

Genesis 37-50

Joseph

Review:

-This family line that we are following is very important because God has chosen to partner with this family...they are not perfect, but beginning with Abraham: hospitable, obedient and trusting

-Abraham and Hagar have Ishmael

-but Abraham and Sarah have the promised child: Isaac

-Isaac takes Rebekah (daughter of Abraham's Brother so they are family) as his wife

-Rebekah has twin boys: Esau and Jacob

-Esau is the firstborn but Jacob is the one who carries the family line

*this is significant....because Esau is the bechor

-**What is the bechor?** (this will come into play in today's story)

-The directive to give the firstborn a double portion is found in print in the Book of Deuteronomy but was already in practice in the ancient world: "He [the father] must acknowledge the firstborn . . . and give him a double share in all that he possesses, for he [the firstborn son] is the first fruits of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his."
21:17

-Practically speaking, this means that if there are five sons, you first split the inheritance into six portions, and the firstborn son gets two portions while everyone else gets one

-What makes the firstborn so special that he receives a double portion?

-more reasons than we can cover here but this son would be especially loved by his father for making him a father and for his father's continuance

-He would also have extra responsibility for caring for the family/carrying on the father's business

-So Esau is the rightful bechor, and yet Jacob receives both the birthright and the blessing of the bechor....this was according to God's prediction while the boys were still in the womb

-Jacob, who deceives his father, is himself deceived by his uncle Laban while working 7 years for Rachel to be his wife...he is given instead Leah, after the bridal week is given Rachel as well and must work 7 more years

-Jacob has 12 sons:

Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah

Bilhah (Rachel's maidservant): Dan, Naphtali

Zilpah (Leah's maidservant): Gad, Asher

Leah: Issachar, Zebulun

Rachel: Joseph...later Benjamin (and Rachel dies)

Then we finished last week with the reuniting of Jacob and Esau, how Jacob humbles himself and makes amends but still separates himself from Esau

Genesis 37

-Today we pick up with Jacob settling in the land of Canaan where his father had lived as a foreigner (Gen 37:1)

-we meet and get to know Joseph:

-17 yrs old

-often tended his father's flocks (remember how Jacob got those flocks!...the spotted animals from Laban's flocks)

-worked for half of his brothers (sons of Bilhah and Zilpah...interesting family division here)

-he told his father about "bad things" his brothers were doing

-Jacob "loved Joseph more than any of his other children"

-so one day Jacob makes/fashions for Joseph a "beautiful robe" or multi colored/vari-colored tunic (coat of many colors) (v. 3)

-v 4 tells us that his brothers "hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them" and they couldn't even say a nice word to him

-What is happening here?

-Why is Joseph only working with a few of his brothers?

-Why does Isaac show such favoritism (he obviously saw what this did in his own family between he and his twin!)

-there is definitely bitterness and jealousy in this family (between moms and kids)

-Jacob loves Rachel most and Rachel's child most and everyone knows

-We also have Joseph bringing a "bad report" about his brothers to their father

-we don't know the nature of the bad report

-Hebrew phrase used here that can mean "smear" and when used elsewhere in Genesis it's associated with something misleading, hurtful, disagreeable or even miserable *et dibbāt ām' rā'āh'*

-we don't know if that is what is happening here, but **Joseph definitely made his brothers look bad...whether this was intentional or not, it was at least lacking in wisdom**

-and then we add this special coat give to Joseph by his dad as an expression of his love for him

-there is a lot of focus on the *colors* of the coat, the Hebrew lends toward striped, but this is not the point

-the point is that the brothers HATE him when he shows up wearing it

-each of these children certainly have a coat....their father would provide that for them

-but THIS coat PROVES that their father loves Joseph more than them

-HOW?

-Let's go back to the *bechor*

-The *bechor* would receive the extra favor

-This would have been a sign to these brothers (in an eastern way) that though TEN brothers came before him, Jacob sees Joseph as the bechor...the one who will receive the “extra” including the inheritance

-and at the very least it shows who has his heart

-Add to this that then Joseph has two dreams:

-their bundles of grain bowed to his

-the sun moon and 11 stars bowed down to him

-and he doesn't just have these dreams, HE TELLS THEM ABOUT THEM

-even his father, who adores him, scolds him for this

-Who is this Joseph? Is he just naïve? Is he cocky?

