

WEEK
4

Oct. 5 - 11,
2026

Daily Bible readings

Genesis 37:1-36

Joseph: sold to save Monday, Oct. 5 Genesis 37:1-36

This is sibling rivalry of literally biblical proportions. Joseph is not the oldest of Jacob's sons, but he is the firstborn of Jacob's true love, Rachel, so he has a special place in Jacob's heart, and Jacob makes that clear.

One of the ways Jacob shows that love is giving Joseph a distinctive robe or cloak. Most of us are familiar with the musical "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," which takes its name from the common translation of this being a "coat of many colors." The wording isn't really clear; the New International Version translates it as being a "richly ornamented" robe. What is clear is that it was far nicer than what his brothers had, and didn't endear him to them.

In verse 2 we get the sense that Joseph, even into adulthood, was a bit of a tattletale—again, not a way to gain popularity among his brothers.

And finally, we're introduced to Joseph's special gifts of receiving meaningful dreams and being able to interpret dreams. Those gifts, along with his lack of diplomacy, get him in trouble in this chapter, though they will serve him well later on.

When the brothers ask, "What is this dream you had?," they see the dream only as an insult. God will turn it into their salvation.

When Joseph and his brothers are far away from the protection of his loving father, the brothers plot to kill Joseph.

The eldest, Reuben, suggests that rather than killing Joseph in cold blood they throw him into an empty cistern and leave him to die there—though Reuben plans to secretly return and save him.

But after the brothers dump him into the cistern, a group of traders pass by and another brother, Judah, suggests selling him into slavery instead. They do, getting 20 silver coins for their brother, who is taken on to Egypt to be sold.

The name "Judah" is a different form of the name "Judas." In Genesis, one of the 12 suggests selling a favorite son. In the New Testament, another Judas—one of another 12—will trade pieces of silver for a favored son.

As in the New Testament story, this act of brutal betrayal will be used by God to save his people, reminding us that God is able to redeem even the worst situations. Evil is still evil, but God can even use evil intent to the advantage of his people.

Daily reflections by Rev. Mark Fleming

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Monday meditation

Proverbs 3:31-32

Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways. For the Lord detests the perverse but takes the upright into his confidence.

Prayer focus

We pray for the wisdom to see violence for the trap that it is—and the courage to redeem the victims of violence through God's grace.

Judah's drama

Tuesday, Oct. 6

Genesis 38:1-30

Of all the sections of the Bible that should be labeled as Not Safe for Children's Time, Chapter 38 competes for top of the list.

Sexual practices have been a source of conflict between people and a challenge for the human relationship with God since the second chapter of Genesis. Here in Chapter 38 we see that nothing has changed. In a parallel to the modern day, it looks like the influence of the practices of the surrounding culture brings its own complications.

Before we get into the various moral issues raised, let's look at the basic story:

- Judah marries and his wife bears three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah.
- Judah finds a wife for Er. Her name is Tamar.
- Er is judged wicked for unknown reasons and dies.
- Judah tells Onan to lie with Tamar so that she might bear a child who would be considered the son of Er. This practice, called levirate marriage, was practiced in the region and later supported in Deuteronomy.
- Onan avoids getting Tamar pregnant by spilling his semen on the ground rather than completing his duty. This is judged evil and he dies.
- Judah, concerned that Shelah could also die if he marries Tamar, avoids having him enter a levirate marriage with her.
- Tamar presents herself to Judah as a shrine prostitute. Judah, not recognizing her, has sex with her. Shrine prostitution

was practiced in the region as a way of ensuring the fertility of the flocks.

- Later Tamar, pregnant by Judah, presents herself to Judah. He is enraged that she has acted as a prostitute and orders her burned to death.

- Tamar shows him his own property she took in pledge for payment. Judah recognizes both his hypocrisy and his failure to provide for her through Shelah. He says, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah."

- Tamar gives birth to twins. One of them, Perez, is an ancestor of King David and consequently considered an ancestor of Jesus.

Over the years, the rudimentary birth control effort by Onan has sometimes been misinterpreted as masturbation, though his sin is unrelated to it. The main wrongdoing here seems to be his failure to provide an heir for his brother and Tamar. (In a culture where a widow would be in a very bad position without children to support her, this would seriously harm Tamar).

We find it shocking that Judah would employ a prostitute. The fact that he may have done so as part of a local religious practice seems to make it an even greater offense against God.

Once again we see people who we look on as heroes of the faith showing themselves to be far less than we would like them to be.

