II. Boys Will Be Boys

12-Jun-05  Genesis 37:2-36

Theme: God calls the brothers to repent through Joseph; instead they harden their hearts and vainly attempt to thwart God’s message by attacking the messenger.

Key Verses: Genesis 37:3-4 3Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. 4But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

Review

Last week, we covered an introduction to the Joseph Story, Genesis 37-50. First, I discussed the literary structure of this section. While it can be organized in a grand chiasm of 14 sections, or even in two chiasms of seven sections each, the overriding literary structure is the parallel panel. The Joseph Story is organized in seven pairs of complementary panels, which each pair of panels having a similar theme. This organization structure helps us to follow the flow of the story, and even explains why Genesis 38 – the story of Judah and Tamar – which appears to interrupt the flow of the story, is placed where it is.

After a “big picture” review of Genesis, I then highlighted five main themes of the Joseph Story. First, we have an advancement of the promises made to Abraham. The focus of the Joseph story is on glory-influence, being a blessing outside of the Land. Joseph becomes a blessing to the entire world. Next, we have Joseph’s purity in service. Joseph was ready to serve, but not ready to sin. Remaining pure, resisting temptation, regardless of consequence – is another major theme in the Joseph Story. Third, we have the theme of God’s providence. God is directing every detail in the Joseph Story for His purposes. The responsibility of men is not negated, but men are not able to overturn the purposes of God. The Providence of God trumps the evil of men. Fourth, we have the preparation of God’s people in the incubator of Egypt. They will not stay there forever. God will bring them out when He is ready. But they need to learn the lessons of Joseph while living in Egypt. Finally, we have a preview of coming attractions. In many ways, Joseph is a type of Christ who prefigures the Messiah to come, from the line of Judah.

Finally, I mentioned a number of recurring motifs in the Joseph Story. Keep your eyes and ears opened for the following: wisdom; dreams; clothing; doubles; weeping; replacement of the older by the younger; and going down to Egypt amongst the many recurring motifs of the story. As we begin our study of Genesis 37 this morning, we will already begin to see many of these motifs enter into the story. And so, let’s begin our detailed study of the Joseph Story.

Introduction

“Boys will be boys.” Have you ever said that to excuse unruly behavior? “Well, that’s just the way boys are.” Tom Sawyer yanks Becky Thatcher’s pigtails or dips them in the inkwell. No big deal – “boys will be boys.” The problem with this saying is that it excuses sinful behavior and trivializes the problem of sin. As we look at Genesis 37 this morning, there is a huge gap in behavior between Joseph and his other brothers, and saying that “boys will be boys” does not explain away or justify the actions of the brothers. We need to understand rightly this morning that the brothers’ actions are not just boyhood pranks. They are the sinful responses of rebellious hearts that refuses to hear and heed the Word of God spoken to them.

Genesis IV – Notes. Doc  p. 20  DSB  9-Sep-05
Before us today are the first two sections, or parallel panels, of the Joseph Story. In the first panel (37:2-11), we see Joseph elevated over his brothers, both by his father Jacob, and by the Word of God. In the second panel (37:12-36), we see the brothers rebel against their father and against God. They attempt to elevate themselves over Joseph and thus reverse what Jacob and God have ordained.

A. Joseph over His Brothers (37:2-11)

Structure of Panel 1

All fourteen panels in the Joseph Story can be arranged as chiasms. In this first panel, we can see that the center of chiasm is the hatred of the brothers towards Joseph, thus setting up the tension that drives the entire Story and prepares us for the sequel in the next panel.

a history of Jacob (37:2a)

b Jacob favors Joseph (37:2b-4)
  • loved more than all his brothers
  • brothers hated him, could not speak peaceably to him

c Joseph’s first dream (37:5-7)
  • brothers’ sheaves bow down to Joseph’s sheave

d CENTER: Brothers hate Joseph and his dreams (37:8)

c’ Joseph’s second dream (37:9)
  • sun, moon, and eleven stars bow down to Joseph

b’ Jacob rebukes Joseph (37:10-11a)
  • “shall your mother and I and your brothers” bow down?
  • brothers envied him

a Jacob ponders (37:11b)

