

# PM Genesis 37:1-36 Life of Joseph: Dreams

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Preacher: Rev Trevor Kane

[ 0 : 00 ] And again everyone, it's good to be with you, it's good to continue our studies in the life of Joseph this evening. But as we come, let's turn to the Lord in prayer and let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for these studies that we can have in the life of Joseph. We thank you, Father, that your word is true, that your word is living and active. We thank you, Father, that your word doesn't seek to gloss over the faults and failures of your people.

Well, perhaps as we consider this Joseph narrative, we are reminded of that in particular ways.

We're reminded of the sin of Jacob in having more than one wife.

We're reminded of the sin of Jacob in having a favourite child. We're reminded of the sin of Joseph, of pride and arrogance. As we come to your word, it doesn't seek to romanticise, it doesn't seek to gloss over the faults and failures of your people.

But yet as we come this evening, Father, we thank you for the one who is perfect. The one who is sinless, the one who is spotless.

[ 1 : 07 ] We thank you this evening for your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray this evening, Father, that you would keep us close to him in days of uncertainty. That you would bind us closer and closer to him.

That we may be conformed more and more to his image rather than to the image of the world. We pray, Father, that as we come to your word now, that you would go before us. That you would give us wisdom and insight and understanding.

Help us to see the great truths of scripture that are there we ask. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, tonight we're considering a passage in Genesis 37.

Genesis 37. It would be good if you have it open in front of you so that we can see what God is saying to us together through his word. Genesis 37. And we're considering these first 11 verses together.

Genesis 37, beginning to read verse 1. Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob.

[ 2 : 09 ] Joseph, being 17 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 of his other 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.

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 round it and bowed down to my sheaf. 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.

Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, Behold, I have dreamed another dream.

[ 3 : 16 ] Behold, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars were bowing down to me. 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.

Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. It will be helpful for us if you keep that passage, Genesis 37 verses 1 to 11, if you keep it open in front of you as we come to consider what

God's word is saying this evening.

It's probably fair to say that there's always one child in the family who's considered to be the favourite. If you asked my two older brothers who that child was in our family, I have no doubt that they would say that I was the one who was the favourite.

If you asked me who it was in our family, I would say that it was undoubtedly my eldest brother. But what does it mean to be the favourite? It's the one to whom the rules don't seem to apply. It's the one to whom the standards of behaviour don't seem to be expected.

[ 4 : 27 ] It's the one who can do no wrong in their parents' eyes. Speaking as a parent, of course, you can say that you love all of your children equally. You love them all the same.

You see their strengths and their weaknesses. Perhaps most frustratingly of all, you see your own strengths and weaknesses reflected back to you from them. You see your own strengths and weaknesses in their lives.

And that's perhaps one of the most frustrating things about your children. And that's perhaps why your children, more than anything, are the ones who can get on your nerves the most. As we come to Genesis 37 this evening, as we come to perhaps one of the more famous incidents in the life of Joseph, these dreams that Joseph has, we see right at the outset that Jacob doesn't try and hide his feelings, does he?

Jacob doesn't try and pretend that he loves all of his children equally. It's clear right from the outset here that Joseph is his favourite, that Joseph is his favourite son. It's quite clear from the passage that Joseph was his favourite.

It's quite clear that Joseph knew that. It's quite clear that the rest of the brothers knew that. And it's important that we understand that because that's going to feed into what we see this evening. But it's also going to feed into what we think about over the next few weeks.

[ 5 : 44 ] It's also going to feed into the narrative as a whole. It helps explain for us how the brothers end up in the situation that they do. It helps explain for us some of the tension that we find in the life story of Joseph.

We want to see three things this evening. Think about three things together. Firstly, we want to think about upset. We want to see how upset the brothers are at Jacob's actions.

Secondly then, we want to think about upending. How this dream that Joseph has upends the expected social order and status of the day. And then thirdly and finally, we'll see how Joseph is an upstart.

How eventually this second dream even causes his father to say, well, hold on, Joseph. This isn't right. Upset, upending, and upstart.

So firstly then, we want to think about upset. We want to think about the upset that Jacob causes by his actions. And we can see that in verses 1 through 4. Verses 1 through 4 of Genesis 37.

[ 6 : 49 ] We see the upset. This is, of course, our second study in the life of Joseph. We thought last week about his birth. We saw how Jacob really loved Rachel.

He really loved Joseph's mother. But how it was Leah who bore Jacob all those sons. It was Leah who bore Jacob the six sons to be his offspring. We saw how Rachel took matters into her own hands and gave Jacob her servant to be his concubine, to be his wife.

