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The Family of Abraham: Part 27—The Sale of Joseph

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Today, I discuss the sale of Joseph into Egypt.

Within this video, I mention this article by James Hamilton on some of the typological connections of the Joseph narrative: <http://equip.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SBJT-V12N4.Hamilton.pdf>.

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Transcript

Welcome back to this, the 27th in my series on the story of the family of Abraham. Today we're looking at chapter 37 of the book of Genesis, which is a very familiar chapter. You've heard this story before.

It's the story of Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. And although it is a familiar story, I believe that this chapter has certain aspects of it that maybe you haven't seen before, certain mysteries to be disclosed. And so within the next few minutes, I hope to get into a few of these.

But before we get into the chapter itself, we need to think about the background. What do we know already? What are some of the balls that are already in motion? When we look in the previous chapters, we've seen a story of rivalry within the family, rivalry that set up originally with the action of Laban when he switches his two daughters and gives Jacob Leah rather than Rachel as his wife. And from that point onwards, there's this rivalry between Rachel and Leah originally, and then between the two sides of the family.

So you have four wives, you have the two handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah, and then you have Rachel and Leah, and their children are in rivalrous relationships. When you look at chapter 34, you see something of Dinah is abducted by Shechem, and Jacob just does not seem to take this seriously enough. He's not, he hears the news and he holds his peace until his sons come in, but he's not going to take this sort of action that really would expect of him.

Then we see a few chapters later that Rachel dies in giving birth to Benjamin. And at that point, Benjamin's a favoured son. He's son of my right hand, this favoured status.

And yet that seems to put this son that's quite far down the pecking order in terms of birth order at the real top. It just does not seem right. And Reuben at that point sleeps with Bilhah, his father's wife.

Now, Bilhah was the handmaid of Rachel. Rachel's just died. And so the favoured wife has just died.

And it seems maybe at this point, Bilhah is going to rise up the ranks a little. And Benjamin is going to be the son at the centre of things. And Reuben, his action tries to displace his father, tries to ensure that Benjamin is not the one who inherits.

Now, that suggests the possibility that Joseph is already out of the scene at that point. But that depends upon how we read the chronology. And there are difficult questions on that front.

The stories here are not straightforwardly chronological, as we'll see in chapter 38 in particular. So there's this setting of rivalry within the family. The father favours Rachel and her children over the sons of Leah and the handmaids.

Earlier on in chapter 30, we see that when Joseph was born, it was at that point that Jacob decided to return to the land. Joseph was the turning point. Joseph was the sign of God's favour.

Finally, the loved wife has given birth and now they can move into the land. When we read the introduction to this chapter, the same sort of thing is taking place. It starts off with the words, this is the genealogy of Jacob.

And you think, Jacob has these 12 sons and etc. etc. That's not what we read.

We read Joseph being 17 years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. You have the genealogy of Jacob, but the genealogy of Jacob is Joseph. It seems as if Joseph takes up the whole centre of the stage when it comes to the descendants of Jacob.

And maybe that's just the way that Jacob views things, that Jacob sees Joseph as the one who is single-handedly bearing his legacy. He's the b'kor, he's the firstborn. He's the one that's receiving the double portion, the status of the favoured son.

And later on, we'll see that that does in fact happen. There is the favouring of this son over all the others. And as we read this story, we'll see that that underlying problem, that underlying tension within the family is aggravated further in the treatment of Joseph.

And there are a few key stages that we need to bear in mind here. So the first one is, he bears a bad report on the handmaid's children. So Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

He's looking after the sheep with them and he brings back a bad report about them to his father. And the handmaid's children are not at all pleased about this. But bear in mind that this word for bring back a bad report, it suggests spying.

He's spying, he seems to be spying upon them for his father. The same language is used when the people bring back a bad report about the land, the spies, when they're sent into the promised land to spy it out. The ten bring back a bad report, just as Joseph does here.

The same language is used of slander or infamy elsewhere in scripture. So this is a negative concept. Joseph is maybe a bit of a tattletale, but he's someone who brings back these bad reports upon his brother, brothers.

That maybe wins him favour with his father. This is the faithful son. All the others are unfaithful.

But this is the one that will stand by me, that will argue, present my case, present my interests among the brothers, the one who will stand up for me. And I'm going to favour this son over the others. And that's what we see next.

