

Genesis 37:2-17
Joseph's Dream Causes Trouble

This morning, we embark on the last major section of the book of Genesis

- We have studied creation
- We have seen the Fall of man
- We have seen the universal Flood
- We have seen mankind multiply after the Flood
- We have seen God choose Abram to be the lineage through whom the Messiah would arrive

We have seen how Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are oftentimes sinful, unqualified men

- We wonder sometimes why God would ever choose such men to be His instruments

But we remind ourselves that there is only One perfect Man

- There is only One Person who deserves to be favored by God
- That is none other than Jesus Christ, the Messiah

This last portion of the book of Genesis will highlight another unlikely candidate

- Joseph will be the focus for much of the remainder of Genesis

It is a joy to sit down and read Genesis 37-50

- I would challenge you to do that sometime this week
- Familiarize yourself with this last portion of Genesis, the book of beginnings

We will concentrate on the first half of Genesis 37 this morning

- It will introduce us to Joseph and his brothers
- It will show us what kind of a relationship they enjoyed with one another

Let's read Genesis 37:2-17

From this first half of Genesis 37, we see three experiences of Joseph

- He experienced preference from his father (37:2-4)
- He experienced jealousy from his brothers (37:5-11)
- He experienced help from a total stranger (37:12-17)

I. Joseph experienced preference from his father (37:2-4)

² These are the records of the generations of Jacob.

For the 11th time in the book of Genesis, we encounter this Hebrew term *toledot*

- It serves to transition from one member of the chosen family to the next
- Thereby, it serves to narrow the focus of the elect line to one particular family member

The record of the family history of Jacob will carry us through the end of the book of Genesis

- The sons of Jacob will be the focus

Joseph is particularly in focus for the remainder of Genesis

- Although Joseph will not be the elect seed of Jacob
- That privilege is reserved for Judah

Joseph, when seventeen years of age.

We are immediately introduced to Joseph

- He will be the predominant figure and focus of this portion of Genesis

I think we are all somewhat familiar with Joseph

- He strikes us as a young man who was dealt some pretty difficult circumstances in life
- Yet, he continues to trust God through it all

There will be several nuggets along the journey

- We will slow down and examine them

Moses tells us that Joseph is “**seventeen years of age**”

- He is among the younger sons of Jacob
- He was the last child born to Jacob while still in Haran with Laban (30:25)

Joseph is also the firstborn son of Rachel

- As you know, Rachel was Jacob’s beloved wife
- This will be significant as we proceed this morning

An interesting study about seventeen years mentioned here¹

- Joseph lived with Israel for the first 17 years of his life
- Israel would live with Joseph for the last 17 years of his life (47:9, 28)

was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was *still* a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives.

The Text also tells us that Joseph was acting as a shepherd

- He “**was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was *still* a youth**”
- He was probably acting as an apprentice, learning the ropes of shepherding from his older brothers

But Moses is quick to point out that Joseph learned his shepherding skills from “**the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives**”

- Dan and Naphtali
- Gad and Asher

The strange absence of Leah’s six sons is striking

- Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun

The six sons of Leah were much older than Joseph

- Perhaps Joseph felt closer to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah²

¹ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 499.

² Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 535.

There were several reasons why the sons of Leah didn't like Joseph

- We encounter one such reason at the end of verse 2

And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

Somewhere along the line, we are told that Joseph “brought back a bad report about them to their father”

Naturally, we have a lot of questions

- What kind of a report did Joseph bring back to Israel?
- What did the brothers do that warranted such an action?
- Was Joseph told to give a reporting on his brothers or was he a tattletale?
- Were all eleven brothers guilty or just the six sons of Leah?

We don't have the answers to all those questions

- But we have enough information in the Text to give us a good idea of what was going on

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons,

The first reason why some of Joseph's brothers didn't like him was because they thought he was a tattletale

- They didn't like him tattling on them back to Israel

The second reason why some of Joseph's brothers didn't like him was because there was obvious favoritism

- Verse 3 tells us, “**Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons**”

Uh oh, this is trouble

- Haven't we seen favoritism before?

