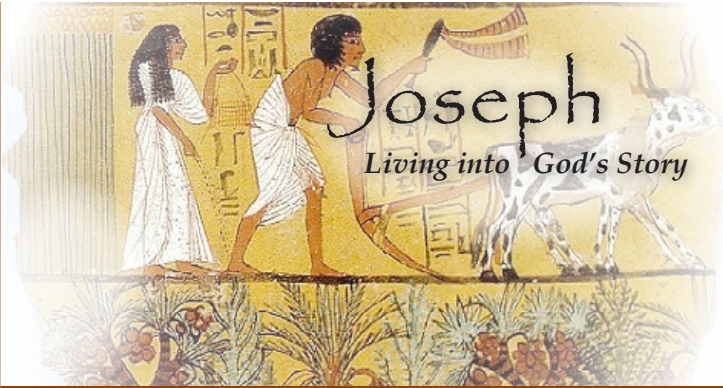


Weekly  
Discussion  
Guide

February 7,  
2010

Genesis 37:  
And So the  
Story Begins



*Where we start . . .*

If you were sure that God was speaking to you and you shared what you had “heard” with others, what kind of reception would you hope to receive from them?

*What we read . . .*

Let’s dive into Joseph’s story and think through what happened to Joseph when God began to speak to him. Read Genesis 37:1-36.

Describe Joseph’s “home life,” drawing on what we are told here. What would it have been like? Why?

What might have moved Joseph to share his dreams with his father and brothers?

What was the outcome of Joseph’s sharing? Why?

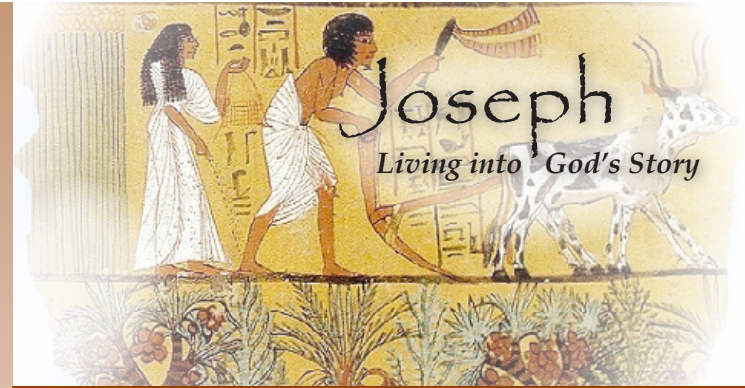
*Why this matters . . .*

As we will see in the weeks to come, Joseph is going to be a key figure in the development of God’s story to fulfill His promises to Abraham and work out His plan in the world. But notice how Joseph’s story begins—it is not a very auspicious beginning. What does that suggest to you about how God might undertake to weave your life into the story He is writing?

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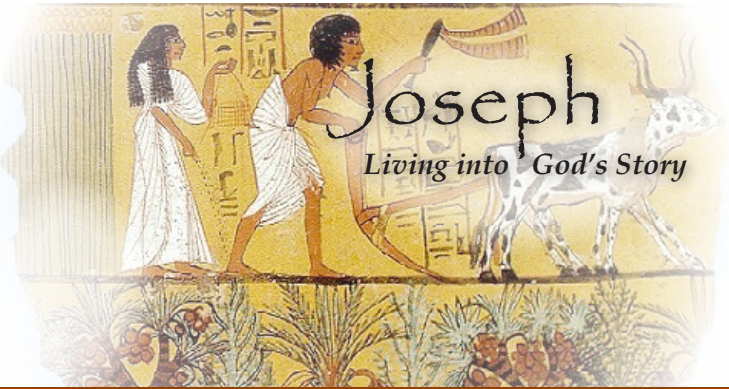
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*What are we focusing on?*

This week we begin looking at the story of Joseph in detail. Genesis 37 opens with Joseph already into his young adult years and a few brief statements about the family dynamics in Jacob's (his father's) household. Joseph is a critical figure in the playing out of God's plan and the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham and others. In fact, the account of Joseph's life gets more attention in Genesis than any other figure. You might think that such a strategic person would have had an auspicious start--either to life or to mission. But neither seems to be the case. And we get to see that "Living into God's Story" might not unfold--or even begin--in the way we might expect.

*What will we be discussing?*

One critical event in this first chapter of Joseph's story centers on the dreams God gives to Joseph. That revelatory experience pushes the story along. Thus, the opening question seeks to stir our thoughts about what it might be like to "hear from God" and what we might expect in sharing such revelation with others. From there, we turn our attention to the Genesis account.

As you read and try to understand what is being played out before us, it might be helpful to keep in mind some of the "back story" to this account. Drawing on earlier passages in Genesis, we can know that:

Joseph's father was Jacob.

The conniver who stole a birthright and a blessing.

The schemer who deceived his own father.

The patriarch who was wrestled to the ground by God.

The husband who married four but loved one, Rachel.

The believer who learned to lean on God.

The father who mourned the loss of his dear wife, Rachel, when she gave birth to his last son, Benjamin.

Joseph's brothers were 11 in number.

Two of them, Simeon and Levi, dealt treacherously and vindictively with a neighboring city even though the people of that city sought to make right a wrong done to their sister. The other brothers joined in. (Genesis 34)

One of them, Reuben, slept with one of his father's wives, and apparently without any consequence. (Genesis 35)

One of them, Judah, mistreated his own daughter-in-law, treating her contemptuously. (Genesis 38)

When Joseph brings a "bad report" to his father about the brothers (Genesis 37:2), the language suggests that he was not just telling what he thought, but what was being said about the brothers by others.

And after apparently years of relative silence from God, when God does speak to Joseph through dreams, it initially appears to be anything but a good thing . . . for him or for anyone else for that matter.

Drawing these thoughts together, we can build some realistic idea of what life was like for Joseph. And, honestly, it had anything but a great start!

Joseph was bereft of his mother.

Joseph was hated by his brothers.

Joseph had an awkward (at best) relationship with his father.

Joseph had dreams that appear to be from God, but when he turns to those who should or might be able to help him understand what is going on he is harshly rebuffed.

Joseph's dreams are belittled and attacked.

Perhaps you (or someone in your group) has tasted something akin to Joseph's life as pictured here: misunderstood, alone, troubled, puzzled, living a bit "dysfunctional," at odds with those you hoped would be closest to you, criticized for what you thought God was saying to you. If so, take heart! God carried on His amazing and life-altering plan through Joseph--a man with an incredibly troubling "start." But that did not hinder God.

Perhaps 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 can serve as something of a New Testament commentary on what we have read here in Genesis about Joseph:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."