

Joseph: The Dream Master

SCOTT HOEZEE

Martin Luther King, Jr. once told the world: I have a dream; and his dream inspired millions. Entrepreneurs sometimes have dreams for building a new business, and if they realize those dreams everybody celebrates the success; but sometimes dreams can make life hard for the person who has them. Just ask Joseph. He had a dream of a future in which he would be an important person, the most important person in his family in fact; and although in the book of Genesis those dreams come true one day, they made Joseph's life miserable for a very long time. Today on Groundwork, we will discuss Joseph, the dream-master, and the first part of his amazing story.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and Dave, we are getting pretty deep now into the book of Genesis. We are in part of a six-part series where we have been looking at the stories of Abraham and Jacob, and now we are in the fourth generation since Abraham; and therefore, we are arriving at the children of Jacob. We have been looking at Jacob and Esau. Now Jacob has kids and immediately, starting in Genesis 37, the focus shifts to who is, at this time anyway, the youngest of all of the children, and it is a boy named Joseph.

DAVE BAST

Yes, we are picking up Joseph's story. Jacob is going to reappear, of course, later on. We are not quite finished with him, but he recedes into the background, and really, Joseph steps front and center. He comes on the stage in a not entirely appealing fashion. Let me read it from Genesis 37:

¹Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan – and so, they are in the Promised Land now again – ²And this is the account of Jacob's family line. Joseph, a young man of 17, 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. ³Now, Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. ⁴When 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.

So, sibling rivalry – here it is again in another generation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have been noting throughout this series that the families and the people that are the frontrunners of God's covenant – these people are at the forefront of the wedge God is going to drive through history to save the whole world – they are fraught with problems; they have problems upon problems. We saw the great sibling rivalry – well, really, Cain and Abel had a sibling rivalry; Jacob and Esau the classic, and now here is young Joseph, who is absolutely hated by his brothers because he is Daddy's boy.

DAVE BAST

Well, yes; you know, he is the baby of the family, and part of it is not his fault because Jacob just lavishes all this extra love on Joseph. He gives him this beautiful coat; but he is also a little bit of a snitch; he is a

tattletale; kind of a snot, really. He comes running back when he is 17 years old: Daddy, hey, you know what those big brothers of mine are doing out there with the flocks? They are drinking and smoking and chasing women...

SCOTT HOEZEE

I saw Reuben with a cigarette. If Joseph had any sense, he would start keeping his mouth shut because every time he goes by these brothers wearing that colorful dream coat thing, and he would say: Hi, guys; and every single brother would just glare. Joseph actually could not make these guys angrier if he tried. And it only gets worse.

DAVE BAST

And he is on the receiving end, too, then because there is this line in Genesis that says none of them could speak a kind word to him; so you just know how big a bully a big brother can be when he wants to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All parents know it is a really bad idea to play favorites among your kids; and so, Jacob here is playing favorites. Joseph was born when he was old. He is just his favorite and he makes it clear; he gives him that gift. That is not a good idea; however, we as readers of Genesis are starting to say to ourselves: Wait a minute; where have we seen it before that the younger ends up being the key player? I think I have seen this before; in fact, it has been throughout the whole book.

DAVE BAST

Yes, there is a pattern developing here. That clues us in. You know, there are always two levels to a Bible story. You can imagine the reactions – or you can even read about the reactions of the characters toward one another, but we the readers stand outside that and we see the hand of God operating through this, because in and through the whole story, it is not just a soap opera about the ups and downs, the loves and lives and loses of these people. It is about God instituting a plan. Remember way back to Abraham in Genesis 12: I will bless you, and through you all the nations will be blessed. And that is the thing that drives it forward, that promise. How is Joseph going to play a role in that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is a story of grace, we have been saying all along, and part of the way grace shows up is that God is upending social conventions and customs and family rituals by always choosing the younger; so, Abel, younger than Cain – God’s favorite; Jacob a little bit younger than Esau – God’s favorite; and now Joseph is being singled out; and we are not told yet that this is a God thing, but we start to have our suspicions; and then, we get this as the story continues at Genesis 37, at the 5th verse:

⁵Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more ⁶because he said to them, “Listen to this dream I had. ⁷We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it. ⁸And 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 the dream he had and what he had said. ⁹Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream. This time the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” ¹⁰When he told his father, as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” ¹¹His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

So again, Joseph could not make things worse if he tried. These dreams are definitely going to make it worse.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and you know, at the very least we would have to say he is naïve, isn’t he, in the way he shares this. At the worst, we might say this kid is really a little so-and-so.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, he is a little brat – a little bit of a brat. You know what is interesting about the text though is that it does not tell us God sent him the dream. God is not mentioned here at all so far in this story. God’s name, and the hidden hand of God is hidden indeed. He just had a dream and then he had another dream, and we as readers are left to wonder could this be God?

