

## Genesis 37 Joseph in Canaan

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### Overview

37:1 is transitional from ch. 36. It marks a contrast between Esau's descendants "in the land of their possession" (i.e., Seir, 36:43) and Jacob "in the land of Canaan." Jacob is finally home, in the land God promised to him. Note the contrast between Jacob's "dwelling" and his father's being "a stranger." It seems as though the heir of the promise will finally be able to enjoy the land. But affairs are set in motion that will once more remove him and his family from this land.

On a larger scale, ch. 37 opens the last section of Genesis. The overarching theme of this section is 50:20, "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." We will see much "thinking evil" throughout these chapters, but behind it all is the sovereign Lord, producing good. Ps 76:10, "surely the wrath of man shall praise thee."

### 2-11, Provocations in Hebron

The whole story revolves around the antagonism between Joseph and his brothers. This antagonism is further evidence of tension that we have already seen within the family, resulting from Jacob's multiple wives:

- The sense of alienation expressed by Simon and Levi over the rape of their full sister Dinah and Jacob's lack of involvement (34:31 "our sister");
- Reuben's defilement of Bilhah after the death of Rachel, to strengthen his own mother's position in the family (35:22)

*Application:* the whole history of Jacob and his wives warns us about the dangers of polygamy. Tensions between children of different mothers but the same father are legendary (cf. Cinderella). It is tragic enough when they result from death and remarriage, but even worse when they are caused by our own sin through divorce and remarriage. Let this history warn us about the need to be steadfast in cleaving each one to the wife of his youth (Mal 2:14, 15).

This general tendency to division flared up in the case of Joseph. The section opens by describing three reasons. The first is justified and is Joseph's fault. The second is justified but is not Joseph's fault. The third is not justified, but Joseph does not handle it wisely. This range of possibilities reminds us of 1 Peter 2:11-20. We should do all we can to "have [our] conversation honest among the Gentiles," but even then recognize that they will still oppose us. They will oppose us because we are the Lord's, but we should not let this excuse ungraciousness or a hidden pride on our part. There is plenty of the flesh in each of us to provide a stumbling block to others.

- Rom 14:13, Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way.
- 1 Cor 10:32, Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:
- 2 Corinthians 6:3 Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:

## 2, Tattling: Justified and Joseph's Fault

### Context

**Joseph, being seventeen years old.**—This makes Jacob 108, because Jacob is 130 (45:6) nine (7+2) years after Joseph is 30 (41:46). Isaac is still alive and 168 years old.

**the sons of Bilhah and ... Zilpah.**—These are Dan, Naphthali, Gad, and Asher. Benjamin presumably is too young to be out in the fields. The other six are the sons of Leah, who are not part of this group with which Joseph is working. We meet them later in the story, tending flocks far from Hebron, in Dothan. Apparently, the sons of the handmaids were responsible for the flocks near home, while the older sons had begun to travel farther abroad in search of pasture. Joseph is working with the sons of the handmaids

- because they are closer to home, and his father wants him nearby;
- because they are closer in age to himself;
- because as Leah's sons, they would be antagonistic to him, while the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid, would be more likely to defend him.

**The lad.**—The Hebrew word has the sense of “servant,” much as an earlier age used “boy” of domestics. We should probably read, “he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah ...” As the youngest, he would be liable to be bullied. We can imagine that they gave him the dirtiest, least pleasant jobs.

### Joseph's report

**their evil report.**—Some commentators try to justify Joseph's report as a legitimate impartial reporting of things that Jacob needed to know. No doubt there may have been slights committed by the brothers toward Joseph, as the younger son. But the Hebrew word *dibbah* has negative overtones wherever it is used. It suggests two things: deception, and antagonism toward the person or thing being described. Consider some specific examples.

We see *deception* in the three uses of the term (Num 13:32; 14:36, 37) to describe the report brought by the spies concerning the land of Canaan. Read 13:25-33 to compare the initial report with the slanted version that was given to oppose Caleb's recommendation to go in: From a land “that floweth with milk and honey” (v.27), it becomes “a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof.” The “evil report” is clearly slanted.

The aspect of *antagonism* is clear in Jer 20:10 (“defaming”). He has been imprisoned for predicting the fall of Jerusalem, and his enemies are watching for him to say something so that they can turn him in and “take our revenge on him.” See also Psa 31:13; Ezek 36:3.