To have children through her. We saw Leah react in a similar way and give Jacob her servant again to raise up more offspring. But then finally and wonderfully, we saw how Jacob, how the Lord, sorry, gave Jacob and Rachel this child, Joseph.

Now we skipped over quite a bit of the narrative. We skipped over quite a bit of Genesis. And there's some important things that are happening in that narrative that we need to understand. And narrative reminds us of how dysfunctional this family was.

You know, it wasn't just restricted to Jacob, this dysfunctionality. The whole family, the whole wider family circle was really quite dysfunctional. Jacob, first of all, has to flee from his father-in-law, Laban.

[ 8 : 07 ] But he's nowhere to go. He's no homeland to call his own. He decides to head back to his homeland. But the problem is that his brother is still there. Esau is still there.

We remember, of course, how things finished between Jacob and Esau. Jacob cheated Esau out of his inheritance. Jacob cheated Esau out of the blessing and had to flee for fear that Esau might kill him. So as he's returning, he's, of course, worried about how Esau will react.

But as we come, we saw how Esau welcomed Jacob back, that there was reconciliation, that there was peace between the two brothers.

And as I said in the prayer, that's one of the things that helps convince me that the Bible's true. Because it doesn't over-romanticize its hero, does it? It's not a work of fiction where the hero is a clean-cut, clearly good person.

As we come to Jacob this evening, we see that he has many faults and feelings. We see that they are recorded for us. The Bible doesn't paint its people as people who have no flaws.

[ 9 : 17 ] But rather, it's honest. It's true. It's reflective of real life. As we read the Bible, we read narratives of deeply flawed men and women, but deeply flawed men and women who are used by God to achieve great things.

It doesn't gloss over their faults and feelings, but it does highlight what God can do, even from seemingly the most unpromising of circumstances. Anyway, the brothers have met, they're reunited.

And so that explains to how we get to, where we get to in verse 1. Because the last time we left Jacob, he was in the land of his father-in-law. He was in the land of Laban. But now as we come to chapters 37, verse 1, we notice that Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

We're now going to be allowed, verse 2, into the family history. We're now going to see the family history, if you like. These are, the author tells us, the generations of Jacob. And notice, notice please, where it starts.

It starts with Joseph. Not what you would expect, is it? You would expect it to start with the eldest son.

[ 10 : 33 ] You would expect the generations of Jacob to start with the oldest boy, but instead they start with Joseph. Joseph. We're told Joseph was 17 years old and he was pastoring the flock with his brothers.

Yet we can see the split, can't we? We can see the divisions. We can see how the family is clearly not a united family, but clearly a divided family. Notice what happens. Jacob, Joseph, sorry, verse 2, being 17 years old, was pastoring the flock with his brothers.

Now notice, he was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wife. Who did Joseph hang around with? Who were his group?

Who were his friends? Well, it wasn't the sons of Leah, was it? It was the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Certainly he hangs around with his brothers. Certainly he hangs around with his half-brothers, at least.

But it's the sons of the two servant women that Joseph hangs around with most. The sons of Leah, it seems, kind of keep themselves to themselves.

[ 11 : 35 ] The sons of Leah, it seems, have formed a little group, all of themselves, all six of them, hanging out together. And the rest of the brothers are kind of just left to get on with it.

But Joseph becomes a bit of a telltale, doesn't he? Notice what it says, verse 2. So Joseph's hanging around, with Bilhah and Zilpah's sons. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father, verse 2.

Very end of verse 2. He becomes a bit of a grass. He brings this bad report about his brothers. Now what it is, we're not quite sure. It could be that Joseph tells his father that they're not looking after the flock properly.

Perhaps that's why then, next week, Jacob is going to send Joseph to see how his brothers are getting on with the flock. It could be that Joseph goes and tells Jacob that these brothers won't let him join in their games.

It could be that Joseph runs to tell his father that these brothers aren't being nice, aren't being kind to him. Whatever it is, we don't know. But whatever it is, Joseph runs straight to his father and tells him.

[ 12 : 40 ] that's to say, I can relate to this. If any of my brothers wouldn't share with me, if any of my brothers wouldn't let me join in their games or if they beat me up, for example, I would be straight to my mother telling her what was happening, telling her about the great injustice of what my brothers were doing to me regardless of what I'd happen to have done to deserve it.

And then we get to verse 3. Now Israel, we're told, that is, Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons.

He was the son of his old age, of course, but he was also the son of the woman whom he loved. He was also the son of Rachel. He was also the son of the woman whom he worked another seven years for.

And Jacob loves Joseph more than anyone else. To show his love, to show his favoritism, to show how much Jacob loves Joseph, what does he do?

He made him a robe of many colors. Now in your Bible you might notice that there's a slight textual variation in some texts. You'll see that in some texts it'll say that what Jacob gave Joseph was a coat with long sleeves.

