

GENESIS

Why The Beginning Matters

Study 22

Joseph and Judah's Descent

Genesis 37-40

Genesis 37: Joseph the Shepherd becomes Joseph the Slave

Genesis 37:1-8

Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

This is the account of Jacob's family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

1a) Objective Question. Select all that apply. According to the video lecture, which of the following is true?

- A. We know for certain which Pharaoh was in power in the time of Joseph
- B. If Joseph was 17, his older brothers are probably full-grown adults with families of their own
- C. We don't know for sure whether Joseph was a *noti* snitch, or the brothers were really doing something bad
- D. Genesis 12 through 50 are historical narratives (because they happened in real history) but they are also narratives because they tell the story of history in a particular way with an emphasis on various characters, the plot, narration and how the story is told
- E. Joseph seems to be able to interpret what God is trying to speak to him through his dreams.

Genesis 37:17b-36

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a

hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?” Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, “We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.”

He recognized it and said, “It is my son’s robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.” Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.” So his father wept for him. Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

b) Objective Question. Select all that apply. According to the video lecture, which of the following is true?

- A. It takes at least a few hours for Joseph to reach the brother’s shepherding location, not just a few minutes away from home
- B. Reuben although the eldest, seems to have lost respect among the brothers and was not even informed of the plan to sell Joseph
- C. Ishmaelites and Midianites merchants can refer to the same group of people where Ishmaelites refers to the ethnicity or race and Midianites refer to the location they are from.
- D. The death of Joseph made Jacob love the sons equally.

c) Discussion Questions. Genesis 35:22 might give a clue on how Reuben lost the respect of his brothers. How would you feel about Reuben if you are one of Bilhah’s sons who knew that Reuben slept with their mom in Genesis 35:22?

Genesis 35:22

While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.

Genesis 38: Judah's Descent and Realisation

Genesis 38:1-19

At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah. There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and made love to her; she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, who was named Er. She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan. She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah. It was at Kezib that she gave birth to him. Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death.

Then Judah said to Onan, "Sleep with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother." But Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death also. Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Live as a widow in your father's household until my son Shelah grows up." For he thought, "He may die too, just like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's household.

After a long time Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him. When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep," she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.

When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you."

"And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked.

"I'll send you a young goat from my flock," he said.

"Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" she asked.

He said, "What pledge should I give you?"

"Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. After she left, she took off her veil and

put on her widow's clothes again.

Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. He asked the men who lived there, "Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?"
"There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here," they said.

2) a) Objective Question. Select all that apply. According to the video lecture, which of the following is true?

- A. Judah is depicted as a negative character in most parts of Genesis 38
- B. Judah left the promised land and married a Canaanite against his great-grandfather, Abraham's orders and tradition
- C. Judah's sons Er and Onan are evil, they should have not shared the same woman
- D. Judah dishonored Tamar by not providing for her and sending her back to her father's house, and not giving Shelah to Tamar, making her a rejected widow.
- E. Judah is the type of man who sleeps with shrine prostitutes.

Genesis 38:24-30

About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant."

Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!"

As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are."

Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again.

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand; so the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, "This one came out first." But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, "So this is how you have broken out!" And he was named Perez. Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out. And he was named Zerah.

b) Objective Question. Select all that apply. According to the video lecture, which of the following is true?

- A. Burning to Death for adultery or prostitution was not an Israelite practice but more likely a Canaanite practice
- B. Judah realizes he also deserves death for what he did when Tamar revealed the person who impregnated her
- C. Tamar was completely righteous for acting like a prostitute

D. Judah did not try to lie to get out of the situation and admitted it was true by publicly raising the twins as his sons (Genesis 46:12)

F. Judah showed some sign of repentance at the end of Genesis 38.

Genesis 39-40 Joseph's Slavery and Imprisonment

Genesis 39:1-6

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Genesis 39:19-23

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

3) a) Discussion Question. What is the recurrent theme in Genesis 39:1-6 and 19-12?

Although Joseph's status and situation 'did not improve', the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success for everything under Joseph's care, even in prison.

Genesis 40:12-15

"This is what it means," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."

Genesis 40:23

The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

b) Discussion Question. Who was Joseph depending on to get him out of prison?

Takeaway

Judah was portrayed negatively but showed signs of repentance at the end of Genesis 38. Despite Joseph's tragic situation, the Lord's hand was upon Joseph when he was serving in Potiphar's house and in the prison.