Prov 10:18 places the word in the same category with flattery. “He that hideth hatred *with* lying lips, and he that uttereth a **slander**, is a fool.” Here *dibbah* “slander” is compared with insincere flattery. The first half of the verse says good things insincerely; similarly, the latter half says bad things without grounds. Both are inaccurate, and both are motivated by deception.

Another way to look at this noun is to review the people who are responsible for producing *dibbah*. They are without exception of ill repute:

- the unbelieving spies in Num 13-14

- David's enemies in Ps 31:14
- A fool in Prov 10:18
- Someone who seeks to shame you in Prov 25:10
- Jeremiah's enemies in 20:10
- Those who mock the land of Israel in Ezek 36:3

This is the company to which Joseph belongs by conducting himself in this way.

Moses' use of this word suggests that Joseph is not simply bringing a fair and impartial report of what has happened in the field, but (as siblings so often do) is tattling, carrying tales about his brothers to enhance his own standing in his father's eyes. His behavior falls under the category of being a "talebearer" or "slanderer" that is forbidden in texts such as Prov 11:12-13 and Lev 19:16.

### **3-4, Favoritism: Justified but not Joseph's Fault**

#### *Jacob's Favoritism*

It is natural that Jacob should have preferred Joseph, the son of his favorite wife, born later in his life than the others (save Benjamin, who is still an infant). (*Jacob came to Haran at age 57, and his first child would have been born about eight years later, at 65; Joseph isn't born until Jacob is 91, just about to leave Haran. The usage in 44:20 goes against the Targum's interpretation that Joseph is precocious.*) Jacob should have recalled the unhappiness that came in his own family through parental favoritism (25:28, "And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob"). On the contrary, he marks his preference for Joseph by making him a special coat.

There is some disagreement over the nature of this coat. The AV follows the ancient versions, which describe it as multicolored. But the actual term used denotes the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, suggesting a long, full-sleeved coat. An Akkadian term suggests a ceremonial robe with gold embroidery, which would likely be both variegated and long. In any case, it is not a robe suited to hard labor, but one more appropriate for an overseer, marking Joseph's exalted position in his father's eyes.

It is interesting that Moses here uses the name of "Israel" rather than "Jacob." While showing favoritism may have been unwise, Jacob certainly is prescient here, recognizing Joseph's capabilities and anticipating his later rise to power.

#### *The Brothers' Response*

**they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.**—So great was their jealousy for Israel's favor that they were unable even to speak a kind word to him.

### **5-11, Dreams: Unjustified, but handled poorly**

Joseph's dreams are revelations from the Lord, and Joseph cannot to be blamed for them. But there is some evidence that he reports them in a less than conciliatory tone of voice.

There are two dreams. The first shows Joseph's superiority over his brothers; the second includes his parents. Joseph explains the first only to his brothers, but includes his father in the explanation of the second, showing that he understands their import.

### *5-8, Superiority over his brothers*

The first dream deals with his relationship with his brothers.

**6, Hear, I pray you.**—The use of *Sim)u na)* rather than simply *Sim)u* is interesting. Although *na)* means “please,” when used with *Sim)u* it always adds a sense of rebuke and reflects tension between speaker and hearer, unlike simple *Sim)u*, which is not marked for tension (tense: Judg 9:7; Isa 1:10; relaxed: Psa 34:11; 49:2; 66:16; Prov 4:1). Thus his words reflect a certain imperiousness, almost an “I told you so” attitude, perhaps anticipating a resistance on the part of the hearers. Note these examples of the expression that Joseph uses:

- Num 12:6, the Lord's rebuke to Aaron and Miriam in their challenge to Moses
- Num 16:8, Moses' rebuke to the sons of Korah at the time of their rebellion
- Num 20:10, Moses' rebuke to the people who complained about lack of water.

Note the threefold “behold.” He emphasizes each point of the dream, seeking to make it as vivid as possible to them.

One wonders whether he might not have been better off not sharing his dreams with them at all, given the tension already in the family. That he did share them may be attributed to his desire to defend himself in an oppressive, competitive atmosphere.

**7, We were binding sheaves in the field.**—He pictures himself working with his brothers, the environment in which they had been abusive to him, and suggests that the time will come when the tables will be turned.

**8, they hated him yet the more.**—Lit., “they added to hate him.” Moses is making a pun with Joseph's name, which means, “he will add” (that is, Rachel's desire that God would grant her another son). His name promised an increase in prosperity and blessing, but in interactions with his brother, it leads only to an increase in hatred.

