

00-03-05a

If you'll turn with me to the book of Isaiah chapter 49, we'll continue our worship this morning with our scripture reading from this passage. Isaiah chapter 49. There is an interesting convergence in our two studies.

We are looking at, in the gospel of Luke, the Lord Jesus Christ in his ministry to the Roman centurion and then the widow of Nain and in the symbolic miracles that are recorded there. He did many others that are not recorded, John tells us, but we see Jesus healing, giving the blind their sight, giving hearing to the deaf, raising the dead, and doing these miraculous signs that were foretold in the Old Testament prophets. These were signs of identification.

These were things so that the nation of Israel could identify their Redeemer. There is the tension and the conflict between the two pictures that are given of the Messiah in the Old Testament. You have the conquering king who will rule and break off the bonds and the yoke of oppressing nations and give Israel freedom and indeed dominance over Gentile nations.

And then you also have passages such as this, the servant, the suffering servant. Here in Isaiah 49 and in Isaiah 53, of course, is one of our most recognizable passages where it talks about the suffering of the servant of God on behalf of the people. And as we continue in Genesis and are embarking on the Joseph section, beginning in chapter 37 and going through the end of the book, Joseph is a wonderful picture of the sufferings of Jesus Christ on behalf of his people.

So it is fitting that as we look at our scripture reading this morning, we find ourselves in Isaiah 49, where God's servant is sent to his people, Listen, O coastlands, to me, and take heed, you peoples from afar. The Lord has called me from the womb. From the matrix of my mother he has made mention of my name.

And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand he has hidden me and made me a polished shaft. In his quiver he has hidden me.

And he said to me, You are my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have labored in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain.

Yet surely my just reward is with the Lord, and my work with my God. And now the Lord says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, so that Israel is gathered to him. For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength.

Indeed, he says, it is too small a thing that you should be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel. I will also give you as a light

to the Gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth. Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, their holy one, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nations abhors, to the servant of rulers.

Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord who is faithful, the holy one of Israel, and he has chosen you. Thus says the Lord, in an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. I will preserve you and give you as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages, so that you may say to the prisoners, Go forth, to those who are in darkness, show yourselves.

They shall feed along the roads, and their pastures shall be on all the desolate heights. They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them, for he who has mercy on them will lead them. Even by the springs of water he will guide them.

I will make each of my mountains a road, and my highways shall be elevated. Surely these shall come from afar. Look, those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim.

Sing, O heavens, be joyful, O earth, and break out in singing, O mountains, for the Lord has comforted his people and will have mercy on his afflicted." It is tempting to take a break from Genesis and spend a couple of weeks in Isaiah chapter 49. As you can tell just by reading through it, there is a lot here. Some of it really cries out for explanation and interpretation.

But in the broad view, you can see that God has designated a servant who will deliver his people. In the course of that, Israel itself will be a servant to God and be the means of deliverance to the whole world. But there is an interplay between what God says to this individual who is his servant who will deliver the nation, and the nation as a servant who will be the means of deliverance for the world and a light to the Gentiles.

But this servant who has been pre-designated in God's plan, you can see this in the first few verses, he's called me from the womb, from the matrix of my mother, he has made mention of my name. And you remember the literal fulfillment of this when Gabriel tells Mary, thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. But he says, he has made my mouth like a sharp sword.

And of course, it calls to mind the numerous references to the word of God as a sharp sword that pierces and divides and exposes the thoughts and intents of the heart. In the shadow of his hand, he has hidden me and made me a polished shaft. In his quiver, he has hidden me.

This is the sharp sword and the sharp arrow that is going to fly a straight course and pierce and accomplish the purpose for which it was formed and made as a weapon. And

its function is to pierce, but it is hidden. It's not immediately recognized.

It's in the scabbard or in the quiver initially. So it's a sharp weapon and it's going to do a lot, but initially it's not visible. It isn't seen.

It's there. Its purpose has been established from the beginning, but there's going to be a period of time before it is brought to light and used to accomplish its purpose. And you can see this in the career of Joseph.

You can see this in the career of the Lord Jesus Christ, where there is initially no recognition of the role that this individual is going to play in terms of deliverance, but yet later on it becomes very clear. You also see that this servant is one who is despised in verse 7. The nation abhors, is a servant of rulers initially, and yet kings are going to see and arise. Princes will worship, and there's going to be that idea of reversal.

This one who is despised and abhorred, who bows down to kings and serves kings, there will be a turnabout and it will be the kings and the princes who will be bowing down and worshipping. And all of this is summarized in the last section because the Lord says, in an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. And this is another one of those, what a secular person might call a stock phrase from the Bible, where it seems like sometimes just to make it more grand eloquent there will be extra words thrown in.

But look at what this says in verse 8, in an acceptable time I have heard you. There can be crying out many times, but God will hear in the acceptable time. There are conditions that need to be met before God is going to hear.

Elsewhere in Isaiah, I'm trying to think of the reference, I don't think I can pull it out of my memory, but he says your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear. We know that if we do not forgive one another, our prayers are not heard. A man who does not love his wife and does not treat his wife with respect, the Bible says his prayers will not be heard.