But once again we also see God working to redeem even the worst acts of unfaithfulness and prove his own creative capacity to bring blessing from a bad situation.

Tuesday meditation

Proverbs 3:33-35

The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed. The wise inherit honor, but fools get only shame.

Prayer focus

Lord, let us avoid the curse of wickedness, whether it comes from the world around us or from inside our own heart.

Dream job

Wednesday, Oct. 7

Genesis 39:1 – 40:23

Joseph provides a change from many of the people we've met before in the Bible: he is honest, honorable and faithful. No wonder he didn't get along with the rest of the family.

In addition to his integrity, Joseph is a competent manager. When he becomes a slave in Potiphar's household, his abilities result in him quickly becoming a trusted servant, serving more as a chief of staff than as a slave.

After he ends up in jail even though he committed no wrongdoing (even because he committed no wrongdoing), he again turns a lowly position into a leadership role, becoming a trusted deputy to the head of the prison.

His ability to interpret dreams comes back into play, as he interprets the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners. Even here the story highlights both his abilities and his honesty; he shows the integrity of a prophet of God by speaking the truth as it was revealed to him even when the news will not be welcomed.

He also makes sure to acknowledge that his gift comes from God; it is not from his own wisdom. "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

While it seems at first glance that the two men he interprets dreams for are at the bottom of the social ladder, as personal servants to the Pharaoh they would have been in positions of trust. The cupbearer (perhaps a personal butler kind of a role) would have been in close proximity to the king and serve him drinks. He would have to be deeply trusted both because of the opportunity his role offered to poison the Pharaoh, but also because he would be likely to be around when matters of state were being discussed.

The baker would not have been quite so close, but would also need to be absolutely trustworthy as he provided food the Pharaoh ate.

While the cupbearer was in a position to help Joseph in gratitude for what Joseph had

done for him, he fails to—at least for a while.

While we don't usually look to Joseph for his similarities to Jesus, they have some striking things in common: Joseph is able to lead by serving, he is faithful to speak the truth, and he suffers as a result of his righteousness.

Wednesday meditation

Proverbs 4:1-9

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. For I too was a son to my father, still tender, and cherished by my mother.

Then he taught me, and he said to me, "Take hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them.

"Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown."

Prayer focus

God, grant me both wisdom and the heart of a servant, and let me use both for the building of your kingdom.

Foretelling a famine

Thursday, Oct. 8

Genesis 41:1-57

After two more years in prison, Joseph's fortunes change.

Pharaoh has had two dreams that disturb him greatly. The magicians and wise men who would usually advise him have no explanation for the dreams. The cupbearer, being in a position to hear what is going on, finally remembers Joseph and his gift of dream interpretation.

He tells Pharaoh of the young Hebrew in prison who rightly interpreted dreams

there, and Pharaoh sends for Joseph.

Joseph responds with humility, telling Pharaoh that he is unable to interpret the dreams, but that the God he serves can. “I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”

Again, Joseph seems to have more in common with the prophets who will come along much later than he has in common with his recent ancestors.

Joseph tells Pharaoh that both dreams have the same meaning: there will be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine. He then suggests that Pharaoh find a “discerning and wise man” to put in charge of preparing for the famine during the years of plenty.

Pharaoh realizes that Joseph is the discerning and wise man he is looking for, and makes Joseph the leader of the country second only to Pharaoh himself—not a bad outcome for someone who has been sold into slavery. He oversees the construction of cities to store excess grain in preparation for the coming famine while also starting a family and having two sons.

Finally, the famine comes.

Not only is Egypt able to feed its people, but it also gains wealth by selling food to surrounding nations.

Joseph, at least, has succeeded in becoming a blessing to the world.

Thursday meditation

Proverbs 4:10-17

Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many. I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.

When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.

Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way. For they cannot rest until they do evil; they are robbed of sleep till they make someone stumble. They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.

Prayer focus

God, grant me the wisdom and the righteousness to be a blessing to those around me.

A dream comes true

Friday, Oct. 9

Genesis 42:1-38

Chapter 42 begins a back-and-forth exchange between Joseph and his brothers.

Ten of the brothers journey to Egypt to buy grain, since they too are victims of the widespread famine. The fact that Jacob keeps Benjamin at home with him suggests he doesn't really trust his sons.

When they go before the governor, they don't recognize that it is their brother, Joseph. Of all the times in the Bible where people fail to recognize loved ones, this is probably the most reasonable. Joseph was 17 when they last saw him; now he is about twice that age. Egyptian dress and grooming would have been very different than what they were used to, and Joseph is speaking Egyptian and using an interpreter to communicate with them.

