

Genesis 37:1–22 Jealous Again

Joseph betrayed by his brothers

Brown Community Group July 21, 2019

37 Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

²This is the account of Jacob's family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

⁵ Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶ He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: ⁷ We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

⁸ His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹ Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" ¹¹ His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Observations

1. Remember the author(s). The Hebrews did not write like Western writers. Rather than sagas or epics, the Hebrews wrote more in stories with explanatory chapters. The timeline was less important than the message.
2. This chapter begins a new chapter in the life of Jacob (Israel). The balance of the book is about Jacob's family even though Joseph is the primary character. It has bookends: it begins in Canaan and ends in Canaan.
3. The robe. The description of the robe is vague but the intent is clear: it was a special robe that designated favor or princely standing, something that was not yet earned by Joseph. It would not have sat well with his older brothers to have been given this honor. (Sub-observation: Jacob was probably not one to make age the priority in inheritance). It most likely was long, both to cover much of the legs and the wrists. It likely was decorated and the Septuagint called it a "coat of many colors."
4. Verses 3-17 all happened before verse 2 because he had the dreams BEFORE bringing the bad report. This means Joseph was not necessarily 17 when he had the dreams.
5. This is only my opinion, but I believe Joseph was very young when he had the dreams. This would explain why he was so naïve that he did not realize the impact it would have on his brothers. The main reason to believe this is the reference Jacob makes to his mother, Rachel, bowing down in the future to Joseph, even though Rachel had died in chapter 35 giving birth to Benjamin.

Genesis 37:10 "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

However, in chapter 45, when Joseph makes himself known to his brothers, he says "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you." Benjamin would have had to have been several years old for him to have remembered what Joseph looked like.

6. The dreams come true in chapter 42 when the brothers visit Joseph in Egypt:

Genesis 42:6-9 So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. ... Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them...

7. The similarity is more than just the bowing down of sheaves grain. Not only were the brothers bowing but they had come to buy...sheaves of grain!

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

¹² Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

¹⁶ He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

¹⁷ "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'"

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

¹⁹ "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. ²⁰ "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

²¹ When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. ²² "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? ²⁷ Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels^[b] of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. ³⁰ He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?"

³¹ Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."

³³ He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

³⁴ Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him.

³⁶ Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Observations

1. His brothers were tending their flocks near Shechem. This is an odd place because, in chapter 34, these same brothers killed every male in the city due to the defiling of their sister. On top of that, they looted the city and took the women and all livestock with them. Afterwards they were afraid of retaliation. The question then is...did the events of chapter 34 take place before Jacob sent Joseph (in the order of the chapters of Genesis), after Jacob sent Joseph or concurrently. There is support for all.
 - a. **Before**-The brothers could have been far enough from the town that they felt safe. They could be why Jacob was concerned and/or why they moved on. The geography of where Jacob lived also makes sense.
 - b. **After**-Other than the order of Genesis, there is no reason this could not have happened afterwards. Joseph is never mentioned in chapter 34.
 - c. **Concurrently**-This would be a good explanation as to why Jacob was concerned and why he wanted a report. He had heard rumblings. It also explains why they moved on and Jacob did not know.
2. Some scholars believe that the story of Reuben trying to save Joseph was part of another history melded with the longer story. It can be read that way but does not detract from the overall story or the fact that it is the word of God.
3. The heartlessness of the brothers is shown when Joseph is in the cistern pleading for his life and they sit down to have a meal. Remember, the plan for the brothers (with the exception of Reuben) was to kill him and Joseph probably knew it.

Genesis 42:21 They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us."

4. Revenge is sweet. The Ishmaelite traders would have been the descendants of Ishmael, the half-brother of their grandfather Isaac.
5. Joseph ends up in Egypt. One of the primary purposes of this story, and perhaps the primary one, is to show how the Israelites end up in Egypt but still claim Canaan as their own. This is and will be shown.
6. The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. Jacob is grieved by the deception of his sons. Jacob begins his own journey by deceiving his own father, Isaac.
7. Foreshadowing. The story of Joseph, both in chapter 37 and following chapters, could reflect foreshadowing of Jesus. Although there are other minor similarities, here are some significant ones:

Stripped of this clothing

Buried in the earth

Raised from the earth

Sold for silver

Went to Egypt while young

Resisted temptation (Potiphar's wife, Satan)

Falsely accused (Potiphar's wife, Jewish leaders)