-and now the brothers, consumed with jealousy, have had enough, and they decide to kill Joseph **this seems like a big jump**

-Enter the town of Schechem again (where sister Dinah was raped the brothers Simeon and Levi killed all the men and where Jacob tells these boys that they have made him a stench in the nostrils of the people of the land 34:30)

-just a note...Schechem first shows up in Gen 12 right after Abraham is given his mission...for his offspring to be a blessing to all nations...this family doesn't seem to be accomplishing the mission at the moment

-anyway, the brothers are near there pasturing sheep so Jacob sends Joseph there to check on them

-the brothers have moved from there but as Joseph approaches they recognize him coming and they make plans to kill him, throw him in a cistern and tell their father a wild animal got him

-But Reuben tried to “rescue” Joseph (**who is Reuben?** The true *Bechor*) by discouraging bloodshed and suggesting the throw him into an empty cistern/well where he will die (but they don't have to kill him)

-his secret plan was to come back for him later

-so the brothers strip him of his coat and throw him in the empty cistern (ouch)

-just as they sit down to eat, they see a caravan passing through ...Ishmaelite traders (**who are Ishmaelites?**) heading to Egypt

-for some reason, Reuben is no longer present, so Judah speaks up in Joseph's defense, suggesting they not kill Joseph but instead selling him to the traders

-When Reuben returns to rescue Joseph he finds that he is gone

-consumed with grief he goes to his brothers to ask where he is

-then the brothers kill a goat and dip Joseph's coat in it and send it to their father (cowards!) with the message:

*“we found this, please **examine** (Hebrew word is **nakar: a specific word to recognize**) it to **look and see** whether it is your son's tunic or not”*

-Jacob DOES **nakar** the coat and assumes an animal got him, and he is distraught...Scripture tells us he mourns deeply

Genesis 38

-the next chapter tells us Judah left home

-we are left wondering why...was there a rift in the family?

-and strangely, we jump forward in time to see Judah marry a Canaanite woman and they have 3 sons

-the oldest marries a woman named Tamar but her husband was wicked so God took his life

-The next brother is tasked (according to cultural practice) to marry the widow and produce a child for his brother's lineage to be carried on

-but this man denies Tamar a child so God took his life too

-so Judah tells Tamar to go back to her parents and wait for the 3rd son to grow up so she can have a child through him

-but Scripture tells us that Judah didn't really intend to give his 3rd son to Tamar...he was afraid this son would die too

-*"some years later"* Judah's wife dies and after he mourns, he went up for the shearing of the sheep and Tamar gets word (v.12)

-she knows the youngest son has grown up and Judah has not fulfilled his promise, notice v. 14 says she *"changes out of her widow's clothing"*

and shrouds her face and places herself beside the road as a prostitute would

-Judah sees her (but doesn't recognize her) and propositions her

(prostitution is in the Bible, not endorsed, but it's there)

-they arrange payment, and he gives her collateral: his identification seal and its cord and his staff

-his seal or signet would have been used to stamp his identity on documents and would have been carried on a cord (like one used for binding sheep) as a necklace

-the staff would have likely been carved in a unique way

-both items would have been, without a doubt, easily linked to HIM

-Judah sends a friend to make payment to her (a goat) and to retrieve his items, but she can't be found

-3 months later it becomes known that Tamar, the widow, has become pregnant

-she is accused of prostitution and Judah declares that she should be burned

-but as they were taking her out to kill her, she sent this message to her FIL:

*"I am with child by the man to whom these things belong...Please **examine/recognize or look and see**, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?" v.25*

-Two things to note here:

1. she does not publicly shame Judah

2. She uses a particular phrase...worded in a way that he is very familiar with, a phrase used by Judah and his brothers when they brought the robe/coat to their father and asked him to examine or **nakar** it. She asks Judah if he **"nakars"** these items

-This phrase **"do you nakar this"/recognize or look and see** is used only 8 times in Genesis and all have to do with deception:

1. when Isaac doesn't **recognize** Jacob (deception for the blessing)
(Gen 27:23)

2. When Rachel is hiding the idols from her father Laban & Jacob tells him to *Nakar* what is yours (Gen 31:32)

3. Deception of Jacob (when the boys dip Joseph's coat in blood) (Gen 37:32)

4. Jacob recognizing the coat as Joseph's (Gen 37:33)

5 & 6. And now 2 times in a row in Judah's story:

- **examine/recognize** or **look and see**, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these? (Gen 38:25)

-Judah recognizing the items immediately (Gen 38:26)

7& 8. And then we will see them two more times right in a row coming up in Joseph's story:

-when Joseph recognizes his brother (Gen 42:7)

-although Joseph recognizes his brothers they don't recognize him (Gen 42:8)

-This story ends with Tamar giving birth to twins (Perez and Zerah) Zerah's arm came out first, and a string was tied on his wrist, but his brother Perez was born first (Perez means "break out") Zerah means "scarlet" (the color of the string)

-**Ch 39** jumps right back to Joseph's story with Joseph in Potiphar's house in Egypt

-we are left to ask, **why was this story placed here?** Judah is older, with children and now grandchildren, so the author has placed this story here purposely

-Judah is not a perfect follower of God

-he is part of an imperfect family...as we follow this family line, there is always at least someone willing to continue to trust God and follow Him

-it seems that Judah (among other reasons) is set here as a model of an imperfect follower who will *nakar* his mistakes

-we have to wonder if that phrase....*do you nakar these items?* Just hit him so hard...and at that moment he was faced with his own sin...the sin of how he treated his brother and the deception he participated in against his father

-remember, **whose idea was it to sell Joseph?**

-Judah is sinful

-Judah is also willing to own his sin declaring that [Tamar] *is more righteous than I am because I didn't arrange for her to marry my son Shelah.*

-Let's keep this in mind and keep an eye out for Judah and where he will show up again in Joseph's story and see what we can further learn from him

Chapters 39-50 we will need to do more of a fly-over/summary

-we are mostly familiar with Joseph's story

-a note: if you are familiar with his story he has likely been painted as an example (Joseph fled from sin!!) which is true, he did run from sin, but the sages and rabbis also express frustration with Joseph....his lack of wisdom and a bit of self interest

-39:2 tells us *The Lord was with Joseph so he succeeded in everything he did*

- Potiphar recognizes this and he likes it so he made Joseph his personal attendant (in charge of household and everything he owned)
- then God blesses Potiphar's household
- his household affairs run smoothly, his crops and livestock flourish
- so Joseph elevated even more
- Joseph was handsome so Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him, Joseph refuses
- Eventually running off with her holding his cloak, she turns it into him forcing himself on her, Potiphar is **furious** and J is thrown into prison
- 39:21 *but the Lord was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love*
- Joseph becomes a favorite with prison warden, who puts him in charge of other prisoners and all that happened in the prison
- The Lord was with him and everything he did succeeded (39:23)*

Ch 40

- this chapter is about the dreams of two of the prisoners: Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker...where they remain for *quite some time*
- each has a dream and they tell them to Joseph
- Joseph tells them the meaning of their dreams: within 3 days the cupbearer will be restored to his position and the baker will be impaled on a pole
- he turns out to be correct, but the cupbearer *forgot all about Joseph, never giving him another thought*

Ch 41

-TWO FULL YEARS LATER

- Pharaoh has 2 dreams that no one can interpret
- Pharaoh is very upset by these dreams...even all of the magicians and wise men in the land
- the cupbearer remembers Joseph
- Pharaoh sends for Joseph at once and tells him his dreams
- Joseph says dreams are for God to interpret, but then immediately begins to interpret the dreams
- (this is different than the interpretation scenario in the prison but for today we will stick to the story)
- the Midrash tells us more information here....there is a detail here that if you know it (or hear it) the dream interprets itself
- and that is the number seven (7 beautiful cows and 7 weak or not beautiful, 7 good heads of grain and 7 weak/thin heads)
- the number 7 is the clue....but
 - Beautiful & not beautiful (Leah and Rachel) there is a linguistic tie (well favored and sleek)
 - Details in Pharaoh's dream that immediately connect him to his family's story
 - my dad had to work 7 years for the beautiful/well favored but got the sleek (or weak)
 - he likely immediately tied this to years of abundance and lack

*also note that the 7 cows grazing in the marsh/reeds is a word that is difficult to translate and can mean brothers (this comes from Rabbi Akiva)...which is an interesting nugget here that would also speak to Joseph's own story)

-now it is possible that Joseph has been confronted by a dream that speaks to his own life and he is IN Egypt where this dream is about to come into play (and it is bleak)

-Joseph gives some wise advice, possibly (likely?) God – inspired and Pharaoh asks if he could find “anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?”

