

## Genesis 37-40 Joseph Sold into Slavery in Egypt

### Introduction

Backing up to last week's study, it seems worthwhile to take one more look at Jacob wrestling through the night. Keeping in mind the pictures of Messiah found in the events of life of these patriarchs, we might be reminded of Jesus wrestling in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane the night He was arrested.

*"My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with me."*

*"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."*

*"My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."*

*(Mt 26:38, 39, 42)*

Jesus has been sent into this world to save the lost souls of Israel, to establish His Kingdom, to bring salvation and good news to man. Now He was ready to depart this world and return to Heaven, the Promised Land. But, physical death on the cross was the only way He could return to Heaven.

Jacob had been sent away to the world, Haran, to collect His brides, Leah representing the Jews, and Rachel, representing the church, and all their offspring. God had called Jacob back to the Promised Land, but now to get there, he had to meet up with Esau, the seed of the serpent, and that represented great pain. The prophecy given Eve in Genesis 3 is *"the serpent would bruise his heel, but He would crush the serpent's head."* Jacob had reports that Esau was bearing down on him with 400 soldiers. It might get real ugly. Just as Jesus took his disciples to the Garden, had them sit and wait at a distance, was all alone and wrestled with God over the events that were imminent, Jacob sent his family across the river, was all alone, and wrestled with the fear of what was about to transpire in the process of returning to the Promised Land.

The fear was not just about the possibility of great pain being inflicted on Jacob, leading to death. Much of the fear was for his beloved family and their wellbeing and safety. Similarly, Jesus was just as concerned about His "family", and the fact that Satan would do all he could to sift them like sand, destroy them, and they would be lost for eternity.

Even though Jacob is still very much alive and vibrant, the Redemption story will begin to move on to the development of Joseph, first born of Jacob's beloved Rachel, but not first born of Jacob. That is Rueben, first born son of Leah, and first born of

the 13 children born to Jacob. Jacob will still appear in the narrative, but from here on out it is his sons who take front stage.

The messianic picture will be seen in the sons of Jacob, especially Joseph, as the story continues to unfold.

### **Chapter 37**

Vs 1-4 Scripture is clear that Jacob is dwelling in the land promised to Abraham and all of Abraham's descendents. When we were studying Abraham we saw that from the time Abraham left Haran, just beyond the Euphrates River, and as we followed his footsteps all the way to the Nile in Egypt, Abraham journeyed on all of the land God had promised to give him, from the Euphrates to the River of Egypt, and everything in between. Here we find Jacob living across the Promised Land. Jacob is still dwelling in the area of Hebron, south of Jerusalem (Gen. 37:14). His sons are tending flocks far to the north, near Shechem.

Scripture states that now the attention will shift to generations of Jacob, with an emphasis on Joseph. Joseph is 17 years old and working the flocks with his older brothers. Scripture tells us there is conflict between Joseph and his brothers. Something happens while tending the flock and Joseph reports it to Jacob. We don't know what it was, but it deepens the rift between the brothers.

Additionally, Jacob does not even try to hide the fact he loves Jacob more than his brothers and showers Joseph with valuable gifts, namely, a multi-colored tunic. Because of this favoritism on the part of the father, Joseph's brothers hated him all the more and could not even speak to him on friendly terms.

### **Taken from the commentary of the sages as provided by Chabad.Org**

*These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph being seventeen years old... (37:2)*

*Should not have the verse said, "These are the generations of Jacob: Reuben, etc."? Why Joseph?*

*Because everything that happened to Jacob, happened to Joseph. As Jacob was born circumcised, so was Joseph born circumcised: as Jacob's mother was infertile, so was Joseph's mother infertile; as Jacob's mother had difficulty in childbirth, so did Joseph's mother have difficulty in childbirth; as Jacob's mother bore two sons, so did Joseph's mother bear two sons; as Jacob was hated by his brother, so was Joseph hated by his brothers; as Jacob's brother sought to kill him, so did Joseph's brothers seek to kill him.*