[13:56] It doesn't really matter to be honest. Either way it's a sign of Jacob's favoritism towards Joseph. Either way it's a sign that Jacob loves Joseph more than any of the others.

If this were a coat that was a coat of many colors which has been the traditional understanding of it it would have been an expensive gift. You know the dyes, the patterns, all of that stuff would have been expensive.

If it was a coat with long sleeves the implication again was kind of obvious it would be a sign that Joseph wasn't expected to work. You know they lived in an agricultural society a society working with sheep and goats as we're going to find out next week.

And so to have a coat with long sleeves provided not warmth but if you lived in that agricultural society working with sheep and goat all the time having a coat with long sleeves would have actually been a hindrance.

It would have got dirty very quickly. It would have got in the way of what you were trying to do. So a coat with long sleeves would have been a sign that Joseph wasn't expected to work. He wasn't expected to do the hard work with the sheep and the goats.

[15:07] Whatever way you want to take it it's clear the message is clear Joseph is the favourite and his brothers know that don't they?

His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers and what did they do? They hated him and could not speak to him. It's tension upon tension isn't it?

We saw the tension even as we thought about the sons last week. We saw the tension of these six sons being born to Leah. We saw the tension of them clearly understanding that their mother wasn't as loved as Rachel was.

and it's tension upon tension now because not only are they aware of that but now here they are aware that Joseph is the favourite son. In fact they had a different mother was bad enough.

The fact that their mother wasn't loved was bad enough. But now here Jacob loves Joseph more and shows it clearly.

[16:14] It just adds to the tension. But what does it mean for us? What can we take away from this this evening? Well as we come to God this evening we come to our Heavenly Father.

We come to the God who loves us all equally. There is no favouritism with God. If we are in his son the Lord Jesus Christ this evening then he loves us with that perfect love with which he loves Christ. That perfect love that casts out fear. There is no more reassuring thought than that this evening. To know that if we are in Christ tonight God loves us.

God is for us. But secondly it is good to challenge ourselves about our attitude to brothers and sisters isn't it?

Because when Joseph's brothers here saw the favouritism when Joseph's brothers here saw the fact that Joseph was blessed by his father father what was their reaction?

[17:17] They hated him. They couldn't speak peacefully to him. They couldn't say anything kind to him. But what about us when God blesses another believer?

What about us when God blesses another tribe that isn't our own? What about us when God blesses a church that isn't ours in the town? Can we speak well of it?

Can we praise God for all that he's doing? Can we thank God for the way that he's working? Or will our attitude be like the brothers here? Will we refuse to say anything good about it?

Will we remain suspicious and hard hearted about it? Will we refuse to believe anything good about it? If that's our attitude tonight then we need to come back to the first truth that we thought about that God loves us in his son the Lord Jesus Christ.

That in Jesus Christ we cannot be any more blessed. That in Jesus Christ we cannot be any more loved by God. So Joseph upsets his brothers by telling tales.

[ 18 : 26 ] Jacob upsets his family by loving Joseph more than them. But secondly then we want to think about this upending this upending and we see that in verses 5 through 8 this first dream that Joseph has the upending of society.

It's safe to say this isn't a happy family home isn't it? It isn't a place of peace and quiet. It isn't a place of serenity. It isn't a place of good familial relationships. And just to add to that verse 5 happens. So there's tension, there's distrust, there's hatred verse 4. And then verse 5 happens.

Joseph has this dream and rather than keep it to himself, rather than ponder the meaning in his heart, rather than wonder what it might mean, he goes and tells his brothers. Because of this dream we're told verse 5, the brothers hated him even more. God this is going to lead to the brothers selling him into slavery, this is going to lead to the brothers plan that we will think about next week of killing him.

[ 19 : 44 ] But it's important to highlight even here that what we'll see next week, that what we'll think about next week with this plan to kill him, what we'll think about next week with this plan to sell him into slavery, it wasn't a one-off, it wasn't a spur of the moment thing.

It wasn't that they saw Joseph coming and they thought, let's kill him. Rather this hatred, this dislike, this distrust of Joseph has been building for months if not years.

What we see next week will be the outpouring of it. What we see next week will be the outworking of it. But it's an attitude of heart that's been going on for a long time. If you listen to a policeman talk about a serious crime, about murder or rape, or if you watch any of those true crime documentaries, that's one of the things that often comes across.

If you listen to the policeman who's in charge of the investigation talk about it, they'll often say that it's rare for someone to jump in at murder. It's rare for someone to jump in at rape. Usually there'll be a history of offending behind it. Usually there'll be a pattern behind it.

