The Other Gospels

Accounts of Jesus from Outside the New Testament

Edited and Translated by Bart D. Ehrman & Zlatko Pleše
History of Joseph the Carpenter

Like other infancy gospels, the History of Joseph the Carpenter attempts to fill the narrative gaps in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke by shedding more light on the life of and death of "the father of Christ according to flesh." Framed as a revelation given by Jesus to his disciples on the Mount of Olives (1, 30–32), this first-person 'homily' outlines the central moments in Joseph's biography: his background (ch. 2), his relationship with Mary (3–4), his role in Jesus' birth and growing to manhood (chs. 5–14), and his death at the age of hundred and eleven (chs. 15–29). As indicated by its opening section ("This is the departure from the body of our father Joseph"), the text focuses on the circumstances accompanying Joseph's death and on Jesus' miraculous preservation of Joseph's body, followed by the proclamation of his feast-day. Besides its clear purpose for Christian liturgy, the text tries to clarify the ambiguous status that Jesus' adoptive father has in the canonical Gospels. Here Joseph is straightforwardly portrayed as an old widower with children from his previous marriage; this clarifies the New Testament references to Jesus' brothers (chs. 2–4). Joseph's initial doubts about Mary's virginity (ch. 5) are immediately countered by his readiness to register Jesus as the legitimate son (ch. 7), and is further explained by human incapacity to understand divine mysteries (ch. 17). Finally, Jesus' curious reluctance to promise immortality to Joseph during his lifetime, which created a stir among the apostles (chs. 30–31), is amended by a passionate filial care for the father's post-mortem fate: at Jesus' instigation, the soul of Joseph is delivered to heaven (ch. 23) and his body is preserved both from corruption (chs. 25–27) and from end-times tribulations (ch. 31).

The History of Joseph the Carpenter is a complex mixture of ancient literary genres. The "revelatory dialogue" (in which Jesus delivers a revelation, as in other Gospel texts) serves as a narrative frame for two distinct literary units: (1) the biography of Joseph, a kind of Christian midrash on the canonical infancy narratives, which seems heavily indebted to the Proto-Gospel of James, and (2) the account of Joseph's death, to which the text itself refers as a "testament", and which exhibits a number of striking similarities with the
Jewish-Hellenistic genre of "testament' literature" (e.g., the Testament of Abraham). The section is also quite similar in form and content to various sixth- and seventh-century Coptic accounts of the passing of the Virgin Mary (the dormition traditions), including the Sermon on the Virgin’s Dormition delivered by Theodosius of Alexandria in 565. In its present form, the History of Joseph the Carpenter is thus a compilation of various traditions concerning Mary and the "holy family," most likely composed in Byzantine Egypt in the late sixth or early seventh century. Some earlier scholars proposed Greek as the original language of this composition, but their linguistic arguments have been rejected by other specialists in favor of a Coptic original.

The text of the History of Joseph the Carpenter is preserved in three different versions: one in Arabic and two in the regional dialects of Coptic—Sahidic and Bohairic, respectively. The Arabic version, attested by a number of both complete and fragmentary manuscript witnesses dating from the fourteenth century onward, was first published by G. Wallin in 1722 along with his own Latin translation. In 1808, E. Quatremère reported his discovery of the complete Bohairic version in an eleventh-century manuscript from the Vatican Library, at that time stored in the Royal Library in Paris. Eventually, P. de Lagarde produced an authoritative critical edition of the Vatican Bohairic manuscript.

The translation here is of de Lagarde’s edition, with occasional changes based on a careful examination of photographs of the manuscript. The most significant variants in the other Coptic version (the Sahidic fragments) are given in footnotes.

Bibliography


History of Joseph the Carpenter

Prologue

This is the departure from the body of our father Joseph, the carpenter, the father of Christ according to flesh, who lived one hundred and eleven years, and whose entire life our Savior related to the apostles on the Mount of Olives. The apostles, for their part, wrote down these words and deposited them in the Library at Jerusalem. And the day when the holy old man laid down the body was the twenty-sixth day of the month of Epiphi,\(^1\) in the peace of God. Amen.

