

Session 12: The Twelve Sons Cycle

Key texts: Genesis 37:12-50:20

Announcements

→ Upcoming EquipMEN† events:

- *Exponential2:2 applications now available. Due on 5/12!*

The Twelve Sons Cycle (37:12-50:26)

There has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, in respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, from that day to this... God's absolute sovereignty... is what my mind seems to rest assured of, as much as of anything that I see with my eyes... The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God... God's sovereignty has ever appeared to me, [a] great part of His glory. It has often been my delight to approach God, and adore him as a sovereign God. (Jonathan Edwards)

The sovereignty of God is often questioned because man does not understand what God is doing. Because He *does not* act as we think He should, we conclude He *cannot* act as we think He would. (Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*)

The Cyclic Structure of the Twelve Sons Narrative²²

- A. Introduction: Beginning of Joseph story with a dysfunctional family (37:2-11)
- B. Jacob mourns "death" of Joseph (37:12-36)
- C. Interlude: Judah signified as leader of twelve tribes (38:1-30)
- D. Joseph's enslavement in Egypt (39:1-23)
- E. Joseph savior of Egypt through favor at Pharaoh's court (40:1-41:57)
- F. Journey of brothers to Egypt (42:1-43:34)
- G. Brothers, especially Judah, pass Joseph's test of brotherly love (44:1-34)
- G'. Joseph gives up power over to brothers (45:1-28)
- F'. Migration of family to Egypt (46:1-27)
- E'. Joseph savior of family through favor at Pharaoh's court (46:28-47:12)
- D'. Joseph's enslavement of Egyptians (47:13-31)
- C'. Interlude: Judah blessed as ruler (48:1-49:28)
- B'. Joseph mourns death of Jacob (49:29-50:14)
- A'. Conclusion: End of Joseph story with a reconciled family (50:15-26)

"Unlike the two previous cycles Isaac versus Ishmael; Jacob versus Esau), no further distinction is made between the natural and the supernatural seed. All twelve sons of Jacob are part of the supernatural seed and become the patriarchs...of the twelve tribes that will constitute the nation of Israel. The issue to be resolved in this cycle pertains to *kingship*. Which of the twelve will rule his brothers? And out of which tribe of Israel will the king of Israel arise? In this struggle Joseph, father of Ephraim, becomes the ruler over his brothers while they sojourn in Egypt, but *Judah* emerges as the king worthy to rule Israel in the land. Judah's four older brothers are disqualified: dull Reuben by his incestuous relationship and the hotheads Simeon and Levi for using the sacred rite of circumcision to destroy Shechemites who raped their sister."²³

²² Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 314.

²³ Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 314.

Whose story *is* this, anyway?

“The last main section of Genesis further develops the theme of a regal line descended from Abraham. While royalty is initially ascribed to Joseph, and is later linked to his younger son Ephraim, future kingship is also associated with the line of Judah. As immediate heir to the patriarchal promises, Joseph, the governor of Egypt, mediates divine blessing to many people. Genesis, however, anticipates a time when the leadership of Israel will pass from the tribe of Ephraim to the tribe of Judah (see Ps. 78:67–68). This story serves the first readers by explaining how they came to be in Egypt, namely, through God’s mysterious use of evil and noble deeds to bring about his purpose (cf. Gen. 50:20).”²⁴

Three Key Scenes: Judah and Tamar (38:1-30); Joseph Interprets Pharaoh’s Dreams (41:1-36); Joseph’s Reveals His Identity and Provides for His Brothers (45:1-28)

Man-o-logue: What do you think the author intended to convey to the reader in your assigned scene?

- What is/are the main point(s)?

- What questions would your scene have answered for the people of God as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land?

- What else do we need to see in this scene?

Judah and Tamar (38:1-30; cf. 49:8-10; Ps. 78:67-68; Matt. 1:3)

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh’s Dreams (41:1-36)

Joseph’s Reveals His Identity and Provides for His Brothers (45:1-28)

²⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, from introductory notes on Genesis 37-50.

Some Summarizing Theological Reflections on the Twelve Sons Narrative

- God _____ sin-ridden men as his _____ for his work of redemption.
- God's covenantal promises are _____ and cannot be _____.
- God is _____ over the outworking of his covenant promises.
- God normally works through _____.
- God _____ for _____ what men _____ for _____.

Suggested reading for next week's seminar discussion

Scripture to study: Luke 24:13-27

For further reading: *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*, by Graeme Goldsworthy; *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*, by Edmund Clowney

Worship: *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise* Walter Chalmers Smith

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great Name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

All laud we would render; O help us to see
'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee,
And so let Thy glory, Almighty, impart,
Through Christ in His story, Thy Christ to the heart.