Punished with sinners

Foretold the future

People bow before him

Not accepted by his brothers

Forgives

Not recognized by people who knew him

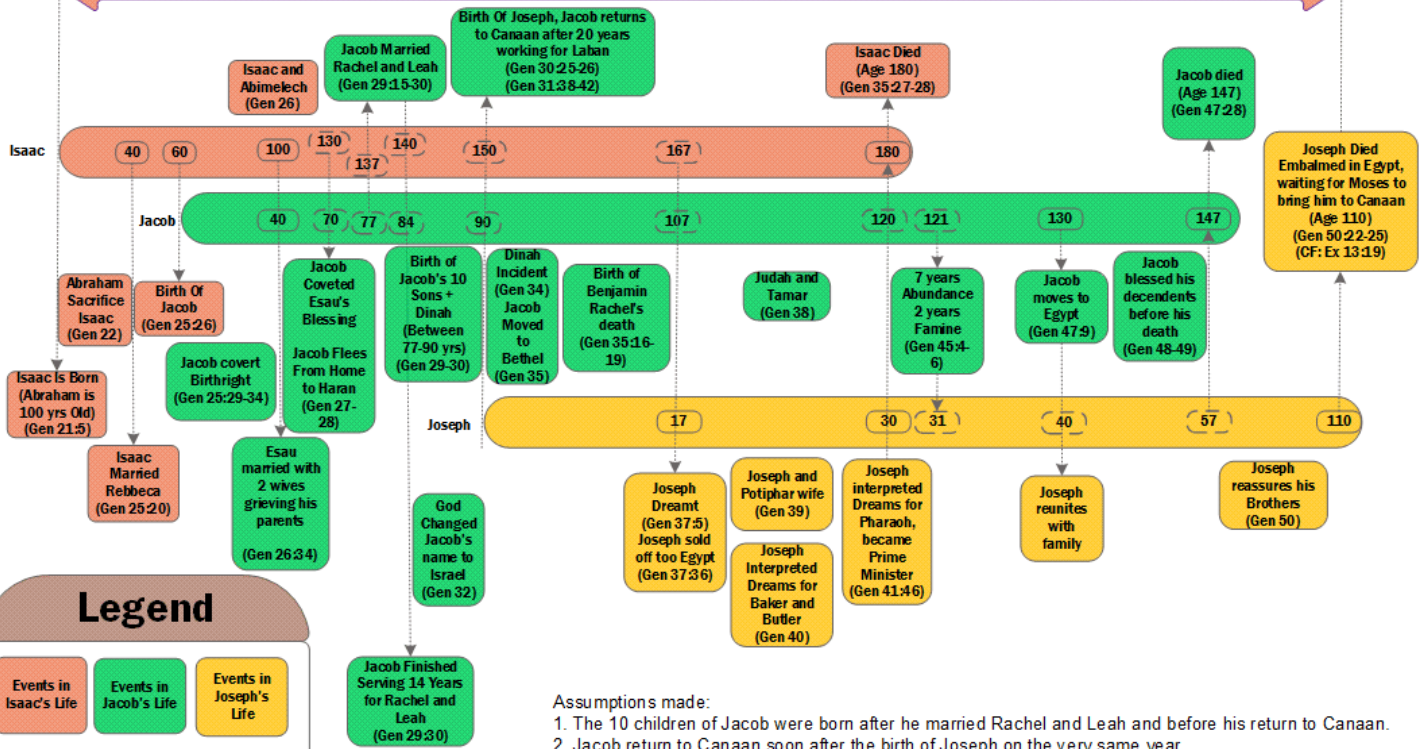
Thought to be dead

Questions:

1. Why would Joseph persist in telling his dreams when it angered his whole family?
2. Did the brothers intend for Joseph to die, even if it was not at their own hand?
3. What was God's plan in all of this? Did God plan for the brothers to sell Joseph? Were the future events in Egypt a "fix" for what happened? Note: there is no correct answer. We see evidence of God's influence of events and he shares his knowledge (the dreams) but I do not believe we know God's desire or plan until the Israelites return to Canaan 400 years later.

Key Events in the life of Isaac, Israel and Joseph

260 Years



Legend

- Events in Isaac's Life
- Events in Jacob's Life
- Events in Joseph's Life

150 Estimated age, based from clues and assumptions

150 Age confirmed using verses from the bible.

Assumptions made:

1. The 10 children of Jacob were born after he married Rachel and Leah and before his return to Canaan.
2. Jacob return to Canaan soon after the birth of Joseph on the very same year
3. Jacob move into Egypt approximately at the 10th year after Joseph became prime minister
4. God Gave Joseph 1 year to prepare the necessary infrastructure to collect the grains and the 7 years of abundance started only when he is 31

Note: The timeline are not drawn to scale, the age of the bible characters are denoted in oval.