám Husayn”

Verily, the Most Gracious God hath unmistakably intended [by reference to Joseph], naught but Ḥusayn, the Self of the Apostle, the Fruit of the Chaste One [Fáṭimih], and the Son of 'Alí, begotten of Abí Ṭálib. God hath verily shown Ḥusayn within the Sanctuary of His Heart (*Mash'arihi'l-Fu'ád*), and above the Throne, that the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars have manifestly knelt before Him in adoration of the One True God. Hence when Ḥusayn addressed His Father, saying, “I saw eleven Stars, and the Sun and the Moon; I saw them in very truth bowing down for the Eternal God, by virtue of the embracing truth of My Cause.” . . . Verily the stars of the Throne in the Book of God have bowed down in very truth for the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, . . . – The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* (Chapter 5, Súrih of Yúsuf), INBA 3:10–11, provisional translation by Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, pp. 147 and 391, n. 15.

The Báb

Joseph as the Báb

“Joseph also symbolizes . . . the Báb” “the true Joseph”

O PEOPLES of the East and the West! Be ye fearful of God concerning the Cause of the true Joseph and barter Him not for a paltry price¹ established by yourselves, or for a trifle of your earthly possessions, that ye may, in very truth, be praised by Him as those who are reckoned among the pious who stand nigh unto this Gate. [¹ cf. Qur'án 12:20.]

– The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, Chapter XXI, *Selections From the Writings of the Báb*, p. 49, www.bahai.org/r/975616563.

The Báb

Joseph as the “Return” of the Báb

“Joseph also symbolizes . . . the Promised One of the Bábí Dispensation”

Erelong will God wreak His vengeance upon them, at the time of Our Return, and He hath, in very truth, prepared for them, in the world to come, a severe torment.

– The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, Chapter XXI, *Selections From the Writings of the Báb*, p. 49, www.bahai.org/r/975616563. [Hear, I read “at the time of Our Return” as an oblique allusion to Bahá'u'lláh.]

The Báb

Commentary

- ❖ In this way, we can see, the truth of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* becomes manifest in the Persian Bayán. The station of Joseph symbolizes the divinity of the Point, the station of the sheer revelation of God and of absolute Divine Unity. The martyrdom of Husayn also symbolizes the same station; thus the Báb is Joseph and Husayn, *and will return as Husayn (that is, Bahá'u'lláh) in His next Revelation.*
- ❖ – Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb* (Ottawa and Waterloo, ON: Association for Bahá'í Studies and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), p. 272 (emphasis added).

Bahá'u'lláh as the “Return” of Husayn

“In truth, this is Husayn”

By God! This is He Who hath at one time appeared in the name of the Spirit, [Jesus Christ] thereafter in the name of the Friend [Muhammad], then in the name of 'Alí [the Báb], and afterwards in this blessed, lofty, self-subsisting, exalted, and beloved Name. In truth, this is Ḥusayn, Who hath appeared through divine grace in the dominion of justice, against Whom have arisen the infidels, with what they possess of wickedness and iniquity. – Bahá'u'lláh, Additional Tablets and Extracts from Tablets Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, www.bahai.org/r/107788893.

Bahá'u'lláh

“Stand ashamed before My beauty”

Thereupon they severed His head with the sword of malice, and lifted it upon a spear in the midst of earth and heaven. Verily, that head is speaking from atop that spear, saying: “O assemblage of shadows! Stand ashamed before My beauty, My might, My sovereignty, and My grandeur. Turn your gaze to the countenance of your Lord, the Unconstrained, so that ye may find Me crying out among you with holy and cherished melodies.” – Bahá'u'lláh, *Additional Tablets and Extracts from Tablets Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh*, www.bahai.org/r/107788893.

Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá' u' lláh as the Qayyúm

“Indeed the Qayyúm has come to you”

Indeed the Qayyúm has come to you just as the Qá'im [the Báb] had prophesied his appearance.'

– Bahá'u'lláh (Mázandarání 1968–73, vol. 4, p. 531). Provisional translation by Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini, “The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph,” *A Most Noble Pattern*, p. 25, note 15..

Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh as the “Joseph of Bahá' (Yúsuf al-Bahá)”

Bahá'u'lláh as “Joseph of Bahá' (Yúsuf al-Bahá')”

“Finally, in the Book of Names (*Kitáb al-Asmá'*), in the chapter entitled ‘The Name of God, the Bearer of Glad-Tidings’ (*Ismu'lláh al-Bashír*), the Báb identifies himself as a herald to the Joseph of Bahá' (*Yúsuf al-Bahá'*), namely the Promised One.”

– Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini, “The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph,” *A Most Noble Pattern*, p. 19.

The Báb

Bahá'u'lláh as “Joseph of Bahá' (Yúsuf al-Bahá')”

Hearken! Then take ye firm hold of the garment of the Joseph of Bahá' (*qāmiṣ Yúsuf al-Bahá'*) from the hand of His Exalted, Transcendent Herald of Glad Tidings. And place it upon thy head in order that thou might recover thy sight (or “be endowed with insight”) and discover thyself truly aware.

– The Book of Names (*Kitáb al-Asmá'*), Arabic text cited in *Qámús-i-Íqán*, Vol. 4, p. 1875. Provisional translation by Stephen Lambden, “*The Qayyūm al-asmā' of the Bāb* (I-CXI): Introductory Notes.”

The Báb

JOSEPH IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Joseph in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh



SHRINE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

'AKKÁ AREA, ISRAEL

Joseph in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- ❖ Selected passages, presented below, accentuate certain salient motifs from the Joseph saga – and thus the importance of Joseph as an ideal figure for conceptualizing and appreciating the person and work of Bahá'u'lláh.
- ❖ From the Kitáb-i-Íqán, an interesting comment on a verse in the Qur'an in which it is asserted that no "independent Prophet" would appear after Joseph – with such close-mindedness characterized as a "spiritual disease."



“And Joseph came to you aforesaid with clear tokens”

After the denials and denunciations which they uttered, and unto which We have referred, they protested saying: “No independent Prophet, according to our Scriptures, should arise after Moses and Jesus to abolish the Law of divine Revelation. ...”

Thereupon this verse ... was revealed: “And Joseph came to you aforesaid with clear tokens, but ye ceased not to doubt of the message with which He came to you, until, when He died, ye said, ‘God will by no means raise up a Messenger after Him.’ Thus God misleadeth him who is the transgressor, the doubter.”¹⁶⁴ [Note 164: Qur’án 40:34] ...

Bahá'u'lláh

“Most of the people have become afflicted with the same spiritual disease”

Therefore, understand from this verse and know of a certainty that the people in every age, [were] contending that no Prophet should again be made manifest to the world. Even as the Christian divines who, holding fast to the verse of the Gospel to which We have already referred, have sought to explain that the law of the Gospel shall at no time be annulled, and that no independent Prophet shall again be made manifest, unless He confirmeth the law of the Gospel. Most of the people have become afflicted with the same spiritual disease. – The Kitáb-i-Íqán (¶ 236), www.bahai.org/r/347595259.

Bahá'u'lláh

“In our Qá'im . . . four signs from four Prophets, Moses, Jesus, Joseph, and Muhammad”

In the “Biḥár” it is recorded: “In our Qá'im there shall be four signs from four Prophets, Moses, Jesus, Joseph, and Muḥammad. The sign from Moses is fear and expectation; from Jesus, that which was spoken of Him; from Joseph, imprisonment and dissimulation; from Muḥammad, the revelation of a Book similar to the Qur'án.” Notwithstanding such a conclusive tradition, which in such unmistakable language hath foreshadowed the happenings of the present day, . . . – The Kitáb-i-Íqán (¶ 282), www.bahai.org/r/675492591.

Bahá'u'lláh

“Joseph of Bahá”: Declaration to Mystics

Methinks at this moment I perceive the musk-scented fragrance of the garment of Há' from the Joseph of Bahá; verily He seemeth near at hand, though ye may think Him far away.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ An intimation of Bahá'u'lláh's imminent Manifestation. – The Four Valleys (¶ 33), The Call of the Divine Beloved, www.bahai.org/r/794820335.

Bahá'u'lláh

“The divine Joseph”

And cups of crimson-coloured wine are being borne round by the hand of the divine Joseph and raised to the beauty of the All-Glorious. ... Hasten then, O concourse of men, and drink your fill from this stream of everlasting life! ... Say: O assemblage of true lovers! The beauty of the Desired One hath shone forth in its naked glory. And this, verily, is from the grace of God, the Most Exalted, the Most Bountiful. – Days of Remembrance (Tablet 44, ¶¶ 12–14), www.bahai.org/r/538687192.

Bahá'u'lláh

“Joseph of faithfulness” with “fragrances of enlightenment”

Cleanse thy heart from every blasphemous whispering and evil allusion thou hast heard in the past, that thou mayest inhale the sweet savours of eternity from the Joseph of faithfulness, gain admittance into the celestial Egypt, and perceive the fragrances of enlightenment from this resplendent and luminous Tablet, a Tablet wherein the Pen hath inscribed the ancient mysteries of the names of His Lord, the Exalted, the Most High. – Gems of Divine Mysteries (¶ 29), www.bahai.org/r/467955456.

