

The covenant established by God in Genesis 12 with Abraham marks the first moment in the history of the Israelite people. From this point forward, the Genesis story focuses on the generations that follow in this important family. In today’s reading, we turn to the story of the sons of Jacob, who is also known as Israel, the great-grandchildren of Abraham.

We noted in our readings last week that conflict between siblings is a recurring theme in Genesis. What occurred in Cain and Abel’s story and was also experienced in the relationship between Jacob and Esau begins between Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 37. In verse 3, what is the first sign that there will be problems between Joseph and his brothers?

Parents have tremendous influence over their children. In what ways, positive or negative, has your life been influenced by your own parents?

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What starts out as a bad relationship between siblings only gets worse as Joseph begins to share his dreams. Their father’s favoritism of Joseph coupled with the dreams he shares only serve to enrage them further. Eventually, Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams will save his life, but at this point in the story, they place him in great danger.

One of the primary functions of a family is to shape our identity and define our value. Whenever these basic needs are neglected, the result is damaged lives and relationships. How would you describe what is happening within Jacob’s family at this point in the story?

What do you anticipate will happen next between Joseph and his brothers? What, if anything, could the characters in this story do to avoid the long-term damage that seems to be on the horizon for this family?

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In Genesis 37:12-25, Jacob sends his son Joseph out into the fields to check on his brothers. When they see Joseph coming, verse 18 says the brothers “plotted to kill him.” The oldest son, Reuben, intervenes and instead instructs his brothers to throw Joseph into a well. Stripping him of the “ornamented” robe he had received from his father, Jacob, Joseph is left to die until the brothers realize the potential profit they might gain from selling Joseph into slavery.

The brother’s actions in this section serve as a reminder that resentment that is allowed to fester leads us to callous acts that may have previously seemed unimaginable. Have you seen this in your own life? Is there resentment in you that you are allowing to grow?

What steps can you take to protect your heart from the poison that resentment brings?

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In the years that have passed since he was sold into slavery, Joseph has grown to be the second most powerful man in Egypt. Joseph had many ups and downs in that time span, but it was ultimately his ability to interpret dreams that won him the favor of the Pharaoh. His rise to power ensured that when the sons of Jacob came to Egypt for food, the man they would have to face was their lost brother.

The episode that is narrated in verse 6 is the fulfillment of the dream that Joseph had shared with his brothers in Genesis 37. How do you think Joseph felt seeing this vision become a reality?

Joseph now faces a difficult decision. With all the power he now possesses, Joseph can respond with judgement or grace. Which do you think he will choose? How would you handle this situation?

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