

Illuminating Scripture

Lecture Six Handout

1.Gen. 37:2

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought an ill report of them to their father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

2.Gen. 37:12

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." ¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers, and with the flock; and bring me word again." . . . So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. ¹⁸ They saw him afar off, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild beast has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; cast him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him" — that he might rescue him out of their hand, to restore him to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; ²⁴ and they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty, there was no water in it.

3.Gen. 37:25

Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers heeded him. ²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by; and they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of

the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver; and they took Joseph to Egypt.

4.Gen. 37:31

Then they took Joseph's robe, and killed a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood; ³² and they sent the long robe with sleeves and brought it to their father, and said, "This we have found; see now whether it is your son's robe or not." ³³ And he recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe; a wild beast has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." ³⁴ Then Jacob rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

5.Gen. 44:1

Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, ² and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. ³ As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their asses. ⁴ When they had gone but a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup? ⁵ Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he divines? You have done wrong in so doing.'"

6.Gen. 44:6

When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. ⁷ They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! ⁸ Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; how then should we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? ⁹ With whomever of your servants it be found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." ¹⁰ He said, "Let it be as you say: he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be blameless." ¹¹ Then every man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and every man opened his sack. ¹² And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ Then they rent their clothes, and every man loaded his ass, and they returned to the city.

7.Gen. 44:14

When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there; and they fell before him to the ground. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed divine?" ¹⁶ And Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has

found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found." ¹⁷ But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

8.Gen. 44:18

Then Judah went up to him and said, "O my lord, let your servant, I pray you, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?' ²⁰ And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children; and his father loves him.' ²¹ Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes upon him.' ²² We said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' ²³ Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.' ²⁴ When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. ²⁵ And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' ²⁶ we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' ²⁷ Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; ²⁸ one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. ²⁹ If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.' ³⁰ Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the lad's life, ³¹ when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. ³² For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.' ³³ Now therefore, let your servant, I pray you, remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord; and let the lad go back with his brothers. ³⁴ For how can I go back to my father if the lad is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would come upon my father."

9. J. Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* (Yale, 1993)

The enormous power behind Judah's offer derives from the complicated set of substitutions that it articulates. Judah will be the substitute for Benjamin, accepting upon himself the slavery to which Joseph has sentenced his younger brother. But Benjamin is himself a substitute, standing in for that other beloved son and child of Rachel and Jacob's old age, Joseph (44:20; 37:3). And Joseph and Benjamin are both, in some deeper sense, substitutes for their father and thus paradigms for the people Israel. We have already seen that the deceptive report of Joseph's death leads Jacob to speak of

his own . . . (37:34-35). This is because, as Judah puts it with reference to Jacob and Benjamin, "his own life is bound up with his" (44:30).

. . . By offering to take Benjamin's place—to bear his brother's sentence of slavery in Egypt—Judah has at long last made good his crime of proposing the sale of Joseph, taking the place of the one who takes Joseph's place. He has also made good his offense against his father, now preferring lifetime slavery, as he puts it to Joseph, over "send[ing] the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief" (v. 31) . . . The paradox is that this very willingness breaks the impasse in the family: Joseph drops his disguise, neither Benjamin nor Judah is enslaved, yet Jacob is redeemed nonetheless from his own death-like state of continuous mourning for his beloved son, and the fractured family is reunited and reconciled.