

SESSION #16

We have now come to the final character among the Genesis patriarchs, Joseph. Much of this amazing young man's life record can be summarized with these two words:

“Dreams & Disappointment”

- Joseph's fascinating stories are found between his **dream** about the sheaves (in 37:5) and the **doxology** which affirms God's hidden purposes were at work

Gen 50:20

But as for you [Joseph said to his brothers], you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.

- through these narratives, WE are invited “to live bracketed between the *hint of the dream* and the *doxology of the disclosure*.” – as Brueggemann tells us
- the *content* of life “between the brackets” will be different for each of us but the brackets remain the same: the dream and the doxology
- ...an echo of the PROMISE and the PRODUCT we saw in Abram's life back in session #5

[A. Turbulent Triangle]

- Genesis 37 introduces us to the initial **context** for Joseph's story: a **turbulent triangle**

Gen 37:3-4

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of *many* colors. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

- **Jacob** loves too much, with partiality
- **Joseph** is *being* loved too *much*
- and the **brothers** are feeling loved too *little*
- once again the stories of the patriarchal families highlight the hazards of parental partiality
- the most flagrant evidence of father Jacob's partiality was Joseph's **robe**
 - Andrew Lloyd Webber called it the “Amazing Technicolor DreamCoat”
 - it may not have been multi-colored, but it was a special ornamental robe with long sleeves; it was a type of clothing not designed for manual work
 - i.e. this placed him apart as someone who didn't need to do ordinary work, a privileged person; a teenager now made supervisor over his older brothers!
 - this special robe may also have been meant by Jacob to show his choice of son for the birthright/blessing, as that privilege had been squandered by the wickedness of the eldest son Reuben
- this elaborate robe from his father was soon ripped off him by his brothers
- and later another cloak was torn from him by Potiphar's wife
- but as Brueggemann emphasizes: “The clothes do not make this man. It is the *dream* that makes this man.”

- so let's turn to this "**Destiny Dream**" itself

B. Destiny Dream

- what was this dream?
- basically it was one dream, but given on two separate occasions

Gen 37:6-7

So [Joseph] said to [his brothers], "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed:
7 There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." ...

Vs 9 Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me."

- a double dream from God indicates the **certainty** of its fulfillment
- much later, in Gen. 41:32, Joseph explained to Pharaoh the reason for two similar dreams in his case: "*the matter has been firmly decided by God*"
- as we follow Joseph's fascinating story we find out that this dream literally comes true – God does bring him to a powerful position of leadership, causing his brothers to bow down before him
- but at age 17 this dream generates a deep hatred for Joseph among the brothers who already resent him:

Gen 37:4-5

But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

5 Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and they hated him even more...

Vs 8 And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

- the dream creates major **family tensions** but in the end the dream **prevails**; and we who read recognize that this dream originates from the main character in the drama – **Yahweh** – who has His own ultimate purposes to work out in & through these characters
- so, Joseph dreams, but already within his family there are...

C. Killers of the Dream

- Joseph had 2 dreams, and then 2 crushing disappointments
 - first, he was sold into slavery
 - and then secondly, he was thrown into prison

- in the first instance, the dream killers were his own brothers
 - and the battle between the dream and the 'killers of the dream' involves Joseph being thrown into a pit and then sold into slavery by these brothers
- let's read the whole story (in the New Living Translation):

Gen 37:23-35

²³ So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing.

²⁴ Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? His blood would just give us a guilty conscience. ²⁷ Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed. ²⁸ So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces* of silver.

And the traders took him to Egypt...

Vs. ³¹ Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. ³² They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: "Look at what we found. Doesn't this robe belong to your son?"

³³ Their father recognized it immediately. "Yes," he said, "it is my son's robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!" ³⁴ Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. ³⁵ His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "I will go to my grave mourning for my son," he would say, and then he would weep.

- as a result, by the end of chap. 37 the father believes the dreamer is dead & the brothers believe the threat of the dream is removed
- but vs. 36 hints that all is not over; the dreamer is still alive, and therefore there is hope for the dream too

Vs. 36

Meanwhile, the Midianite traders* arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard.

- in spite of how hopeless things look, God has not abandoned the dream; He is **still at work**

Phil 2:13

for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

- on the surface, the situation doesn't look good for Joseph, and we are left hanging in suspense here! ...and to make it more intense, the writer interrupts this fascinating story by inserting an interlude about Judah (taking up the entire chap. 38)
 - we're going to stay with the Joseph narrative, but this interlude chapter with its description of Judah's wicked behavior creates a sharp & unmistakable contrast between **Judah's character** and **Joseph's behavior** in chap. 39

- chap. 39 then introduces us to yet another dream killer: the wife of Joseph's master
- the record of chap. 39 gives us **two truths** which must be kept in balance (or dynamic tension)
 - 1) life is **confidently settled**

Gen 39:2-3

The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that **the Lord was with him** and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand.

Vs. 21

But **the Lord was with Joseph** and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Vs. 23

²³ The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph's* authority,* because **the Lord was with him**; and whatever he did, the Lord made *it* prosper.

- note the repetition of the phrase: "*The LORD was with Joseph...*" it **brackets** the dramatic action twice at the beginning and again twice at the end
- this identical theological formula appears prominently in the story of **David** as the underlying factor for *his* success too

1 Sam 16:18

Then one of the servants answered and said, "Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, *who is* skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the Lord *is* with him."

1 Sam 18:14-15

And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the Lord *was* with him.

- 2) the **second truth** to be kept in balance, or in dynamic tension on the other hand, is that life must be lived at **great risk**
 - in Joseph's story it is the seduction by Potiphar's wife, told in Gen. 39:7-12
 - ...Joseph, God's man of the dream and the promise, resists temptation in his faithfulness to God, and loses yet again his garment
- we also see that **obedience to God** does not always mean **success** as the world defines success (as Bill Arnold reminds us)
 - Joseph ends up in prison because of his godly obedience!

- opposition to the outworking of God's dream in our lives can come from sources similar to those we see here in Joseph's life:

- from family members
- from employers & bosses
- from seducers; not just individuals but in the widest sense of the term anyone or anything that could seduce us away from obedience to God

1 John 2:15-17 (Message) "Don't love the world's ways. Don't love the world's goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity."