



Genesis – 37:1-36
Joseph is Sold into Slavery
(Lesson #46)

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Outline for this week in your notes:

- I. Joseph brings an evil report against the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah (37:1-2)
- II. Israel makes Joseph a coat of many colors (37:3-4)
- III. Joseph dreams a dream and shares it with his brothers (37:5-8)
- IV. Joseph dreams another dream and shares it with his brothers and father (37:9-11)
- V. Israel sends Joseph to check on his brothers who are tending Israel's flocks (37:12-17)
- VI. Joseph's brothers conspire against him (37:18-27)
- VII. Joseph's brothers sell him to Midianite merchants (37:28)
- VIII. Joseph's brothers create a ruse to cover their sin (37:29-33)
- IX. Israel is crushed when he sees the "evidence" that points to Joseph's death (37:34-35)
- X. The Midianite merchants sell Joseph into Egyptian slavery (37:36)

1 Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. 2 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.

Vs 1 - So, although we recorded the death of Isaac, when we pick back up, we pick back up looking at events in Joseph's life. As this point in the timeline Isaac is still alive.

Vs 2 - Here we see the 11th and final use of the Hebrew word translated generations תולדה (*towl'dah*), where it is being used as markers of each significant people group.

It is used 11 times this way in Genesis and this is the final one. Again it means **descendants, genealogies, record of, or generations** (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2).

Vs 2b: Next we are told: So some **important details**, this event happens when Joseph was 17.

If we are correct with our timeline, Joseph was born at the **end of the 14 years (in Haran)**, at that point Jacob would have **been 91**, which means now (**as Joseph is 17**) Jacob would **have been 108**. We know Jacob was 120 when Isaac died, so this **would have been 12 years before Isaac died**.

Other than Benjamin, **Jacob is the youngest son**. He is **number 11** in the pecking order.

But here he is at 17 in the field feeding the flocks of Israel, but notice he is not alone. He is with his brethren. When we read that we **assume the other 10**, but then Moses goes on to say he is with the **sons of Bilhah**, and the **sons of Zilpah**. So Moses seems to be saying he is with **Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher**.

These are the younger of the boys and it appears Joseph is working closer with the boys born around his age.

The Hebrew word translated "feeding" means **shepherding**, so it appears that Joseph was in charge of what this band of five were doing.

Vs 2c – Notice Moses tells us that: We **do not know the details**, but it seems that something occurred in the field involving Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. Joseph came home to his father, with an **evil report** against these four.

We can imagine, if he told his father something they did in the field that was evil and wicked, it would get back to them and likely caused some **hostility in the family!**

Do not worry, this is only the **start of animosity** against Joseph!

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

Vs 3 - Here Moses tells us something that we **recognize is going to become a major problem**, namely that Israel loved Joseph more than all his children.

He goes on to tell us why, because Joseph was the youngest (other than Benjamin), because he was the last of those born in Haran, he was the “son of his old age.” Israel loved Joseph more than all his other children and he made a special coat. He made for him a **long coat or a long tunic with full sleeves and woven with many colors**.

The Hebrew words here are: **כתנה (kthoneth), פס (pac)**. We see this **same Hebrew phrase** is used of the garment that Tamar wore (*2Sa 13:18-19*).

This is likely a **royal robe**. We cannot help but wonder if **Israel was elevating Joseph to receive the blessing of the firstborn**. We cannot be sure, but we can be sure he loved him more than the other brothers and he made a special gift for him, this **royal robe**.

Joseph was hated by his brother, but dearly loved by his father, this of course reminds us of Jesus:

“10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” (Joh 1:10-11 ESV)

Vs 4 - When Israel gave this special gift to Joseph, it generated a great deal of animosity from the brothers.

When the other brothers saw how Israel loved Joseph in this very different and very special way, they hated Joseph, and notice further, they could not even speak to him peaceably.

Notice what has occurred. Joseph has done nothing, at least nothing that Moses mentions, yet their anger at what the father has done for Joseph, results in them hating Joseph, and so much so that they **cannot even speak peaceably with him!**

5 Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Vs 5 - So Joseph **dreams a dream...** Let’s pause here for a second, we have seen this a number of times where God is speaking to people in the Old and New Testaments through dreams. We have seen him do it with **His saints**, and we have seen him do it **through unbelievers**.

As you work through the Old Testament it is amazing the **number of dreams** that God provides:

- Abimelech (Gen chapter 20), Daniel (Dan chapter 2), Jacob and the dream in Bethel (Gen 28), Jacob and the animals mating (Gen 31), Joseph (twice as you will see) here in (Gen 37), Pharoah (that would be interpreted by Joseph) (Gen 41), Etc.

Does God still speak to us through dreams? Although that is not the normal experience, my answer is yes, it seems to me in rare instances He still does. Think of the Muslim (Escape from Darkness) (Daniel Shayasteh).