The second aggravating incident is not that just Jacob loves Joseph more than the other sons. We see that. But there's something more that he does.

He favours him over the other sons. That's bad enough if your parent loves your sibling more than they love you. But if they go further and they favour that sibling over you and give them all the good things in the way that they don't give to you, that's taking things a step further.

And it's the inequity of the situation that really rankles with the brothers. Jacob gives Joseph a special coat, generally translated a true tunic of many colours. And he's treating Joseph as the firstborn.

Now the possibility is they all have coats. But Joseph is given a second. He's given this extra sign of his father's favour.

He's treated as the firstborn. Joseph is the child of promise, as we've seen earlier on in chapter 30. He's the one that when he's born, it's this sign of hope, this sign that things are going to change.

When we think about this situation, step back and look at the situation in Jacob's family, we can see that there's something fundamentally awry in the way that Jacob is treating his children and his wives. Later on when we get to the book of Deuteronomy, we'll see this expressed more explicitly. In Deuteronomy we read, The language there is odd.

It's language that we don't find elsewhere in scripture for the most part. But it is something that we see in one other place in the book of Genesis. In Genesis chapter 49 verse 3, Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength.

So Reuben is the firstborn. He's the one that should have the favoured status. Now he's demoted on account of his actions with his father's wife, but that's his status.

And Joseph is butting in on something that isn't really his possession. So we have one aggravating incident, bringing back a bad report on the handmaid's children. The second aggravating incident, the fact that the father favours Joseph over the other brothers and gives him the tunic of many colours.

He treats him as if, almost as if he was his firstborn. The third aggravating incident is the fact that he has this dream, but not just that he has the dream. The fact that he reports it to his brothers.

The dream in question is about him out in the fields with his brothers and his sheaf arises and all the other sheaves bow down to his sheaf. There seems to be an obvious presentation here of his superiority among the brothers and the fact that they will at one point pay homage to him. His brothers said to him, shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us? So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

So it's not just the fact that he's had this dream. It's the fact that he's told it to them. Now, the second is just rubbing, is trying to rub salt in a wound.

They already feel angry about the way he's favoured above them. But now he's telling them this dream. For what purpose is he telling them this dream? He's had the dream.

Maybe he should just keep it to himself. He's had this dream that tells of his future superiority, but now maybe he's just trying to aggravate his brothers. It just does not look good.

And you can imagine how the brothers are fairly angry by this point, seething. The father's favouring him. And now it seems maybe God is favouring him too.

Everything is against them. And how they handle that situation as the unfavoured sons. This is a bigger theme within the story of Genesis.

How does Jacob handle his position as the unfavoured son? He tries to subvert and he tries to usurp his brother's position. Now, maybe that's exactly what we're seeing in the next generation, that the unfavoured sons are trying to do what Jacob did to Esau. They're trying to subvert and overtake their brother who is favoured above them.

And so these overarching themes are worth paying attention to. There is a second dream. So the first, the sheaves of his brothers are bowing down to his sheave.

But in the second dream, there are more parties involved. The sun, moon and the 11 stars bow down. And there is bow down to Joseph.

This is quite a powerful image. The sun, moon and 11 stars, again, it seems like it's an obvious interpretation. In the first case, we have an interpretation that suggests the sheaves are associated with the brothers.

Why sheaves? Again, we might ask that question. They're shepherds and they don't seem to be planting grain. So the fact that they're associated with sheaves, maybe is a little surprising.

But in the second one, sun, moon and 11 stars, as it's reported to Jacob, Jacob knows it's obvious. That's me. That's my wife.

And that's the 11 brothers. They're all bowing down to Jacob, to Joseph. The question of who the moon is and which of the wives this is, is this Rachel, who seems may have died by this point? We're not sure if Benjamin has been born yet.

Depending on the chronology, it's questions to be asked. Is it Bilhah? Or is it Rachel up in heaven? Or is it Leah? It's not entirely clear. So that may be part of the question that is underlying here.

But the second dream involves Jacob and brings him into the picture. So this is not just now between Joseph and his brothers. Jacob is part of the picture too.

And Jacob is bowing down to his son. That's a surprising situation where we see the son gaining supremacy over his father. And that's not just a firstborn situation.

It's something more. And Jacob, I think, senses this. He's angry in response.

He doesn't hate his son, but he's angry. There's something wrong about this picture. And maybe his response explains some of the events that happened just a little bit further down the line.

