

## Genesis Chapter 37 - Commentary by Mike Wells

### Chapter 37 Overview:

The focus now shifts to the children of Jacob. In chapter 37 is the story of Joseph's ordeal at the hand of his jealous brothers. The chapter is divided into 3 parts: (1) the story of Joseph being Jacob's beloved son in verses 1-7; (2) Joseph hated by his brothers in verses 8-19; (3) Joseph betrayed by his jealous brothers in verses 20-27; and (4) Joseph sold into slavery in verses 28-36.

***Genesis 37 : 1-4 - 1 And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. 2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. 4 And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.***

- Jacob continued to live in Hebron, the land of his father.
- As a 17 year old young man, Joseph and his brothers were helping shepherd his father's flocks.
- He saw his brothers doing evil and unrighteous things and he told his father.
- There is a big difference in Joseph's character and behavior and his brothers.
- One reason was that he was young when his father got right with God as noted in **Genesis 32:10-11**.
- This apparently left a profound mark on Joseph.
- His older brothers had developed during the years of their father's less than godly living.
- Jealousy and hatred from his brothers toward him already existed.
- Indeed, "*the wicked watcheth the righteous and seeketh to slay him*" (**Psalm 37:32**).
- What made their jealousy worse was the perception that their father loved Joseph more than the rest of them.
- That was reinforced by his gift to Joseph of a coat of many colors.
- Common work day garments of that time were unremarkable and drab.
- A coat with colors woven or dyed into the fabric was expensive and noticeable.
- So, his jealous brothers "*hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.*"

***Genesis 37 : 5-8 - 5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. 6 And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: 7 For, behold, we were 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, and for his words.***

- The problem between Joseph and his eleven brothers was made worse by prophetic dreams which God had given him.
- He told his brothers that in one dream they all were binding sheaves in a field.

- His sheaf of grain stood upright and theirs “*made obeisance*” to his sheaf.
- The word translated as **obeisance** (hvx *shachah*) commonly has the sense to ‘**bow down.**’
- His brothers did not miss the significance of them someday bowing to Joseph.
- They then “*hated him yet the more.*”

**Genesis 37 : 9-11** - *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. 10 And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is 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? 11 And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.*

- Joseph had another dream in which “*the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.*”
- Not only did his brothers despise him even more, but even his father didn’t care for this dream and he rebuked him.
- They all understood the implications of his dream.
- Someday, the entire family (his father, mother, and brothers) would bow before Joseph.
- Though that is exactly what would happen later on, at the time, the idea did not make Joseph a popular person with his family especially his brothers.

**Genesis 37 : 12-19** - *12 And his brethren went to feed their father’s flock in Shechem. 13 And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. 14 And he said to him, Here am I. And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15 And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? 16 And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks. 17 And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. 18 And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. 19 And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.*

- His brothers had taken the family herd to Shechem.
- Jacob still was living near Hebron.
- “*The vale of Hebron*” means **the valley of Hebron** which was approximately a sixty-mile journey northward.
- Jacob called for Joseph to go and visit them and see how they were doing.
- The obedience of Joseph is shown clearly in his reply to his father, ‘*Here am I.*’
- Joseph made the journey, arrived in the vicinity of Shechem, and inquired of his brothers.
- He was told they had moved on to Dothan which was a short distance farther north.
- As he approached them in Dothan, they recognized who he was and immediately began to plot revenge.

- Not only had their jealousy brought forth hatred, their hatred now took them to brink of murder.
- The wicked character of his brothers now shined through.
- They snickered to each other, “*Behold, this dreamer cometh.*”

**Genesis 37 : 20-24** – *21 Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. 21 And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. 22 And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again. 23 And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; 24 And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.*

- Joseph’s brothers came up with a scheme in which they would kill him and cast him into a pit (an empty cistern).
- Reuben, the oldest, said, “*Let us not kill him.*”
- As the oldest, he knew his father would hold him responsible for his little brother.
- In addition, he may have wanted to repair his damaged relationship with his father for his affair with Bilhah, his father’s concubine.
- His plan was to detain Joseph in a pit and then send him back to their father.
- So, they listened to Reuben, stripped Joseph of his beautiful coat “*and cast him into a pit.*”
- Most theologians say that these pits were likely cisterns designed to collect rain water.
- It is noted how that this one had no water in it.

**Genesis 37 : 25-28** – *25 And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. 26 And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? 27 Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content. 28 Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.*

- A caravan of **Ishmeelites** (descendants of Ishmael) was passing by with camels loaded with spices headed for Egypt.
- Judah therefore proposed rather than kill Joseph that they should sell him as a slave to the passing caravan.
- The word **profit** was more than a metaphor.
- Judah saw the potential of gain in selling his brother as a slave (he didn’t just propose this out of mercy)
- His mercy was slight.
- He hoped to profit at his brother’s expense.
- The mention of **Midianite merchantmen** is simple in its explanation.

- They were a part of the greater caravan heading to Egypt.
- They were a group distinct from the Ishmeelites, but both were traveling together.
- So, Joseph was sold to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver.

***Genesis 37 : 29-30 - 29 And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. 30 And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?***

- Apparently, after placing Joseph in the pit, Reuben had left.
- Jewish tradition says he went away, intending to return by night and release Joseph.
- When he did return, Joseph was gone and Reuben was so upset that he rent (ripped/tore) his clothes, a middle-eastern symbol of great distress.

***Genesis 37 : 31-35 - 31 And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; 32 And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. 33 And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. 34 And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. 35 And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.***

- The brothers concocted a story of how a wild animal must have killed Joseph.
- They took his coat and dipped in it a goat's blood they had killed.
- When they got back home, they asked Jacob if this was his son's coat.
- They would not even refer to Joseph as their brother, referring to him only as their father's son.
- Jacob was filled with grief, identifying the coat and assuming (as they had hoped) a wild animal (a lion or bear) had killed him.
- His entire family tried to comfort Jacob, but they couldn't comfort him.
- ***"Thus his father wept for him."***

***Genesis 37 : 36 - And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.***

- Meanwhile, the Midianites which had been part of the caravan of the Ishmeelites sold Joseph as a slave unto one Potiphar.
- Potiphar was an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.
- The guard is the elite unit assigned as a bodyguard for Pharaoh.