Bahá'u'lláh

“The sweet-smelling savor of My garment”

Say: From My laws the sweet-smelling savor of My garment can be smelled, and by their aid the standards of Victory will be planted upon the highest peaks. The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: “Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty.” Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe. – The Kitáb-i-Aqdas (¶ 4), www.bahai.org/r/304611242.

Bahá'u'lláh

Metaphor of the fragrant “garment”

[Note] 1. the sweet-smelling savor of My garment ¶4

This is an allusion to the story of Joseph in the Qur'án and the Old Testament, in which Joseph's garment, brought by his brothers to Jacob, their father, enabled Jacob to identify his beloved long-lost son. The metaphor of the fragrant “garment” is frequently used in the Bahá'í Writings to refer to the recognition of the Manifestation of God and His Revelation. – The Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Note 1), www.bahai.org/r/722701372.

Bahá'u'lláh

The Báb identifies Bahá'u'lláh as the “true Joseph”

[Note] 1. the sweet-smelling savor of My garment ¶4

Bahá'u'lláh, in one of His Tablets, describes Himself as the “Divine Joseph” Who has been “bartered away” by the heedless “for the most paltry of prices.” The Báb, in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, identifies Bahá'u'lláh as the “true Joseph” and forecasts the ordeals that He would endure at the hands of His treacherous brother (see note 190). – The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Note 1), www.bahai.org/r/551202111.

Bahá'u'lláh

“Shoghi Effendi draws a parallel between ...”

[Note] 1. the sweet-smelling savor of My garment ¶4

Likewise, Shoghi Effendi draws a parallel between the intense jealousy which the preeminence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá had aroused in His half-brother, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, and the deadly envy “which the superior excellence of Joseph had kindled in the hearts of his brothers.” – The Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Note 1), www.bahai.org/r/551202111.

Bahá'u'lláh

“Bartered away the Divine Joseph for the most paltry of prices”

Say: O people! Dust fill your mouths, and ashes blind your eyes, for having bartered away the Divine Joseph for the most paltry of prices. ... Erelong, will God, with the Hand of Power, strip them of their possessions, and divest them of the robe of His bounty. To this they themselves shall soon witness. Thou, too, shalt testify. – *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (§ CIII = 103), www.bahai.org/r/946125932.

Bahá'u'lláh

JOSEPH IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Joseph in the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá



SHRINE OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, CENTER OF THE COVENANT

NOW UNDER CONSTRUCTION (DESIGN CONCEPT: "NIGHTTIME BIRD'S-EYE VIEW")

Joseph in the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- ❖ Here, we see a creative and extensive use of selected Josephian metaphors from the constellation of salient motifs drawn from the rich legacy of the Joseph saga, as presented in the following slides.



“The Báb . . . hath identified Joseph as the Manifest Beauty” [Bahá'u'lláh]

Since in His commentary on the Súrih of Joseph, the Báb—may my life be offered up for His sake—hath identified Joseph as the Manifest Beauty, the true Joseph, and hath referred to Him as “our great and omnipotent Master”, then whenever thou readest it, thou wilt but weep and grieve for the wrongs suffered by the Blessed Beauty. – *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Tablet 69, ¶18), www.bahai.org/r/902615050.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

“Joseph rose from the depths of the pit to reach the apex of heaven”

It hath ever been thus: Abraham departed from His native land, but His departure became the cause of joy. Moses was sent far from His homeland, but that exile led Him to behold the Fire upon Sinai. Joseph was made a homeless wanderer in Egypt, but He rose from the depths of the pit to reach the apex of heaven. Jesus was forced to leave the Holy Land for Egypt, but this separation became the cause of blessings. Muḥammad fled from Mecca to Medina, but His flight resulted in victory.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“All these banishments became the cause of the illumination of the East and the West”

The Báb was likewise banished from Shíráz to the banks of the river Araxes, but auspicious indeed were the results of His banishment! The Blessed Beauty—may my soul be offered up for His loved ones—was exiled from Persia to Iraq, thence to Constantinople, and later to the Land of Mystery [Adrianople/Edirne], before being transferred to the Most Great Prison. All these successive banishments became the cause of the illumination of the East and the West. – *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Tablet 29, ¶ 2), www.bahai.org/r/589430752.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

“Mírzá Yahyá, like a venomous viper, pierced the blessed body of Bahá'u'lláh”

