



Seventeen Spoons: Desert Songs Trilogy

Esther Goldenberg

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A favored son longs to be accepted by his resentful brothers in *Seventeen Spoons*, the moving second novel of Esther Goldenberg's epic biblical trilogy.

Joseph, longed for for ages, receives special treatment from his parents, earning his brothers' ire. They toil as shepherds; he studies with a scribe. Their days are long and hard; he enjoys frequent respite with the women, among whom he learns about Yah, their god. His brothers are laborers, and he a dreamer. His report of a dream in which his brothers bow to him seals his fate. Sold into Egypt to spare his life, he becomes "honored as a dreamer instead of ridiculed as one," leading to his eventual rescue of the very siblings who once scorned him.

This novel finds new avenues for wonder in the biblical tale. Joseph's tenderness centers it, and his relationships with women give it particular depth. He cares for Deenah through the ordeal of her slaughtered husband; he accepts his Egyptian wife's fury when he circumcises their sons, and he doesn't interfere when she seeks comfort with her maidservant.

God is a somewhat removed presence in this retelling, wherein Jacob's nighttime wrestling is a more earthbound affair. But the text also extends radical awe to features like the coat of many colors:

From bottom to top, I had transformed into light of every color that blended together with everything. I was all of it, and all of it was me. We were one. The same. Bright and beautiful, dark and beautiful, everywhere and all.

Joseph's extraordinary empathy and penchant for kindness see the story through to its redemptive end.

A tale of fraternal resentment and the workings of fate, *Seventeen Spoons* is a powerful novel about Joseph's entrance into Egypt.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January / February 2025)

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