1. Introducing Joseph (37:2-4)

This 11th and final section of Genesis starts out with the phrase: “This is the genealogy of Jacob.” What is to follow is the account of Jacob’s descendants. The main character of the story is Joseph, but the other sons of Jacob have their parts to play as well.

a. Joseph’s Report (37:2)

Immediately we are introduced to Joseph, age 17. And immediately, we are faced with the opportunity to evaluate who this young man is. You get the sense that the sons of Jacob divide into camps. There are the six sons of Leah – the first wife - and undoubtedly they feel superior to the others. Then there are the four sons of the two concubines – they appear to have banded together, knowing they are inferior to the sons of Leah, but probably imitating them in attitude and behavior. And then there are the sons of Rachel – the beloved wife – Joseph and Benjamin (who at this point in the story might not yet even have been born). What is clearly evident is that Joseph is different than his 10 brothers by the other three mothers, for the first action we hear of Joseph is that he brings a bad report of the second group of brothers to his father Jacob.

And right off the bat, we have our first interpretive controversy. What is Joseph’s motivation for this report? Is he a spoiled-brat tattletale, as some commentators suggest? For example, Baldwin comments: “Joseph was no better or wiser than other teenagers who note with dismay the unacceptable behavior of older brothers.” Wenham is even harsher in his criticism: “It seems likely that Joseph misrepresented his brothers to his father.” Wenham calls Joseph’s report an “indiscretion, if not downright lying.”
However, I believe that Joseph a righteous man. Ross portrays Joseph as “a faithful son among unfaithful sons.” Jordan goes further: “The first appearance of Joseph in the Bible is as a righteous judge, the right-hand man of his father.” As we look at the other aspects of Joseph’s character in these introductory verses, we will see that Joseph has been entrusted with much, and he is here acting as the faithful steward of his father’s house.

What is definitely clear in this first verse of the story is that there is a tension between Joseph and his brothers, a tension created by Joseph’s righteousness and their unrighteousness, but fueled by their father’s favoritism.

b. Jacob’s Favoritism (37:3a)
You would have thought that Jacob would have learned something from his own life. The old tensions between Jacob and Esau were created by essentially the same factors as were present in his own household. The spiritual differences in Jacob and Esau (his desire for the birthright and Esau’s disdain) were intensified by the favoritism showed by their parents for one or the other of the twins. Jacob followed in his parents’ footsteps, showing favoritism first to his wives (Rachel over Leah) and then to his children (Rachel’s children over the others). Joseph becomes the object of Jacob’s affection, the beloved son who is esteemed more highly than the others. This special attention leads to envy (cp. v. 11)—what Boice calls the root of bitterness—in the lives of his ten other brothers (excepting Benjamin).

c. Joseph’s Tunic (37:3b)
The favoritism of Jacob is demonstrated concretely by the bestowal of a special tunic upon Joseph. This tunic is commonly translated as a “coat of many colors.” Andrew Lloyd Webber has written an entire musical about the Joseph Story called Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. But we should banish this concept of a rainbow coat from our minds, since this translation is almost definitely inaccurate. The only other place in the Bible with the same Hebrew word is in 2 Samuel 13:18-19, describing the robe of a princess worn by Tamar after Absalom assaulted her.

Most likely, the tunic or robe described is richly ornamental, with long sleeves to his wrists and reaching down to his ankles. The meaning of such a tunic should be fairly obvious. In that day, most tunics were sleeveless and stopped at the knees, designed for working men doing manual labor (such as shepherding). Joseph’s garment was clearly not intended to be a working garment; “its design precluded manual labor” (Hartley).