DAVE BAST

Oh, come on, of course it could be – of course it is. I mean, that is the clear presumption. We know these dreams are coming from God, and actually, they are prophetic – they are clearly prophetic of Joseph’s own life, and maybe of something more; of the one Joseph stands for who will receive ultimately the worship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The one hint we get... So, you get these scenes at the breakfast table where Joseph comes down from bed wearing that miserable coat – to his brothers’ minds it is miserable. He tells them these dreams. The brothers spit out their orange juice. They are just furious. And then, the second dream even involves his mother and father now because there is the sun and moon, and then even Jacob says, “You are going too far.” And then in verse 11, that last line I just read: But Jacob kept the matter in mind.

DAVE BAST

Yes; Jacob has had some dealing with God. He has learned a few things along the way...

SCOTT HOEZEE

He himself is the younger one who was favored

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and I think he is beginning to file this away, thinking: Hey, wait a minute; maybe there is something going on here, and this is a God thing that is blossoming in Joseph’s life. So, let’s watch where this is going. Well, where it is going to go in the immediate future is very much downhill rapidly for Joseph himself, and we are going to look at that part of the story next.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and let’s move right along with the text. We are in Genesis 37, and Joseph the dreamer has just had these dreams – doubled, incidentally – the same essential message twice; and we are going to see that recur in his story; but we pick it up when he goes back out to visit his brothers, and he is trying to find them at a place called Shechem, and he is told: Well, they have moved on. I heard them say, “Let’s go to Dothan.”

^{17b}So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan, ¹⁸but they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹“Here comes that dreamer,” they said to each other. ²⁰“Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we will see what comes of his dreams!” ²¹When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. ²²“Do not shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. ²³So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe; the richly ornamented robe he was wearing, ²⁴and they took him and threw him into the cistern.

From there eventually they got another plan. They saw a caravan of traders – Arab traders coming through – and so they sell him for, what, twenty pieces of silver?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Twenty shekels of silver, right; to the Ishmaelites.

DAVE BAST

Almost thirty pieces of silver – where will we hear that happen?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it will come up again. The other thing, too; they throw him into a dry well, and you can only imagine Joseph is wailing and crying. The text does not tell us, but you can only imagine...

DAVE BAST

He is just a young boy, really, compared to them. They are grown men.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He had to be crying, and yet, the text in verse 25 says that after they did that, the brothers sat down and ate dinner. How in the world could they eat after they did such a terrible thing, and with Joseph's cries still going on? These are not nice people. Who does that?!

DAVE BAST

Blood of your blood, too. I mean, this is a clan; so it is not just family relations, but you have to put this in the context of the whole culture and law, really, of the Middle East, which said you protected your own. If somebody attacked you, the only defense you had was for the clan to rally round you. So they are betraying one of their own. It is just about as bad as it gets – their own brother; and sure, Joseph had some immaturity. He had some annoying habits, but he is the chosen one, and nothing he has done deserves the treatment now that he is going to get, and it is going to be the start of a real bad period in Joseph's life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is the dreams – the things we looked at earlier in the previous segment of this program – it is those dreams that sealed the deal; that sealed their... doubled their hatred... quadrupled their hatred for Joseph; such that when Jacob sends Joseph out just to see how the boys are doing – and that, too, right? The older brothers are out slaving in the field, having to live in tents and sleep on the ground, and Joseph is home sleeping in his feather bed, maybe, with his Technicolor dreamcoat there, and they can see that coat coming a mile off; and they see him coming and they just said, let's just kill him; let's get rid of this annoyance in our lives and kill him. They do not end up doing it, but what they end up doing instead is selling him into slavery – their own little brother shipped off to Egypt to who knows what fate; and it is the dreams that did it. As we said earlier, Dave, we as readers not only have our suspicions, we are pretty sure God gave him those dreams, so then why does it lead to so much trouble? Thanks a lot, God.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, that is one of the mysteries, I think, that we all struggle with. I mean, here is a person who has been chosen by God – actually, it seems like everybody who is chosen by God, in Genesis at least, runs into problems.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It does not make life easy.

DAVE BAST

Hey, choose somebody else for a while, maybe. Leave me alone. Yes, why is it that the God who comes us to promising blessing, health, life, salvation, happiness ultimately; meanwhile, there are so many struggles that come along the way? Maybe the endgame is happy and pleasant and joyful, but getting there is anything but; and that is the struggle of faith.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Joseph's dreams turned into a nightmare in the meanwhile. Yes, his brothers rough him up. They strip that coat off of him, and as we know – we did not read this far, but many of our listeners know the story – that eventually the brothers are going to take that coat home. They are going to dip it in goat blood and then show it to their father and say: Man, we were just walking along the road...

DAVE BAST

Look what we found. Hey, do you recognize this? There is some cruelty there – some real cruelty.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, they are breaking their father's heart

DAVE BAST

And by the way, one more trick played on old Jacob, the trickster, and this one really hurts because he looks at it and he says that is Joseph's. He has been killed. He jumps to the conclusion...

SCOTT HOEZEE

He weeps.

DAVE BAST

You know, there is one good brother here – Reuben. That is an interesting little sideline. First of all, he persuades his other brothers not to kill, and he is the firstborn – he is the oldest. So, Reuben, again by law would have the inheritance, but he is not his father's favorite. He has been displaced by Joseph; and yet, he has enough...

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is some decency there.

DAVE BAST

He has enough decency or integrity to say... He comes up with a plan: If we just lock him up in this dry well I will let him out later on and bring him back; but it does not work because for some reason Reuben goes off somewhere and while he is gone, they sell him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes I have imagined this story... And again, you end up going a little beyond the biblical text, but you have to think: After Joseph has been stripped of his coat, sold – I am sure he cried and cried and begged and begged his brothers not to sell him; and then the Ishmaelites throw him in the back of a wagon or something and cart him off to Egypt; and you know, Joseph just must have been thinking: Why is this happening to me? You know, I think all of us eventually – and I am sure that many of the people listening to this program – we are people of promise, too, you know. We have also had a dream; we are baptized people perhaps; we are members of God's covenant people now today in the new Israel of the Church. We have had all of these promises given to us. We are faithful disciples, and yet, things happen in our lives; and we say if that is all true – if the dream of redemption in Christ and the new creation – if it is all true, why is this happening to me?

DAVE BAST

Yes; I do not think we can help but ask those questions when the bad things happen; when the bad times come; but I go back to Jacob and the story that we looked at last week: I will not let You go unless You bless me; that kind of hanging on of faith. We will see in Joseph in spades, really. He is a young guy at the beginning of the story, but he just refused to let go of the promises of God, and somehow through all of the ups and downs – and the next part of his story is mostly going to be downs – he knows that God is with him and that God has a purpose that He is working out in his life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And maybe that is a little bit of good news in a story which is really full of a lot of bad news. The good news is God stays with us, and that is comforting for all of us to know. God stays with Joseph. It is not going to make everything better in an instant, but God stays with him, and we will look at how that starts to play out in just a moment.

BREAK:

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, and today we have come to the story of Joseph; and to this point in the story we have seen Joseph grabbed by his brothers who are jealous and hate him because of the favoritism, and really, Joseph's own sort of naïve assumption of superiority with these dreams that he has had. So they are going to kill him, and instead they see their chance to make a little money off of him. They sell him as a slave. He is taken down to Egypt, and as far as they are concerned, that is it. That is the end. It is kind of a living death. Then they come back and trick Jacob into believing Joseph is dead.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is right; and then – we will not go into this at all because we do not have time – but then the book of Genesis takes a little time out from the Joseph story; the entire 38th chapter is a side story about one of Joseph's brothers named Judah; and so we spend really a fairly long chapter of 30 verses with Joseph totally out of the picture; but there is this little hint at the end of Chapter 37, where it says:

³⁶Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard. So, there is that little "meanwhile" in there that before we take this pause, we think: Well, maybe Joseph – he is not quite landing on his feet, but, but, maybe getting close to Pharaoh could be hopeful – and so, we pick it up in Genesis 39. I will just read a couple of these verses.

¹Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, a captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken Joseph there. ²The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³When his master saw that the Lord was with him and the Lord gave him success in everything he did, ⁴Joseph found favor in his eyes, and he became his attendant. ⁵Potiphar put him in charge of his household and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is more like it. The Lord was with Joseph. So, okay, he has had a little bit of trouble in his life and his brothers have betrayed him and sold him; he is a slave; but he lands on his feet. Here he is in Potiphar's household, and he is an attractive guy, he is capable.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Smart.

DAVE BAST

Smart, and he has integrity – a crucial factor. Potiphar can trust him. So pretty soon he is running the whole show, and this is no small deal. This does not mean he is some kind of au pair watching the kids. Potiphar is an important official. There would probably be dozens, maybe scores of slaves. There would be land to manage and farm and all the rest.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Books to keep.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; so here is Joseph; okay, he is well on his way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, we as readers are starting to say: Well, those dreams – those dreams that we thought were from God, even though the text did not tell us – they are. And God is with him. What is interesting is that in the verses I just read it uses the Hebrew name for God – Yahweh – or Jehovah we used to translate – Yahweh – and it says that even Potiphar, who is an Egyptian and whom I assume does not really know the God of Israel at all – but the text says that Potiphar noticed that Yahweh was with Joseph; and because Yahweh was with Joseph, he trusted him. So, even though Potiphar is probably a pagan worshiper of the Egyptian cult of whatever religion, he senses that Somebody – capital S – Somebody is with this kid, and so he is going to trust him.

DAVE BAST

But I think as readers and as listeners we probably know what comes next. It does not last, and one day Joseph is working away in the house – you know, keeping the books or whatever – he is on the computer, and here comes Mrs. Potiphar, and she is a bit of a – what do we call her, the Real Housewives of Thebes or something like that? She is...

SCOTT HOEZEE

She is on the make with Joseph.

DAVE BAST

Yes, she sees Joseph and she tries to seduce him... and why not? He is a slave. He is a good looking young guy. She is a bored housewife. She can have what she wants. No slave dares to say no. And Joseph does dare to say no because he has something that she has never run into before. He is a servant of God. He is a follower of the Lord, and it is so interesting how he repels her advances. He says, "My master does not concern himself with anything in the house with me in charge. Everything he owns he has entrusted to me. No one is greater in the house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you because you are his wife. How, then, could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" [Genesis 3:8-9]
Wow; so it is...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Good answer!

DAVE BAST

It is this double thing of: I have integrity and I will not betray Potiphar, who has put such trust in me, but if I did that, I would also sin against God; and though Joseph does not say it, he would be sinning against himself, too. He would be untrue to himself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is a good guy; he gives the right answer, and for his trouble he gets falsely accused of rape – thank you, Mrs. Potiphar...

DAVE BAST

She is not going to let him get away with that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, she is insulted. She throws him into prison; so it is pillar to post for Joseph.

DAVE BAST

He is lucky they did not just kill him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, they could have executed him right on the spot and nobody would have said anything about it with a slave...

DAVE BAST

Did I say, “lucky?” It is providential. The hand of the Lord is upon him that they did not just kill him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But he cannot catch a break. So, we have just been told the Lord is with him – the Lord is with him – the Lord prospers all that he does – well then, why didn’t the Lord keep Mrs. Potiphar from lying about it? I have no idea, but I think everybody knows that it often goes this way. You know the Lord is with you. You sense God is with you, and it still does not prevent terrible things from happening in our lives. So now, once again Joseph is sitting in a terrible place. He ends up in prison, and we just have to wonder – there had to be a lot of lonely nights in his cell, where he thought: Whatever happened to those dreams? I thought they were maybe starting to come true and now I am right back to zero. Whatever happened to the dreams? Why, why, why do terrible things keep happening to me?

DAVE BAST

Right; well, guess what? Here comes some more dreams, and while he is in prison he meets two disgraced officials from Pharaoh’s household now; and so, these are very high and important people. One is the butler – kind of the chamberlain – the master of Pharaoh’s household. The other is a baker. Each of them has a dream. They have very different results, and Joseph is able to interpret both of the dreams to each man, and they come true.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and he just says... One of the dreams, the meaning of which is you are going to get restored: The cupbearer, the butler will get restored to his old job; and then Joseph says: When you get restored, do not forget me; but he does. And it will be two more years, and we will see this in the next program, two more years before he remembers Joseph and gets Joseph out of prison; and then things really take off; but two more years and Joseph just had to wonder where it was.

There was that line I read earlier, that word “meanwhile” at the end of Chapter 37: Meanwhile, Joseph – at least initially – landed on his feet; and there is a lot of Joseph’s story that fits what I sometimes call: The meanwhile of faith, where we are told: This ain’t over yet. This is not over yet. God is still at work. Stay tuned. Keep reading. Do not give up hope.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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