

## **Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 21, Joseph and his Brothers (Gen. 37:2-38:30)**

### **Resources from NotebookLM**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

#### **1. Abstract of Mathews, Genesis, Session 21, Joseph and his Brothers (Gen. 37:2-38:30), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Kenneth Mathews' Genesis Session 21** provides an overview of the Joseph narrative in Genesis 37-38. **The lecture analyzes Joseph's dreams**, his brothers' jealousy and betrayal, and the resulting sale into slavery. **The session also examines the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38**, connecting it thematically to Joseph's narrative and highlighting its significance for the future lineage of kings in Israel. **Mathews discusses interpretations of Joseph's character**, exploring both positive and negative aspects, and emphasizing the repeated motifs of blessing, procreation, and reconciliation within the broader context of God's plan. **The lecture concludes by foreshadowing Joseph's future in Egypt and the ongoing development of the narrative.**

**2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathews, Genesis, Session 21 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).**



**Mathews\_Genesis\_  
Session21.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Mathews, Genesis, Session 21, Joseph and his Brothers (Gen. 37:1-38:30)

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture on Genesis 37-38, focusing on Joseph and his brothers:

#### Briefing Document: Genesis 37-38 - Joseph and His Brothers

##### Overview:

This session introduces the Joseph narrative within Genesis, specifically focusing on chapters 37 and 38. It emphasizes the "tol edoth" structure ("these are the generations of"), and how this narrative is the culmination of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis. The themes of blessing, procreation, land promise, deception, betrayal, and strife continue to be prominent. While the story centers around Joseph, it also highlights the flawed characters and moral decline of his brothers, particularly Reuben and Judah. Ultimately, the narrative moves toward reconciliation and God's sovereign plan to preserve the family and provide for them amidst a great famine, despite their moral failings.

##### Key Themes and Ideas:

1. **"Tol Edoth" (Generations of) Structure:** The narrative is introduced as "the account of Jacob" (Gen 37:2), similar to previous narratives focused on Abraham and Isaac. As with those, the narrative focuses on the descendants of the one named in the phrase.
  - *"This begins in chapter 37, verse 2, where it says in the New International Version this is the account of Jacob."*
  - The emphasis is on the offspring of Jacob, particularly Joseph and his brothers.
1. **Jacob's Continuing Importance:** While the story shifts focus to his sons, Jacob remains a crucial figure, and the narrative includes the implications of his sons' actions on him.
  - *"When we think about Jacob, Jacob is an important figure...because of his relationship to his sons and how so much is given in these chapters to what occurs between his sons and what the implications are of their behavior for him."*
  - Jacob's burial (Gen 50) brings this narrative to a close, in Egypt.

1. **God's Promises and Geographical Location** Despite promises of residence in Canaan, the Jacobites find themselves in Egypt.

- *"the promises are partially being fulfilled. It's in progress, it's fulfilling."*
- This emphasizes the orientation of Genesis towards the future, and the continuation of God's plan outside the promised land.

1. **Recurring Motifs:**

- **Blessing:** The narrative highlights the theme of God's blessing, as seen in the Abrahamic covenant and Pharaoh's recognition of Joseph's favor with God.
- **Procreation/People:** The story centers on the family and descendants of Jacob, and their role in God's plan.
- **Orientation Towards the Future/Land Promise:** God's promises are constantly moving towards a future fulfillment and the occupation of the land.
- **Deception, Betrayal, and Strife:** The conflict between Joseph and his brothers is a central example, continuing the themes seen in prior narratives. However, this will end in reconciliation.
- *"Additionally, we have seen deception, betrayal, and strife; all of these important motifs keep coming to the fore, and it is very prominent in the Jacob to edoth with Joseph and his brothers, which will show the strife ending as it did with Jacob and Esau with reconciliation."*

1. **Joseph: Ideal or Flawed Character?** Mathews argues against the traditional interpretation of Joseph as a purely ideal figure, highlighting his early arrogance and later deceptive actions towards his brothers.

- *"I, on the other hand, go with those who see Joseph as a flawed character. this doesn't mean that he is a wicked man by any means, but in his youth, I think he showed a spirit of pride and arrogance, and he has a series of practices of deception and betrayal against his brothers once he rises to authority in Egypt."*
- Mathews compares him to other flawed patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau).
- While he is a man of great faith, his flaws distance him and the sons of Jacob from God.