This garment was a visible indication for all to see of Jacob’s special affection upon Joseph. While Jacob’s other sons were out in the fields tending to the flocks, Joseph was exempt from manual labor. His role in reporting on the activities of the brothers, combined with this royal robe, indicate that Joseph held a position of authority in the household over the brothers. In essence, Joseph was the steward of his father’s house.

d. Jacob’s Heir (37:2-3)
That position of authority probably was confirmed through Jacob considering Joseph as the heir of his household. Reuben had forfeited the right (Genesis 35:22). Joseph, although not the second born son, was the first-born son of the second and beloved wife, and Jacob appears to have transferred the birthright to Joseph. This is indirectly confirmed by a reference in John 4:5, where we are told that Jesus met the woman in Samaria in the town of Sychar, “near the plot of
ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.” We are not told of this transaction in Genesis, but it appears as if Jacob had deeded over to Joseph the plot of ground he had purchased in Canaan, an indication that he was his heir.

e. The Brothers’ Hatred (37:4)
All of these factors – Jacob’s favoritism of Joseph, the special tunic of authority, Joseph’s position as the youngest brother who is the steward and heir of the household, and especially Joseph’s righteousness – all combine in a predictable way to produce jealousy, resentment, envy, and hatred in the other brothers. Boice puts it this way: “The brothers hated Joseph because he was not like them. They stood for treachery, murder, and incest. He stood for truth. So as long as he was present, his virtue exposed their vice. In the end, they determined to rid themselves of him.” How about that for a little foreshadowing?

So, that’s our introduction to Joseph—immature, whiny tattletale, or misunderstood younger brother? Right from the start of the story, a contrast is being established, a contrast that leads to the tensions that drive the rest of the Joseph Story all the way to the very end, when the brothers still don’t understand Joseph or his motivations. Joseph, the Spirit-filled man, is set apart from his worldly brothers. The next bit of the story intensifies that separation.

2. Joseph’s Dreams (37:5-10a)

a. Joseph’s Prophecies (37:6, 9a, 10a)
We can see the difference between Joseph and the other brothers very clearly here. Joseph has been labeled as “naïve,” “insensitive,” or “unwise” for rubbing salt into his brother’s wounds by relating his dreams to them. Since the dreams are not directly stated as being from God, one commentator suggests that they might be the product of Joseph’s “own inflated ego.”

But we must look at it from a different perspective. God’s revelation has been given to Joseph; he is called to proclaim the Word of God. In this, he is no different than any other prophet. “A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8). So, the compulsion of God’s Spirit comes upon Joseph to proclaim God’s Word.

Perhaps Joseph was reluctant to tell his brothers the dreams he had. Certainly after the reception of the first dream, Joseph would have realized they didn’t want to hear the contents of the second dream. And yet Joseph proclaims these God-given visions anyway. Instead of looking at Joseph as being unwise for proclaiming the dreams, we need to look upon the brothers as unwilling to hear God’s inspired Word. Here is another point of separation between Joseph and his brothers – receptiveness to the Word of God.

b. Joseph’s Dreams (37:7, 9b)
As I have previously noted, Joseph’s dreams represent a new way of God communicating with His people. In the past three generations, God had spoken directly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, in the Joseph Story, God only speaks indirectly through dreams that must be interpreted by Joseph, the Spirit-filled man.

The contents of the dreams themselves are rather straightforward in their symbolism. Even the spiritually insensitive brothers understood their meaning: Joseph was to be exalted over the rest of his family, who would bow down in homage to him. This meaning is clear from both dreams, and reinforced by the repetition. The first dream has an agricultural setting, while the second
dream is in the celestial realm. Thus, both heaven and earth testify to the ultimate exaltation of Joseph over his kindred.

What the brothers’ missed in their own interpretation of the dreams is their own exalted positions. True, they were to bow down before Joseph, but they were represented as stars, and the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and stars) are routinely used as symbols of powers and authorities in the Scriptures. God in His providence had plans for the brothers as well, but they were too busy hating Joseph to notice.

c. The Brothers’ Hatred (37:5, 8)
While the dreams spoke of the exaltation of Joseph, their real message was for the brothers to repent of their envy against Joseph and submit to the will of God now. God was calling them by His grace through the younger brother to repent and be restored. However, like Pharaoh, they hardened their hearts and resisted.

