

FPFWC Christian Development



Struggles with Love

September 2020

Fall Quarter

September 5, 2020

Lesson #1 –Biased Love

Scripture Focus – Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28

ICE BREAKERS –

1. What is the difference between a house and a home?
2. How should we deal with feelings of jealousy?

**Key Verse: “His brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.”
Genesis 37:11**

LESSON BACKGROUND

Joseph was born around the year 1916 BC. In world historical context, this would be near the middle of the Bronze Age, which began around 3000 BC. Other technological and societal advancements made this a time of important, though comparatively slow, change.

The struggles with love involving Joseph go back years before Joseph to his father Jacob (about 2007-1860 BC). Jacob was raised in a home where favoritism appears to have been the primary parenting skill of his father and mother, Isaac and Rebekah. Genesis 25:28 tells us all we need to know: “Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.”

Such a scenario was bound to produce family conflict. This infighting came to a head when Rebekah learned of Isaac’s desire to bless his favorite son, Esau (the older of the two). This would solidify Esau’s privileged position, with promises of abundance for the future. She disguised Jacob so that he would feel hairy like Esau in the presence of blind Isaac. The ruse worked, and the blessing intended for Esau was pronounced on Jacob (Genesis 27:1-41).

To escape Esau’s vengeance, Jacob traveled to Haran, where Rebekah’s brother Laban lived (Genesis 27:42-43). There Jacob married the two daughters of Laban, namely Leah and Rachel, and became the father of one daughter and 11 of his eventual 12 sons (29:15-30:24). Joseph was the last son born to Jacob in Haran (30:22-24). On the way back to Canaan, after residing in Haran for 20 years (31:38), Benjamin was born. He and Joseph were the only two sons of Rachel. Tragically, Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin (35:16-20).

Eventually, Jacob settled with his family in Canaan near Bethel (Genesis 35:1), a journey hundreds of miles from Haran. Perhaps he believed that he would enjoy his last years in relative calm, as opposed to all the strife he had experienced thus far. However, some of Jacob's most heartbreaking trials were yet to come, sown from seeds in his own past.

LESSON COMMENTARY

Joseph in the Pit (37:2-40:23)

The "records of the generations of Jacob" (v. 2) focus attention not on Jacob, but rather on that son in the next generation through whom the Abrahamic covenant is channeled (i.e., Joseph; see comments on 25:19-35:29 and 38:1-30) until the emphasis in the narrative begins to shift from Joseph to Judah (see 43:8-9 and 44:18-34 and related comments below). Thus begins the Joseph cycle now that the subsequent narrative cycles for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have come to their respective conclusions.

a. Joseph Is Sold into Slavery by His Brothers (37:2-36)

37:2-17. The account of Joseph, around whom the majority of this last major section in Genesis revolves, presents a pattern that is employed by God throughout later history as one among several means of displaying His concern for Israel. This pattern features the elevation of a Jewish person to the upper echelons of governmental power, resulting in an elevation of the Jewish sociopolitical standing, and often also the improvement of their material welfare. Other examples from the biblical period include Moses (the adopted son of Pharaoh; Ex 2:10), David (commander and bodyguard of the Philistine king Achish; 1Sm 28:2), Daniel (adviser to the Babylonian and Persian king from Nebuchadnezzar until Cyrus; Dn 1:21), Esther (queen of the Persian king Ahasuerus [or Xerxes]; Est 2:17), her relative Mordecai (first chamberlain of Ahasuerus, then second to the king himself; Est 2:21; 10:3), and Nehemiah (cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes; Neh 1:11).

Jacob, though having come to a place of true dependence on God, was not perfect. Not surprisingly he fell into the same pattern of sin expressed by his parents, namely, showing clear favoritism for one among several siblings. Just as Isaac's preference for Esau and Rebekah's preference for Jacob fueled the fraternal enmity that eventually prompted Esau to plot his brother's murder (27:42), so too did Jacob's preference for Joseph—whom his father loved... more than all his brothers (v. 4). This was the first factor that fueled an outright hatred of him on the part of his brothers that culminated in their plotting "to put him to

death" (v. 18). The strife between Joseph and his brothers that begins in this passage reflects a common theme in Genesis (see comments on 4:8).

An important tidbit of parental instruction is here, for though any parent with several children may be inclined to favor one of them, the true hatred of Joseph's brothers was fanned into life only after their father's natural inclination toward Joseph as the son of his old age was outwardly displayed by his giving him a varicolored tunic (v. 3). This was a continual visual reminder to the brothers of Joseph's favored status. Moreover, the strife between brothers was exacerbated by a second factor—Joseph's own pride. This was evident when he told his brothers about his two dreams—both of which clearly symbolized his family bowing down to him (in submission, not worship)—and they hated him even more (vv. 5-11). For the sun and the moon and eleven stars, see comments on Rv 12:1-6. The fulfillment of these dreams becomes evident later in the narrative, when the family must go down to Egypt for food and had to bow before Joseph (Gn 42:9). Yet a third factor in the strife—developing hatred was Joseph's brothers' envy of him. They saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers (v. 4) and resented his dreams so much that the brothers were jealous of him (v. 11).

37:18-36. Thus the brothers decided to kill Joseph and throw his body into one of the pits in the wilderness (v. 20). Yet the oldest brother Reuben, in an act of compassion—or at the very least out of respect to his father—persuaded them, for the moment (cf. v. 26), not to lay hands on (i.e., kill) their brother, but rather to throw him into a pit so that he (Reuben) might later rescue Joseph and restore him to his father (v. 22). Sadly, Reuben's good intentions were a fourth factor in Joseph's descent to slavery—rather than forthrightly defend his brother, his schemed failed to protect his younger brother. The fifth factor causing Joseph to be sold into slavery was his brother Judah's greed. Without Reuben's knowledge, Judah then took the lead, perhaps showing some compassion (for he is our brother, our own flesh, v. 27) but mainly displaying a greedy attitude. He wondered aloud about the profit in murdering their brother (v. 26) and instead proposed selling Joseph to Ishmaelite traders on their way... down to Egypt (vv. 26-27). Already this revealed the enmity God declared in 16:12 would arise between Ishmael's offspring and Isaac's. Since Ishmael was Isaac's great-uncle, these Ishmaelites would have been Joseph's second cousins, no more than two or three times removed). The sixth and final factor in the strife between family members is the deception by the brothers caused by dipping Joseph's tunic in the blood of a goat and bringing it to their father (vv. 31-32). Jacob concluded that a wild beast had devoured Joseph, for whom he then mourned for... many

days and refused to be comforted (vv. 33-34). Many years earlier Jacob had deceived his own father using his brother Esau's garments (27:1-46); now his sons deceived him using Joseph's torn and blood-stained garments (37:33-35). There are three results for the sad events described in this chapter. First, Joseph will now live in slavery (cf. 39:1-6). Second, Jacob is to live the next 22 years in sorrow, grieving for his favorite son (37:35). Third, Joseph's brothers will continue to live in guilt, always seeing the sin against their brother as the source of all their woes (cf. 42:21-22; 44:16). [

LESSON NUGGET – Joseph's dreams were to him what God's Word is to us today: they gave him the assurance he needed when the going was hard.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*