1. **Dreams and Divine Communication:** Unlike previous narratives with direct theophanies, God primarily communicates through dreams that require interpretation, primarily by Joseph.
  - *"Now, in the case of the Joseph narrative, dreams, yes, but these dreams have to be interpreted, and Joseph does that, and these are the primary ways whereby God reveals what will take place..."*
  - This may indicate a distancing of Jacob's sons from God.
1. **Moral Decline of the Brothers:** The Joseph narrative is intertwined with a tale of severe moral decline among the brothers, seen through their murderous plans against Joseph and deception of their father.
  - *"And so, we see in rather dramatic form, beginning with chapter 34, where we have the brothers involved in the murderous treason of the Shechemites..."*
  - This raises questions about whether they possess sufficient moral character to carry out God's plans for them.
1. **Joseph's Dreams of Authority:**
  - Joseph has two dreams (Gen 37:5-11) in which his family (brothers, father, and mother) bow down to him, signifying his future authority. The brothers interpret the dreams as indicating they would be subject to him, an idea they resent.
  - *"Now, in the first dream, this has to do with the agricultural environment of the sheaves that bow down to the one important sheaf...Then, in the second dream, this is astral. This has to do with the sun and moon and 11 stars were bowing down to me..."*
  - Jacob rebukes him but ultimately "kept the matter in mind," aware that his dream may be significant.
1. **Betrayal and Sale of Joseph:** Fueled by jealousy, Joseph's brothers initially plan to kill him but are convinced by Reuben to throw him in a cistern. They then sell Joseph to Ishmaelite/Midianite traders headed to Egypt.
  - *"So, when he appears from a distance, they plot to kill him...So, Judah has a plan, and that is, what will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him."*
  - The brothers use Joseph's torn and bloodied robe as evidence of his death to their father, who mourns deeply.

- **The Judah and Tamar Narrative (Chapter 38):** This chapter, often seen as an interruption, is crucial for highlighting the moral decline of Judah and implicitly contrasts it with the integrity of Tamar.
  - *"But more importantly, what's at work here is another clear signal at the outset of the terrible moral decline of the brothers. And Judah is a leading figure."*
  - Judah fails in his responsibilities to Tamar (not providing her with a third son for levirate marriage) and unknowingly impregnates her, who had disguised herself as a prostitute.
  - The birth of Perez and Zerah contains ambiguities that mirror the birth of Jacob and Esau, and hints that Perez (ancestor to David) will be the favored one.
  - *"And the way in which this works is that one of the two, Perez, takes, or I guess you could say supplants his twin, Zerah...And it's his brother Perez who breaks forth and is the first to emerge from the womb of Tamar."*
  - Judah's recognition that Tamar is "more righteous than I" (Gen 38:26) shows a moment of repentance and self-awareness.
1. **Reuben and Judah as Key Figures:** Both sons of Leah will play important roles in the future of Israel.
- Reuben, the firstborn, tries to save Joseph.
  - Judah's leadership is important as he suggests selling Joseph, and the narrative connects him to the Davidic line.
  - *"So, we want to look then at these three important sons in the future of Israel as a nation. So, we have Reuben the first born, we have Judah, and then we have Joseph. Now Joseph becomes the father of two tribes...Judah is located in the south and is the most preeminent tribe in the south."*

**Conclusion:**

Genesis 37-38 establishes the main conflict and characters for the Joseph narrative. It explores themes of betrayal, reconciliation, and God's sovereign plan working through flawed individuals. The stories are full of ironies and ambiguities, reflecting the mysteries of God's ways. While Joseph's character is questioned, the focus shifts to the moral decline of his brothers, specifically Reuben and Judah, whose actions both further this decline, and yet ultimately also forward God's plan. The narratives are a preparation for Joseph's rise to power in Egypt and God's provision through the coming famine.

## 4. Study Guide: Mathews, Genesis, Session 21, Joseph and his Brothers (Gen. 37:2-38 :30)

### Joseph and His Brothers: A Study Guide

#### Short Answer Quiz

1. How does the phrase "these are the generations of" introduce the Joseph narrative, and what does it signify regarding the focus of the story?
2. What is the significance of the geographical location of Jacob's descendants in Egypt, given the original promise of residence in Canaan?
3. According to Dr. Mathews, what are the major recurring themes found throughout Genesis, and how are these themes evident in the Joseph narrative?
4. How do the theophanies in the Joseph narrative differ from those in the preceding patriarchal narratives, and what might this difference suggest?
5. What are the two main interpretations of Joseph's character, and why does Dr. Mathews lean toward seeing him as flawed?
6. How did Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph exacerbate tensions in the family, and how does this echo previous relationships within the patriarchal family?
7. Describe the two dreams that Joseph had, and what do they foreshadow regarding the future relationship between Joseph and his family?
8. What is the role of the mysterious man in the field in the narrative, and how does his presence contribute to the understanding of God's plan?
9. How do Reuben and Judah's actions demonstrate both the moral decline of the brothers and how God's plan continues despite their behavior?
10. What are the key elements of the Judah and Tamar story, and how does this episode contribute to our understanding of Judah's character and God's plan?