Frame Story: Jesus Addresses His Disciples

1 (1) One day, when our good Savior was sitting on the Mount of Olives and his disciples were assembled before him, he spoke with them saying: 'Beloved brothers and children of my good Father, whom he chose from among the whole world, (2) you know that I have told you many times that I must be crucified and taste death for the entirety,\(^2\) and rise from the dead and give you the preaching of the gospel, so that you may preach it in the whole world, and that I would clothe you with power from on high\(^3\) and fill you with a holy spirit, so that you may preach to all the nations saying to them, 'Repent, (3) for it is better for a person to find a cup of water\(^4\) in the age that is coming than all the goods of the entire world.' (4) And again, 'Better is a single footprint in the house of my father than all the wealth of this world.'\(^5\) (5) And again, 'Better is a single moment of the righteous rejoicing than a thousand years of the sinners crying and mourning: their tears cannot be wiped away, nor are they heedless at all.'\(^6\) (6) Now then, my honorable members, when you go to them, preach to them that it is with right balance and right measure that my Father will draw an account with you.'\(^7\) And again, 'A single careless word that you utter will be required from you.'\(^8\) (7) Just as no one can escape death, so no one also can escape what he has done, be it good or evil.\(^9\) (8) Yet all these words have I told you already, that is, 'No mighty one can be saved by his power, nor can a person be saved by the size of his riches.'\(^10\) Listen now, I will tell you the life of my father Joseph, the blessed old carpenter.

---

1. July 20 in the Julian, or August 2 in the Gregorian calendar.
4. See Mark 9:41.
5. See Mark 10:23–25.
7. See Ezek. 45:10; Matt. 7:2; Mark 4:24; Luke 6:38.
9. See Eccl. 12:14; 2 Cor. 5:10.
10. See Ps. 32:16.
History of Joseph the Carpenter

Joseph's First Marriage

2 (1) There was a man Joseph from a city called Bethlehem, which belonged to the Jews and is the city of King David. (2) He became well versed in the knowledge and craft of carpentry. (3) This man Joseph took to himself a wife in the union of a holy matrimony, and she bore him sons and daughters, four male sons and two female daughters, whose names are Judas and Joset, James and Simon; the names of his daughters are Lysia and Lydia. (4) And the wife of Joseph died as it is appointed to all people and left James still at young age. (5) Joseph was a righteous man glorifying God in all things, and he went on working at the craft of carpentry, he and his two sons, living by the work of their hands according to the Law of Moses. (6) And this righteous man of whom I speak, this is Joseph my father according to flesh, to whom my mother Mary was betrothed for a wife.

Mary in the Temple

3 (1) While my father Joseph remained a widower, my mother Mary, for her part, good and blessed in every manner, dwelled in the temple and served there in purity, having grown up to twelve years: she spent three years in the house of her parents and another nine years in the temple of the Lord. (2) Then the priests, as they saw the virgin live reverently and dwell in the fear of the Lord, spoke to one another, saying, 'Let us search for a good man and betroth her to him until the time of the wedding, lest we let the custom of women befall her in the temple and we come to be under a great sin.'

Joseph the Safe-Keeper of Mary

4. (1) Immediately they called up the tribe of Judah and chose from it twelve people corresponding to the names of twelve tribes of Israel. (2) The lot fell upon the good old man Joseph, my father according to flesh. (3) Then the priests spoke and said to my blessed virgin mother, 'Go with Joseph and obey him until

12. For the names of Joseph's sons, see Mark 6:3 (James, Joses, Judas, Simon) and Matt. 13:55 (James, Joseph, Simon, Judas). In Mark 15:40, Mary is “the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.” Epiphanius, Panar. 78.8 names Joseph's two daughters “Mary and Salome”; according to the Coptic Synaxarion, Joseph had three daughters.
13. This phrase, used throughout the text, is probably borrowed from Heb. 9:27.
14. See Mark 15:40.
15. See Matt. 1:19.
17. See parallel passages in Prot. Jas. 7.2–8.3.
the time comes that we make the wedding.18 (4) My father Joseph received Mary my mother into his house. She found the little boy James in the sadness of orphanage and began to foster him; for this reason she was called Mary of James.19 (5) After Joseph had brought her into his house, he next took to the road to work in carpentry. (6) Mary my mother spent two years in his house until the right time.

Mary's Pregnancy and Joseph's Dream Vision

5 (1) Now in the fourteenth year of her life I came out of my own will and resided in her, I who am Jesus, your life. (2) And when she was three months pregnant, the guileless Joseph came from the place where he worked in carpentry and found my virgin mother pregnant. Disturbed and fearful, he planned to dismiss her secretly.20 (3) And because of grief he did not eat or drink. 

6 (1)21 But in the middle of the night, behold Gabriel, the archangel of joy, came to him in a vision by the order of my good Father and said to him, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife to yourself; for he whom she is about to bear is from the Holy Spirit. (2) She shall bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus:22 it is he who will rule all nations with a rod of iron.23 (3) And the angel left him. Joseph awoke from sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took Mary to himself.24

The Birth of Jesus

7 (1) After these things a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all of the world should be registered, each person after his city. (2) The good old man also went, and he took Mary, my virgin mother, to his city of Bethlehem—for she was about to deliver—and had his name recorded by the scribe: 'Joseph, the son of David, and Mary his wife, and Jesus his son are of the tribe of Judah.25 (3) And Mary my mother bore me on the way back to Bethlehem, near the tomb of Rachel,26 the wife of Jacob the patriarch, who is the mother of Joseph and Benjamin.