At this time, the one whom He had, with loving-kindness, nurtured in His own bosom ever since his earliest years, the one upon whom He had showered at every moment His tender care, rose up against Him with passionate hatred and assailed Him like a horde of calamities. Mírzá Yahyá even attempted to shed the sacred blood of the Ancient Beauty, and like a venomous viper he pierced the blessed body of Bahá'u'lláh. Mírzá Yahyá then began to moan and lament, and raised the cry of the oppressed, claiming to be an innocent victim and alleging that he had been most grievously wronged. ...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“He cast the Joseph of the Egypt of Existence into the depths of a darksome pit”

He wailed and groaned, sighed and moaned. And like the envious brothers, he cast the Joseph of the Egypt of Existence into the depths of a darksome pit. He then raised a plaintive cry, sobbed and wept, and made manifest the verse “And they came at nightfall to their father weeping.”⁵⁵ And then he began to keep company with the estranged, and became a confidant of the enemies.

⁵⁵ Qur’án 12:16 [Sūra of Joseph].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“All this, in order to cause the Eternal Covenant to be brought to naught”

He accused the Peerless Beauty of having committed mischief and sedition, and he circulated leaflets of falsified Text amongst the malicious. All this, in order to extinguish the candle of the Company on high, consign the celestial Teachings to oblivion, turn the Morn of divine Oneness into night, and cause the Day-Star of Truth to set, the verses of guidance to be annulled, and the banquet table of the Eternal Covenant to be brought to naught. – *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Tablet 31, ¶ 2), www.bahai.org/r/014022042.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

“Alluring as a Joseph in the Egypt of the spirit”

Such is the case with the holy Manifestations of God. Such in particular is the case with the divine reality of the Most Great Name, the Abhá Beauty. When once He standeth revealed unto the assembled peoples of the world and appeareth with such comeliness, such enchantments—alluring as a Joseph in the Egypt of the spirit—He enslaveth all the lovers on earth. – *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Tablet 31), www.bahai.org/r/161140043.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

“The robe of the Joseph of the all-glorious and unseen Kingdom is dyed with blood”

How would they reply if the Abhá Beloved [Bahá'u'lláh] should say: ... “Did ye not see the clear words of the Book of the Covenant? ... Was the Centre of the Covenant not plainly visible? ... Ye made a plaything of the Ancient Covenant, and considered the clear text of the Testament to be delirious ravings. The robe of the Joseph of the all-glorious and unseen Kingdom is dyed with blood, the raiment of the Ancient Beauty stained crimson.” – *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Tablet 63, ¶ 7), www.bahai.org/r/109288458.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

“Diffuse the sweet savours of Thy holiness in this nether world”

Thou hast, O my Lord, fashioned immutable realities in the world of existence and created beings of diverse natures. Thou hast desired naught for that noble species—the reality of the human soul—save that it should attain unto the most exalted station, perceive the signs, discover the testimonies, hoist the ensigns of Thy remembrance before all creation, lift up its voice and proclaim Thy name in the world of being, and diffuse the sweet savours of Thy holiness in this nether world—all this, so that its innermost being might mirror forth and reflect the image of the Concourse on high. . . .

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“They bartered away the Joseph of Thy remembrance for the most paltry of prices”

Yet alas, souls remained heedless They bartered away the Joseph of Thy remembrance for the most paltry of prices, and stained his garment with the blood of vain imaginings. They repudiated Thy Covenant, cavilled at Thy Beauty, violated Thine honour, debased Thy Word, denied Thy wisdom, and hurled their calumnies upon Thy Countenance, all the while thinking themselves to be of them that are guided aright. – *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Tablet 63, ¶ 3), www.bahai.org/r/897554103.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

“Perfume . . . seekers with the fragrance of the robe of the divine Joseph”

Now, too, receptivity in that land is great, but a mighty effort is needed if the friends are to impart these joyful tidings with gladness and delight, and to perfume the senses of the seekers with the fragrance of the robe of the divine Joseph.