**for his dreams, and for his words.**—Note the two elements: his dreams and his words. Both the content and the means of presentation were offensive to them. “His words” may also go back to the tattling in v.2.

Yet in hating him for his dreams, they are setting themselves against God, for dreams and visions were the two means of God's revelation to people at this time (Num 12:6).

### *9-11, Superiority over the whole family*

**9 another dream.**—Joseph's next dream anticipates his superiority over his parents as well as his brothers, and he reports it to his father.

**10 his father rebuked him.**—Jacob must be aware of the tension that is growing between Joseph and the other sons, and when he hears of this dream, he tries to rein in Joseph's arrogance.

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The word “rebuke” is a very strong term, most often applied to God’s rebuke of the wicked, the nations, or the forces of nature (in the OT, the Red Sea, Ps 106:9; in the NT, Matt 8:26, the Sea of Galilee). The LXX sometimes translates it, “threaten.” It implies strong emotion and authority on the part of the rebuker.

The form of the rebuke demands that Joseph explain what seems irrational. Compare similar rebukes elsewhere:

- Exod 18:14, Moses’ father in law asks him to explain what he is doing with the people all day long.
- Jos 22:16, the congregation asks Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh to explain their altar.
- 2 Sam 12:21, David’s servants ask why he mourned for a living child but arose for a dead one.
- 2 Kings 18:19 = Isa 36:4, Rabshakeh asks Hezekiah why he thinks a god can deliver him, when other gods have proven impotent.
- Neh 2:19, Sanballat and associates ask Nehemiah why he is building the wall.
- Neh 13:17, Nehemiah asks the nobles why they are profaning the Sabbath.

His subsequent statement reinforces this. It is inconceivable that a son should expect his parents to bow down to him. “Thy mother” here may be Leah as his stepmother, or the astral imagery may encourage Jacob to think ahead to the afterlife.

There is some tension between the sternness of Jacob’s rebuke and the potential, which he ought to have realized, that the dream might be from the Lord. Perhaps he is trying to moderate the brothers’ anger.

In most instances of rebukes of this sort, the person being challenged offers an explanation, but Joseph is silent.

**his brethren envied him.**—This time, their attitude is described as envy rather than hatred. This shows their deep wickedness. They would do it too, if they could.

**his father observed the saying.**—Jacob is wise enough to realize that there may be more to this dream than the ambitions of an arrogant teen-ager, and experienced enough in the ways of God to wait trustingly to see what develops. Often the best course of action when confronted with perplexities is to note them for future reference, and trust in the Lord to work out the details.

### *Parallels to Luke 2*

There are several notable parallels between the second dream and Luke 2, and these in turn are part of a much larger system of parallels that we will observe.

	Gen 37	Luke 2
Unexpected superiority of young boy to his elders	7 For, behold, we <i>were</i> binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. 8 And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams,	46 And ... they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. 47 And all that heard him were astonished at

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	and for his words. 9 And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.	his understanding and answers. 48 And when they saw him, they were amazed:
Parental rebuke	10 his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What <i>is</i> this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?	and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.
Parental memory	11 his father observed the saying.	51 his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

Significance: Luke clearly has Joseph in mind in writing about the Lord Jesus. There are many other parallels as well: of both Joseph and our Lord, it is recorded that he is

- beloved of his father,
- whom he obeys faithfully,
- the subject of prophecies concerning his role as deliverer,
- the object of his brethren's hatred and jealousy,
- so that they conspired to destroy him,
- stripped of his clothing
- and sold for silver,
- the object of false accusations,
- condemned along with two criminals,
- yet recognized by his people after they had given him up for dead,
- sent by God to preserve his people.

These points of similarity, and many others, result from an important transition that has taken place in the people of God. During the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), the chosen people were one small family. Now they expand out to become a people, twelve families that are rapidly multiplying. The time has come for God to deal with them as a people. He deals also with us as a people, under similar principles. These common principles naturally lead to similarities between their redeemer and ours. In both cases:

- The people are sinful. We cannot understand God's dealings with us unless we begin with this fundamental truth, that all have sinned and come short of God's glory. Joseph's brothers sinned in their hatred and jealousy for him. We sin in our selfishness, pride, and seeking to gratify ourselves.
- The solution to this problem is not democratic. It does not arise from within a society by its own progress—sin is too powerful for that to happen. Morally and spiritually, societies degrade. They do not improve. We have seen in each generation of the patriarchs that the faith of the father is not inherited by the children. God must intervene to deliver his people from their sin.