18. For the alternative account of Joseph's election as the guardian of Mary, see Prot. Jas. 8.3–9.2.
19. Mary the virgin is assimilated here to Mary of James from Luke 24:10; see Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40.
22. See below 17.5–6.
23. See Ps. 2:9.
25. See Luke 2:1–6; see also Prot. Jas. 17.1, where Joseph is at a loss as to how he should register Mary and her child.
8 (1) Satan took counsel with Herod the Great, 27 the father of Archelaus, who beheaded John, my beloved kinsman. 28 (2) Thus he sought for me in order to kill me, 29 thinking that my kingdom was from this world. 30 (3) Joseph was informed by my Father in a vision; and he got up and took me and Mary my mother; 31 I was sitting on her arms with Salome walking behind us. We went down to Egypt and stayed there for a year, until the body of Herod was eaten by worms and died 32 because of the blood he shed of the sinless little children. 33

The Settling in Nazareth

9 (1) When that lawless Herod died, we returned to the land of Israel and resided in a city of Galilee whose name is Nazareth. 34 (2) And my father Joseph, the blessed old man, worked at the craft of carpentry and we lived from the work of his hands. He never ate bread he did not earn, acting in accordance with the Law of Moses.

10 (1) And after this long period of time, his body did not remain without power, nor his eyes without light; not one tooth was missing in his mouth; and he did not lack in understanding and wisdom all that time, but was rather like a youth. His life had reached one hundred and eleven years in a good old age. 35

11 (1) Now his two elder sons Joset and Symeon took wives and went to their house. His two daughters also took their husbands, as it is customary for all people; and Joseph stayed with James, his little son. (2) After the virgin bore me, I lived with them in a full obedience of childhood. 36 Indeed, I did all things human short of sin alone. 37 (3) And I called Mary my mother and Joseph my father, and I obeyed them in everything they told me. I never contradicted them, but I loved them dearly.

---

27. See Matt. 2:4, where Herod consults with all the chief priests and scribes.
30. See John 18:36.
32. See Acts 12:23, which describes the death of Herod Agrippa.
33. See Matt. 2:15–16.
34. See Matt. 2:19–23.
35. See Deut. 34:7: "Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated."
37. See Heb. 4:15.
Joseph's Death Draws Near

12 (1) But then the death of Joseph, my father, drew near, as is appointed to all people.38 (2) When his body grew ill, his angel announced to him, 'In this year you will die.' (3) And as his soul was troubled, he went up to Jerusalem. He entered the temple of the Lord and repented in front of the altar. He prayed in this way, saying:

13 (1) 'God, the Father of all mercy39 and the God of all flesh,40 the Lord of my soul and body and spirit:41 (2) If the days of my life you have allotted me in the world are completed, then I beseech you, Lord God, that you send me the archangel Michael to stand by me until my wretched soul come out from my body without trouble and torment. (3) For death is a great fear and trouble to all people, whether human, cattle, beast, reptile, or bird. (4) In short, every creature under heaven which has a living soul is fearful and troubled until their soul is separated from their body. (5) Now, then, my Lord, let your angel stand by my soul and my body until they are separated from one another without trouble. (6) Do not cause the angel, appointed to me from the day you created me until now, to fill his face with anger toward me in my path, as I am coming to you, but rather let him be at peace with me. (7) Let not those with changing faces give trouble to me in the path, as I am coming to you.42 (8) Let not those who are at the gates retain my soul, and do not put me to shame at your fearful tribunal. (9) Let not the waves of the fiery river heave like beasts towards me, the river in which all souls are purified before seeing the glory of your Godhead. (10) O God who judges everyone with equity and righteousness,43 let now your mercy, my Lord, become my solace; for you are the fountain of all good. Yours is the glory forever and ever. Amen.'

14 (1) After these things he returned to Nazareth, the town where he resided, and fell sick with the illness of which he was to die,44 as it is appointed to all people.45 (2) And his illness was very grave, more than all other times he was sick from the day he was born into the world.

38. See Heb. 9:27.
39. See 2 Cor. 1:3.
40. See Jer. 32:27.
41. See 1 Thess. 5:23.
42. See the Egyptian Book of the Dead, chap. 17. In T. Ab. 17, Death reveals to Abraham all of his frightening faces.
43. See Ps. 9:8.
44. See 2 Kings 13:14.
45. See Heb. 9:27.
Joseph's Biography Summarized

(3) This is the life-sketch of my beloved father Joseph. (4) He was forty when he took a wife. He remained in wedlock with his wife for another forty-nine years; she died, and he lived alone for a year. (5) My mother spent two years in his house when the priests gave her to him, after he was told by the priests, 'Guard her until the time for celebrating your marriage.' (6) At the beginning of the third year of her dwelling in his house, that is, the fifteenth year of her life, she bore me on the ground in a mysterious fashion: no one understands it in the whole creation save me and my Father and the Holy Spirit, since we are in unity.

