

Lesson: Joseph, the Salvation of the Family, and the Promise (Genesis 36:1-38:30)

The narrative shift after the reestablishment of the family in Canaan. Isaac has died and now the vocation of carrying the promise rests with Jacob and his family. The story is about to focus primarily on the rise of Joseph and his calling to protect his family, and thereby, the promise that will save the world. How Joseph rises can appear disturbing, but it establishes that in God’s way of doing things rising often occurs through perilous descent. The story from here will primarily remain singularly focused except for chapters 36 and 38 which explore the founding of the family of Esau (chapter 36) and the beginnings of Judah’s family (chapter 38). We do not have a certain chronology for the sequence of these particular chapters.

Biblical Takeaways

1. ***Esau and the Kingdom of Edom (Gen 36:1-43):*** What may seem unexpected to us is something Moses would have found quite important. After ch. 35 closes with the discussion of the burial of Isaac by his two sons, Moses explores the lineage of Esau. Though Esau was not chosen to carry the promise, he was still blessed and continued the prosperity of the Abrahamic family. He established the kingdom of Edom. Ch. 36 describes his descendants in its development as a nation-state. Many centuries after, Israelites will refer to the Edomites as family (Num 20:14; Deut 23:7; Obad 1:10).
2. ***Judah and Tamar (Gen 38:1-30):*** The narrative also explores the beginnings of Judah’s family with a story about his profligate ways. He liked prostitutes. Judah ended up marrying a Canaanite woman. He had a son named Er whom God killed. He had another son named Onan whom God killed because he refused to continue his brother’s family. He asked his son Er’s wife to wait for him to give her his last son, Shelah but, seemingly, he never intended to give him to her. She, Tamar, ended up disguising herself as a prostitute and tricked Judah into sleeping with her. So he ended up fathering the next generation of his own line.
3. ***Joseph and his dreams (Gen 37:1-36)***
 - a. Joseph was his father’s favorite and he enjoyed his father’s attention. We learn a lesson about the dangers of favoritism within families throughout this story. Joseph was a tattletale and they hated him. Jacob showed his favoritism of Joseph by making him a coat while he participated in field work. KJV translates it as multicolored. But the Heb. may suggest that it is a long-sleeved coat. Both signify the same idea, his father made it so he didn’t have to work in the fields as hard as his brothers.
 - b. Joseph had two major dreams. The first suggested his brothers would bow before him. The second suggested his entire family would bow. After telling these to his brothers, they wanted to hurt him. After telling the second dream to his father, he rebuked him. But Jacob, being a dreamer himself, knew God was up to something, he kept the dream in his heart (v. 11).
 - c. Jacob sent Joseph out to the fields one fateful day to check on his brothers. Finding them in Dothan, the brothers, except for Reuben, planned to kill him. The thought was to kill him to destroy his dreams (v. 20). The problem, of course, was that Joseph did not manufacture these dreams. They came from God. You cannot kill what God was revealed.
 - d. Reuben was able to convince his brothers to not kill him but to throw Joseph in a pit with no water. Once Reuben walked away from them for a little while, Judah decided they could sell

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him into slavery. They sold him to Midianite/Ishmaelite traders who then sold him into Egypt to a man name Potipher.

- e. Reuben was distraught for the loss of his brother. He, being the oldest, feared what would happen since he was responsible for the boy. They decided to lie to their father. They took the coat, dipped it in goat’s blood, and claimed that Joseph had been killed by an animal. Jacob went into despair with grief for the loss of Joseph. But God was at work.