You might start off with a little bit of low-level drug dealing. It might start off with a fight outside a pub and criminal damage or grievous bodily harm or whatever it is and build up from there.

[ 21 : 04 ] Their offending history builds up from there. So too here, with these brothers, their actions don't start and end next week. Their actions don't start and end when they decide to sell Joseph into slavery.

Their actions have been building for a long time. It's a consistent pattern of behavior that they've shown. They hate Joseph when they see his coat. They hate Joseph when they see that their father loves him more than them. They hate Joseph when he has this dream. It's a consistent pattern of life.

And it's a reminder to us that we need to be watching our hearts. Watching our attitudes. Watching our words. Because bitter thoughts, bitter words, bitter attitudes grow and grow and grow and grow and grow until they've taken over our whole lives.

So what's the dream? Why did it cause such consternation amongst the brothers? Why did it cause such outrage amongst them? But we see the answer in verse 7.

Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field and behold my sheaves arose and stood upright and behold your sheaves gathered round it and bowed down to my sheaf.

[ 22 : 23 ] Now set against the background, we can see why that might be so incendiary, can't we? The brothers don't miss the implication. They don't miss what Joseph is saying. They don't miss what Joseph is trying to communicate to them.

We see that in verse 8, don't we? His brothers said to him, Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us? Are we going to worship you? Are you going to rule over us? Are you going to be king over us?

Now remember, Joseph is his father's favourite. Joseph is the apple of his father's eye. And he's essentially saying to his brothers, look, one day, one day you're going to come and bow down before me. One day you're going to come and worship me.

He's already the favourite and here he is saying in effect that you will bow down before me. Of course this would have upended the social structure of the day, wouldn't it? I mean the social structure of the day would have said that the blessing, it would have said that the inheritance would have flowed through the firstborn son.

It would have been expected to flow through Reuben. If anyone was going to be bowed down in worship to, if anyone was going to be bowed down to, it would be Reuben, not Joseph the

youngest. And yet here is Joseph upending that social contract.

[ 23 : 49 ] Here is Joseph upending that social expectation saying in effect the youngest will be the most significant. It's the way of God's kingdom, isn't it?

It's how God's kingdom works. It's what we're taught by Jesus Christ himself, that the first will be last and the last will be first, that the least in the kingdom of God will be greater than the greatest of the kingdom of the earth.

The key thing for us is to be in the kingdom of God, to be part of the kingdom because then we're truly great. No matter our social status, no matter what it's like in this life, if we're part of the kingdom of God, then we are truly great.

So we've seen Joseph upset his brothers, we've seen Jacob upset his sons, we've seen Joseph in his dream upending the social society of the day. And then thirdly, finally, we want to think about this upstart, this upstart, and we see that in verses 9 through 11.

We see that it begins again with another dream, verse 9. He dreamed another dream. But notice that this time the dream has grown in scope.

[ 25 : 02 ] Notice this time that the dream has expanded, hasn't it? Because first time it was the brothers, first time it was these other 11 sheaves that came and bowed down to his sheep. But notice what we're told in verse 9.

Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and 11 stars were bowing down to me. Again, the implication's clear. Now not only is it his brothers, these 11 stars that are bowing down to him, but now it's also the sun and the moon and again it's clear that he means his father and his mother.

His mother having died, bearing Benjamin of course, are bowing down and worshipping him. Jacob, to his credit, kind of finally realises, look, this isn't right, this can't go on, the boy's going too far, the boy needs to be reined in.

There's no need for him to tell this dream to anyone. There's no need for him to keep telling these dreams to people. It's clear to Jacob, I think finally, that Joseph's really just trying to wind his brothers up.

It's clear that he's trying to get one over on them. It's clear that he's trying to make himself better than them. And he says, look, enough. Am I going to bow down to you as your mother?

[ 26 : 21 ] Going to bow down to you? But what can we take from this though? What does it mean for us this evening is it a message about how God communicates his plans and purposes to us?

Should we be interpreting our dreams literally and taking them as divine communication? No. I think rather it's a reminder to us not to put ourselves in the place of God.

It's a reminder that the only one who is worthy of worship and praise this evening is God himself. It's the one to whom we come to God this evening the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're going to see as we continue this life study of Joseph we're going to see that these dreams come true. That his brothers would one day come and bow before him. That his brothers one day would look to him to be their saviour.

But as we've been reminded this evening Joseph was an imperfect saviour. It's a reminder to us this evening to come to the perfect saviour.

[ 27 : 32 ] The one who had no sin. The one who offered his life as a sacrifice for sin so that we might come to know God. It's a reminder to us this evening to keep looking to Christ.

The only saviour of mankind. And the only saviour from sin. Amen. Amen.