

**Joseph Sold by His Brothers**  
**Genesis 37:12-36**  
**Week 2**

Opening

Be sure to hop onto the video call a bit early so group members aren't anxiously, awkwardly waiting. Remember you are the host, so just as if you were welcoming folks into your home, use these first few moments to welcome each participant by name. It means a lot to acknowledge everyone on the call and confirm you can see and hear them.

-if there are new folks joining your group, be sure to introduce them as well

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot. **I like the consistency of praying the same pray to center ourselves each week, but once again, feel free to have someone pray differently to open this week.**

*Holy God, as we gather again virtually, we ask that you Spirit would be at work among us to connect us and renew us by your Word and our fellowship. Give us wisdom and insight and strengthen our bonds with one another and you. In the name of our risen Lord we pray, Amen.*

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

**Check-in question**

So far, God has not made any grand appearance in the narrative (beyond speaking through dreams). He does not intercede to protect Joseph. He does not save him from the pit. **Have you experienced moments in your life when difficult or tragic things were happening and God seemed silent? In hindsight are you able to see God's work or is it still painful?**

\*since we're doing these meetings on Zoom, some groups may want to add an extra activity to help folks feel at ease. There are some great games out there that you can play via Zoom. Reach out to Sarah if this is something you'd like to try out.

Read: [Genesis 37:12-36](#)

In addition to the broader questions below, I am including some other information about this passage and some other ideas to get conversation going; however, don't jump too quickly to these as they shape the discussion. Be sure to first ask what the group thinks, and which parts stand out to them. Trust the Holy Spirit here !

v.12 Jacob is apparently a very wealthy pastoralist, for his flocks can graze all the way from his current home in Hebron to Shechem, a distance by today's roads of about 60 miles (see map below). Despite the distance, Joseph is willing to be the messenger.<sup>1</sup> His charge is to "see if it is well (shalom) with your brothers and with the flock." Are they in order, in balance in right relationship? That is why Jacob sent Joseph out.

Walter Brueggemann refers to verses 12-17 as "a curious interlude which does not visibly affect the action."<sup>2</sup> Though some believe the geographical range from Hebron to Shechem may reflect the unification of the Abraham (Hebron) and Jacob (Shechem) stories and traditions.

v.22-24 We find Reuben trying to save his brother (there is some conflation and confusion concerning the roles of Reuben and Judah. This is traditionally explained as rival versions of the same story told by rival tribes, so that the two brothers compete for a positive role.) **How do you feel about Reuben and Judah in this story? Do you respect their efforts or find them to be cowardly or something else all together?**

v.24-25 It was common in the Middle East for people to conserve water for the dry season by collecting it in large cisterns, like wells. There is something mafia-like about the way the brothers throw Joseph in the empty cistern to die, then coolly settle down for dinner. It seems strange that Judah's recognition that "he is our flesh and blood" does not extend to hesitation about selling him into slavery.<sup>3</sup>

**What might have happened if the Ishmaelite caravan had not passed through? Could this be an unseen way in which God was working out his plan?**

v.28 The brothers received an average price for Joseph in 20 pieces of silver (shekels). In Leviticus 27:5, 20 shekels is the monetary equivalent of a male aged 5-20 years to be used when paying off a vow.<sup>4</sup>

\*it is puzzling that the caravan is referred to first as Ishmaelite, then as Midianite, then (in some translations) as Medianite. Perhaps this reflects the combining of different versions of the story. "Ishmaelites" here could also refer to a subset of the Midianites. And many translations assume the "Medianite" is a textual slip for Midianite.<sup>5</sup>

v.35 "Sheol" in the Old Testament was an underworld to which all the dead, without exception had to go. It was neither a place of punishment nor a place of reward. The

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<sup>1</sup>Towner, Sibley W. *Genesis*. Westminster Bible Companion, 2001.

<sup>2</sup>Brueggeman, Walter. *Genesis*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, 1982.

<sup>3</sup>Goldingay, John. *Genesis for Everyone*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

<sup>4</sup>Towner, Sibley W. *Genesis*. Westminster Bible Companion, 2001.