But that experience is not normative. Personal observation, it seems this happens more when no written revelation is readily available. But we should not attempt to tell God he cannot do it that way, not do I believe we should expect or demand that God give us a divine dream.

So, Joseph dreamed a dream, and as we will see this is a **divine dream**, this is a **dream foretelling the future**, this is a **dream from Yahweh!** Although it comes with no announcement.

And then Moses tells us that he **shared this dream with his brothers**, at this point we are not told the content only that he shared it with his (older) brothers and probably Benjamin his younger brother.

But little brother Joseph shares the dream with his older brothers for sure. Then Moses tells us that, upon hearing Joseph's dream, his brothers, **hated him yet the more.**

They hated him already, they could not even stand to talk to him already, now they hated him even more. The idea of the Hebrew is upon hearing this dream it added more hatred to what they already felt for Joseph.

Vs 6-7 - The Hebrew word translated **"hear"** is the Hebrew word שמעו (**shama'**) (**shaw-mah'**), it means listen up, to give heed. As you hear this you have probably heard of a text called the Shema (Deut 6:4-7).

Now Moses shares the conversation. We do not know where the 12 were, but at some point, likely out of excitement about the vivid dream he had just had, Joseph tells his brothers, **listen to this dream I had!**

Here is what he shared: We were all in the field binding sheaves of some unnamed grain, we were there working together, and all of a sudden, the sheaf I had bound together, arose. It rose up, and it stood upright.

Then your sheaves, the ones that you (the other brothers) had bound circled around mine. The idea of the Hebrew word seems to be that your sheaves **encompassed mine**, they **encircled mine**. Further, having encompassed mine, they paid homage, they **bowed out of deference to my sheaf.**

Now at this point, each of us likely has an idea of what this might mean, each of us using our sanctified imagination, likely has a picture in mind, and even a take away.

Now the good news is we do not need to use our **sanctified imagination**, to estimate what the **other brothers thought about this dream** and its interpretation, for **Moses tells us plainly.**

Vs 8 - His brothers, no doubt with anger in their voices said: Shall you reign over us? Shall you have dominion over us? They recognized this dream showed Joseph as sovereign over which they bowed down in submission!

Then Moses tells us, that these boys, likely the first ten, Benjamin was a very young boy, hated him yet the more. They hated him because of his dream, they hated him for telling his dream, they hated him for the coat.

What Joseph did, at **most is naive**, at worst he failed to recognize that telling this dream would generate more anger against him. But his brothers could not stand him!

APPLICATION: I would submit in all honesty his brothers hated him without a cause. He had actually done nothing wrong. He did not cause his father to create the coat, he did not cause the dream.

NOTE: Joseph is never presented in the New Testament as a **type of Christ**, so I will refrain from doing so. But this event **does remind us:**

"But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'" (Joh 15:25 ESV)

Like Joseph's brothers hated him, without a cause, Jesus's national brothers hated him too without a cause.

If you are reflecting the light of the glorious **Son of God**, do not be surprised **that the world hates you.**

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." (Joh 15:18 ESV)

9 Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" 11 And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Vs 9 - Joseph has another dream and he tells this dream to his brothers, again likely the 10, because Benjamin would have been so young. In this dream, the sun, moon, and 11 stars bowed down to me.

Again, our sanctified imaginations are already imagining what this means. But again, Moses is going to tell us exactly what the brothers thought the dream meant.

Vs 10 - Here it appears when Joseph shared the dream, not only were his older brothers present, but his father, Israel was present also. So, he told the dream to his father and his brothers and his father **rebuked him**.

Israel says: What is this dream you have dreamed? Shall I, and your mother (**likely the matriarch at the time, Leah**), shall I, your mom, and your brothers all bow down in **reverence** and **deference** to you?

Are we all to **bow down in submission** to you? Are you to **reign over us**?

Vs 11 - His brothers hate him for the coat, the dreams and they are filled with jealousy.

APPLICATION: Jealousy! When God blesses you in some area of your life there will be some who become jealous. Do not be surprised if your success does not result in the world applauding. But instead, some get jealous.

APPLICATION: Jealousy is nasty business and will eat our lunch (Jas 3:14-16, Pr 14:30).

BUT, his father, also sort of tucked this saying away. He **sort of filled this away**. Like Mary would do many years later (Luke 2:19), he **"kept this saying in mind."**

12 Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." 14 So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

Vs 12 - Then we are told that the brothers, we should assume the 10, went to pasture Israel's flocks and they went near Shechem.

Now you will see it in a moment, but this is after Israel has moved to Hebron, where his father lived. Why go to Shechem? It is a long trip, plus remember what happened in Shechem?