– *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Tablet 21, ¶ 3), www.bahai.org/r/055154208.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

“Now the Joseph of the celestial Canaan, the ruler of the Egypt of the spirit”

O thou servant of the Ancient Beauty! When Joseph—peace be upon him—unveiled his bright countenance in the Egypt of beauty, he set ablaze the souls of a myriad buyers. Now the Joseph of the celestial Canaan, the ruler of the Egypt of the spirit, with a face radiant as the sun and a beauty far above the praise and description of such as are endued with understanding, hath rent asunder the veils and emerged resplendent in the midmost heart of the world. ...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“Among those who are enamoured by the Mystic Beloved”

But alas, all the buyers have busied themselves with the world of water and clay, have pursued their selfish desires, and have hence been deprived of beholding His Countenance and attaining His presence. Render thou thanks unto God that thou hast been among the buyers who seek that Divine Beauty, and among those who are enamoured by the Mystic Beloved. The glory of God rest upon thee and upon all those who have been enraptured by His Beauty. – *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Tablet 70, ¶ 1), www.bahai.org/r/553841333.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

“Ye have smelled the musk of faithfulness from Joseph’s raiment”

As to you, O ye loved ones of God! Loose your tongues and offer Him thanks; praise ye and glorify the Beauty of the Adored One, for ye have drunk from this purest of chalices, and ye are cheered and set aglow with this wine. Ye have detected the sweet scents of holiness, ye have smelled the musk of faithfulness from Joseph’s raiment. – *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Tablet 2), www.bahai.org/r/758231529.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Thou shalt behold slandering women exclaiming, "This is no other than a noble angel."

Praise be to God that thou art engaged day and night in serving the Cause of God
Erelong its splendours shall shine forth and its musk-scented breaths be shed abroad.
... Thou shalt behold the envious becoming remorseful, and the slandering women
cutting their hands, exclaiming, "Great God! No mortal is this! This is no other than a
noble angel." [Qur'án 12:31.] – *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*
(Tablet 39, ¶ 6), www.bahai.org/r/588113243.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

JOSEPH IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Joseph in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi



RESTING PLACE OF SHOGLHI EFFENDI, GUARDIAN OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH
IN THE GREAT NORTHERN CEMETERY, LONDON

Joseph in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

- ❖ The primary "purpose" of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, according to Shoghi Effendi, was "to forecast what the true Joseph (Bahá'u'lláh) would endure." (See next slide.)
- ❖ Mírzá Yahyá's egregious and unrelenting opposition to Bahá'u'llah was "more perfidious than the conduct of the sons of Jacob towards Joseph their brother." (See slide after next.)
- ❖ This resulted in "the heaviest blow ever sustained by Him in His lifetime." (See third slide to follow.)



“Purpose” of the QA “to forecast what the true Joseph (Bahá'u'lláh) would endure”

Already in Shíráz, at the earliest stage of His ministry, He had revealed what Bahá'u'lláh has characterized as “*the first, the greatest, and mightiest of all books*” in the Bábí Dispensation, the celebrated commentary on the súrih of Joseph, entitled the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', whose fundamental purpose was to forecast what the true Joseph (Bahá'u'lláh) would, in a succeeding Dispensation, endure at the hands of one who was at once His arch-enemy and blood brother. – *God Passes By*, p. 23, www.bahai.org/r/488745356.

Shoghi Effendi

“More perfidious than the conduct of the sons of Jacob towards Joseph their brother”

More odious than the unrelenting hostility which Abú-Jahl, the relative of Muḥammad, had exhibited, more shameful than the betrayal of Jesus Christ by His disciple, Judas Iscariot, more perfidious than the conduct of the sons of Jacob towards Joseph their brother, ... the monstrous behavior of Mírzá Yaḥyá, one of the half-brothers of Bahá'u'lláh, the nominee of the Báb, and recognized chief of the Bábí community, brought in its wake a period of travail which left its mark on the fortunes of the Faith for no less than half a century. ...

Shoghi Effendi

“This supreme crisis Bahá'u'lláh Himself designated as the *Ayyám-i-Shidád*”

This supreme crisis Bahá'u'lláh Himself designated as the *Ayyám-i-Shidád* (Days of Stress), during which “the most grievous veil” was torn asunder, and the “most great separation” was irrevocably effected. ... It brought incalculable sorrow to Bahá'u'lláh, visibly aged Him, and inflicted, through its repercussions, the heaviest blow ever sustained by Him in His lifetime. – *God Passes By* (p. 163), www.bahai.org/r/573198624.

Shoghi Effendi

JOSEPH IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Conclusions

Evaluative Thesis & Predicative Thesis

- ❖ **Evaluative thesis:** Just as the story of Joseph is the “best of stories” (Qur’an 12:3), the metaphor of Joseph is the “best of metaphors.”
- ❖ **Predicative thesis:** The Qur’anic Joseph is the single most comprehensive, extensive, pervasive symbol and allegory of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Bahá’í Writings.
- ❖ The Joseph tradition spans the full range of the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the Bábí religion and the Bahá’í Faith (including others as well, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *et al.*).
- ❖ As such, the Joseph saga, all told, represents not only the “best of stories” but the “best of metaphors” as well.

JOSEPH IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Questions & Discussion