

# JOSEPH

*From DREAMER to DELIVERER*



R.C. SPROUL

Joseph



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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# The Dreamer

When we read the biblical accounts of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, we're accustomed to seeing their portraits, warts and all. The Bible doesn't hesitate to broadcast the sins of the saints. We read of the adultery and murder committed by King David and the deceitfulness of Abraham, but for one Old Testament saint, we must press very hard to find anything blameworthy in his character. That person is Joseph.

So extraordinary is Joseph's virtue that throughout church history, many interpreters have seen him as a

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type or forerunner of our Lord Himself. That view is not universally held, but it is understandable why such a view has been ventured, considering Joseph's sterling character.

We are told in Genesis about Joseph's mother, Rachel. His father, Jacob, had to work seven years for his father-in-law, Laban, before he could marry Rachel. Yet Laban deceived him, and after that seven-year period, Jacob was given Leah as his wife instead of Rachel. Jacob was permitted by Laban to marry Rachel just a week after he had married Leah—but only after he agreed to labor another seven years for Rachel. Joseph was the child of Jacob's old age and the firstborn to Rachel.

Genesis 37 picks up the narrative of Joseph's life:

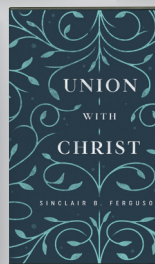
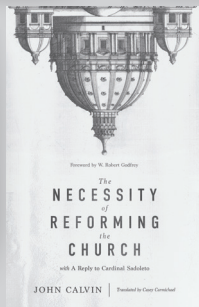
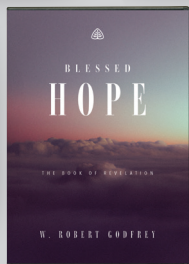
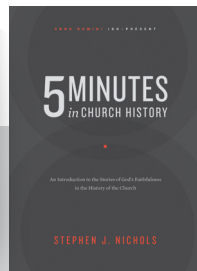
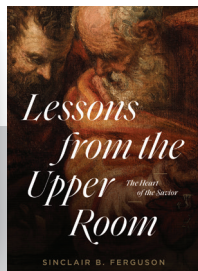
Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. (vv. 1–2)

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Some have argued that at the very beginning of the Joseph narrative, we see a defect in his character. Here was a boy who was bringing a bad report about his brothers to their father—a report that would not be taken kindly by the brothers. If we read back into this text the whole character of Joseph manifested in his biographical sketch in Scripture, however, we are inclined to think that the report, though negative, was true and that Joseph could be excused for giving a higher response to a higher duty—namely, fidelity to his father over fidelity to his brothers.

This interpretation hints at a similar incident in the life of Jesus. We know next to nothing of Jesus' boyhood years, except for the occasion when He visited the temple in Jerusalem at age twelve. He stayed behind in the temple to talk with the teachers on matters of theology, and His parents were unaware that He had been left behind. Presumably, the men were traveling with the men, and the women with the women and children. Joseph probably thought Jesus was with Mary, and Mary thought He was with Joseph.

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