

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Lesson 27. (Gen chapter 37:1 - 36). For lesson copies, go to <http://www.montgomerychurch.org/resources8.html>

Introduction/Review: Over the past several weeks, we have looked at three primary types of call from God in Genesis: The Sovereign Call/Design of God in chapters 1-11; the Response to the Clear Call of God by Abraham in chapters 12-25, and the response to God’s call when “conflicted,” evidenced by Jacob in chapters 26-36. As we work our way through to the completion of Genesis, this part of our study will focus on the story of Joseph, depicted by some commentators as a response to the call of a God who remains “hidden” but certainly not unknown.

Read chapter 37 completely through: This is our introduction to the life and (mis)fortunes of Jacob’s favorite son. Note the absence of direct communication from God to Joseph, stark contrast to God’s previous methodology with Joseph’s ancestors. Note also some similarities. Like his father, Joseph displays early character traits that will undergo transformation in his life.

Re-read 37:1-4: The opening verse establishes previous connections. As the story progresses, we realize that the story of the promise is reaching a climax. The land is secured; descendants are plentiful (per the original promise in Gen 12:1-3).

- What picture does Scripture paint of the young teenager Joseph and his relationship within the family? What specific evidence is cited to support this portrait? Briefly discuss.
- Now note particularly the description at the end of verse 4 where it says things were so bad between the brothers that they no longer “*could speak peacefully*” (ESV) with Joseph. The word used for this absence of “peace” is “*Shalom*,” a word that reappears in verse 14 when Jacob dispatches Joseph to see if his brothers are “well” (*Shalom*). Does this state of affairs describe parts of your own family dynamics, and if so, what has been done or should be done to change it? Discuss.

Re-read 37:5-11: Joseph estranges himself even further from his brothers by relating his dreams. Note: In the ancient world, it was often assumed that a key criterion to distinguish idle dreams from dreams with a larger significance was whether a dream came singly or in pairs. Only dreams that occurred in pairs were considered to carry a larger significance – a point reinforced by Joseph himself when he becomes an interpreter of Pharaoh’s dreams (read 41:32).

- What is the content of Jacob’s dreams and what is the effect on Joseph’s family?
- Given ancient world thought (described above) and Jacob’s relationship with God, what do you think is going through Joseph’s father’s mind? Discuss.

Re-read 37:12-18: Jacob/Israel dispatches Joseph to check on whether his brothers are “well” (peaceable, “*Shalom*”) while they are taking care of the flocks. Joseph goes a couple of places and finally locates his brothers and the flocks. NOTE: The language showing the breakdown of “*peace*” is particularly striking when we move to the New Testament and read about Jesus Christ, “*For He Himself is our peace (“shalom”), who has made the two one (Jews & Gentiles) and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...*” (Eph 2:14). By becoming our “*peace*,” Jesus clears the way for Jews who would only say “*shalom*” to fellow Jews (except in this instance in Joseph’s life), to say “*shalom*” now to Gentiles, and vice versa. What a tremendous transformation in light of the hostility denoted in this early part of Joseph’s life.

- When the brothers see Joseph coming, is there “*shalom, peace*” in their hearts or actions? What do they say and do? Given Christ’s sacrifice, what application, if any, can you draw for your own lives and life within the body at Montgomery? Discuss.

Re-read 37:19-36: The brothers hatch a plan to get rid of Joseph, Reuben actually thinks he can pretend to go along with it and later save Joseph, but in the end Joseph is sold into slavery and he is taken to Egypt. Note the reactions of Reuben, his brothers, and Jacob to these events.

- Describe and contrast the apparent emotions and reactions of Reuben, his brothers, and Jacob in these verses. What do you conclude about the presence or absence of “*shalom*” in hearts and lives? Discuss.