

An Overview of the Life of Joseph

Genesis 37

INTRODUCTION: Our sun is a massive nuclear reactor it generates heat in excess of 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. One would need to explode 100 billion tons of dynamite every second to match the energy produced by the sun. Yet our sun is 1 of more than 100 billion stars in the Milky Way Galaxy some far larger than our Sun. And our universe is filled with galaxies.

Yet when it came to the verbal description of the stars in Genesis, we have a half a verse.

Genesis 1:16 (NIV)

¹⁶ ... He also made the stars.

That being said, Genesis devotes 13 chapters, that's 25% of its content to the life of Joseph.

John Phillips was right when he said, *"that reveals to us that God is more concerned with making Saints than making Stars"*.

And no saint is giving more direct attention in Genesis than Joseph.

- We have more words spoken by Joseph than any other figure in the entire Old Testament, more than Moses, more than King David.
- Why? Why is Joseph so significant? Joseph is considered by many to be the most Christlike figure in the entire Old Testament.
- A.W. Pink traces a total of 101 parallels between Joseph and Jesus.

Joseph's life shows us the difficult balance between the need for **significance** and the need for **sentimentality**. We all desire and need BOTH.

- **Significance** - Every human has a distinct need we want to know that their life has meaning, importance.
- **Sentimentality** - Every human want to develop and maintain deep connections with other people.

Most people have a tendency to do well at developing one or the other.

- They will change the world, but not cultivate any real and meaningful relationships with their friends and family.

Or

- They will develop deep relationships, but fail to live a life that makes a significant impact on those around you.

Joseph shows us how we can do both.

OVERVIEW: Many of you are familiar with the story. Joseph is the favorite son of Israel (AKA Jacob).

TEXT: Genesis 37:3–4 (ESV)

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

That word in the Hebrew is “Shalom” it literally says, “they could not say Shalom to Joseph”.

Do you see what’s happening? Joseph’s *sentimental* relationships suffer in direct proportion to the increase of his *significance*.

We are told his father gives him a special **ROBE**, a coat of many colors. The phrase, “Many colors” is a difficult phrase to translate. It really means a long sleeved Robe.

Such a robe was used to differentiate between those who worked in the fields doing **manual labor** and those who **ruled** from the residence. Field workers would have a short tunic, but those who lead stayed home and wore long robes. It was a robe of *distinction* and *authority*.

This sort of coat would have typically been given to the oldest of the sons. Joseph was not the oldest son. He was however was the child of his favorite wife - his beloved Rachael.

Keep in mind - Genesis is descriptive not prescriptive. It’s simply saying this is how things were, it’s neither affirms or condemns Israel’s parenting at this point. Favoritism is warned against at other parts of scripture and if anyone should have known that it’s Israel who had struggled under his father’s preference of Esau.

ILLUSTRATION: My uncle’s told the story of Grandma Fuller who seemed to always prefer Harold (the oldest grandson) to all the other boys. One day Harold was on the roof of the barn repairing a leak. Grandma Fuller saw him and said, “Harold you get down off that roof and let one of these other boys do it, you may fall and get hurt!”. Well that would have made sense if Harold was the baby, but he was the oldest. That sort of thing gets lodged in the heart of a child.

It certainly lodged in the hearts of Israel’s sons.

To make matters worse - Joseph had these dreams.

Genesis 37:5–8 (ESV)

⁵ Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: ⁷ Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Just a word of advice - if you ever have a dream that all of your siblings are going to bow down to you... keep it to yourself. Just a thought!

Genesis 37:9–11 (ESV)

⁹ Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" ¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Then in Verse 12....ISRAEL SENDS JACOB TO CHECK ON HIS BROTHERS IN SCHECKEM BUT HE DISCOVERS THEY HAVE MOVED ON TO DOTHAN

¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they **conspired against him to kill him.**

Now that is the sort of thing that doesn't come out of thin air. These brothers had no doubt been talking about Joseph for sometime. With each conversation their hatred and jealousy was stirred. Bitterness had taken deep root.

¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer.

Literally in the Hebrew it says, "Behold the Lord of the Dream". Do you hear the sarcasm? *The root of bitterness often blooms with the flower of sarcasm.*

²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."

Think about that - they would rather live with the guilt of blood rather than live with the prospect that Joseph might actually continue to be blessed.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ Then they sat down to eat.