#### Answer Key

1. The phrase "these are the generations of Jacob" introduces the Joseph narrative by indicating that the focus of the story will be on the descendants of Jacob, specifically his sons, and their relationships and impacts. It is the account of the offspring rather than the person named in the catchphrase.

2. The location of the Jacobites in Egypt shows that the promises to Abraham are being fulfilled in stages rather than all at once. The promises included the promise of residence in Canaan, and the narrative implies that God is at work despite the fact that the descendants of Abraham are outside of Canaan.
3. The major recurring themes include blessing, procreation, and the land, as well as deception, betrayal, and strife. In the Joseph narrative, we see the promise of blessing worked out even through strife and betrayal as the family is saved from famine.
4. The theophanies are different because, while dreams are present, there are no direct appearances from God, angels, or direct speech; rather, dreams that need interpretation are the main way God communicates his plan. This may indicate a distance between God and Jacob's sons.
5. One interpretation is that Joseph is an ideal person of faith and a type of Christ, while Dr. Mathews argues that Joseph is flawed because he demonstrates pride and deception, consistent with the flaws of his ancestors. Joseph's character is not perfect like the coming Messiah.
6. Jacob's favoritism towards Joseph, demonstrated by the richly ornamented robe, caused jealousy and hatred among the other brothers. This favoritism echoes the preferential love of Isaac for Esau and Rebecca for Jacob, creating similar family tensions.
7. In Joseph's first dream, the sheaves of grain bowed down to his sheaf, and in his second dream, the sun, moon, and stars bowed down to him. These dreams foreshadow the family's eventual submission to Joseph.
8. The man's identity remains a mystery; he is an essential element for Joseph to find his brothers at Dothan. The ambiguity of his appearance encourages the reader to consider the sovereign hand of God at work even in apparent coincidences.
9. Reuben tries to prevent Joseph's murder by recommending the cistern, while Judah suggests selling him into slavery, showing how both have degraded morally; yet, God uses these actions to bring about his plan of salvation through Joseph's rise to power in Egypt.
10. The Judah and Tamar story involves Judah's failure to provide for Tamar, her trickery to secure her future, and Judah's ultimate recognition of his wrongdoing.



This episode highlights Judah's moral decline and, paradoxically, reveals the lineage of the Davidic kings.

## Essay Questions

1. Analyze the ways in which the Joseph narrative both reflects and departs from the preceding narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis.
2. Discuss the recurring themes of deception and betrayal in the Joseph narrative, and explore how these themes contribute to the overall message of the text.
3. Compare and contrast the characters of Joseph and his brothers, examining their motivations, actions, and transformations throughout the story.
4. Evaluate the significance of dreams in the Joseph narrative, and discuss how they serve as a means of divine communication and revelation.
5. Consider the portrayal of justice and reconciliation in the Joseph story, and discuss how these elements contribute to the narrative's overarching theological message.

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Theophany:** A visible manifestation of God to humankind.
- **Tol' doth (תּוֹלְדוֹת):** Hebrew word that translates to "generations," "account," or "history," used as a literary device to mark narrative sections in Genesis.
- **Patriarchs:** The male ancestors of the Israelites, particularly Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- **Goshen:** A region in ancient Egypt where the Israelites settled.
- **Reconciliation:** The restoration of friendly relations.
- **Levirate Marriage:** A custom where a man is required to marry his brother's widow when the brother has died childless.
- **Typology:** A way of interpreting the Old Testament by seeing its events and people as foreshadowing aspects of the New Testament.
- **Midianites:** A group of people that intermarried with the Ishmaelites.

- **Shechem:** A city in Canaan significant in the patriarch stories.
- **Dothan:** A location where Joseph finds his brothers and is sold to slavers.
- **Potiphar:** An Egyptian official who buys Joseph as a slave.
- **Adullam:** A city southwest of Jerusalem, where Judah moves after leaving his family.
- **Scarlet Thread:** A red cord used by the midwife to identify the first twin born.
- **Seal:** A personalized cylinder used for identification.
- **Cistern:** A dry well that Joseph was tossed into.
- **Sackcloth:** A material used to demonstrate mourning.
- **Yahwist:** A term used to describe someone who worships Yahweh, the God of Israel.
- **Leah:** Jacob's first wife and mother to Reuben and Judah.
- **Rachel:** Jacob's favorite wife and mother of Joseph.
- **Bilhah and Zilpah:** Handmaidens to Rachel and Leah, who also had children with Jacob.
- **Ephraim and Manasseh:** Joseph's two sons, who become tribes of Israel.
- **Hebron:** The city where Jacob settles prior to sending Joseph to find his brothers.

## **5. FAQs on Mathews, Genesis, Session 21, Joseph and his Brothers (Gen. 37:2-38:30), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)**