- God delivers his people through one of their own, whom he chooses and sends. He does not send an angel to preach to them, but works through human representatives. In the Old Testament, these were people like Joseph, Moses, the judges, and the prophets. In the New Testament, he sends forth his own son, the Lord Jesus. But he does not send him in angelic form as he did so often in the Old Testament. Rather, he sends him made of a woman, in the likeness of sinful flesh, as a man, to become one of the people whom he will redeem.
- Because of sin, we naturally hate the one whom God sends to save us. We do not want to admit that we are sinful, that we cannot save ourselves. We resent the privileged position of the chosen redeemer, and we persecute him. Yet in spite of our hatred, the savior loves and forgives us.
- Redemption costs something. The redeemer must suffer in order to be able to save. Joseph had to go through slavery and prison to reach the position where he could deliver his family. Our Lord had to carry our sins in his own body on the tree in order to be able to forgive us.

These are universal principles in God's dealings with his people. Sin, the need for a savior, who must be our kinsman, the exchange of hatred for love, and the price that must be paid—all these are integral to how God has set up the world. We will find them reflected wherever in Scripture God delivers his people. The story of Joseph is the first such episode, and thus the parallels between it and the ultimate fulfillment are particularly striking.

## 12-36, Revenge in Dothan

The previous section established Joseph's position of priority and suggested some shortcomings on his part:

- tattling on his brothers
- a boastful attitude concerning God's blessings to him.

But he is not essentially a bad child, nor are his brothers righteous, as this section shows. Two points made here are his commendable devotion and submission to his father, and his brothers' wickedness toward him.

### 12-14, Dispatch to Shechem

Observe in this mission the *setting*, the father's *command*, and the son's *willing obedience*.

**12 his brethren.**—Probably the sons of Leah, the older six, since we already know that the younger ones were occupied closer to home. The only ones named in this section (Reuben and Judah) are Leah's sons.

**The Setting.**—The choice of Shechem for grazing seems unusual:

- It is a long distance (about 50 miles, or 80 km, four days' journey) from the family encampment. Why go so far?
- It would expose them to the hostility of neighboring villages in view of their slaughter of the people of Shechem in ch. 34. (Compare Jacob's fear in 34:30.)

Why would they undertake such a journey?

- Do they want to inquire into the state of the parcel of land that Jacob purchased there (33:19)?
- Is this an instance of the recklessness of youth, seeking adventure by courting danger? Maybe this is the ancient equivalent of bungee jumping or sky diving.
- Possibly, it is an assertion of their independence. They are so fed up with Joseph's pretensions to superiority and their father's encouragement of him that they want to get away from it all.

**13a, 14a, The Mission.**—Israel is concerned for his sons. Note the use of his spiritual name. He recognizes the danger associated with Shechem, and wants to be assured that all is well with them. So he sends Joseph to bring news.

**13b, 14b, Joseph's Obedience.**—Joseph unhesitatingly accepts the assignment. He might have reason to fear—not only the Shechemites, but also his brothers. But his love for his father is so great that he gladly undertakes the mission.

**NT Reflections.**—The gospels clearly teach that this same pattern marks the mission of the Lord Jesus.

- We, like the children of Jacob, have distanced ourselves from our heavenly father. In doing so we face unnecessary risks, but so great is our animosity for him that we prefer the Shechemites to the father's house.
- He has sent his beloved son, not only to learn of our welfare, but to guarantee it.
  - 1 John 4:14, "the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world."
  - John 3:16,17, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."
- The Son willingly obeys the father.
  - John 4:34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.
  - John 8:28 I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.
  - John 6:38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.
  - John 17:4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

### **15-17a, Direction to Dothan**

The next episode emphasizes to us the degree of Joseph's obedience to his father. On arriving in Shechem, he is unable to find his brothers. At this point, he has satisfied the literal requirements of his father's instruction to go to Shechem. He could have returned home reporting that they



were not in Shechem after all. Instead, he continues to roam about the area, until a field laborer asks him what he is looking for. His attitude, “I seek my brethren” (v.16), is in stark contrast with the attitude of Cain, who insisted, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (4:9). In spite of their animosity toward him, Joseph’s faithfulness to the father’s purpose leads him to persevere in seeking them out. He goes another day’s journey (13 miles, 21 km) to Dothan to find them.