Joseph maybe is getting ideas above his station. Even his father will bow down to him. But yet his father doesn't dismiss it.

His father holds this thing in his heart. He keeps the matter in mind. On one level, it seems like Jacob wants this thing to come to pass.

He wants to see the supremacy of his son Joseph over the others. Now he's not certain about how that will relate to him. But there's some part of him that wants this to be the case.

And at this point, you see the attitude of the brothers changing further. So first of all, the brothers can't speak peaceably to him. Then they hate him.

And then at this point, they envy him and they're jealous of him. And there's this fierce jealousy of the status that Joseph has. Not just that he's had these dreams, not just that he's favoured above them by the father, but the fact that the father gives credence to this dream.

And seems on some level, they think he wants this to happen. He wants to see us bow down to this young punk kid. And it just doesn't seem right.

And so you should be able to imagine the motivations of the brothers at this point. They've grown up with these rivalries. The older ones will remember their mothers really being at each other's throats and being angry about this and having this deep rivalry between them.

And then maybe as they grew up a bit, some of them would have asked their mothers, what do our names mean? And Dan and Naftali would discover, well, your aunt had this great rivalry with her sister. And so she gave me to your father. And then you were born and you were called because of your aunt's rivalry with her sister.

And these sorts of names would tell them in their very name, they were bearing this rivalry in the family. What are they going to do about this? And as they grow a bit older, then they leave the land of Padamaram and they travel towards their their uncle, Jacob Esau and their father. Well, he puts the sons of the handmaids with his wife's head.

And then he puts Leah with her children. And then he puts Rachel and Joseph. Well, we know who he really cares about.

We know what side of the family is the one that really matters to him. Everyone else is

second class. And he's willing to dispose of us if it needs be.

If some of us have to die, then he's willing to sacrifice us. We are in the front line. And the others, they're protected.

They're kept close to him because he does not want to see them come to any harm. And as we go through this story, we need to bear in mind that these are things that have been stirring for quite some time. And these are larger problems within the family of Abraham.

The problem of rivalries between these wives and its rivalries between the unloved and the loved child. It's the rivalry between the chosen and the unchosen. How does Jacob handle this? How does Esau handle this? The same problems are faced in the next generation.

But there are other questions to bear in mind here. We've thought about the consider... we've considered the motivations of the brothers. But they're not the only parties involved.

There is also Jacob. What is Jacob thinking at this point? Well, here's this favoured son. Here's this son that I really care about.

It's the son of my loved wife. And I really want to put emphasis upon his place within the family. I want to raise him up within the family.

And yet he's had these dreams. And in these dreams, he's maybe getting ideas above his station. He's not seeing himself as the faithful firstborn that's going to serve his father.

Rather, he's presenting himself as the guy who's going to just be the boss of everything. And where exactly does he stand with regard to me? Maybe Jacob looks back over the previous events and thinks, that time when he brought back that bad report on Dan Naftali Gad and Asher, was that really about wanting to serve me? Or was that for his own sake, to advance his status within the family, so that he can remove rivals and rise up himself? What is Jacob... What is Joseph really about? And maybe that explains part of the reason why he sends him out to Shechem with his brothers. We've seen that the brothers can't speak peaceably to him.

We've seen that the brothers hate him. We see that they are jealous of him. And now he sends out Joseph to his brothers to see if things are peaceful with them.

And that just seems... Well, he knows how Joseph gets on with his brothers. And also he knows how all of... so much of this started with Joseph bringing back a bad report on his brothers. He's sending out Joseph again, after all the aggravating tensions since, and expecting him to bring back a peaceful word from his brothers? How is that going to

happen? What is Jacob's motivation here? Is there a possibility that he's trying to test Joseph? That he's trying to test if Joseph is loyal to him, or if Joseph's merely in it for himself? What would be one way he could test that? Send his son on a dangerous mission.

A very dangerous mission. A dangerous mission that might lead to him suffering severe consequences. But of course, being a loving father, he doesn't want that to happen to his son.

And so maybe he knows that this... the brothers are going out to Shechem, but that's just the first place in their itinerary. They're going to move on to Dothan and other places. And if he sends Joseph to Shechem, maybe he'll just come back, say, confine them.

And he's tested his son. His son has proved to be faithful. And then it will be okay.