15 (1) Now all the days of the life of my father Joseph, the blessed old man, were one hundred and eleven years, as my good Father commanded. (2) And the day he departed from the body was the twenty-sixth of the month Epiphanius. (3) Then began the transformation of the precious gold, which is the flesh of my father Joseph, and the change of the silver, which is the mind and wisdom. (4) He forgot to eat and to drink, and the knowledge of his craft turned into error. (5) And when the light rose on that day, that is, the twenty-sixth of the month Epiphany, my father Joseph became disturbed on his bed: he let a loud groan, clapped his hands, and cried out in great disturbance, speaking as follows:

The Lament of Joseph

16 (1) 'Woe to me today. Woe to the day my mother bore me to the world. (2) Woe to the womb in which my life was sown. Woe to the breasts whose milk I sucked. (3) Woe to the knees on which I sat. (4) Woe to the hands that lifted me up until I grew up and came to live in sin. (5) Woe to my tongue and my lips, for oftentimes they have been implicated in violence, in calumny and false slander, and in idle words of distraction full of deceit. (6) Woe to my eyes, for they have looked at wrongdoings. (7) Woe to my ears, for they have loved to listen to empty talks. (8) Woe to my hands, for they have laid hold of things that are not theirs. (9) Woe to my stomach and my bowels, for they have craved for foods that are not theirs; whenever my stomach found something,

46. One of the Sahidic manuscript fragments (S'British Library, Or 3581B, chaps. 13.6–15.2) has after "the fifteenth year of her life" the following text: "and Joseph lived for yet another 18 years from the moment she gave birth by an inscrutable mystery." This detail supplements information about the length of Joseph's life in the prologue as well as in 10.1 and 15.1.

47. In ancient Egyptian texts, the flesh of gods is made of gold and their bones of silver.

48. See Job 3:11–16.
it burned it more than a burning fiery furnace and made it useless in all respect.
(10) Woe to my knees, which have served my body ill, taking it to many a worthless path. (11) Woe to my body, for it has made my soul barren and estranged from God who created it. (12) What am I to do now? I am enclosed on all sides. (13) Truly woe to all who will sin. (14) Truly this is the same great trouble which I saw upon my father Jacob\(^{49}\) when he was coming forth from the body, and which has also overtaken me, the wretched one, as of today. (15) But hurry, O God the arbitrator of my soul and my body, who do your will in me!

*Jesus at Joseph's Death-Bed*

17 (1) While my beloved father Joseph was saying these things, I got up and approached him as he lay down. I found him troubled in his soul and his spirit, and I said to him, 'Hail, my beloved father Joseph, whose old age is good and blessed at once.' (2) He answered in great fear of death, saying to me, 'Hail many times, my beloved son. Behold, my soul has rested within me a little when I heard your voice. (3) Jesus my lord, Jesus my true king, Jesus my good and merciful savior, Jesus the redeemer, Jesus the steward, Jesus the protector, Jesus who are all goodness, Jesus whose name is sweet in the mouth of all and very soothing, Jesus the eye that sees, the ear that listens with righteousness: Hear me today, me your servant, as I beseech you, shedding my tears in your presence. (4) You are truly God, you are truly the Lord, just as the angel oftentimes said to me, and especially on the day that my heart was in doubt because of typically human thought about the blessed virgin—for she conceived a child—and I said: "I will dismiss her quietly."\(^{50}\) (5) But as I was thinking about this, the angel appeared to me in a vision and said to me: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid and accept Mary your wife to yourself; for he whom she is about to bear is from the Holy Spirit. (6) Do not doubt at all about her conception, for she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus."\(^{51}\) (7) You are Jesus Christ, the savior of my soul and my body and my spirit. Do not find fault with me, your servant and the work of your hands! (8) I did not understand, my Lord, nor do I know the mystery of your incredible birth; nor did I ever hear that a woman had conceived without a man, or that a virgin bore a child while sealed in her virginity. (9) My Lord, if this mystery had not been ordained, I would not

---

49. See Matt. 1:15–16.
50. See Matt. 1:19.
51. See Matt. 1:20–21; see above 6.1–2.
believe in you and your holy birth, nor would I glorify her who bore you, Mary the holy virgin.

