

Joseph is a very long story in the Bible. It is a great story that has musicals and movies made about it and endures with cultural appeal. You know may know the story well. If so, you can skip this very abbreviated version:

Jacob adored Joseph, his 11th son and Rachel's firstborn. This doting made the 10 sons of *Leah* jealous, so they sold him into slavery. Joseph would end up in Egypt, working for Potiphar. After being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, he was imprisoned. There, Joseph interpreted dreams, which eventually brought him to Pharaoh's attention. Pharaoh made Joseph second-in-command because Joseph had predicted seven years of famine. During the famine, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt for food, unknowingly seeking help from him. Joseph forgave them, reconciled with his family, and ensured their survival in Egypt. He would bury his father - Jacob/Israel - after his dad blessed Joseph's children.

History detail Joseph lived in the Egyptian Middle Kingdom. Egyptian customs include centralized grain storage to buffer the people during famines. The practice of elevating capable foreigners in Egyptian bureaucracy was normal.

I found myself a little lost as to why *Benjamin* was so central to all the tricks that Joseph would play on his brothers before revealing himself. Joseph and Benjamin were the two sons of Jacob's favorite wife, *Rachel*. After Joseph's apparent death, Jacob would transfer this favoritism to Benjamin the only other son of Rachel. I imagine in Joseph's darker moments in Egypt, he relished the thought of sticking it to those "Those d..n ten sons of *Leah*." Jacob's penchant for favoritism gets passed on to Joseph who in Egypt gave fivefold more to Benjamin than the others. In the end, he blessed them all.

Jacob, Joseph's Dad I don't think we are supposed to admire Jacob. He is "the heel puller," or the "usurper." It takes Jacob "the liar" a long time to admit that he relishes deceit and double dealing. You know the story of Jacob's epiphany, where God wrestles with him all night. Only after exhaustion sets in does God give Jacob a new name - Israel. There are multiple nuanced meanings to Israel: "let God prevail", "having power with God", and "God's fighter."

Generational Journey Jacob/Israel's never became a bastion of integrity, but "he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people" 49:33. It would be up to the *later* generations to live into this new name of "having power with God." Each successive generations had their own foibles and needed their own God-tailored-gift. We, so many generations later need the same.

Core belief Joseph believes his suffering was part of God’s larger plan to save lives. He longed for his family and homeland and did everything he could for reconciliation. Just before today’s OT reading, Joseph indulged in terrifying his brothers incognito. But by the beginning of today’s reading, he finally couldn’t take it anymore and said, “I am Joseph.” Can you imagine what his brothers, who assumed him long dead or enslaved, were feeling? They surely felt “dismay” (נִבְהָלוּ, nivhalu) takes over the brothers once Joseph did the big reveal. This commander of Egypt does not at all match up with their memory of Joseph as the dreamy, braggadocious boy they sold into slavery.

But he says, “Come closer to me,” Joseph bridges the gap created by betrayal. In the Ancient Near East, proximity is necessary for forgiveness and reconciliation. He emphasizes this reconciliation with “Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves.” Joseph saw himself as the vehicle to bless the people of Egypt *and* his family because he was the “father to Pharaoh.” He let so go because he desperately missed his family.

Joseph wanted to resettle the family, but native-born Egyptians saw shepherding as disgusting and beneath them (Genesis 46:34). Still, Joseph arranged for his family to live in the “land of Goshen,” a fertile region in Egypt, suitable for raising livestock.

Remnant The term “remnant” (שְׁאֵרִית, she'erit) foreshadows Israel’s future survival and God’s covenant faithfulness way past Pharaoh. Later biblical writers would riff on Joseph as a precursor to the Messiah:

- Both were rejected by their own. John 1:11
- Both suffered unjustly yet saved many. Isaiah 53:10-11
- Both forgave those who wronged them. Luke 23:34

What about us?

How can we embody Joseph’s forgiveness in our own relationships?

We might play a few tricks on the way to reconciliation, but in the end, we can clearly tell the truth and draw close to those who burned bridges a long time ago.

With God as our provider, how do we share the providence in way that lifts people?

Even if we are not as powerful as the commander Joseph, “the father to Pharaoh.” we still have power to lift our family and ‘countrymen’ if we are willing to draw closer.

The sermon itself I am playing with the perspective of Joseph’s assistant / translator. I don’t have well planned thoughts just yet, but maybe by sermon time!

Finally-You might not feel like reading Genesis 37 to the end, if so, try audio. You can start here with Gen 37: <https://www.biblegateway.com/audio/dolan/msg/Gen.37> **Todd**