### **18-22, The Brothers Plot**

The kindness of a random stranger, whom Joseph meets as he is wandering in the field, is in stark contrast to the treatment that Joseph receives at the hands of his own brothers. Their *attitude* of hatred, manifest in vv. 2-11, here turns to *action*. This action has four stages, outlined in the next four paragraphs: their plan, their execution of it, their refusal to repent, and the cover-up toward Jacob.

**18 they saw him afar off.**—Probably, he was marked by the coat he wore (v.23).

**they conspired.**—The word is always negative, and refers to deceptive, knavish behavior. This specific form describes the attitude of the Egyptians toward Israel during their period of enslavement in Psa 105:25.

This is the first step in their sin. They deliberately plan Joseph’s destruction. Here is the difference between a sin of ignorance and one of high hand (Num 15:22ff). Compare our Lord’s instruction in Matt 15:17-20 that a person is defiled by what issues from his heart. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. Thus while the Pharisees condemned murder and adultery, our Lord condemns hatred and lust (Matt 5).

**19 this dreamer cometh ... 20 what will become of his dreams.**—Their comments show the focal point of their animosity. It was not the tattling that showed Joseph’s sense of superiority, nor the special coat that showed Jacob’s favor, but the dreams that implied God’s favor toward him.

Nothing offends the natural man more than the notion that God is sovereign in his creation, and has determined different destinies for different people. The flesh is confident that it can defeat the arrogance of an adversary, or even the advantages conferred by other people, but the idea that God has set bounds that we cannot overcome in our own strength is absolutely repulsive.

As in Joseph’s case, this animosity is typically reflected against the believer.

**Two Plans.**—They agree in their hatred for Joseph, but differ on what is to be done to him.

Most of the brothers want to slaughter him (a more vivid term than that used in v.18, which simply means “put to death”).

Reuben, though, advocates simply abandoning him in a pit.

- The story he promotes to his brothers is that Joseph will die of natural causes. Thus they can achieve their aim without personally soiling their hands with fraternal blood. That they accept his proposal shows the deceitfulness of the human heart, how it seeks to be justified by technicalities without confronting its own inward wickedness.
  - They think their sin is mitigated because it isn’t as bad as it could be. But the measure of sin is not the nature of the deed, but the authority of the one whose

law is rejected. An Israeli proverb claims, *din pru'a kedin me'ah*, the judgment for stealing a cent is the same as for stealing a dollar.

- Contrast the teaching of our Savior, “whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment,” Matt 5:22. The contrast between these shows how man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart (1 Sam 16:7). In the end, it’s not the deed itself at all, but the attitude of the heart, that constitutes sin.
- In fact, he intends to deliver Joseph and return him to his father. Perhaps he is seeking to repair the rift between Jacob and himself that resulted from his indiscretion with Bilhah in 35:22.

At this point, Reuben could have ended the whole affair by standing up to his brothers. He is the eldest. But he doesn’t want to be rejected by them. Like the chief rulers who believed on Jesus secretly (John 12:42-43), he wanted to protect Joseph while having his brothers think he hated him (John 12:42-43: “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: 43 For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”) God calls us to go to Jesus “outside the camp, bearing his reproach” (Heb 13:13).

### **23-24, Joseph in the Pit**

The second step in their sin is that they carry out their plan.

**23 unto his brethren.**—Note Moses’ emphasis on their relation. These are not bandits or friends of Shechem, who might be expected to be cruel to him, but his brethren, those with an obligation to love and care for him. Compare the sentiment in Psalm 55:12-13, usually understood as prophetic of Judas’ relation to our Lord: “For *it was* not an enemy *that* reproached me; then I could have borne *it*: neither *was it* he that hated me *that* did magnify *himself* against me; then I would have hid myself from him: 13 But *it was* thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.”

**they stript Joseph out of his coat.**—The coat was an emblem of oversight and authority. Adding insult to injury, they are not content to abandon him to death, but must first make clear to him that they reject their father’s preference for him, and disdain any notion of his authority over them.

**Cast.**—This is not a gentle action, but what they would have done with a dead body (v.20). They tossed him in. Used in Exod 1:22 of throwing babies into the river to drown.