-Pharaoh puts Joseph in command of Egypt specifically to prepare for the coming famine

-Notice an interesting pattern happening:

In story of Jacob & Joseph

-gifts (from dad)

-dreams

-coat is stripped

-thrown into pit

In story of Potiphar's wife & Joseph

-gifts (from Potiphar)

-dreams (aspirations: she wants to sleep with him/he says my master holds nothing back from me)

-coat is stripped

-thrown into “pit”

In story of Pharaoh & Joseph it reverses all of these items

-pulled from pit

-clothes put on him

-dreams

-gifts from Pharaoh (2nd in command in Egypt)

Even in the periphery stories

Judah & Tamar & cupbearer and baker there are

-clothes

-dreams

-gifts

-pits

-but Judah & Tamar's story is missing a pit...the rabbis claim this is because forgiveness is part of their story

-Another interesting element that is going to come into play here is Joseph's relationship with Pharaoh

-When Joseph is thrown into the pit what do you think he is thinking?

(my dad will come looking for me. Joseph doesn't know his dad is lied to)

-timeline: sold into slavery at age 17

13 years in Potiphar's house...11 yrs service and at least 2 in prison

Joseph is likely 30ish now

-Pharaoh will step into this role in a somewhat symbolic way

- Throughout **chapters 42-45** we cover the famine that God warned Pharaoh would follow the seven years of abundance through his dreams
- the famine is severe and eventually the sons of Jacob (Joseph's brothers) are sent to buy food
- This is where Joseph *nakars* them but they don't *nakar* him
- Joseph could have had them killed, he was that powerful. Instead, he appears to want to teach them something
- he requires one of them stay in prison while the rest go and get the younger brother
- The brothers talk amongst themselves (thinking Joseph, who had been speaking to them through an interpreter) can't understand them...they say
Clearly we are being punished for what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his anguish when he pleaded for his life, but we wouldn't listen. That's why we are in this trouble"
- Reuben reminds them (and gives more info) that he tried to talk them out of that plan
- meanwhile Joseph begins to weep and chooses Simeon to be placed in prison
- we don't know why he chooses Simeon...perhaps he knew/heard that Reuben wasn't for the plan and he chose the next oldest as the responsible party?
- the rest of the brothers return to their father and their youngest brother Benjamin
- Their father is distraught to have lost another son and will not allow Benjamin to be taken to Egypt, even when Reuben offers his two sons as collateral for bringing Benjamin back
- the famine rages on
- when they are out of food again (TWO YEARS LATER), this time Judah puts his own life on the line as collateral to bring Benjamin back unharmed
- So Jacob relents and the 10 brothers return to Egypt/Simeon is released to them
- Joseph throws an elaborate dinner party with his brothers as the guests and Joseph struggles to contain his emotions
- Joseph seats the brothers for this dinner and to their amazement seats them in age order and serves Benjamin 5 times the amount of food as his brothers
- Joseph plans another "scheme" to test his brothers...hiding payment in Benjamin's sack of grain and then sending a servant to accuse him of stealing
- all of the brothers offer themselves as slaves (not just Benjamin), but Joseph only wants Benjamin to pay for this "crime"
- THIS IS THE MOMENT**
- Judah steps forward and tells of the heartache of their father at the loss of his son years ago (Joseph) and that losing this son would certainly kill him
- Remember, Joseph had no way to know this
- Judah, offers his own life in exchange for the boy** (keep in mind he doesn't even know if Benjamin is innocent or not)
- and then Joseph breaks down, reveals his identity...his brothers are stunned (45:3)
- HAVE SOMEONE READ GENESIS 45:5-8**
- Joseph points out that this was God's plan all along and then sends them to tell their father he is alive and bring him back to live in Egypt