In fact, we have seen multiple examples

- Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob (25:28)
- Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau (25:28)
- Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (29:30)

Favoritism has already ripped apart the chosen family of Isaac

- Yet Jacob picks up in his father's footsteps
- He didn't seem to think anything was wrong with it

Imagine being one of the other eleven sons of Jacob

- Joseph was loved more than you
- Joseph was always preferred over you
- Joseph always got what he wanted

You ever felt that way?

- If so, you may be guilty of jealousy
- Joseph's brothers were definitely jealous of Joseph
- And that was a sin

because he was the son of his old age;

Why did Israel love Joseph more than his other sons?

- Moses tells us, “**because he was the son of his old age**”

Jacob was privileged to give birth to thirteen (13) children

- Six sons and one daughter through Leah
- Two sons through Bilhah
- Two sons through Zilpah

Later on, Rachel gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin

- These were special to Israel
- Because Rachel was special to Israel

But if any of the twelve sons of Israel was considered “**the son of his old age,**” it would have been Benjamin, right?³

- Benjamin was the last son born to Rachel

Two considerations

- First, the thought of Benjamin must have reminded Israel of the death of Rachel – not the most pleasant of reminders
- Second, Joseph was the firstborn son of Rachel – this brought much joy and happiness to Jacob

and he made him a varicolored tunic.

To celebrate Joseph’s privileged status, Israel made Joseph “**a varicolored tunic**”

I think just about every single English version I had access to has some reference to color

- Robe of many colors (ESV)
- Coat of many colors (KJV)
- Tunic of many colors (NKJ)
- Varicolored tunic (NAS; NAU)
- Richly ornamented robe (NIV)

We know what a “**tunic**” is

- That is the easy word to translate

A tunic was the normal type of clothing for men

- It would be like a robe
- It covered the entire body, yet allowed for men to work without interference

The harder word to translate is the Hebrew term *passim*

- Most English versions translate this in terms of color

The only other time this word is used in the OT is 2 Samuel 13:18-19

- Tamar is described as wearing a “**long-sleeved tunic**”

³ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 407.

Hence, the only two references of this word in the OT refer to

- A princess
- A favored son

The reference to color in this tunic goes back to the Greek version of the OT⁴

- The OT was written mostly in Hebrew
- There are only a few chapters where Aramaic is the original language

But Greek-speaking individuals oftentimes didn't understand Hebrew

- So they need a version of the OT that they could read, study, and understand
- Hence, the Septuagint was formed
- The OT written in Greek

This is similar to our need for English versions

- Most of us don't understand Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew
- Hence, we need a version that we can read, study, and understand

But when it comes to understanding certain terms, we need to go back to the original languages

- We need to consult Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek

We have an example here of where some of our English versions have gone back to the Greek version of the OT instead of the Hebrew

- Do you see the slight difference?

Instead of consulting the primary source, some have consulted the secondary source

- This is a problem that we wrestle with today

You may say, "Kevin, this is a tunic we are talking about! This isn't worth arguing about!"

- I would agree with you

But there are some today who would argue that there is one particular English version that supersedes the rest

- In other words, God "inspired" one particular English version
- If your version differs from it, then your version is not inspired
- As if one particular English version is "the standard"

I would just challenge you to refer back to the original languages – Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek – when you have questions about the meaning of a particular word

- You may be surprised at what you find

I don't think that this tunic had any reference to color at all

- Rather, I think it has more to do with the length and type of the tunic

It was designated to be worn by those who were leaders and rulers over others

- It was not your common, everyday tunic

This special tunic would have marked Joseph was being the future leader of the family⁵

- Normally the firstborn of the family would have been the leader

⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 2*, 351.

⁵ Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis*, 122.

Why was Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob, overlooked for leadership?⁶

- Genesis 35:22 told us that he disqualified himself in Israel's eyes by sleeping with Israel's concubine

⁴ And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers;

What has been assumed thus far is now confirmed

- Joseph's brothers were well aware of their father's favoritism and preferential love

Their father's antics and actions were not unnoticed

- They knew that Joseph was the favored child

and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

Because of this preferential treatment, Joseph's brothers were very angry and jealous

- As a matter of fact, we are told that **"they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms"**

"hated" is a very strong term

- Especially when you consider that this was expressed toward a brother

They hated him so much that they **"could not speak to him on friendly terms"**

- The term "friendly" is the Hebrew term *shalom*⁷
 - o A term for well-being
 - o A term for peace

These brothers were acting more like enemies than family

- How sad, but true

Joseph experienced preference from his father (37:2-4)

- But he also experienced...