Now that's significant - if you know the story. That empty well is foreshadowing the famine that looms on the horizon. Ultimately, Joseph will save all of these brothers by giving them bread. But here and now, they eat, while Joseph languishes in the pit.

25b. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

They returned to Israel and reported that Joseph was killed by wild animals and he wept believing his son dead.

So this portion of the story ends with Joseph alive but enslaved... to this man Potiphar an officer of Pharaoh.

As we begin to look ahead we are going to see Joseph tested with: Promotion, Prosperity, and Power. He will be betrayed, hurt, forgotten. He will be tempted to cheat and sacrifice his purity.

Through it all we will learn three things from the life of Joseph.

We learn to:

1. Rest in God's Unfolding Plan -

In a sense the entire story of Joseph is asking if you believe **Romans 8:28 (ESV)**
²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

You see, God's purpose was to humble Joseph, to save his brothers, ultimately to maintain the covenant community through which the Messiah would come.

But why did he do it all this way? I mean couldn't he just send an Angel to tell Joseph he was a spoiled brat? Or to rebuke the brothers for their hatred? Could God just have stopped the famine?

ILLUSTRATION: DOTHAN: Let me show you something - Verse 17 tells us that all of this happened in **Dothan**. Centuries later in, In 2 Kings we are told of another story that happened in Dothan. When the story happened with Joseph Dothan was a remote place. Centuries later in the time of Elisha it was a city.

An enemy army surrounded Elisha and his servant. Elisha cried out to God and God sent Angelic Chariots of fire to smite the enemy army.

Same city, same need for deliverance in Joseph's life... no angel.

So can God do it that way? Sure. But does he always? No! WHY?

Because the most important lessons in life cannot be TOLD they must be SHOWN.

I tell you God's purposes every week - But God must show you... during the week.

- **Peter** is in prison prays and an angel shows up to set him free
- **John** the Baptist in prison, prays, and he is beheaded.

How do you face that reality? The coat of Joseph! It was the assurance of his ultimate fathers love.

Not only RESTING in God's plan....

2. Recognize Open Doors -

The story ends with **Midianite traders** selling him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

We can read the story from above the pit... we see that these Midianite traders arrived just in the Nik of time. And Potiphar just happened to be in need of a new slave that day.

If those two coincidences hadn't occurred the Bible would have ended in just a few chapters... no Israel, no Messiah, no salvation for you and me.

Now these doors Joseph was drug through, but as the story progresses, Joseph must learn to recognize the doors... as the story progress he will meet a

A Baker, A Butler, and A Pharaoh

- **Bakers** - are those people who take various ingredients and pull it all together to make something great. You will have people in your life with that ability. They will see in you what you can't see in yourself.
- **Butler** - Butlers open doors. You will have people from time to time that will open doors for you to move to new levels.
- **Pharaoh's** - Those are the leaders, the authorities, who have the power to make you or break you. You will need to recognize a Pharaoh and you need to know how to behave around them.

Not only RESTING in God's plan....Recognizing Open Doors....

3. Relate Yourself to the Ultimate Story -

Joseph's story is significant mostly because of how it relates to the ultimate story.

You see, the irony of Joseph's story is that is it MASSIVELY important in the Old Testament, but he's only mentioned four times in the New Testament.

Which of Israel's sons become important in the New Testament? Judah - messiah is the lion of the tribe of Judah.

So ultimately Joseph was only significant because of how he related to Judah and Judah is only important because of how he relates to Jesus.

You see...that's really what the Bible is screaming to us - It's not about YOU! It's about Him!

ILLUSTRATION: We are basically by nature very self centered individuals. Let me show you - when you see a group picture... who do you look for first? Yourself! You judge the entire photograph by how YOU looked in it.

We tend to view life that way. It's a story about us. The songs we listen to on our iPhones are our soundtrack. And it's all about how we win in the end.

But if you could zoom out you'd see that the movie isn't about you... as a matter of fact you have to watch the final credits a really long time before our names appear.

You say well Pastor I thought you said every human had a need for significance...that's right... well you are ending the sermon by saying we aren't very significant at all.

No, I'm saying that your significance Joseph's significance, Judah's significance is only found by relating your story to the story of a true and better Joseph - the Lord Jesus Christ.

- He too was favored by the Father.
- He too was hated by his brothers.
- He too went down to a deeper pit.
- He too came out of the pit and ascended to the right hand of Majesty.

**Joseph's life is ultimately about Jesus
And friend, so is your's.... Let's pray. FED/LED**