They owned land, and it was likely that land that was conducive to feeding and watering Israel's large flocks. Also, no one had attached them, since they left Shechem. Maybe the availability of food and water drove the decision. Equally following the customs of the day, Shechem belonged to Israel by the **right of conquest**.

Shechem was **50 miles** from Hebron, so likely at least a **2 day walk** (Avg 3 miles per hour for 8 hours).

Vs 13 - Joseph (only 17) is sent to check on his brothers, This likely occurred after some amount of times passed and Israel started to worry.

Vs 14 - Israel said to Joseph, go now, see how things are going with your brothers and with the flock and bring me back word.

No email, no text messaging, no cell phones. Israel dispatches Joseph, NOTICE... to go from the valley of Hebron (so that is where they are now living) and go to Shechem and see how things are going.

15 *And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?"* **16** *"I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock."* **17** *And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.*

Vs 15 - Joseph makes it to the place where he expected to find his brothers and they are not there and Jacob is wondering from field to field and an unnamed man asks Joseph: **"What are you seeking?"**

Vs 16 - Joseph tells him plainly: **"I am seeking my brothers."** Further Joseph says to this unnamed man: **"Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock."**

Now what is the likelihood that this man has any clue where Joseph's brothers are? Maybe, this man knew the family and Joseph knew this man. Maybe.

For sure, there is a sovereign God in heaven who works in the background even when we do not know it, and God is bringing Joseph to the place where he needs him to be, knowing, what his brothers who hate him and who are jealous of him will do.

Vs 17 - Strangely enough, this man knows where they went. I mean what is the likelihood.

APPLICATION: The Writer of Hebrews said this:

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."
(Heb 13:2 ESV)

Rich are you saying this man was possibly an angel. I am saying we should never rule out the possibility of a sovereign God directing our steps through what seems like very natural processes.

This "man" knows exactly where they are. They left here and went to **Dothan**. The name itself means **"two wells"** or **"two cisterns."** We might guess they are looking for adequate water, but we cannot be sure.

Now Dothan is **20 miles** from Shechem and about **a day's** journey north.

18 *They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." 21 But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life."*

Vs 18 - Now as Joseph was approaching his brothers, having located them in Dothan, they saw him coming.

Before he got to them, they began to plan, they began to scheme, they began to conspire against him. They began to plan an evil plot against him, to kill him! Here the brothers, all born of different mothers, Joseph's only blood brother not present, hatch a wicked plan to kill their brother.

Vs 19 - They say to one another **here comes the dreamer!** They hate him, they are jealous of him, and now they plan to be rid of this dreamer. It appears they have nicknamed Joseph **"the dreamer."**

I suspect they likely said this to his face, for in this text you can sense their **jealousy** and **hatred**.

APPLICATION:

"If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1Jo 4:20 ESV)

"Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness." (1Jo 2:9 ESV)

They are planning the cold-blooded murder of their brother; they are plotting to take innocent blood.

Vs 20 - Here is the plan, let's kill him, throw him into one of the pits here in the land, the word can also be used for **cistern**, but let's **throw him into a hole**. We will tell everyone that a fierce animal has devoured him.

Here it is... We will see what will **become of his dreams**. They are so filled with anger and jealousy that it is consuming them; it is causing them to plan the unimaginable.

Do not play with these two emotions. Put down anger quickly by beginning to pray for the person. Put down jealousy recognizing that God is the one who has allowed you and I to have what you have.

Vs 21 - We are not exactly sure how this planning is occurring with the 10, but when Reuben (the eldest) heard of this he "rescued" Joseph out of his brothers' hands.

It seems the eldest, Reuben, who is born of Leah tells the others, **let us not take his life**. Why does Reuben step up now? Where was he when Levi and Simeon killed the men of Shechem? Was this not the guy who slept with Rachel's handmade in what was likely a powerplay to take over leadership from Jacob?

Here he steps up and, at least to some degree, acts like the older brother.

22 And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him" — that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. 23 ¶ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. 24 And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Vs 22 - Reuben speaks to the other nine, we can imagine this is while Joseph is still walking towards them. He tells them: **"Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"** So the plan changes slightly at Reuben's recommendation, let's just drop him in this cistern and he will die of starvation, thirst, exposure or whatever, but do not shed his blood.

But then Moses tells us why he said this... **Because he hoped to rescue him out of their hands and restore him to his father**. Here Reuben is attempting to save his life and we will see this play out in a moment.

Now of course, he could have simply withstood his brothers, he could have simply said that is not happening and you will have to kill me too. But instead, he takes a passive approach to deliver Joseph.

Vs 23 - Joseph arrives at the site where his brothers are, you can imagine he is happy, he has found them, he is probably making jokes about how difficult it was to find them, and as he arrives where they are, they forcibly grab him, they strip the robe of him that his father has made.

Here, like a common criminal he is stripped, this reminds me of another whose robe was stripped off him, by his national brothers.