*Jacob was a shepherd and Joseph was a shepherd, Jacob was persecuted, and Joseph was persecuted; Jacob was blessed with ten blessings and Joseph was blessed with ten blessings; Jacob was exiled from the Holy Land, and Joseph was exiled from the Land; Jacob took a wife outside the Land, and Joseph took a wife outside the Land; Jacob begot children outside the Land, and Joseph begot children outside the Land; Jacob was escorted by angels, and Joseph was escorted by angels; Jacob was made great through a dream, and Joseph was made great through a dream; the house of Jacob's father-in-law was blessed on his account, and the house of Joseph's father-in-law was blessed on his account; Jacob went down to Egypt and Joseph went down to Egypt; Jacob ended the famine and Joseph ended the famine; Jacob adjured [his children] and Joseph adjured [his brothers]; Jacob charged [his children] and Joseph charged [his brothers]; Jacob died in Egypt and Joseph died in Egypt; Jacob was embalmed and Joseph was embalmed; the bones of Jacob were brought up [from Egypt to the Holy Land], and the bones of Joseph were brought up [from Egypt to the Holy Land]....*

*Jacob fathered Tribes, and Joseph fathered Tribes; Jacob was lost to his father for 22 years, and Joseph was lost to his father for 22 years; Jacob was indentured on account of a woman, and Joseph was imprisoned on account of a woman; Jacob supported Joseph for 17 years, and Joseph supported Jacob for 17 years...*

*Midrash Rabah; Zohar; et. al*

**Messianic Picture:** It is important to note that Joseph represents a messianic picture. He is the beloved son, the son of pride. His older brothers represent the leaders of Israel in the time of Y'shua, Jesus, who cannot speak on friendly terms with him. As the Joseph story unfolds, not the similarities to the Jesus story of the gospels.

#### Vs 5-11 The dreams

Two dreams are recorded and Joseph has the audacity to share them with his family, only furthering the hatred and enmity between himself and his brothers.

- Dream One: Joseph and his brothers were binding sheaves in the field when his own sheaf stood erect and all the other sheaves, his brothers, gathered around his sheaf and bowed down. His brothers responded, “*Are you actually going to reign over us?*” And, “*Or are you really going to rule over us?*” And the brothers hated Joseph even more because of his dreams and his words.
- Dream Two: The sun, moon and eleven stars were bowing down to him, Joseph. This time he shared the dream with his father, Jacob, as well as the brothers. Jacob said that he had gone too far this time; “*Shall I, and your mother, and*

*your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?”*

The brothers were jealous of him!

- Jacob kept these things in his heart. Jacob understands things of the spiritual realm. He has met angels, seen God in a dream, seen the promises of God fulfilled, studied at Shem and Eber's yeshiva. No doubt his mother told him the story of God speaking to her when she was still pregnant, and understood the patriarchic mantle had been miraculously thrust upon his shoulders. He most likely understood (and was pleased) the spiritual promises would flow through this unusual son of his beloved Rachel.

Vs 12-17 The brothers have taken the flocks to pasture around Shechem but Joseph is not with them. However, Jacob sends Joseph to Shechem to observe and report on the welfare of the brothers and the flocks. Joseph is willing and goes to do his father's bidding.

The brothers have moved the flocks on from Shechem and are now in the vicinity of Dothan, so Joseph journeys on to Dothan. Dothan is about 12 miles north /northwest of Shechem, Close to the major trade route coming through the Jezreel Valley.

Vs 18-28 The brothers see Joseph approach and are none too thrilled to see “the dreamer”. Discussion ensues on killing him and reporting to Jacob that he must have been devoured by a wild beast. *“Then what will become of his dreams?”*

Reuben provides the voice of reason and persuades them against murder. Reuben is the heir apparent to the patriarchy and has certain responsibilities as the head of the family while away from their father. Reuben is also not on his dad's list of favorites because of raping Bilhah, the maid servant of Rachel, after Rachel's death. Reuben could ill afford to have to report to Jacob the tragic death of the beloved Joseph while he, Reuben, was in charge. Reuben offers an alternative to murder; just put Joseph in one of the dry pits along the way. Reuben thought that later he could save Joseph from the pit, and all would be well.