The brothers’ envy at Joseph’s exalted position in the household of Jacob was the root of bitterness. That root now leads to what Boice calls a shoot of bitterness—hatred. Their hatred intensifies three times in this short passage (vv. 4, 5, 8). Consider the object of their hatred. Is it really Joseph? Or is it what Joseph represents? Since these dreams were God-given, the brothers’ hatred is focused not really on Joseph, but on God. God is the one who will exalt Joseph. God is the one who has chosen Joseph. Boice points out: “Envy is an angry resistance to God’s decrees. Consequently it is ultimately resentment of God and hatred of him. Joseph was not like them. He was godly while they were godless; they hated him for that. But here, in addition, we find them hating Joseph because God had chosen him for a position of special future prominence.” Their rebellion is not just against Joseph, but also against God Himself. They are like Cain, who gets mad at Abel because of the word of God rebuking him and praising his brother. And like Cain, their hatred begins to turn to thoughts of murder.

3. Discounting Joseph (37:10b-11)

a. Jacob’s Rebuke (37:10b)
Jacob understands the sun and the moon to refer to himself and Joseph’s “mother.” If this chapter is chronological with the previous chapters, then Rachel is already dead, and perhaps Jacob is referring to Leah. However, I believe that this chapter is unchronological at this point. The organization of material in Genesis first and foremost is arranged chiastically, not chronologically. I believe the end of the Jacob Cycle was rounded out before beginning the Joseph Story, and this chapter may have taken place before the events of Genesis 34 (the slaughter of Shechem). Certainly Joseph would not have participated in that event. Later on in this chapter, Joseph and his brothers are out near Shechem, and many commentators have wondered why they were still in that area, where they would be most unwelcome given the events of Genesis 34. I believe the answer lies in the fact that Genesis 37 happens before Genesis 34. Thus, the moon could actually refer to Rachel who was still alive.

That raises another problem, for if Rachel were still alive, then Benjamin had not yet been born. However, the second dream clearly had 11 stars for 11 brothers, but if Benjamin hadn’t arrived yet, then there were only ten brothers. Let me address that issue momentarily.

In any event, Jacob’s rebuke of Joseph is surprising, especially given their relationship as described in vv. 2-4. Joseph may have expected his brothers to be against him, but he surely
didn’t expect his father’s reprimand. How Jacob must have hurt Joseph by seeking to stop his proclamation of God’s Word through him. This family is a lot like ours in many ways. Sins of the heart and sins of the tongue find fertile ground in families like Jacob’s, and like ours.

b. The Brother’s Hatred (37:11a)
Once again, the heart attitude of the brothers is displayed. This time, they are envious or very jealous. This repetition of their heart attitude sets the stage for the next act in the play, when they seek to reverse the tables and come out on top over Joseph.

c. Jacob’s Pondering (37:11b)
And that brings us to the end of the panel, with a very curious phrase: “but his father kept the matter in mind.” It reminds me of the attitude of Mary after the birth of Christ: “But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, 51). Mary thought about what she had seen and heard, what the angel had told her, and how it came to pass. Jacob is a bit like that here in Genesis 37.

Jacob is a complex, real character. Even though Jacob had rebuked Joseph, perhaps to prevent further occasions for the brothers’ to hate him, Jacob considered carefully what Joseph had said. One moment he is chiding Joseph; the next moment he is pondering. Even when he has moved on from being the star of the show to only having a small, supporting role, he is complex and hard to figure out. He’s a lot like you and me.

What was he pondering? Perhaps he was contemplating the eleven stars bowing down to Joseph, as he counted only ten other brothers. Perhaps that gave Jacob encouragement that Rachel would have another son – Benjamin, the son of his right hand, the one who would for a time replace Joseph in his heart. Perhaps Jacob considered that even though he had exalted Joseph above his brothers, God would exalt him higher than he could even imagine. Perhaps Jacob was thinking back over his own life, and how a brother’s enmity and a prophecy of the older serving the younger had shaped his life, and now it was déjà vu all over again. Regardless, while the brothers resented Joseph, Jacob pondered these things in his heart.