He'll know where he stands with respect to his son. But it's not quite what happens. And there's a twist in the tale.

The distance from Hebron to Shechem is about 50 miles. And it's about 50 miles further to Dothan. So this isn't just a short journey.

This would be a couple of days, perhaps, he was going on this journey trying to find his brothers. And then even further. So maybe three or four days he's traveling.

He goes first of all to Dothan. And he goes first of all to Shechem. And then he's sent on to Dothan.

When we're reading this story, we need to pay attention to some of the echoes, some of the words that are used. And one way in which this test theory might have some weight is the way that we see echoes of the testing of Abraham. Come, I will send you to them.

He said to him, here I am. And that response, the way that Abraham responds to God, that faithful response, but that response that has that sense of doom attached, that something's going to be asked of you that's a very difficult thing. And that difficult thing may lead to you losing everything.

But I'm going to test your loyalty. Is Jacob trying to set up a test of loyalty for his son here? Later on, we might ask, why does Joseph not send word back to his father when he's safe in Egypt? He's in Egypt for many years and he forgets his father's house. Now, why does he forget his father's house? He might forget his brothers, but surely he knows his father loves him.

Surely he knows his father is concerned and weeping and in anguish over his loss. But does he? Does Joseph think that perhaps his father sent him to his brothers to his death,

knowing that his brothers would kill him and that his father was angry with him as a result of his second dream and maybe getting ideas above his station and so want to send him off to his doom or maybe just put him in his place. So Joseph maybe does not know what his father is thinking here.

He maybe doesn't know his father's motivations. And when he is taken by his brothers, that all goes wrong. Maybe Joseph's impression of his father's intent is wrong.

And his father actually just wants to test him, just wants to see if he is a faithful son, if he's loyal to him or if he's just in it for himself and being faithful on the surface of things in order to be advanced. And we can see the way that it's very easy to do that just by bringing false reports, other things like that. First of all, he goes to Shechem and Shechem is a place where bad things happen.

In Shechem, it's a site that's associated with the split of the kingdom. And it's associated with, just a few chapters earlier, with the massacre of the city of Shechem. This is not a good place.

And so we have maybe an ominous sense of foreboding as we're approaching Shechem. But he arrives at Shechem and no one's there. He looks around for his brothers and they're not to be found.

And this is a strange thing to record. Why have this particular incident? We'll consider that in a few moments. He meets a certain man and there he's wandering in the field and the man asked him saying, what are you seeking? He said, I'm seeking my brothers.

Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks. And the man said, they have departed from here for I heard them say, let us go to Dothan. So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

Now, it's surprising there's a man wandering around there who just happens to meet Joseph, who just happens to have overheard where the brothers were going to go. So Joseph's quite fortunate if he's looking for his brothers. Well, he's obviously having the way prepared for him.

It seems as if he'd have no chance of finding them. They'd moved on 15 miles away. And how was he to know exactly where they were? But lo and behold, there's someone who's overheard their conversation and can pass on the news to him.

They've gone to Dothan. This incident is an interesting one in a number of respects and we'll return to it in a moment. One thing that might be worth noting is that Dothan, we only find it mentioned one other time in scripture, it's associated with Elisha and people seeking to capture him and then the eyes being opened and seeing the armies of God surrounding that sort of thing.

That's the story. But what we have here is maybe attached more to the chapter that follows. What does Dothan mean? Dothan, two wells.

In the next chapter we have Eneim, which means two springs. So keep that in mind. These stories play off each other and maybe there is a meaning to the term two springs, two wells, that helps us to see something more going on.

So, refreshing. The brothers hate Joseph. They can't speak peaceably to him.

They are jealous of him because the father favours him over them and he's been given firstborn favours in many respects over Reuben and over the other brothers. Then the father is not certain where Joseph stands with regard to him. He's testing him perhaps and he's testing him in a way that maybe has certain echoes of Abraham's being tested by God.

Is he truly loyal? Is he in this for himself, what he can gain? If he is called to sacrifice his beloved son, will he do that? And here, if Joseph is called to do this dangerous mission for me, will he do it? Is he faithful when it comes to a costly enterprise that there may be nothing in it for him? So the father tells the son, gives the son a dangerous mission and the son responds, here I am. And he says, please go do this, etc. And then we see more echoes coming up.

They see him coming from afar in verse 18. Now, when they saw him afar off, even before he came etc. they conspired against him to kill him.