Joseph was stripped of his multicolored tunic and thrown into a dry pit. As the brothers sat down to eat, **Judah** realized a new opportunity had just arisen on the horizon: Ishmaelite traders. “Let's sell Joseph into slavery. We can tear his tunic and dip it in sheep blood, and tell dad we found this along the way”.

And so they did. They sold Joseph for 20 shekels of silver, and the Ishmaelite traders from Midian took Joseph to Egypt to sell him as a slave. (Messiah was sold by Judas for 30 shekels of silver)

Vs. 29 Reuben was not with the brothers when they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders. Where had he gone? Scripture does not tell us. However, upon his return, when he learns Joseph has been sold; Reuben is most distraught. Is this because he deep down does love his brother and he is grieving for Joseph's loss? No! Now Reuben has to face Jacob and let him know something bad happened to Joseph. This will not go well for Reuben, the apparent next patriarch of Jacob's clan. *"The boy is not here. As for me, where will I go"?*

So they took the tunic and dipped it in the blood of a male goat (sacrifice) and took it to Jacob, (with a real concerned look on their collective faces), and said, *"We found this; please examine it to see if it is your son's tunic or not."*

Jacob examines the tunic and comes to the conclusion that Joseph has been devoured by a wild beast, has been torn to pieces, and is dead. No lie was required of the brothers, except for concealing the truth that they had sold their brother into slavery.

Jacob is sorrowed in the deepest of sorrows, grieving for the son he loved so much, the first born of his beloved Rachel. He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for many days. No one could bring him out of his deep sorrow for the loss of his beloved Joseph. *"Surely, I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son!"*

Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, captain of the bodyguard.

### **Chapter 38 Judah and Tamar**

As though dropped in without any planning at all, this story of Judah and Tamar seems greatly misplaced. The challenge for us is to find the relevance and purpose to this story and understand it in the scope of the plan of redemption, and what it tells us about the nature of God and about the nature of man.

Vs 1-25 Judah departs from his brothers and moves for about 22 years to Adullam, a city of the Canaanites, located northwest of Hebron, in the valleys leading to the coastal plain. He married the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua, and had three sons with her; Er, Onan, and Shelah. Shelah was born in Chezib, near Adullam.

Judah finds a wife for Er, Tamar, a Canaanite woman who traditions tells us was a descendent of Shem. Er was evil in the sight of God, and God caused Er to die. Tradition says the evil of Er had to do with his pride regarding the extreme beauty of

Tamar. He did not want her to get pregnant and spoil her figure, so he “spilled his seed on the ground”.

As is the custom, Torah will call it the Levirate Law, when a married man dies, especially without children; his next younger brother marries the widow for the expressed purpose of producing offspring for his deceased brother.

Onan marries Tamar but he too refuses to complete the sex act, spilling seed on the ground, because he does not want to produce children for his deceased brother, Er. Perhaps the issue was that if a child is born, it would be done so in the name of the brother, Er, and therefore becomes an heir of Judah receiving Er’s portion, the birthright portion. Again, this was evil in the sight of God, a great injustice to the grieving widow, Tamar. God caused the death of Onan.

Judah, sensing Tamar might be poison, was not willing to give her to his third son, Shelah. Judah sends Tamar back to her father’s house, dressed in widow’s attire, with an empty promise that when Shelah is old enough, he will become a husband for her. That day never came.

In time Judah’s wife dies. Judah goes up to Timnah with his old friend, Hirah, the Adullamite, to oversee the sheep shearers. Through trickery, Tamar presents herself as a temple prostitute, seduces Judah, her father-in-law, and becomes pregnant by him.

Three months later Judah becomes aware that his daughter-in-law is pregnant, and as is his right, commands that she be burned for her sexual immorality. Judah is completely unaware that he is the father of Tamar’s baby, that is until she presents him with the evidence that only he will recognize, proving he is the father. She presents his signet ring, cord or belt, and his staff; he left with her to hold till he paid for her sexual services with the promised kid goat.