B. The Brothers over Joseph (37:12-36)
Structure of Panel 2
a introduction (37:12-14a)
• Jacob concerned in Hebron; worried about Joseph’s brothers, sends him to determine their welfare and reassure him of their well-being
b Joseph leaves Jacob in Hebron (37:14b-17)
• go find your brothers
c Reuben attempts to rescue Joseph from brother’s plot (37:18-24)
• Reuben convinces them to just throw him into pit (he plans to rescue him later)
d CENTER: Joseph is sold into slavery (37:25-28)
c’ Reuben discovers that he has failed to save Joseph from his brothers (37:29-30)
• Reuben returns to pit to rescue Joseph, but is too late
b’ brothers return to Jacob in Hebron (37:31-33)
• they happened to find Joseph’s garment and give it to Jacob
a’ conclusion (37:34-35)
• Jacob distraught in Hebron; mourns Joseph’s “death” and refuses to be comforted by Joseph’s brothers

Epilogue: Joseph sold as a slave into Potiphar’s household (37:36)
Now we come to the second panel of the Joseph Story. Here the tension and hatred described in the first scene reaches the critical point, and the brothers take matters into their own hands in an attempt to defeat the Word of God proclaimed to them by Joseph. They seem to think if they can dispose of Joseph, then they can dispose of God and His Word. But God is not about to let that happen, and the providence of God is on display.

1. **Joseph’s Pursuit (37:12-17)**

   a. **Jacob’s Mission (37:13a, 14a)**
   To start this second panel, Jacob has a job for his household steward–Joseph–to do. It is to check up on the whereabouts of the other brothers, and to return with a report of their activities. Thus, this panel starts out much the same as the first panel, where we saw Joseph returning to Jacob with a bad report of the concubines’ sons. “Perhaps the evil report of the earlier mission prompted Jacob to send Joseph on this one” (Ross). Ironically, Joseph was to see about their welfare (shalom), but the brothers were unable to speak “peaceably” (shalom, v. 4) with him. Not a good start to the mission.

   b. **Joseph’s Obedience (37:13b)**
   Joseph’s character is again seen in his prompt and obedient response, “Here I am.” In this reply, Joseph is consciously echoing the obedient reply of his great-grandfather, Abraham on Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22:7, 11). Abraham was the father of the faithful, and Joseph was a true seed of Abraham’s spiritual line. Many centuries later, the prophet Isaiah would utter the same words in response to the call of God (Is. 6:8). Joseph’s will was to do his father’s will. In this regard, as in many other respects, he previews the coming of the Messiah.

   c. **Canaan’s Geography (37:12, 14b, 17b)**
   To orient ourselves to the story, we need to realize that Jacob and Joseph are living at this time in Hebron, 20 miles south of Jerusalem and about 50 miles south of Shechem. Dothan, where Joseph finally finds his brothers, lies an additional 15 miles beyond Shechem. So, Joseph has a journey of some 65 miles ahead of him, at least three days on foot, searching for his brothers in unfamiliar territory.

   d. **Joseph’s Persistence (37:15-17a)**
   Neither the distance nor the inability to quickly find his brothers dissuades Joseph from his task. Discovering they are not at Shechem where he expected them, he makes inquiries and head on to Dothan, where he eventually finds them. Joseph’s character is again displayed in his persistence in completing the task his father had given him. He could have easily returned to Jacob from Shechem and proclaimed the task finished: “I went to Shechem, but couldn’t find them!” Instead, we find full and complete obedience in Joseph, regardless of the personal cost. Joseph’s mission reminds me of Gilligan’s Island. What started out as a three-hour (or in this case, three-day) tour, ends up in years of exile.

2. **The Brothers’ Plot (37:18-20)**
   As Boice points out, the root of bitterness (envy) leads to a shoot of bitterness (hatred), that produces the fruit of bitterness, “which in this case is the tangible act of reaching out to kill a
brother.” In this course of action, they follow in the footsteps not only of Cain, but also of their uncle Esau, whose hatred of Jacob prompted visions of murder (Gen. 27:41-42).

