

## THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS

"Families will not be broken. Curse and expel them, send their children wandering, drown them in floods and fires, and old women will make songs of all these sorrows and sit on the porch and sing them on mild evenings." –Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*

## God &amp; the Children of Jacob

The Background:

- Genesis 29-30 list the birth order of Jacob's twelve children (eleven boys and one girl) through Leah and Rachel as well as through their Billah and Zilpah. As the rest of the Genesis narrative unfolds, the reader learns progressively more about these children as well as the impact that their family life had upon them.

Jacob's Children and the Unfolding of the Genesis Narrative:

## Genesis 34

Dinah:

- The youngest child of Jacob and Leah. Genesis 34 tells of her sexual assault by Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite. The assault occurred after she "went out to see the women of the land" (Gen. 34:1).
- ⇒ Had Jacob warned his children about associating closely with the people of the land?

Simeon & Levi:

*On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away.*

- These men were Jacob's 2nd (Simeon) and 3rd (Levi) sons with Leah. Despite Jacob's agreement with the Hivites, they attacked them as they recovered physically from the agreement, slaughtering all of the men. The other brothers were also involved in these events, looting and plundering the city,
- ⇒ While their actions could be viewed as justifiable in some sense, Jacob's words to them and the end of his life seem to indicate that much of the violence and destruction that they inflicted was unnecessarily spiteful.

## Genesis 35

Benjamin:

*Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son." And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. –Gen. 35:16-18*

- "Ben-oni" → "Son of my \_\_\_\_\_." This is perhaps why Jacob quickly changes his name to Benjamin.

Reuben:

*While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine. And Israel heard of it. –Gen. 35:22*

## Genesis 37

Joseph:

*Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 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. 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. –Gen. 37:1-4*

## The tense relationship between Joseph and his brothers:

- Joseph reported to Jacob the words/deeds of Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher which probably concerned their disdain for him.
- Jacob made the situation worse for Joseph by repeating in his life the sin of favoritism that his own father Isaac had committed in his relationship with his children.

The Robe of Many Colors:

In the ANE, clothing was symbolic of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

→ It was clear that Jacob intended for Joseph to inherit the \_\_\_\_\_ of the firstborn as well as the \_\_\_\_\_ of Yahweh which had been promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## Joseph's Dreams:

**The 1st Dream**— Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 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."

**His Brothers' Response:** 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.

**The 2nd Dream**— 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."

**Jacob's Response:** 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?" And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

## The Betrayal of Jacob and the Selling Joseph into Slavery:

- Jacob sent Joseph to locate his brothers and to check in on them and their flocks. After speaking with a local man, Joseph found that the brothers had taken the flocks to Dothan.

**The Brother's Plot:** Kill the boy and make it seem as though he was killed and eaten by a wild animal.

**Reuben's Plan**— But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.

**Potential Motive** → To regain the position of \_\_\_\_\_ that he lost with Jacob after the events of 35:22

**Judah's Plan**— Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 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. 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.

**Potential Motive** → To preserve Joseph's life and to \_\_\_\_\_ themselves of any guilt concerning his eventual death.

## The Cover-up:

Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

- Jacob was totally devastated by this news and mourns for Joseph in the customary way of the Ancient Near East.
- All of Jacob's plans for his legacy have fallen apart in light of these tragic events.

**Point of Emphasis:** There is an element of dramatic \_\_\_\_\_ involved in the brothers' deception of Jacob.

⇒ A \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ were used by Jacob in the deception of his own father.

**Foreshadowing:** "Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard."

- The narrator's omniscient view of these events serves to remind us that there is more going on here than meets the eye.

## Some Observations:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ occur at times in life, even for the people of God.

⇒ Sometimes directly to us, like Joseph, or indirectly to us, like Jacob.

2. The \_\_\_\_\_ of God is noticeably absent from this chapter.

⇒ This is intentional on the part of Moses to emphasize the sovereign hand of God over all of these events!

3. The tragedies that occur in our lives are never \_\_\_\_\_ even if we ourselves cannot make sense of them.

## Psalm 88