

Joseph in Egypt – A Cultural Icon from Grotius to Goethe by Bernhard Lang.
Yale University Press 2009.

The story of Joseph and his brothers is the most detailed and engaging in the book of Genesis and casts a giant shadow through history. It is rich in incident and many of its major characters are fleshed out in a manner which is unusual in Biblical writing. As a story it has been re-told many times, not least in Thomas Mann's masterpiece, *Joseph and His Brothers*, which remains my favourite book.

Joseph in Egypt, a superb work of scholarship by the German Professor of Religion Bernhard Lang, details the role that Joseph and his story have played in art and literature between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. In his introduction, Lang presents his subject, before considering the biblical and post-biblical Joseph; the subsequent five sections look at different aspects of the biblical story, and the character of Joseph – The Icon of Piety: Joseph for Children, The Icon of Chastity: the Handsome Hebrew, The Icon of Leadership: Joseph the Statesman, Against the Icon: Radical Readings, The Iconic Text: a Beautiful Story.

He uses different writers' treatment of Joseph to illustrate these sections, including Goethe and Mrs Rowe, Henry Fielding and Voltaire, and quotes extensively from many. Throughout the text is illustrated by reproductions of some classic and less well-known depictions of Joseph, and there is a fascinating mini excursus on some of these representations at the end of the first section.

Joseph in Egypt is a fascinating, impressive, meticulously researched text, of interest to anyone with a love of the Bible, or of art or literature and well as being a wonderful tribute to the role played in the development of modern civilisation by an inspired and inspirational ancient story.

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