“The master dreamer is coming,” they no doubt said sarcastically. And in this phrase, the brothers’ hearts are exposed in their plot to murder Joseph. They are not only trying to eliminate Joseph, they are really trying to prevent the dreams that Joseph had from coming to pass. “We shall see what will become of his dreams!” Their hatred goes beyond fratricide; they are attempting to commit deicide, for this is no less than an attack on God Himself.


   a. **Reuben’s Intent (37:21-22)**
   
   In God’s providence, the eldest brother Reuben comes up with an alternate plan. Rather than killing Joseph outright, he convinced his brothers to simply throw Joseph into a pit, ostensibly to starve to death. However, Reuben secretly intended to return later to rescue Joseph from the pit. The question is, why? What was Reuben’s motivation? The Bible doesn’t tell us.

   Did he feel some responsibility as the first-born? Did he hope to get back into his father’s good graces by preserving Joseph? Was he atoning for some sin, such as with the concubine Bilhah? (Gen. 35:22). Why did he feel he could not speak up and defend Joseph amongst his other brothers? We don’t know the answers to these questions. We merely know what the Scriptures state: that Reuben intended to rescue Joseph, and thus he acted to preserve Joseph’s life.

   b. **Joseph’s Capture (37:23-24)**
   
   The plan seemed good to the other brothers, so they put it into action. The first thing to go was that hated tunic, the symbol of Jacob’s love and Joseph’s elevated status. Joseph’s glory and dominion had been stripped from him. Next, he was cast into a dry cistern. The pit was empty; no food, no water, no chance of escape. And there they left him to die.

4. **Judah’s Proposal (37:25-30)**

   a. **The Brothers’ Meal (37:25a)**
   
   The next phrase is a chilling one: “And they sat down to eat a meal.” Joseph is in the dry cistern without sustenance, and they have a fiesta. Their plan was to tell Jacob that a wild animal had devoured Joseph. By sitting down to the meal, they demonstrate that they themselves are the wild animals. They are the evil beasts who are intent on fratricide.

   Can you imaging how cold-hearted the brothers were? Nothing is said here in Genesis 37 about Joseph’s cries and pleas to his brothers, but the brothers recall it later in Genesis 42:41: “Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.’” Boice puts it this way: “A physicist could compute the exact time required for Joseph’s cries to go twenty-five yards to the eardrums of the brothers. But it took twenty-two years for that cry to go from their eardrums to their hearts.”

   b. **The Ishmaelites’ Caravan (37:25b)**
   
   We now have our second deliberate echo in this story back to Genesis 22, the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. The first echo was in the obedience of Joseph, who said, “Here I am.” In the
second half of Genesis 37:25 we have the second echo: “Then they lifted their eyes, and looked, and there.” In Genesis 22:13, “Then Abraham lifted his eyes, and looked, and there.” What did Abraham see? He found a ram in a thicket, caught by its horns, sent there by God as a substitute sacrifice for Isaac. What did Joseph’s brothers see? A caravan of Ishmaelites (also called Midianites in verses 28, 36) heading south towards Egypt. Just as God sent the ram to rescue Isaac, God surely sent this caravan of distant cousins to rescue Joseph.

c. Judah’s Speech (37:26-27)
Judah is quick to see the possibilities, and so he addresses his brothers. “We can solve our problem and make a profit too!” says Judah. And so he convinces the rest of his siblings to sell their brother to these traders as a slave. What is Judah’s motivation? Is he shirking away from outright murder? Does he think he can salve his conscience by committing a “lesser sin” than fratricide? Later on the law will explicitly condemn this action with the death penalty (Ex. 21:16), so it is not really a “lesser sin.” Is he greedy for the money? Does he think he can thwart the word of God simply by running Joseph out of town on a rail? Once again, we don’t know the motivation of Judah’s heart, but it is clear that God is using Judah’s sinful act, just as he used Reuben, to preserve Joseph and pave the way for the prophetic dreams to come to pass.