Joseph Recalls an Episode from Jesus' Infancy

(10) I remember also the day when the asp bit a boy and he died. (11) His people surrounded you in order to deliver you to Herod. (12) Your mercy laid hold of him: you raised him, even though they falsely charged you that it was you who killed him. And there was a great joy in the house of the one who had died. (13) I immediately took you by the ear and spoke with you saying: "Be prudent, my son!" You rebuked me at once and said, "If you were not my father according to the flesh, surely I would tell you what you did to me!" (15) Now then, my Lord and my God, supposing that you have settled accounts with me for that day and caused these fearful signs to fall upon me, I beseech your goodness not to bring me to your judgment. (16) I am your servant and the son of your servant. (17) If you break off my bonds, I will offer to you a sacrifice of praise, which is the confession of the glory of your Godhead, that you are Jesus Christ, truly the Son of God and the son of man at once.'

Jesus to Mary on the Inevitability of Death

18 (1) As my father Joseph was speaking, I could not refrain from shedding tears, and I cried, watching as death held sway over him and listening to the words of misery he was speaking. (2) After this, my brothers, remember my death on the cross for the life of the whole world. (3) Then my beloved mother Mary, whose name is sweet in the mouth of all who love me, got up and said to me in great pain, 'Woe to me, my beloved son. Is he perhaps going to die, Joseph of the good and blessed old age, your beloved and honorable father according to flesh?' (4) I said to her, 'My beloved mother, who is there ever among people who have worn flesh that will not taste death? (5) For death is the ruler of humankind, my blessed mother. (6) Indeed, you also must die like all people. (7) Whether it is Joseph my father or you my beloved mother, your death is not death but life eternal and unending. (8) For I am also going to die for the universe, because of the mortal flesh I wore in you. (9) So now, my beloved mother, get up and go inside to the blessed old man Joseph until you get acquainted with the ordinance which will come from on high.'

52. This whole section combines three episodes from the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, chaps. 4–5, 9 and 16.
19 (1) And she got up and entered the place where he lay, and she found him with the mark of death shown forth in him. (2) I, for my part, my beloved ones, was sitting at his head, and Mary my mother was sitting by his feet. (3) And he lifted up his eyes to my face, but was not able to speak, for the hour of death held sway over him. (4) He thus lifted up his eyes and released a loud groan. (5) And I held his hands and his knees for a long while, as he looked at me and beseeched me, 'Do not let me be taken away!' (6) And I placed my hand beneath his heart and found his soul brought to his throat, for it was about to be brought up from his body. But the last hour had not yet been completed for Death to come; otherwise it would not have restrained, for it was accompanied by Disturbance and preceded by Crying and Destruction.

Farewell and Lamentation by Joseph's Children

20 (1) When my beloved mother saw me touch his body, she likewise touched his feet and found out that the breath and heat had withdrawn and left them. (2) She said to me, guilelessly, 'Thank you, my beloved son, for since the moment you placed your hand on his body, the heat withdrew from him. (3) Look, his feet and his shins are cold like crystal.' And I called his sons and his daughters and said to them, 'Get up and speak with your father; for this is the time to speak, before the mouth that speaks fails and the wretched flesh becomes cold.' (5) Then his sons and his daughters spoke with Joseph. He was in peril because of the fatigue of dying, ready to depart from this world. (6) Lysia the daughter of Joseph replied, saying to her brothers, 'Woe to me, my brothers, if this is not the disease of our beloved mother—we have not seen her until now! (7) And so it is also with our father, that we should not see him forever.' (8) Then the children of Joseph lifted up their voices and cried. I, too, and Mary my virgin mother cried with them, for surely the hour of death was come.

Jesus Wards Off the Powers of Darkness

21 (1) Then I looked towards the south, and I saw Death. He arrived near the house followed by Amente, who is his instrument along with the Devil, and by a countless troop of officers clothed with fire, their mouths breathing out smoke and sulfur. (2) And my father Joseph looked and saw those who came after him, who were filled with wrath toward him, just as they usually fill their face with

53. S² has "his older daughter Lydia, the purple seller," alluding to Lydia from Acts 16:14.
54. The arrival of Death with countless frightening forms or powers is a distinctive feature of the Jewish "testament" genre; see T. Ab. 16–20, where it is God who sends Death to the patriarch's deathbed.
rage against every soul coming forth from the body, and especially the sinners, in whom they find a little of their own. (3) When the good old man saw them in the company of Death, his eyes shed tears. (4) In that hour the soul of my father Joseph separated with a loud groan, seeking a way to hide so as to be saved. (5) When I saw the groaning of my father Joseph—for he saw authorities that he had never seen—I got up at once and reprimanded the Devil and all those who were with him. (6) And they departed in shame and in great disturbance. (7) And no one among those sitting around my father Joseph knew anything, not even Mary my mother, about all the fearful squads coming after the soul of humans. (8) But when Death saw that I had reprimanded the authorities of darkness and cast them out, for they had no authority over him, he became afraid.55 (9) And I got up at once and raised a prayer to my Father of many mercies,56 saying:

Jesus' Prayer for the Soul of Joseph

22 (1) 'My Father and the Father of all mercies, the Father of truth, the eye that sees, the ear that hears,'57 hear me, your beloved Son, as I beseech you for the work of your hands, namely my father Joseph: send me a great choir of angels, and Michael the steward of goodness, and Gabriel the herald of light, that they may walk with the soul of my father Joseph until it passes across the seven eons of Darkness,58 and also that it may not pass through the narrow paths it is fearful to tread on and even more to see the powers upon them, the river of fire rushing there like waves of the sea. (2) And be merciful toward the soul of my father Joseph as it is ascending to your holy hands, for this is the hour when he needs mercy.

(3) I say to you, my honorable brothers and my blessed apostles, that every person born into the world and acquainted with good and evil, if he has spent his time relying on his eyelids, has need of the mercy of my good Father when he comes to the hour of death, and to the passing of the path, and to the fearful tribunal, and to the making of his defense. (4) But I will turn back to how my father Joseph, the righteous old man, departed from the body.

55. For a similar outcome of Jesus' encounter with Death in the underworld (Amente), see The Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew (Res. Bart.) 4.2–8.
56. See 2 Cor. 1:3.
57. See Joseph's invocation in 17.3.
58. For Boud'hors (2005) 51, ad loc., the seven eons of darkness are the inversed image of the seven heavens of Paradise; but they can also stand for the seven planetary spheres that the soul must traverse during its post-mortem heavenly voyage.
Jesus Hands Joseph's Soul to the Angels

23\(^{59}\) (1) When he thus gave up his spirit, I saluted him. (2) The angels took his soul and wrapped it in finest linen packages.\(^{60}\) (3) I entered and sat by him; nobody noticed that he was dead among those sitting around him. (4) And I made Michael and Gabriel watch over his soul because of the authorities on the road, and the angels sang before it until they delivered it to my good Father.

Jesus Consoles Joseph's Family

24 (1) Now I turned to the body of my father Joseph, laid down like an empty jar. I sat, brought down his eyes, and tried to close them and his mouth. I stayed there looking upon him. (2) I said to the virgin, 'Mary, my mother, where are now all works of craftsmanship that this man had made from his youth until now? They have all passed away in this single hour as though he had never been born into the world.' (3) When his sons and his daughters heard me saying this to Mary, my virgin mother, they said to me with great weeping, 'Woe to us, our

59. The longest extant Sahidic manuscript fragment (S’Vatican Library, Borgia 109, no. 121, chaps. 14–24,1) contains a more detailed version of chap. 23, which runs as follows: "(1) When I said 'Amén,' my beloved mother Mary responded to me in the language of the heavenly beings. (2) And, behold, immediately Michael and Gabriel and the choir of the angels came forth from heaven. They came and stood upon the body of my father Joseph. (3) And straightaway his rattle and panting greatly increased, and I realized that his bitter hour was come. (4) And he kept laboring like a woman about to give birth, his affliction spreading over him as a violent wind and as a great fire that devours a great wood. (5) As for Death, however, fear did not let him enter unto the body of my beloved father Joseph and separate it away; for he looked in and saw me sitting by his head, having hold of his temples. (6) And when I realized that Death feared to enter because of me, I rose and went outside the gate, and I found him waiting there alone in great fear. (7) And straightaway I said to him, 'O you who have come from the places of the South, enter quickly and accomplish that which my Father has commanded you. (8) But watch over him like the light of your eyes; for he is my father according to flesh, and he suffered with me in the days of my youth, fleeing with me from place to place because of Herod's plot, and I was taught by him like all children, whom their fathers teach for their benefit.' (9) Then Abbaton went in and took the soul of my father Joseph, and he brought it forth from the body at the hour when the sun was about to rise in its course, on the twenty-sixth of the month of Eep, in peace. (10) All the days of the life of my beloved father Joseph amount to a hundred and eleven years. (11) Michael took hold of the two ends of a precious silken package, and Gabriel took hold of the other two ends. They greeted the soul of my beloved father Joseph and put it down into package. (12) But no one among those sitting beside him knew that he had died, nor did my mother Mary know. (13) And I had Michael and Gabriel watch over the soul of my beloved father Joseph because of the robbers on the roads. And I made the bodiless angels sing continually before him, until they took him to the heavens unto my good Father."