If we look back in chapter 22, we see on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. Lifting eyes, seeing things afar off, approaching doom. This site of judgment, this site of destiny.

What is going to happen at this place? Other things that take place. Later on when Reuben talks with his brothers, do not lay your hand upon the boy. Reuben is playing the role of the angel.

Then later on they lift up their eyes and see. And instead of having to kill the boy, they see the Ishmaelites, traders coming their way. And so the Ishmaelite traders are like the ram.

That's the alternative. It's the provision. That's the alternative to actually killing him.

Look at story a bit closer. There are other things that emerge. If you look in chapter 21 of the book of Genesis, we've noted already that there is a sort of shadow story there.

A shadow binding of Isaac's story. There is the story of Hagar and Ishmael being sent out. And they are sent out in much the same way as Joseph is sent out to Shechem.

He sent him out of the valley of Hebron and he went to Shechem. And we see much the

same thing in chapter 21. It says, Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar and sent her away.

Then she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. So put something on her shoulder, give skin of water and some bread and sent her away. So it's a similar thing, sending her away.

Is there any connection to Shechem in that earlier story? Yes, there is. As he's going towards Shechem, he's sent towards Shechem. The same consonants are found in the word for shoulder there in the first stories.

It's Shechem and the shoulder. They've connected the two terms. And so in the one case you have the shoulder.

Why mention the shoulder? Just say he gave her some water and some bread and sent her on her way. Why mention the shoulder? And why mention it in two different occasions? It just seems superfluous. And so the connection with the shoulder is interesting.

Then she wanders out and she wanders in the wilderness of Beersheba and she's lost. And the water in the skin is used up. And then she places the boy somewhere out of earshot so that he can die without her having to see it.

There's no water in the well. Later on in the story where Joseph is put in the pit, there's no water in the pit and there's no water in the skin. Again, it's a goat's skin in all likelihood.

And that suggests further connections that we see. The bread remains and the brothers eat bread in the story. Then the Ishmaelites come.

Again, we've heard this before. The Ishmaelites. And then they go down to Egypt and he's taken into Egypt and he ends up marrying there.

This is exactly what we see in the story of Ishmael. Now what's taking place here? What happens in the story of Ishmael? Ishmael is the child who's expelled from the family. And that's what's happening to Joseph.

Joseph is being expelled by his brothers from the family. And it's playing out in different ways the story of God's testing of Abraham and also the event of Hagar and Ishmael going into the wilderness. Now much of this is discussed in much greater detail by Rabbi David Forman and I highly recommend his treatment of this.

It's very insightful and I'm just giving you some things that he brings out and other things of my own. But this story is playing off all these previous stories in ways that help

you to see the destiny of this next generation of Abraham's family echoing the previous generations. So these are events that happened to the great-great-grandfather.

It's now happening to the great-grandson Joseph. He's tested in a new way. And as the time goes on we can see that the plan changes.

As time elapses the plan shifts. So the original one, look this dreamer is coming and they conspire to kill him. And then they say let's kill him now, cast him in some pit and say some wild beast has devoured him.

We'll see what will become of his dreams. And so they think these dreams are going to, these dreams have some sort of way. They're not just brushing them off.

They're trying to attack the dream. They don't want to see this destiny come to pass. And Reuben says let's not kill him.

Shed no blood, cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness and do not lay a hand on him that he might deliver them out of their hands and bring him back to their father. So Reuben's doing a good thing here in trying to protect Joseph from the other brothers. And he's trying to use a plot of putting Joseph in this pit and then they can they can just leave him to die.

The whole point is they're not going to lay any hands on him. They'll just leave him to starve. And so they're not going to sell him.

But then lo and behold on the horizon they lift up their eyes and there are Ishmaelites coming. Coming from Gilead with their camels bearing spices, balm and myrrh on their way to carry them down to Egypt. This is something that they haven't foreseen.

So there's a new shift in the plan. And Judah says to his brothers what prophet is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come let us sell him to the Ishmaelites. So three stages.

First of all let's kill him. Second and pretend a wild beast has killed him. Second let's put him in this pit and leave him to starve.

Reuben believing that then he could rescue the child and bring him back to his father. And then finally Judah let's sell him to the Ishmaelites. And these are three different stages.

And by this point they have stripped Joseph of his tunic. The tunic of many colors that is upon him. And maybe this is referring to the fact that he has two different tunics.