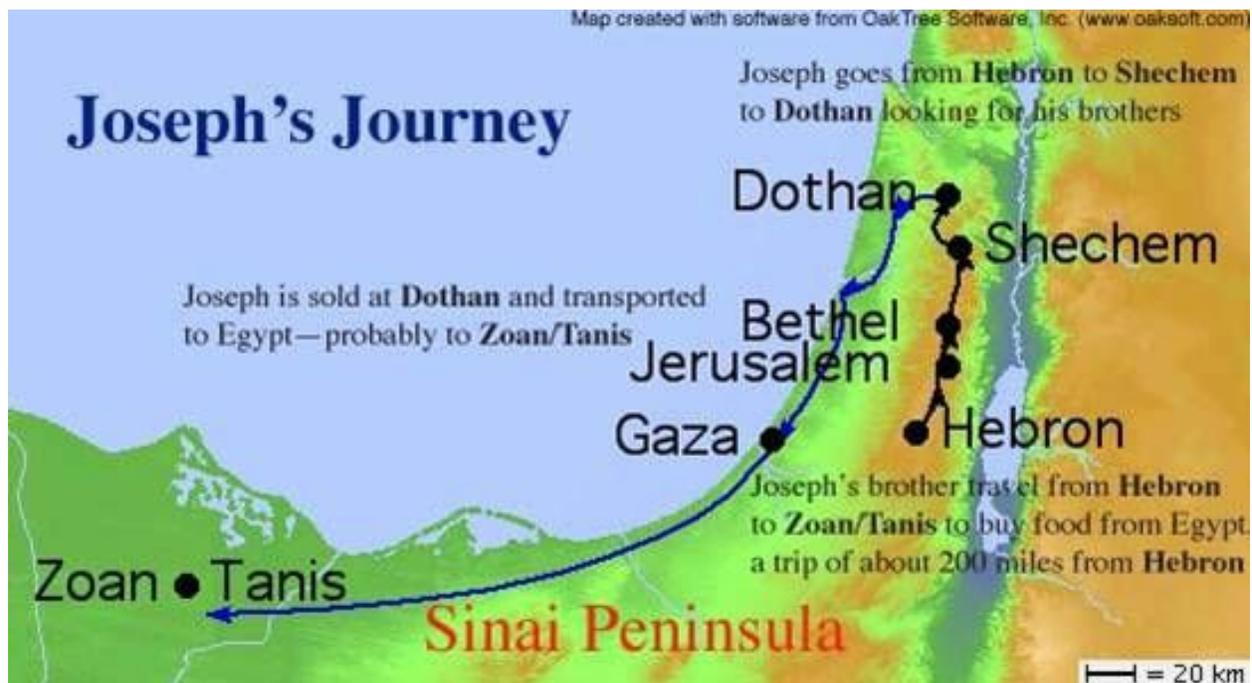
<sup>5</sup>Goldingay, John. *Genesis for Everyone*. Westminster John Know Press, 2010.

dead who went there could do nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:10), but merely continued to have a shadowy existence. No one who went there would return.

**The grief of a parent who loses a child is unlike any other. This grief is not just over the loss of a child, but also the loss of a dream – a promise. Joseph was the promised son, the chosen one. Can you name a time in your life, or in the life of someone you know, when acute grief like this caused you to question God's promises?**

The narrator then takes our gaze at the last moment from the bereft old man and turns us to Egypt (v.36).

**For a moment, try to suspend your knowledge of the end of the story, and imagine how Joseph must be feeling in this moment. What might his prayers be like in the back of that caravan to Egypt? Or would he be praying at all?**



Remind folks of this claim and how it might ring true in the passage for the week:

Walter Brueggemann names the singular theological claim in the Joseph story is **"the purposes of God are at work in hidden and unnoticed ways, but the ways of God are nonetheless reliable and will come to fruition."** This can be the place we come back to each week as we explore the story of Joseph.

1. What from this story confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this story tell us about God?
3. What does this story tell us about humanity?

4. In what ways does this particular passage relate to Brueggemann's idea of God's purposes? How might God's providence already be at work here?
5. What could this story have to say to us today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What about today during this global pandemic?

### The Swedish Method

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A light bulb should be something that “shines” from the passage — something new or fresh. *What stuck out to you this time through?* Every time we read the Bible, God will be reminding us of things we've forgotten and showing us things we haven't seen before.

And when we read the Bible in a group, he'll be revealing different things to different people, multiplying the insight and learning. God does not intend for us to see different *meanings*, but to learn the one true multi-dimensional meaning, and then to see some of the limitless implications and applications from that truth.



A question mark: Anything that is difficult to understand in the text, or a question the reader would like to ask the writer of the passage or the Lord. Did these verses raise any questions as you read? You might stumble over a word or verse, or a connection to another part of the Bible, or a particular theological point.

With every question you ask, try and answer your own question before going to others for help. Some of the deepest, most lasting learning we do comes when we press ourselves to search the Bible for an answer to our own question. The answer might be in the verse we're studying, or in the surrounding chapter or book, or God may bring to mind a verse or verses elsewhere in the Bible. Stop, pray, ask, and do your best. *Then*, turn to others (whether commentaries or other members of your group) for another perspective.



An arrow indicates a personal application for our lives. Identify and commit to something you sense the Spirit is leading you to do in obedience to this text. Make it specific enough that you can do it this week and make it personal enough that you yourself can do it (and not someone else).

A lot of Bible study, both privately and in a group, falls short of applying the text to our personal lives. One of the great things about studying the Bible in a group is that there's built-in accountability. If you talk out loud with others through steps to take toward greater obedience, you have other people around you to follow up and ask you how those particular things are going.

Arrow (Example): When I do my personal Bible reading, I am going to regularly ask if God might be 1) teaching me something, 2) telling me to stop doing something I am doing, 3) correcting some wrong thinking or behavior, or 4) preparing me to live more effectively for him.

### Closing

Remind the group of the Project 15:25 mission partner for the week and ways they can help. Perhaps your COB as a whole wants to join together to support the ministry.

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.