*Vs. 25-26 “Identify, if you please, whose signet, this wrap, and this staff”*

- Doesn’t this sound a lot like the proposition Judah and his brothers presented their father, Jacob, when they gave him Joseph’s coat covered in blood? (37:32)

**Judah’s response** to the goods presented by Tamar: *“She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to Shelah, my son.”* And Judah was not intimate with her any more.

Vs 27-30 Tamar is carrying twins, and when it was time to give birth, one baby stuck his hand from the womb, so the mid wife tied a scarlet string on his wrist. He pulled his hand back in and his brother then was born. They named this baby Perez, and

proclaimed. *“With what strength you asserted yourself”* Then the second brother was born, the one with the scarlet yarn on his wrist, and they named him Zerah.

The Jewish sages teach that unlike Jacob and Esau, both of these boys grew up to be righteous men. This emphasizes that in every man is the capacity to choose good or evil in life. Out of the dubious origins of these young men, they chose righteousness. Out of the blessed origins of Jacob and Esau, only Jacob chose righteousness.

Perez, whose name means something like “explosive”, becomes the progeny of Judah who carries on the Judaic lineage, leading to David and later to Jesus. According to Ray Vander Laan, this name Perez is from the root word “pratz”, meaning something like “to explode”. It is the same word used in Matthew 11:12 when the gospel tells us, *“the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force”* - **the Kingdom of Heaven is exploding, “pratzing”, expanding more rapidly than one can fully comprehend. And violent (strong, determined) men are “pratzing” in the Kingdom, causing it to explode!**

**So why is this chapter located in this place in the Torah? It is the picture of repentance and redemption**

- Judah suggests selling Joseph into slavery, sending him to Egypt
- Judah leaves the family and marries a Canaanite woman, living as a Canaanite in a Canaanite community
- Judah violates an important principle by not allowing Shelah to take Tamar as a wife.
- He is unjust to Tamar by requiring her to remain in her father’s house as a widow and not releasing her to marry another.
- After the death of his wife, Judah takes to consorting with temple prostitutes
- His is self righteous, suggesting his daughter-in-law be burned due to her pregnancy

Judah has become everything opposite of what a child of God should live like. He has not done justice, loved mercy, and not walked humbly before his God. (Micah 6:8)

But when confronted with the error of his ways, he repents and finds redemption. We will see this further played out in his role in securing the release of Benjamin from Egypt, later in the Genesis story. God rewards Judah with the seed that will lead to the Davidic reign and on the birth of Messiah.

**Chapter 39 Meanwhile, back in Egypt**

Vs 1-6 Joseph is purchased by Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh, an important and politically powerful man. Potiphar is the commander of Pharaoh's bodyguard, overseer of the king's special prison, and has much by way of personal properties.

Potiphar realized quickly that there was something unique and special about Joseph, and Joseph made things prosper. Similar to the blessing Laban realized by having Jacob around, Potiphar knew this young Hebrew man was favored by his God.

Joseph found favor in Potiphar's eyes and soon was appointed over Potiphar's entire household. God blessed Potiphar's house on account of Joseph.

*"Now Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance."*

Vs 7- 18 And Mrs. Potiphar also noticed Joseph and desired to have relations with him. She was unrelenting in her pursuit of Joseph, but Joseph stood his ground and rebuffed her advances.

Finally, on one day no one was in the house except she and Joseph and she tried to entice him. He refused, she grabbed his garment (shirt) and he pulled away and fled. She cried "rape" and used the garment he had left behind as evidence of "his attempt to defile her".

Comparison: Judah is convicted of his sin with Tamar by his ring, cord and staff. He is guilty of the sin and these possessions are instrumental in his conviction. Joseph is convicted on account of his possessions in the hands of Mrs. Potiphar, yet he is innocent of any wrong doing. This is another picture of Messiah who is convicted falsely and takes the punishment of mankind, even in his innocence. This is the way of the world.

Vs 19-23 When Potiphar returned home it was reported to him, by his wife, what Joseph was accused of. Potiphar's anger flared up.

What was the true reason of Potiphar's anger?

- Was his anger against Joseph for betraying his confidence?
- Was his anger against his wife, knowing all along she was lying, but he had to act as if she was telling the truth and protect her honor.
- Was his anger because he prospered so greatly through Joseph's presence, now the "golden goose" was in jail?

We are not told, we are only left to ponder the source of his anger. However, it appears Joseph is not placed in a common dungeon, but in Pharaoh's royal jail, under

the control of Potiphar himself. According to Josephus' account, Potiphar initially believed his wife to be a pure and chaste woman and believed the story she told. Jasher's account agrees with the Josephus account, but adds that Potiphar had Joseph beaten for his crime, and during that beating, Potiphar's 11 month old son revealed the truth to him.

God did not abandon Joseph while he was in jail. God endowed Joseph with charisma, and God put Joseph's favor in the eyes of the prison warden. The prison warden placed Joseph over all the other prisoners, and every endeavor within the prison was successful on account of God blessing Joseph.

#### **Chapter 40 Dreams explained**

Vs 1- Two special prisoners are incarcerated with Joseph, men from the King's household, the king's chief baker and the king's wine steward. They had both greatly angered Pharaoh in the performance of their duties, and both were placed in prison. The Midrash explains Pharaoh found a pebble in the bread he ate, indicating the baker did not properly sift the flour before baking. Similarly, the wine steward presented Pharaoh a glass of wine with a fly in it. Potiphar placed these men under the charge of Joseph for safe keeping, as these were not hardened criminals.

Each of these men dreamed dreams that were disturbing to them. Joseph, making his rounds in the morning noticed both were distraught and sought the reason for their distress.

Vs 8 *"Do not interpretations belong to God? Relate the dreams to me if your please."* Joseph realized he was favored by God and God would give him the ability to interpret these dreams.

#### **Chamberlain of the Cupbearer's (wine steward) dream.**

- A grapevine was in front of him.
- On the grape vine were three tendrils.
- It blossomed and flowered and its grapes ripened into grapes.
- Pharaoh's cup was in his hand and he took the grapes and pressed them into the cup
- He then placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

#### **The interpretation:**

- The three tendrils are three days.
- In three days Pharaoh will release you from jail and restore you to your previous duties as Chamberlain of the Cupbearers.
- You will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as you did in previous days.

“Please remember me to Pharaoh when you are restored so I too may be released from this prison”

### **The Chamberlain of the Baker’s Dream**

- Three wicker baskets were on my head.
- In the uppermost basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh.
- The birds were eating them from the basket above my head.

### **The Interpretation:**

- The three baskets are three days
- In three days Pharaoh will release you from this prison and hang you.
- Birds will eat your flesh from you as you hang on a tree.

On the third day, Pharaoh’s birthday (or the third day after the birth of Pharaoh’s son), the wine steward was restored to his former position in Pharaoh’s court. On that same day, the baker was taken out of prison and hanged on a tree and the birds came and ate his flesh.

Some commentators have noted the two men may represent the two thieves on the cross - maybe yes or maybe no. However, think about the fact that these men represent bread and wine. The bread of Christ, His body, perishes on a tree and in three days is resurrected. The wine, represents the blood of Christ. Life is in the blood and life is extended to all the world after three days in the tomb. The wine steward will once again place the cup of wine, life, into the hand of the King.

**Note:** Birthdays in the Bible generally mean someone is going to die violently. Only two specific birthdays are mentioned, this one of Pharaoh’s in which the baker is hanged. In Matthew 14, John the Baptist was beheaded on the birthday of Herod the Tetrarch. It is suggested that in Job 1:13-19, all of Job’s sons and daughters were celebrating in the oldest sons home, presumably his birthday, when they all perished in a killing wind storm that destroyed the house.

The account of these events in “Jasher” states the grand event is not the birthday of the king, but rather a celebration of the birth of the son of the king.

Vs. 23 *“Yet the Chamberlin of the Cupbearers did not remember Joseph, but he forgot him”*.

The sages teach Joseph spent 12 years in prison because he relied on the Chamberlin of the cupbearers to help him gain release, rather than trusting God for his release from prison.