II. Joseph experienced jealousy from his brothers(37:5-11)

⁵ Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

Joseph does not enjoy a healthy relationship with his brothers

- They hate him for a number of reasons
 - o They thought he was a tattletale
 - o They saw that Israel loved Joseph more than the other sons
- But verses 5-11 tell of another reason why Joseph's brothers hated him so much

We are told that Joseph **"had a dream"**

- This isn't unusual

⁶ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 356.

⁷ Wenham, 351.

Many people in the book of Genesis thus far have had dreams

- Abimelech (20:3, 6)
- Jacob
 - o At Bethel (28:12)
 - o In Haran (31:10, 11)
- Laban (31:24)

But the dream that Joseph has is different from the others just mentioned

- Abimelech, Jacob, and Laban each had dreams wherein God spoke and revealed knowledge to them

With Joseph's dream, God doesn't speak⁸

- Thereby, we are not assured that what he sees in his dreams is actually true or not

Thus, we are left with a bit of doubt and uncertainty

- Are these dreams from the LORD?
- Are these dreams from Joseph?
- Would they come true?

We do know that Joseph told his brothers about his dream

- And they weren't too happy with him and his dream

As a matter of fact, verse 5 tells us that "**they hated him even more**"

- This is the second occurrence of this word (37:4, 5)
- It will be used a third time in verse 8

What could possibly be so bad about Joseph's dream that it brought out further hatred from his brothers?

- Verses 6-7 tell us

⁶ And he said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had; ⁷ for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."

Joseph relays the content of his dream

- Remember, God doesn't speak audibly
- Rather, symbolism is used

Joseph dreamed that he and his brothers "**were binding sheaves in the field**"

- This is rather unusual since Joseph and his brothers were shepherds

But no doubt he and his brothers were familiar with sheaves

- This would have been the process of bundling heads of grain⁹

But in Joseph's dream, something unusual happened

- Joseph's sheaf "**rose up and also stood erect**"
- The sheaves of Joseph's brothers, on the other hand, "**gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf**"

⁸ Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 596.

⁹ Kenneth A. Mathews, *NAC, Vol 1B*, 691.

Notice that Joseph makes no attempt to interpret the dream

- He just tells his brothers what he saw in his dream

Just a sidenote here

- Why did God use the terminology of a sheaf?

The bundling of sheaves had to do with barley and other grains

- In other words – food!¹⁰

What would be the problem later in Genesis?

- A famine!
- There wasn't enough food!

Who had the food?

- Egypt

Who was in charge of the food in Egypt?

- Joseph

God was sending a message of what would take place in the future

- But it was not heeded

Do you think his brothers understood the meaning of the dream?

- You better believe it!

⁸ Then his brothers said to him, “Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?”

Verse 8 records the outburst of Joseph's brothers in response to his dream by asking two rhetorical questions

- “Are you actually going to reign over us?”
- “Or are you really going to rule over us?”

The point was clear

- The brothers interpreted Joseph's dream very clearly
- Joseph would be exalted while the brothers would bow down to him

So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Not surprisingly, we are told for the third time that Joseph's brothers hated him, “they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words”

- Three times it has been stated that Joseph's brothers hated him
- How sad that brothers can't even get along!

But there have been a number of reasons for this hatred

- The brothers thought that Joseph was a tattletale
- The brothers noticed how Israel pampered Joseph and loved him more than the rest of the sons
- The brothers interpreted Joseph's dream that he would one day rule over them

¹⁰ Hamilton, 410.

⁹ Now he had still another dream.

Sometime later, Joseph had another dream

- This dream would convey the same truth as the first dream
- But with a different set of symbols

and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

Just like before, Joseph couldn't keep the dream to himself

- He told his brothers
- The brothers who hate him

This time, Joseph didn't dream about sheaves bowing down

- In his second dream, “**behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me**”

In both dreams, Joseph had uttered the word, “**behold**”

- Pay attention!
- Listen to me!
- This is important!