d. Joseph’s Price (37:28)
So Joseph is sold for twenty shekels, the price of male slave between the ages of five and twenty (Lev. 27:5). Joseph was sold at the going rate. Wenham points out that this was quite a windfall for the brothers. “For shepherds who might expect to earn, if employed by others, about eight shekels a year, the sale of Joseph represented a handy bonus!” Through all of Joseph’s trials, we are reminded of how our Savior was also sold for a price by one close to Him, in order that He might ultimately save many, including those who had denied Him and abandoned Him.

e. Reuben’s Grief (37:29-30)
Where was Reuben during this commercial transaction? He apparently wasn’t around, because he was unaware of what had transpired. Perhaps he was on shepherd duty while the others met with and concluded negotiations with the traders. Again, in God’s providence, the one brother who might have had the courage to stop Judah’s plan was absent when it was proposed and enacted.

Reuben’s grief appears real, but it is of no use to Joseph. Joseph needed a real ally, an up-front ally, not the back-door help that Reuben seemed only willing to provide. And as a result, Reuben was implicated in the plot. Because he failed to speak up and act, he was just as guilty in this injustice upon Joseph as the rest of the brothers.

He is just like you and me. We might not have been present when the nails were driven through the Savior’s hands, but we are just as guilty as those who bore the hammers. Our sin made us participants in the death of Christ. And Reuben’s sins made him a participant in the injustice done to Joseph. But praise God, He is in the business of forgiving sinners, and as we go along in the Joseph Story, we will see how God changes Reuben, and how God changes Judah, and how God changes the other brothers. This is not the end of the story, it is just the beginning.
5. **Jacob’s Pain (37:31-35)**

   a. **The Brothers’ Deceit (37:31-32)**

   After the plot comes the cover-up. The brothers implement the killed-by-a-wild-animal ploy, dipping the expensive tunic in goat’s blood. No doubt they would have preferred to cast lots for the garment, but how would they have been able to explain to Jacob why Asher or Naphtali was wearing Joseph’s tunic?

   Jacob thus falls prey to a similar deception as he played on his father. He used two kids of the goats to deceive Isaac (27:9). His sons use the blood from a goat kid to deceive him. Just as Isaac failed to perceive the true identity of his son, Jacob fails to perceive the truth of the lie behind the blood-stained tunic. What goes around comes around. Jacob, the Supplanter, the trickster, the deceiver, is now in turn deceived by his own sons. The sins of the past are revisiting Jacob in new ways.

   b. **Jacob’s Grief (37:33-35)**

   At the start of this panel in verse 13, Jacob sends Joseph to find his brothers. Now in verse 32 at the end of the panel, the brothers send the bloodied tunic back to Jacob. Perhaps they couldn’t face their father with their lies, and so they sent the tunic on ahead by a servant. But if they thought they could avoid Jacob’s grief that followed, they were sorely mistaken. They would be living with Jacob’s grief for decades to come. Every time they looked at their father, they would be reminded of their secret sin. There was no escape for the consciences. Their guilt would constantly be in front of them, through the mourning of their father.

6. **Joseph’s Plight (37:36)**

This episode ends with an epilogue. While Joseph family endured his loss in Canaan, Joseph himself was sold as a slave to the house of Potiphar, an important man in Egypt. And that is where we will have to leave him for a while, because the story continues, not in Egypt in the house of Potiphar, but in Canaan with the continuing exploits of this sinful band of brothers, specifically Judah in Genesis 38.

**Conclusion**

God had called the brothers to repent of their sinful hearts before it led to more sin. Instead, they hardened their hearts and tried to eliminate the messenger, Joseph. Even though the brothers seem to have triumphed over Joseph, the story is not yet over. While Joseph is gone, he is not forgotten. And the guilt of the brothers will be constantly confronting them over the long years of separation. They have paid a terrible price in an attempt to eliminate their problem, but as we will see, all they have really done is further God’s providential plans. For Joseph, despite being stripped of his expensive tunic, has not been stripped of his character. Though exiled from his family, Joseph still remains close to God. Reuben failed in his plan, coming at the wrong time to rescue Joseph. But God’s plans never fail, and in the right instant, God will raise Joseph up and triumph over the evil schemes of the brothers. Joseph’s current suffering is the crucible of his future success. Stay tuned.

Close in Prayer.