**24 a pit.**—Hand-dug pits were often used to capture rain water for later use. While most prominent in the Iron Age (1200 BC), they are attested in the Bronze Age (G.W. Ahlström (1993), *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*, Sheffield Academic Press, p. 337), so Joseph’s pit might fall into this category. The note that there was no water in it suggests that one might expect there to be water, but this might have been at the end of the dry season when cisterns were running low.

Such a pit has a narrow mouth and widens out below. The narrow mouth is intended to reduce the risk of falling in and to cut back on evaporation, but it also makes it impossible to climb out.

### **25-28, Sale to the Ishmaelites**

The way in which they have chosen to deal with Joseph opens up the possibility that they might repent of their sin and deliver him. (That was why Reuben recommended it.) The third step in their sin is that they do not so repent.

**25 they sat down to eat bread**, oblivious to the cries and pleas that Joseph must have been uttering after so brutal a treatment. It is likely that Jacob had sent food with Joseph, as Jesse sent food with David to his brothers in a later era (1 Sam 17:17-18). If so, we can imagine their hypocrisy in enjoying their father's gift after having so abuse his favorite son.

**a company of Ishmeelites ... from Gilead.**—"Gilead," named after the covenant between Jacob and Laban in Gen 31, refers to the area east of Jordan stretching from the Bashan in the north to the plains of Moab that begin around the Dead Sea. To get to Egypt, they must make their way through the central mountain range. One such route passes by Dothan (and in fact is probably part of the reason for the emergence of a city at this location).

**26, Judah said.**—Note his two motives, and the order in which he presents them.

- What profit is it if we slay our brother?
- He is our brother and our flesh.

His concern for "our brother and our flesh" shows that he has perhaps a twinge of guilt over what they have done so far. But his sinful heart deceives him into thinking that if they sell the boy, they won't be guilty for anything that happens to him. This is the next step in the false moralizing that Reuben initiated.

- Reuben: If we leave him to perish in the pit, we won't be guilty of shedding his blood.
- Judah: If we sell him to the merchants, we won't even know when he dies, so our guilt is less.

Both are captious and hypocritical. They have already sinned in their hearts by plotting against him in the first place. Now, as their consciences prompt them to repent, they instead rationalize.

Judah's first motive is even more telling: "what profit is it?" If he can make a shekel out of his brother, so much the better. He is showing here the same trait in the flesh that motivated Jacob to trick Esau out of the birthright.

twenty *pieces* of silver.—This is the typical valuation of a slave in the prime range of 5-20 years (Lev 27:5). Wenham suggests from LH 261 that the salary of a shepherd is on the order of 8 units per year, so this would be a tidy sum.

**Ishmeelites...Midianites.**—The distinction between these terms has been used to defend multiple sources, but this is unlikely. Judg 8:24 shows an overlap between the two groups of Abraham's descendants. Perhaps "Ishmaelites" had become a general designation for desert dwellers, while "Midianites" is more specific to the Keturite offspring.

### **29-35, Deception of Jacob**

The fourth step in their sin is their heartless deception of their father.

**29 Reuben returned.**—He apparently was not there when the merchants passed by. Now he openly confesses to his brothers his desire to deliver Joseph, but it is too late.

**31-32 Joseph's coat ... a kid of the goats ... brought it to their father.**—The great irony of the situation is that now Jacob is deceived just as he had deceived his father Isaac years earlier, with a garment and a goat. Moses wants us to see how children follow in the sinful paths of their parents. We cannot pass on to our children our own faith and redemption; God must work in them independently.

**33-35 Jacob's mourning.**—One might mourn a week for a parent (50:10, when Jacob himself died), or a month for a great leader (Moses, Dt 34:8), but Jacob resigns himself to perpetual mourning.

Review the steps of their sin.

- They plan it. Their hatred overwhelms them. This is where the real offense occurs.
- They execute it, with hypocritical rationalizations that it isn't as bad as it could be.
- They refuse to repent when they have opportunity.
- They cause pain to others in lying to cover up their sin.

We should pray that God would embue us with a deep hatred of sin and give us the courage to turn from it at every point.

### **36, Joseph Arrives in Egypt**

But Joseph is not dead. He arrives in Egypt, where he is sold into the household of an influential official. "Captain of the guard" is literally "chief of the executioners," and he is responsible for the royal prison (40:3). Joseph finds himself right at the center of royal intrigue.