All the brothers have a tunic but he has a double tunic. Maybe that's what's taking place. They cast him into a pit.

And the pit is empty. There's no water in it. I've already mentioned this that the pit being empty with no water in it reminds you perhaps of the skin that is empty.

The water in the skin is used up. And then she casts the boy down underneath one of the shrubs. There's no water in the pit and they cast the boy down.

The lad down into the pit. So it's the story playing out again. The story of Ishmael.

The one who's in the wilderness. And he's put in a pit. He's cast down much as Ishmael was cast down.

And what does Hagar do? Hagar goes at a bow shot so that she will not see or hear the death of the child. The brothers seem to do something similar. They sit down to eat a meal.

Now they in all likelihood are not eating this meal with an ear near ear shot of Joseph. They go some distance away and they're making their plans. And at this point the standing plan is that they just leave him in the pit to starve and to die as he spends days there and there's no one to rescue him.

But then they see the Ishmaelites when they're eating and the plan changes. So they've presumably gone some distance away. They don't want to hear him shouting and calling for help.

They just want to be away. They want to let him die at some distance away from them. Much as Hagar does with Ishmael.

She doesn't want to see her son die. She cares about her son. The brothers don't care about Joseph.

But there's a similar pattern playing out more generally that Joseph is being expelled from the family. And in the expulsion people are just not caring about the fact that this child is dying. They eat this meal and as they are eating the meal they see Ishmaelites coming from Gilead with their camels bearing spices, balm and myrrh.

Where have we seen Gilead before? We've seen Gilead before when Laban pursues Jacob and in the mountains of Gilead they meet up. And then there's this pile of stone Gilead and they're coming from that place. We've seen camels in that story too.

And in that story it's the story of Rachel and her taking of the terrafim. And the father Laban goes and inspects all these different places but she's sitting on her camel and in the camel's knapsack or whatever the terrafim are stored. And she says that can't get up, the way of women is with her and so she just all you see is bloodied clothes.

Keep that in mind when we're reading this story. They see the Ishmaelites and Judah then hatches a new plan. Let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and let not our hand be upon

him for he is our brother in our flesh.

Now there's a slight softening here at different stages. The first, let's kill him and say that wild beast did it. Second, let's throw him into the pit and leave him to die.

We're not going to put our hand against him. And then next, he's our brother in our flesh let's sell him to the Ishmaelites. There's a slight softening over time and maybe if they'd had more time they would have been able to change back to something even less wicked.

But time overtakes them. And Reuben and Midianite traders pass by and it says so they lifted Joseph up and lifted him out, pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver and they took Joseph to Egypt. Who took, pulled Joseph out? This is not something I thought much about before but Rabbi David Forman raises this point and it's really interesting.

It seems that the people who pulled Joseph out were the Midianites. Although in your translation it may say the brothers that's inserted in the translation. The actual statement is they pulled him out.

So who are they? Who's just been mentioned? The Midianite traders passing by. Now why mention the Midianite traders passing by? Are they just the same as the Ishmaelites? Well probably not because the Midianites and the Ishmaelites are different people. They're both descended from wives of Abraham but they're different wives.

They're Why the Midianite traders here? Well it seems that they see the Ishmaelite traders are far off and they think okay we're going to sell him to the Ishmaelites. What they did not know is that maybe on the other side of the hill they're eating on one side and their brother is in the pit on the other. Lo and behold the Midianites come across Joseph and they see this pit and they see this young lad in the pit and they think there's some Ishmaelites behind us let's pull him up and sell him to them.

Sell this kid to them and that seems to be what happens because when Reuben comes on the scene, what is Reuben doing? Has Reuben just been away from his brothers or is Reuben the first person to reach the pit? They've been at some distance and they've been talking and now he sees that they've changed the plan. They want to sell him to the Ishmaelites and okay they're on the horizon they're coming nearer and we need to do something about this. This isn't, this is a matter of urgency.

I need to get him out of there and send him back to father. But he reaches the pit and Joseph is not there. Crisis.

He'd expected to find Joseph but of course Joseph isn't there. Joseph has been pulled up by the Midianites and given to the Ishmaelites. Of course that was that's what Judah planned to do but Reuben did not want that to happen and so Reuben was hoping to be

the first to the pit to pull Joseph out and to rescue him but no.