60. The way in which the angels handle Joseph's soul resembles the treatment of the viscera in the ancient Egyptian mummification procedures, where each of the inner bodily organs was wrapped in a separate linen package.
Lord; for surely our father is dead and we did not notice it, did we? (4) I said to them, 'Indeed he is dead, and yet the death of Joseph my father is not death, but life forever.' (5) Great are the things which my beloved father Joseph is about to receive. For as soon as his soul came forth from the body, all trouble ceased for him. He went into the eternal kingdom; he left behind the burden of the body; he left behind this world full of all sorts of troubles and empty concerns. He went to the resting places of my Father, who is in the heavens that can never be destroyed.' (6) Now when I said to my brothers, 'Your father Joseph is dead, the blessed old man,' they got up and rent their garments and cried for a long while.

**Jesus Preserves Joseph's Body from Corruption**

25 (1) Then all the residents of the town of Nazareth and of Galilee, upon hearing about the mourning, gathered to the place where we were, according to the law of the Jews. They spent the whole day mourning for him until the ninth hour. (2) And at the ninth hour of the day 62 I had everyone leave. I poured the water on the body of my beloved father Joseph and anointed it with fragrant oil. I prayed to my good Father in the heavens with heavenly prayers, which I had written with my own fingers on the tablets of heaven 63 before I took flesh in the holy virgin Mary. (3) And right after I said the Amen of my prayer, there came a host of angels; and I ordered two of them to spread a robe and had them take up the blessed body of my father Joseph, deposit it amid the garments, and wrap it.

26 (1) And I laid my hands upon his body saying, 'No bad smell of death shall rule over you, nor shall your ears be foul-smelling; no waste shall ever flow forth from your body, and neither shall your shroud rot in the earth nor indeed your flesh, with which I have clothed you, but it shall stay in your body until the day of the thousand-year feast. The hair of your head, which I held in my hands so many times, shall not wither, my beloved father Joseph. And all will be well with you.'

**Jesus Establishes the Cult of Joseph**

(2) Those who will provide an offering and deposit it in your shrine on your memorial day, which is the twenty-sixth of the month of Epiphi, I will also bless in the celestial offering, which is in the heavens. (3) And also whoever gives

61. See above 18.7.

62. This is also the hour of Jesus' death in the Synoptic Gospels; see Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:44.

63. See 1 Enoch 81.1, 93.2, 103.2, 106.19.
bread into the hand of a poor person in your name, I will not allow to lack in any good of this world in all the days of his life. (4) Those who give a cup of wine into the hand of a stranger, a widow, or an orphan on your memorial day, I will grant them to you to take them to the thousand-year feast. (5) Those who copy the book of your departure from the body and all the words that have come from my mouth today, I swear by your salvation, my beloved father Joseph, that I will grant them to you in this world; and also that, when they come forth from the body, I will tear the record of their sins so that they may not receive any torment, save the necessity of death and the fiery river placed before my Father, which purifies every soul. (6) And if there is a poor person who has no means to do what I have said, when he begets a son and names him Joseph, glorifying your name, no famine or pestilence will happen in that house because your name dwells in it.

The Burial of Joseph

27 (1) Afterward, the dignitaries of the town came accompanied by the corpse buriers to the place where my father’s body had been laid, wanting to bury his body according to the burial custom of the Jews. (2) And they found him already prepared for burial, with the shroud fitted to his body as if had been fastened with iron clasps; and when they touched him, they did not find any hole in the shroud. (3) Then they took him out to the tomb. (4) And while they dug at the cave’s mouth to open up the entrance and place him next to his parents, I recalled the day when he had traveled with me down to Egypt and the great torments he had suffered because of me. And I spread myself over his body and wept over him for a long while, saying:

Jesus Teaches About Death

28 (1) ‘O Death, you stir plenty of tears and many a lament—but it is he who is over all things that gave you this marvelous authority! (2) But Death is not to be blamed like Adam and Eve, (3) and Death accomplishes nothing without my Father’s command. (4) There is a man who had lived nine hundred years before he died, and many others even more than that. (5) Not a single one of them has said, “I have seen death,” or “It comes at times, troubling anyone.” (6) Rather, it does not trouble them save on a single occasion, and even then it is my good Father who sends it after the person. (7) And the moment it comes after him, he

64. See above, 13.9 and 22.1.
65. See John 19:40.
66. See Gen. 50:1.
hears the verdict coming from heaven. (8) If the verdict comes in haste and full of wrath, Death also comes in haste and anger so as to fulfill the command of my good Father, and to receive the person's soul and hand him to his Lord. (9) Death has no power to cast him into the fire or take him to the kingdom of the heavens. (10) Death, then, fulfills God's commands; Adam, however, did not do the will of my Father but rather committed transgression until my Father got angry with him—for he obeyed his wife and disobeyed my good Father until he brought death upon every soul. (11) Had Adam not disobeyed my good Father, he would not have brought death upon him. (12) What is it that prevents me from beseeching my good Father to send me a great chariot of light to place my father Joseph upon it, so that he does not taste death at all but is taken up in the flesh in which he was born to the places of rest, to dwell there with my incorporeal angels? (13) But because of Adam's transgression these great troubles have come upon all mankind along with this great necessity of death. (14) Insofar as I myself wear the troubling flesh, it is necessary that I taste death in it for the creation I have made, in order that I may have mercy on them.