And, probably most significantly, they have no reason to imagine that this Egyptian governor is the brother they sold into slavery. By any reasonable expectation, they would believe Joseph is dead by now, a victim of harsh captivity—certainly not the wealthy, powerful man they are bowing down to.

Joseph could have responded in several ways.

He remembers the dreams of his brothers bowing before him. “I-told-you-so” must have been on his mind.

Retaliation was also within his reach. A simple “no” to the plea to buy grain would have led to the brothers' starvation with no effort from him. He clearly has the power to order people imprisoned—he could have sent them to rot in jail or worse.

He could have also forgiven them on the spot, creating a nice, neat happy ending to the tale.

Instead, he embarks on an elaborate plan that will ultimately reunite the family, but only after proving that there has been a real change of heart by the brothers. They insist on their innocence, proclaiming, "We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies." But rather than taking them at their word, he creates a test to prove their honesty.

This is instructive for relating to people who have seriously wronged us. Joseph shows no hatred or animosity toward them but is cautious about giving them any new opportunities to hurt him or anyone else. As Christians, we believe in forgiveness and reconciliation, but that doesn't immediately restore trust that has been broken.

Friday meditation

Proverbs 4:18-19

The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.

Prayer focus

Lord, keep me on the path of righteousness. Reveal the dangers along the way and keep me from falling into them.

Caution return

Saturday, Oct. 10

Genesis 43:1 – 44:2

The brothers return to Egypt to get more grain, but this time they take Benjamin along because of Joseph's warning not to return without him. Jacob is fearful to let him go but gives in out of desperation.

To say the brothers find their reception confusing is an understatement.

While they have gone to beg for grain, this mighty governor invites them to his house. This isn't what they expected, and they reasonably fear that he is going to accuse them of cheating him out of the silver that turned up in their bags on the last visit. The servant's reassurances may allay their

fears, but not their confusion.

Joseph himself assures them that he has received all he is owed. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver."

When the meal begins, more astonishing things happen.

The governor takes an unexplained interest in their father and in Benjamin, then retires to his own chamber before returning for a feast. Somehow they are seated at the table in order of age, something their host should have no way of knowing. Benjamin, the youngest, is treated as a special guest.

Often when bad things happen we can't understand why they are happening to us, but sometimes unexpected good fortune can be just as hard to understand. The brothers will find out soon what is happening, but for now they just have to accept it for what it is.

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Notice that the seating at the meal is strictly segregated. While Joseph is both wealthy and powerful, the Egyptians still will not share a meal with him since he is a Hebrew. The reference in verse 34 that the brothers were served food from Joseph's table should have told them that they had more in common with him than they realized.

Saturday meditation

Proverbs 4:20-27

My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body.

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you.

Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

Prayer focus

God, keep me focused on your words and leading, both in bad times and in good times.

Change, forgiveness and gratitude

Sunday, Oct. 11

Genesis 44:3 – 45:24

Joseph puts his brothers to a final test, setting it up to appear that Benjamin stole a valuable cup from him.

Not only is Benjamin Joseph's only full brother (the others have different mothers than he does), but he also looks to be Jacob's new favorite. If the brothers hold the same resentment toward him they had earlier held toward Joseph, they aren't likely to protect him.

Joseph finds, though, that the brothers are changed now. Whether it is for love of Benjamin or love of their father, they are willing to sacrifice their own freedom to protect him. So now, at long last, Joseph reveals to his brothers who he really is.

He says to them, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!" And rather than being angry with them for their betrayal, he says he is grateful that they provided the opportunity to save their lives from the famine. God, he said, had a purpose for him to be sold into slavery in Egypt.

Pharaoh learns that Joseph has been reunited with his family and, in gratitude for all Joseph has done, insists that Joseph's family be given gifts and move to Egypt.

The defeat and indignity of being sold into slavery is well in the past and this looks like a bright new future. We know, though, that the one who came to Egypt as a slave ended up with wealth and honor. We also know that the current invitation, surrounded with wealth and honor, will one day lead back to slavery.

Whether things look bad or good at the

moment, we don't ever know where they are leading.

Sunday meditation

Proverbs 5:1-6

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ear to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge.

For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths wander aimlessly, but she does not know it.

Prayer focus

Grant me the wisdom to discern between attractive danger and true wisdom. Protect me in the choices I make, both wise and unwise.

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