While the brothers were away, while they've been eating, Joseph had been taken up by the Midianites and sold to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver and Reuben tears his clothes returned to his brothers and said the lad is no more and I where shall I go? He seems to be bringing news to the brothers. The brothers, the brothers don't know this yet. The brothers haven't yet heard that Joseph has been taken out of the pit.

They presume he's still there and that when the Ishmaelites come across them they'll say well we've got this young kid in this pit. Well how much would you give us for them for that child? But no he's gone. He's no longer there and so they take Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats and dipped the tunic in the blood and they sent the tunic of many colours and they brought it to their father and said we have found this.

Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not? And he recognised it and said it is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.

What's going on here? First of all we've seen a story of goats and coats already. A story of a father being deceived concerning a beloved son. We've seen the story of Jacob himself deceiving his father concerning the blessing and he pretends to be Esau, disguising himself as the beloved son using goat skin and using the coat of Esau.

So he dresses up as Esau, presents himself to his father using a subterfuge of goats and coats and now the same thing happens to him concerning his beloved son, concerning the son that he wants to bless over the other sons. The sons are using his own tactics against him. There's once again in the next generation of the family the same patterns are emerging and these are things that we need to bear in mind when we read these stories in scripture.

We need to think that these are stories of families and families are the context within which we see sin developing, where we see the roots of sin within one generation being spread to the next and what one generation has done is played out in the following one and when God deals with a family he has to deal with these intergenerational complexes of sin. Not just my individual sin, not just the issues that one person has that are all private and compartmentalised themselves. That's not how the world works.

That's not how families work. That's not how our lives work. Our issues are all entangled with each other and so God dealing with the family of Abraham, he has to deal with these intergenerational problems where one domino after another sets off this cascade of problems.

So when Isaac is deceived by Jacob we've already seen Isaac has favoured one son over another and favoured the wrong son. God has said that he should bless, that Jacob is the one that will rule, the older shall serve the younger and so Jacob, Isaac should know this

but he's shown favouritism and he's been deceived then and his deception switched the younger and the older using goats and coats in the dark of his blindness. In the next chapter or a couple of chapters time we see firstborn and secondborn switched again and they're switched in the dark of the wedding night and Jacob is the one deceived on this occasion and that sets off a rivalry between Rachel and Leah and between Jacob and Laban and then that sets off further events.

It sets off the events that lead to Rachel and Jacob's family fleeing from Laban and then the event of the taking of the terror that sets off more things and then it leads to the rivalries between the different children. The next generation of the family the favouritism showed to Rachel over Leah and her side of the family and at each point we see this cascade of problems going from one generation to another. That's how things work and this is what scripture is talking about here.

It's showing us the way that these cascading problems keep going out and at some point they have to be dealt with, they have to be overcome and God deals with them stage by stage and each generation he's dealing with these problems and addressing these deep rooted issues within the life of the family. The favouritism, the rivalry and how you approach that. How are you supposed to live as the favoured son? How are you supposed to do that properly? How are you supposed to live as the unfavoured sons? We've seen this play out in the story of Esau and Jacob where finally they reach peace, they arrive at a reconciliation but in this story there is no reconciliation yet.

This problem has gone down to the next generation and they have to sort it out. So we've seen the story of Ishmael playing out here and the story of the binding of Isaac. These are all things that are playing out in this story.

The significance of the empty pit is worth thinking about too. Jacob is cast down into this empty pit and the same word is used for the dungeon he is cast into in following chapters. He is cast into a dungeon and he's cast into a pit.

Both of them are the same word. It's not a word we find a lot in scripture. It's a word associated with wells sometimes.

So maybe this gives us a clue into the significance of Dothan. Two wells and later on Enim, two springs in the following chapter. Joseph rises out of both of these places to give new life.

That might be part of what's going on. Other things that need to be considered. That when the brothers go into Egypt and they're wondering about why they're suffering in the way that they are, they talk about what they did to Joseph and they said they did not listen to his cries.

They do not say that they sold him. They say they did not listen to his cries and they're

dealing seriously with what they had done. They're recognising we did something very serious but and this is why we're having these consequences but surely if they sold him into slavery that would be the consequence that they faced.

The fact it would be the consequences for that. We sold our brothers into slavery therefore this is happening to us but no it's because they did not listen to his cries which suggests that it probably was the Midianites. They may be eating on the other side of the hill and this happens in their absence.