You can imagine, at first Joseph likely thinks they are playing some type of game, they are having fun with him, after all he is the youngest brother (besides Benjamin).

Vs 24 – Next, they throw him in this pit, that does not contain any water, likely a cistern dug there in Dothan to store water, and his brothers, throw him into this dry pit.

Now, as we put ourselves in Joseph shoes! We wonder what is he **saying to them**, we wonder **if he is crying out for help** from them.

Truthfully, we do not have to wonder. When the brothers encounter Joseph in Egypt, although they do not recognize him, here is what they say to one another:

"21 Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us." 22 And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood."" (Ge 42:21-22 ESV)

Notice, Reuben says that Joseph "begged" them to let him out of the cistern, and they did not listen.

25 Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him.

Vs 25 – In my mind I can imagine them eating as Joseph is crying out for help, as he is crying out, as he is begging to be delivered from the pit. **They are enjoying their meal.** As they are eating, they look up, and see a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead.

These Ishmaelites were coming from Gilead and their camels were loaded with gum, balm, and myrrh and they were headed towards Egypt to trade with the Egyptians.

Vs 26 - Then Judah (the fourth born son of Leah and fourth of Israel) says to his brothers: "**What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?** Judah has likely been thinking about killing Joseph and it would be hard to kill your brother. Beside what "profit" is there in us killing our brother and concealing his blood. Thus it seems Judah hatches another plan.

Vs 27 - Here it is, rather than kill him and conceal his blood, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites. That way, our hand is not upon him. After all, although we hate him, he is our brother.

Let's sell him. As you read this you cannot help but remember another one, dearly loved of his father, another one who had no guile in his mouth, another one who was sold, the **Lord Jesus Christ!**

28 Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

Vs 28 – Here we see the Midianite traders pass by. They are referred to as both Ishmaelites (verse 25) and Midianites (verse 28). This is not a contradiction; first both were sons of Abraham, and we often see them in the scriptures used almost interchangeably (Jud 8:24-26).

Some of the brothers, drew up Joseph, lifted him out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for **20 shekels of silver.** This was the average price for a slave in this day. He was simply sold as a common slave.

29 When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes 30 and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?" 31 ¶ Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. 32 And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." 33 And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces."

Vs 29 - Reuben, for reasons that are not mentioned was not present when Judah hatched the plan to sell the boy. Maybe he was out tending to his father's flocks, we simply do not know.

But, when Reuben returns, from wherever he was, he goes over to the pit, and he sees that Joseph is no longer there. Once he sees this he tears his clothes, (a sign or a symbol of deep sorrow and deep grief).

We can imagine that they threw him in this pit, and they went on about their work, possibly taking them a good distance from the pit, but Reuben makes it back and Joseph is missing.

Vs 30 - Reuben, returns to his other brothers and says: *"The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?"*

It is likely at this point that Reuben learns what the brothers have done. It is likely here that Reuben learns that Joseph was sold for 20 shekels of silver, that Joseph was sold to Ishmaelite traders. Joseph is GONE!

Vs 31 - Now to cover up their crime, the brothers take Joseph's coat of many colors that Israel had given him and they kill a goat and dip and splatter blood all over the robe. The goal, make it look like Joseph was killed by a wild animal.

Vs 32 - The language is interesting; they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father. It seems that as they were traveling back home, they sent Joseph's robe back to Israel, likely by servants. And they arrived and said: *"This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not."*

I imagine they got the robe to Israel a day before they made it home. By the time they arrived they did not have to answer a single question. Israel's imagination has already done the work.

Vs 33 - Israel responds: It is my son's robe, and a fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces.

34 Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him. 36 Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Vs 34 - Notice Jacob tore his garments. Notice he is called Jacob although he has not done anything wrong.

Jacob tears his garments, puts on sackcloth, and mourns for many days for his son Joseph. We can imagine his sadness, after all as we read in verse 3: *Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons!*

Vs 35 - Not only do all his sons, but notice all of his daughters (more than one, yet the only one we know by name is Dinah), rise up to comfort Israel (Gen 46:5-7).

But Israel refuses to allow any to comfort him, notice, he refuses and says: *"No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him.* As they watched their father fall apart, they stuck to their guns and said nothing!

***** An important point** – The ten, nine if we remove Benjamin were certain that their actions would ensure Joseph's dreams never came to pass. Quite the opposite, God would use their sin, to create the situation, by which he would fulfill the dreams that He gave Jacob. **That is the God we serve!**

Vs 36 - Then verse 36 of chapter 37 sets us up for the next piece of the story. The Midianites, the Ishmaelites sold Joseph in Egypt to a man named Potiphar. Potiphar's name means "the gift of Ra" and Ra was one of the key Egyptian gods.

He was a military officer of the Pharaoh. He is a captain of the guard of Egypt.

The stage is set for what happens next with Joseph.