Jesus Concludes His Narrative

29 (1) As I was saying this, embracing my father Joseph and lamenting him, (2) they opened the door of the tomb and laid his body in it next to the body of Jacob, his father. (3) His end took place when he was a hundred and eleven years old; and not a single tooth was missing in his mouth, nor did his eyes remain without light, but his appearance was like that of a little child. (4) He never lost his strength, but was working at the craft of carpentry until the day he fell sick with the illness of which he was to die.

Frame Story Resumed: Apostles Ask About Enoch and Elijah

30. (1) Now we the apostles rejoiced while hearing these things from our Savior, and we got up at once and made our obeisance before his hands and his feet, rejoicing and saying, "We give thanks to you, our good Savior, for you have made us worthy to hear these words of life from you, our Lord. (2) Yet we wonder at you, our good Savior, as to why you have granted immortality to Enoch and Elijah, so that they till now reside amid the blessings while being in the flesh in which they were born, and their flesh never saw corruption. (3) But the blessed

67. See Matt. 26:53.
68. The whole section 28.10–14 echoes both the images and themes of Rom. 4:12–19.
69. See Acts 2:27, 31; 13:35–37; for Enoch, see Gen. 5:24 and 1 En. 70.1–2; for Elijah, see 2 Kings 2:11.
old man, Joseph the carpenter, to whom you granted this great honor of calling him your father, and whom you obeyed in all things, and bid us saying, ‘When I clothe you with power and send upon you the promise of my Father, that is, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,’ and send you to preach the holy gospel, preach also my beloved father Joseph’; (4) and again, ‘Say these words of life to testify about his departure from the body’; (5) and again, ‘Read this testament on the feast days and on the sacred days’; (6) and again, ‘A person who has not been taught to read well shall not read this testament on the feast days’; (7) and again, ‘Whoever takes away from these words or adds to them, and so considers me a liar, I will soon take vengeance on him’—(8) we wonder why, since the day you were born in Bethlehem and called him your father according to the flesh, you have not promised immortality to him and granted him eternal life.”

Jesus Replies by Invoking His Father’s Omnipotence

31 (1) Our Savior answered and said to us, “The sentence which my Father pronounced upon Adam will not be annulled, inasmuch as he did not obey his commandments. (2) When my Father pronounces upon a person that he will be righteous, he becomes his chosen one. (3) When, on the contrary, the person loves the works of the Devil by his own will and sins, and the Father lets him live a long life, does he not know that he is about to fall into his hands unless he repents? (4) If again one lives a long life in good works, his actions make him an old person; (5) but when the Father sees one corrupting his way, he shortens his life. This is how he ‘takes them away at the midpoint of their days.’ (6) Yet all the prophecies issued by my Father will be fulfilled upon humankind, and all things will befall them. (7) Also, you have told me about Enoch and Elijah that they are alive in the flesh in which they were born, but about Joseph, my father according to flesh, you ask: ‘Why have you left him in the flesh till now?’ (8) Even if he had lived ten thousand years, he still must die. (9) I say to you, my holy members, that every time Enoch and Elijah think of death, their wish is that they had already died so as to escape this great necessity which is laid down for them—especially since they will die in a day of torment and fear, of shouts and threats, and of grief. (10) For the Antichrist will kill these two men and shed their blood upon the earth for a jug of water, because of the rebukes they will give him when they denounce him.”

70. See John 14:26.
72. See Ps. 101:25.
73. In this section, Enoch and Elijah are identified with the “two witnesses” of the heavenly voice from Rev. 11:3–11.
Concluding Doxology

32 (1) We replied and said to him, "Our Lord and our God, who are these two men of whom you have said, 'The son of perdition will kill them for a jug of water'?" (2) Our Savior Jesus and our Life said to us, "They are Enoch and Elijah." (3) And when our good Savior said this to us, we were glad and rejoiced, and we gave thanks and glorified him, our Lord and our God, our Savior Jesus Christ, through whom be all glory and all honor to the Father and Him and the life-giving Holy Spirit, now and for all time and forever and ever. Amen.77

74. See John 20:28.
75. See 2 Thess. 2:3.
76. See John 20:28.
77. The following text was added by the scribe: "Remember me, the sinner, the wretched, who stinks in the pit of his sins, Hapip. Lord, have mercy on him. Amen. I copied it on the twenty-eight of the month of Epiphi, in the year of the martyrs 783."