They're also at the end of the chapter we read that now the Midianites has sold him in Egypt to Potiphar an officer of Pharaoh and a captain of the guard. It's not entirely clear who are these the Midianites or the Medianites. It's not entirely clear.

The word is slightly different. So how this is playing out not entirely certain but it does seem to be that the Midianites and the Ishmaelites are two different groups of people and it's the Midianites who take Joseph out and who sell him to the Ishmaelites. There are other questions that need to be asked about that.

For instance why didn't the brothers see that the Ishmaelites had him? Maybe when they went to the pit the Midianites had gone to the Ishmaelites and then they went out another way. Maybe that's what happened. Other things we mentioned Galad or Gilead this place and the fact that there are camels coming from there suggests some connection with that story of Rachel on the camel and what happens at this point the terror theme.

So she has the terror theme there and here you read that Joseph is torn. This word that suggests it's the same sort of terms as we have in terror theme. Put those things together and you get terror theme.

So maybe there's a play here that if Rachel had gotten up what you would see is bloody garments. Bloody garments associated with the torn son and also in anticipation of her bleeding out in her death in giving birth to Benjamin. These are foreshadowings of what happens not just the death of Rachel herself but the near death of both of her sons.

We'll see more on this coming out in future discussions of this. Judah at this point seems to be the de facto leader of the brothers. Ruben has his own plan but they're not really listening to Ruben.

Judah is the one that can get the brothers to rally around him. He's the one with the actual authority so he maybe functions as the firstborn in many respects in this situation. All of this might draw our minds back to Cain as well.

Cain is the unfavoured firstborn son whose brother is favoured by the father, by God in that case, and the offering that he brings and he's jealous of his brother and the blood of his brother testifies against him. That's another aspect of this that might be in the

background. Think back to Deuteronomy chapter 21 which I mentioned earlier and the language that we find at the end of that.

He shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a first a double portion of all that is found with him. When we read here it says there's a reference to finding and then there's a reference to recognising. They sent the tunic of many colours and they brought it to their father and said we have found this.

Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not? And he recognised it and said it is my son's tunic. Reading that he's acknowledging, okay, as it were, this is my firstborn. This is essentially the son that I have favoured over everyone else and the way that that plays off the language of Deuteronomy 21 which has the story of Jacob so strongly in the background suggests that we're supposed to see something going on here.

There's a judgment upon that particular story and the way that Jacob favours Joseph over the proper firstborn, Reuben and others. Reuben may be removed from his place because of his attempt to usurp his father and the other favoured brothers but at this point it seems that what is taking place is wrong and Jacob has to acknowledge to some extent what's taking place. Tell the truth.

This is your firstborn. It's essentially what he's being asked and again remember it's a deception using goats and coats. It's bringing back upon his head what he did to his father.

When we move from this story elsewhere in scripture we can see that it is not the only time that this story comes up, these patterns come up. We read in the story of Joseph so many of the patterns that we see later on in the story of David. David is shepherding his father's sheep.

David is sent by his father to check on his brothers to bring back a report on them when they're on the battle line. He talks to his brothers and his brother Eliab cannot speak peacefully to him. His brother Eliab thinks that David has all these ideas above his station and in the story of Joseph and David all these parallels are at play.

There's a great piece written by James Hamilton on some of these connections and I'll link that in the show notes below. But today is Mournay Thursday so let's think about a different set of connections because this is the day when we think about the Last Supper where our saviour, the messiah, the one who visited his brethren was betrayed, where he was sold into the hands of gentiles, where he was brought down ultimately to the pit, where there's a conspiracy and betrayal by his brother Judas or Judah. He's rejected and expelled by his brethren, his people, and they cast him out.

He's sold for pieces of silver, he's stripped of his robe, he descends into the pit but then he later returns from the dead. He's raised up and his brethren will bow to him. This is a

story we've heard before.

It happens to Joseph and later on it happens to the son of Joseph. Today as we think about Mourny Thursday and move into the end of Holy Week it's worth looking back at these stories and seeing the way that the story of Christ is foreshadowed earlier in the scripture. We'll get into many of these things later on as I look back on this series and reflect upon some of the ways in which this connects with the story of the gospels.

But for now I'll leave you with that thought. Thank you very much for listening. Lord willing I'll be back again tomorrow.

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