This second dream of Joseph was of more importance

- The sun and the moon and the eleven stars were bowing down

Joseph's brothers knew that there were more than eleven stars in the skies at night

- So they knew that he wasn't insinuating that the entire universe would be bowing down to him

But they knew exactly what he was implying through this dream

- The sun and the moon represented Israel and Rachel
- The eleven stars represented the eleven brothers

In other words, Joseph would one day enjoy a privileged position over his entire family

- Pre-eminence
- Prominence

Both of these dreams relayed this same general principle and truth

- Joseph's family would bow down and serve him

¹⁰ And he related *it* to his father and to his brothers:

Not only did Joseph tell his brothers about this second dream

- He also told his father

You might ask, “Why did he tell his father about this dream?”

- Simple!
- Israel was part of his dream!
- One day, Israel would bow down to Joseph!

and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?”

Israel “rebuked” Joseph

- He questioned whether he and Rachel and their eleven sons would really bow down to Joseph

Israel was the father of the home

- He speaks with a voice of authority
- His rebuke must have painful for Joseph to hear

¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him

As we might expect, the brothers “were jealous of him”

- No mention of “hate” is needed
- We have been told that three times already

Joseph’s brothers were extremely jealous

- Perhaps they wanted to rule over the others
- Perhaps they were envious of these dreams

but his father kept the saying in mind.

Even though Israel rebuked Joseph, the end of verse 11 tells us that he “kept the saying in mind”

- In other words, Israel didn’t totally discount the validity of these dreams

Israel could look back over his life and see how God did some pretty amazing and spectacular things

- God has a habit of choosing the least likely candidate for the task
- He seems to select the person who doesn’t appear to have all the right qualifications

In a few cases, God had selected the younger over the older

- Isaac over Ishmael
- Jacob over Esau

For God to choose Joseph – the younger – over the other older brothers would not be unheard of

- So Jacob “kept the saying in mind”
- He remembered this statement, just in case it came true

He would be waiting to see how God’s providence and sovereignty were displayed¹¹

In this family history of Jacob from Genesis 37-50, we will see that dreams always come in pairs¹²

- Joseph has two dreams
- The cupbearer and cook have dreams
- Pharaoh had two dreams

Why did God give Joseph two dreams?

- Wasn’t one good enough?

¹¹ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 180-81.

¹² Mathews, 691.

Remember that God does not speak in these dreams to Joseph

- Perhaps the one dream would be suspicious
- Perhaps Joseph wanted to believe that he would rule over his brothers and this affected his dreams

Look with me at Genesis 41

- We will cover this in about a month
- But there is a truth and a principle here that is important for us to consider in relation to Joseph's two dreams

Joseph will have the opportunity to interpret the two dreams of Pharaoh

- He gives the reason why two dreams are given

First, look at 41:25, "**Pharaoh's dreams are one *and the same*; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do**"

- The two dreams are really one
- They are different, yet the same principle

Second, look at 41:32, "**Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, *it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about***"

- In the absence of verbal communication and revelation, God repeated the two dreams to Pharaoh in order for the truth to be made known

As we think back to Joseph having two dreams, we could extract that same principle

- One dream about Joseph being ruler over his brothers could be easily discarded and doubted
- But two dreams – it wouldn't be so easily overlooked

So far, Joseph has

- experienced preference from his father (37:2-4)
- experienced jealousy from his brothers (37:5-11)

III. Joseph experienced help from a total stranger (37:12-17)

¹² Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem.

Some time after the two dreams of Joseph had been told, some of Joseph's brothers decided to move away from the home

- But the place where the brothers went to pasture Israel's flock was "**in Shechem**"

Wait a minute

- Shechem?

Genesis 34 is not that far back

- We remember what happened at Shechem
 - o Jacob's daughter Dinah was raped by Shechem
 - o Simeon and Levi went in and destroyed the entire city as the men were recovering from the pain of circumcision
- Jacob's fear was that the Canaanites would rally and attack him and his household (34:30)

This doesn't make any sense

- Why would these brothers want to move all the way to Shechem?

We know that Esau, his family, and his large number of livestock have already moved out of the land of Canaan

- So there doesn't appear to be any shortage of land for the livestock

Jacob still owned land in Shechem¹³

- Perhaps the brothers wanted to get as far away from Joseph that they could
- Perhaps the brothers missed the sin of Shechem and the temptation to be around the Canaanites

¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them.”