Case Study

Case 1 – Hypocrisy “She is more righteous than I”

Karen is a very religious Christian who goes to the Tenth Baptist church every Sunday. She gives exactly one-tenth (i.e. RM500, no more and no less) of her earnings when the offerings are collected. Her attendance was perfect as she never missed a Sunday (until the pandemic came). Karen makes sure she reads her Bible once every day and prays the same prayer consistently at a set time.

Unfortunately, she is a judgmental and uncompassionate woman.

Abby is another believer who attends the same church as Karen, but she sometimes misses coming on Sundays. This is due to her autoimmune disease, which causes her to have bouts of recurring fever. She is unable to earn a constant wage, which averages to about RM2000 a month but she always gives to the Manna Box. Due to her discouragement, Abby does not read her Bible and only prays occasionally.

In their LG, Karen meets Abby and they are put together in a breakout room on Zoom. They are asked to share about their personal life and they get to know one another.

Karen thinks much more highly of herself than Abby, as she judges Abby based on her outer appearance of what she does. She openly condemns Abby in the LG, saying that she could do better as a Christian by never missing church, giving more, reading her Bible, and praying every day just like her.

1) a) Discussion question. As a member of the LG, would you side with Karen or would you defend Abby? Why or why not?

b) Discussion question. Does Karen have the right to judge or condemn Abby?

Model Answer

Karen may have the right to make a judgment call about Abby's situation but certainly not the right to condemn Abby. The Lord Jesus teaches us to discern and judge righteously in John 7:24. *"Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."*

Karen needs to be discerning in how to help and assist Abby. However, she should not use her judgment to condemn Abby.

c) Discussion question. How can Matthew 7:1-5 and Matthew 9:13 be applied in this situation?

Model Answer

The context of Matthew 7:1-5 is not teaching us to not judge at all. However, it does teach us that if we were to judge others, we will be judged the same way.

Matthew 9:13 says "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Karen needs to grow in learning about God's true desire not in outward sacrifices, but in an inner transformation that increases the love and mercy of a person. Jesus had more to say about Pharisees than sinners.

d) Discussion question. By condemning Abby, Karen is actually also condemning herself. How is Karen being a hypocrite here?

Model Answer

There are a few things we can consider that Karen does hypocritically.

- First, Karen's attendance at church may be motivated to fulfill her own standards of righteousness. This comes off a little more obvious when she judges Abby's "godliness" based on attendance. Full attendance at church may mean that Karen is relying on that for being right with God, rather than trusting in Christ as her Saviour.
- Karen gives exactly one-tenth as part of her offering to the Lord. This is in opposition to being a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). She may be giving out of compulsion and out of obligation, rather than from her heart.

- In terms of her Bible reading and praying, Karen seems to make it her yardstick to measure another person's walk with God. What Karen needs to understand is the motive behind these exercises, rather than seeing prayer and Bible reading as an end in itself. For example, if it is done to tick the boxes just because we ought to do it, it is no longer from the heart. In this sense, Karen should examine herself, rather than be quick to condemn someone else.

Case 1.1 – Hypocrisy Continued

Due to Karen's persistent condemnation of Abby, Abby one day loses her temper and openly shouts back at Karen and a heated argument ensues. Karen takes this as an opportunity to complain to her LG leader about this incident and wants Abby to be removed from the LG.

Despite Abby's apologies, Karen remains resentful of Abby and does not forgive her.

2) a) Discussion question. Consider Matthew 18:21-35.

i) As a believer, how should Karen have responded?

Model Answer

As a believer, Karen should be more forgiving of Abby's actions. She has caused much grief to Abby through her constant judging, and she ought to be more aware of the consequences of her actions toward others. Even if she has not done anything to vex Abby, she should nevertheless still be forgiving towards Abby.

ii) Why?

Model Answer

An unforgiving heart seems to indicate that a person may have never actually experienced God's true forgiveness through the atoning work of Christ on the cross. The parable of the unforgiving servant tells us that we ought to forgive others who have wronged us because we have experienced forgiveness for our own wrongs against God.

A repentant person would understand what it means to repent and be forgiven and should show the same grace to others

b) Discussion question. As believers, we should look at our own faults before being quick to condemn others. Has there been a time we have wrongly accused others in a self-righteous manner? Share your experience.