- Interestingly, Pharaoh hears of all of this and invites Joseph's entire extended family to come and live in Egypt and offers them the very best land in Egypt
- *anyone know where? GOSHEN (46:34 tells us it's because Egyptians hate shepherds)**
- They are given wagons, clothing, animals and supplies for the journey
- Jacob is stunned to hear Joseph is still alive and the entire family of Jacob (ISRAEL) set out of Egypt with all of their possessions...and God gives them permission for this to be his provision for them
- This Pharaoh is incredibly gracious and generous, giving them the best land and also employing them to care for his flocks as well
- Jacob stands before Pharaoh as well, and Jacob blesses Pharaoh
- Jacob is 130 yrs old
- the famine continues to ravage the land and eventually all of the Egyptians are also in-debted to Pharaoh (eventually selling him all of their livestock, their land and ultimately themselves as slaves...all willingly in order to stay alive)
- Joseph made Pharaoh the richest man on earth
- *MEANWHILE: 47:27** the people of Israel acquired property and were fruitful and their population grew rapidly
- Jacob lived another 17 years
- near the end of his life he calls Joseph in and asks him to swear not to bury him in Egypt, and Joseph swears
- there is a lot of interesting research surrounding this....citing that this was the moment Joseph had to "choose his dad." Pharaoh? Or Jacob?
- by swearing this oath, Joseph chooses Jacob (and his Hebrew lineage)
- chapters 48-50** account for Jacob's final blessings and the giving of his inheritance to his sons
- Jacob recounts the covenant promise from God, claims Joseph's sons as his own (in place of Joseph himself)...**in the blessing of these two boys with the birthright**, Jacob blesses the younger greater than the older (not choosing the traditional bechor) declaring the younger (Ephraim) would be greater than the older (Manasseh)
 - these sons were born to Joseph in Egypt
 - Manasseh means "to forget" suggesting that Joseph's new "life" has helped him forget his trials
 - Ephraim means "doubly fruitful" suggesting that these trials have led to fruitfulness and blessing
- his final charge to Joseph was that God would be with him and would take him back to Canaan and Joseph gave him an extra portion of land
- Then Jacob calls in his sons for his final words to them. Through his words to them, Jacob reveals their character and predicts their "History" (Gen 49:2-27)
 - Reuben: bechor, but because of his sin he lost his birthright to Joseph's sons (Gen 35:22/1 Chron 5:1-2 he slept with his father's concubine Bilhah)
 - Simeon & Levi (sons of Leah) were both cruel and self-willed (they murdered all the men of Shechem in Gen 34) Simeon's line is later absorbed into tribe of Judah and Levi's line because the priestly line (because of grace) but are given no land allotment

-Judah is identified with the lion and out Judah the lawgiver (Christ) would come, as would all the rightful kings of Israel

-you can read and study the words given to Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali and Joseph and Benjamin (too much to cover here though we will refer to these tribes and the land many more times in the months to come)

****Why does Judah's line become the line of the kings and ultimately of the Messiah?**

What is so special about Judah?

-Jewish tradition answers this: when Tamar keeps the 3 items belonging to Judah (**what were they again?** The identification seal, cord and stick) these represent "kingly" items

-Judah decides which kind of "king" he will be: humble? Or one who flourishes at the expense of others

-Judah lays down power ...he chooses confession over power and essentially turns his life around when it matters

-we can see that change when he is willing to lay his own life on the line for Benjamin's and later as payment for Benjamin's 'crime'

-He is not perfect, but he is willing to learn

-ch 49 ends with Jacob's death and ch 50 is his burial

-a few things to note:

-Jacob wanted to be buried in the family cave in Canaan (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Leah are already buried here)

-All of Egypt mourned Jacob's death (between embalming and mourning time period this was 70 days)

-Jacob asks Pharaoh if he can bury his father in Canaan

-This could have been seen as incredibly offensive and insulting by Pharaoh (why wouldn't you bury him in the customary Egyptian way? We have received him as our own and proved it by mourning for him)

-but Pharaoh agrees

-and he doesn't just agree he sends his officials and senior members of his household and all his senior officers of Egypt along with Egyptians chariots and charioteers to accompany Joseph....Jacob's funeral procession is with the best fanfare and ceremony Egypt had to offer

-they held a solemn memorial and mourned for another 7 days

-Joseph's brothers then become afraid that Joseph may get revenge now that their father is dead so they ask for his forgiveness

-he reassures them again that what they meant for harm, God meant for good and he is kind to them

-Before Joseph dies at 110 years of age, he tells his brothers that God will certainly lead them out of Egypt