Israel became concerned for his sons

- Shechem was far away
- He had not heard from his sons in quite a while

So he decides to send Joseph to inquire on the welfare of his sons

- Obviously, Joseph had not traveled with the rest of his brothers

Benjamin would have been too young

- Israel trusted Joseph to go and tell the truth about how the sons were doing

It could be that Israel was concerned that the Canaanites might try to attack his sons

- Anything is possible

And he said to him, “I will go.”

Joseph immediately agrees to go and check on his brothers for his father

- After all, we learned in verse 2 that Joseph wasn't afraid to tell the truth about his brothers

These closing chapters of Genesis portray Joseph in a very positive light

- He is certainly not a perfect man
- But he is a man of integrity and wisdom
- He shows himself as a man who can be trusted

¹⁴ Then he said to him, “Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock; and bring word back to me.” So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

So Israel sends Joseph from Hebrew to Shechem

- This would have been a distance of about 50 miles¹⁴
- It would have taken Joseph probably two or three days to travel this distance

Back in verse 4, we read that Joseph's brothers “**hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms**”

- “friendly” is the Hebrew term *shalom*
- Peace

¹³ Morris, 538.

¹⁴ Morris, 538.

Here in verse 14, we see another instance of this Hebrew term¹⁵

- Israel tells Joseph, “Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock” (emphasis mine)
- “welfare” is the Hebrew term *shalom*

But Israel, if the brothers didn’t have *shalom* for Joseph before they went to Shechem, would they have changed their minds after going there?

- Wasn’t Israel aware of the dangers of sending Joseph to his brothers?

¹⁵ And a man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, “What are you looking for?” ¹⁶ And he said, “I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing *the flock*.”

But when Joseph arrives in Shechem, he didn’t find his brothers

- He wanders around in a field looking for them

Joseph then just “happens” to find a man who asked him, “What are you looking for?”

- This is certainly gracious of this man to help out the young Joseph
- He is a good Samaritan, helping out someone in a time of need

Joseph tells this anonymous man, “I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing *the flock*.”

- Joseph is desperate – he can’t find his brothers!

The people of this area would surely know the identity of Jacob’s family

- Because of the events of Genesis 34, all the surrounding peoples knew about what the sons of Israel had done to the Shechemites

¹⁷ Then the man said, “They have moved from here; for I heard *them* say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

In God’s providence, this man knew exactly where Joseph’s brothers were

- He told Joseph, “They have moved from here; for I heard *them* say, ‘Let us go to Dothan’”

Dothan was about 13 miles north of Shechem¹⁶

- In total, Joseph is about 65 miles from Canaan!

Joseph is moving farther from Canaan

- He is being faithful to his father
- But he is still venturing too far from home

Joseph travels the extra few miles and finds his brothers at Dothan

- This must have taken Joseph a few days to find his brothers

How are his brothers?

- Has the geographical distance between them and Canaan helped their attitudes?

¹⁵ Mathews, 694.

¹⁶ Hamilton, 414.

Perhaps we will see another Jacob-Esau moment

- Where reconciliation can be accomplished
- Where by-gones can be by-gones

Sadly, that is not how the story unfolds itself in the remainder of the chapter

- There is no reconciliation – not yet
- There is no warm embrace – not yet

The first part of this chapter reminds us of God's sovereign selection

- God chooses whom He wills

But sometimes ungodly and immature individuals don't always appreciate God's choice

- Jealously, hatred, and envy are manifested

Whether they realize it or not, Joseph's brothers aligned themselves against God

- Little did they know what would transpire over the next few years

Let me remind you that those of you to whom God has entrusted positions of leadership will oftentimes face opposition, hardship, and persecution¹⁷

- I wish I could tell you that this type of negative response is unheard of in local churches
- But I can't

Even born-again Christians can struggle with envy and jealousy

- Look at how often the Twelve disciples of Jesus argued over who was the greatest!

The reality is that the call to submit to God-ordained leadership is not an easy, natural thing

- Submission only comes about by the work of the Holy Spirit

Next week, we will consider the remainder of this chapter as we celebrate the Lord's Table

- I trust you will join us

¹⁷ Ross, 601.