

READ

Genesis 37

REFLECT

Joseph's story takes up the largest section of Genesis – 13 chapters – and it starts in chapter 37 with one of the most well known and celebrated stories of Joseph's life, though the details are less certain than popular culture has made us believe. Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob because he was the first child born to him by his favorite wife, Rachel, who had since died in childbirth to Benjamin. The story of his life picks up when he was 17 years old. Very quickly we learn that the favoritism shown to Joseph has been a sore subject for the other children. And Joseph seems to rub his status in his brothers' noses – he told them of two dreams he had in which he was placed on a pedestal and his brothers, represented by grain and stars respectively, bowed to him. This is foreshadowing later events, as dreams were very significant in the Old Testament, but the brothers only took it to be Joseph showboating to them. Even Jacob got annoyed with Joseph's dreams and attitude, but that annoyance didn't stop Israel from using Joseph to keep watch over his brothers (despite the fact that he was the second youngest).

When his brothers saw Joseph coming toward them, they became angry – he wasn't required to work and he came with his dreams and a special outfit. While a popular musical has told us that Joseph's coat had many colors, that's not likely. The Hebrew is unclear (for complicated reason), but suffice it to say that it set him apart and furthered their anger toward him. So, they decided to just be rid of their troublesome brother – first plotting his death, then persuaded by Reuben to simply put him in one of the large water cisterns. Judah saw a passing caravan and had a wonderful idea – sell Joseph instead of killing him, that way they get rid of their brother without needing to shed blood. So, that's what they did – they sold him to Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. Before selling him, though, they took Joseph's special coat. Once he was gone, they dipped it in blood and then told their father that they had found it, thus making him believe Joseph had been mauled by a wild animal. Jacob was so distraught that he was inconsolable, meanwhile Joseph was resold to Egypt and wound up with Potiphar, the Pharaoh's chief officer.

REACT

- Did you grow up with a sibling that you believed received special treatment? How did you react to them?
- Dreams are an important part of the lives of people in the Bible, especially in the story of Joseph. Have you ever read into what has happened in your dreams? Have you had dreams that made you feel uncomfortable or worried? Have dreams ever changed your behavior?
- Reuben, who had previously slept with one of his father's wives, has now saved the life of his brother – his actions have been both detestable and laudable. How do you react when people you know have done bad then do good? Do you trust that they can be good, or do you think of their good act as just a fluke?
- When Jacob was told his beloved son was dead, no one could console him. Have you even been so sad that no one and nothing could make you feel better? Were you ever able to get out of that funk? How?

RESPOND

Examining your Dreams: Dreams play a huge part of Joseph's story, in both this chapter and later on, just as they do throughout scripture. Ancient peoples believed dreams to be a place where the Divine would speak to humans, whereas modern science believes dreams may be one place where the subconscious can break through. Write down any dreams you may remember for several days. Reflect on them – are there any clear anxieties showing up that you may not consciously realize? Is there an act you feel led to do in these dreams? It's impossible to fully analyze them (no matter what the likes of Freud and Jung say), but they can be a window into our subconscious, a place that we may be more likely to trust in what God and our faith tell us to do. If you struggle finding making any kinds of interpretations, speak about your dreams to someone you trust, maybe they can see something you couldn't!