There are many conditions to be heard by the Lord. There is an acceptable time, and sometimes the pressure that we are under, the adversity or the trial that we are experiencing is a necessary catalyst. It is a necessary trial by fire to purge out, to bring to light flaws or problems in our soul so that when the deliverance of God comes, that trial has served its purpose to turn us and to draw us closer to God and give us a greater degree of commitment to the things of God than we had beforehand.

So there is an acceptable time, and sometimes we say where is the deliverance of the Lord? If you think about the Israelites, they had days of servitude, they had days of bondage, they had days of trial, and that was for a purpose because if God had delivered them from each one of those trials, if they had never lacked food in the wilderness, if

they had never suffered a military defeat, how complacent and how superficial would their relationship with God and their faith in Him have been. So there is an acceptable time when God hears, and there is a day of salvation in which He helps, and it is an appointed day. It is a day that God knows about, and it is a day that we fix our confidence on.

Paul talks about this in Romans when you get over to chapter 8, that the whole creation is groaning, waiting for the revelation of the sons of God, and the trials and tribulations that we go through now, the sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed. So we have to reconcile ourselves to the delay, to the interim period between the promise and its fulfillment, and God is working His will, He is accomplishing His purpose in us during that time. There is a day of salvation in which we are helped.

He says, I will preserve you and give you as a covenant to the people to restore the earth and cause them to inherit what is now a desolate heritage, but it is not going to be desolate always. And the idea of reversal goes all through these passages. You can start with Isaiah 49 and read all the way through to 53, and God talks later on about the place where the forests of Lebanon will be like a field, and the fields will be like a forest.

So the place where there was lush tree growth, that will be chopped down and it is going to look like a bare field, and then the bare fields that don't seem to be growing much, they are going to blossom and produce harvests like a forest. And this is a hope that is not seen, and we have this in our own lives. God has made promises to us, we are the possessors of spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in Christ, but our citizenship is heavenly.

And it is essential that it become a reality to us even though it is unseen, because that hope is what sustains us during the interim period. And in thinking about that and about God's purpose, Isaiah 49 in particular emphasizes the fact that this is ordained by God. God calls the name of his servant from the womb and has mapped out the course of this servant's service and existence.

And it involves suffering, it involves being abhorred and being despised and not being recognized for who he is. And yet the end result is going to be a great, victorious deliverance. Well as we turn now back to Genesis and resume our study of the career of Joseph, when we last looked at him, he had become the master dreamer, which put him on the outs with his brothers.

And his father, following a pattern that we've seen earlier in his operation, doesn't seem to be aware of what's going on amongst his children. And doesn't seem to have any qualms about sending Joseph alone and unaccompanied all the way up some fifty odd miles from Hebron to the city of Jerusalem in the area of Shechem where his brothers are supposed to be feeding the flock. It's also interesting that Joseph does not accompany

them.

We know that Joseph has been detailed to supervise his brothers in shepherding back in verse 2 of chapter 37. He's feeding the flock with his brothers or shepherding his brothers, it can just as easily be translated. And so the brothers have traveled quite a good distance northward with the flocks.

So he sends them and says, please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks and bring back word to me. And the word for well there is actually shalom, or if they have peace. And you get the idea that Jacob's concern, and then returning to that region of Shechem, is that there are those in that region to whom violence has been done and they may be looking for revenge.

There may be relatives of those that were slaughtered by Simeon and Levi and the rest of the brothers plundering in that area some ten years earlier. And then we saw the fateful meeting with a certain man in verse 15 because Joseph is found wandering in the field looking for his brothers and not finding them. You imagine that he would return to his father in short order and say, I went to Shechem and they were not there.

I couldn't find anyone who knew where they went so I can't bring you a report. But providentially this man is present and he says they have departed from here. I heard them say let us go to Dothan.

Dothan is another distance even further away from Hebron. And Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan. When they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him.

And as we resume the account here in verses 18 and 19, then they said to one another, look, the dreamer is coming. And this is a phrase that uses the word for dreams and also Baal, which as you may remember, Baal in the ancient Near East is the word for Lord. It is later replaced by the Aramaic term Adonai.

But the old term was Baal. But it fell into disfavor after the Canaanite god who they called Lord in that country was always called Baal or Baal. So they got away from using Baal as a term for Lord.

But in some of the ancient listings of names, you find that Jerubbaal, for example, is a name. And you find names ending in that in the same way that they would end with L, such as Ezekiel, or Yah for Yahweh, Nathaniah or any of the other Yah ending names is because it is referring to the Lord. And in the olden days, Baal was also a title that was ascribed to the Lord God.

And Baal meant Lord. So they are calling Joseph here. They say, well, here is the dream master.

Here is the Lord of dreams. And they are mocking him because in his dream he is being bowed down to by these sheaves and by the sun, moon and stars. So here is the dream Lord, they say, as he comes.

Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit, and we shall say some wild beast has devoured him. We shall see what will become of his dreams. Now there were lots of issues that they had with Joseph.

They didn't like him because of the bad report that he gave on four of the brothers back in verse 2. They didn't like him because he was his father's favorite. Jacob doted on him and gave him the coat of many colors, the coat of authority, the coat that marked him out for special favor, similar to royal robes that have been depicted in pictures that they found in Nuzi and Mari and some of the contemporaneous ancient civilizations of his time. Princes wore this kind of robe made of small strips of colored cloth sewn together and wrapped around the body like a sari.

But what is it that really pushes his brothers over the edge in terms of their jealousy and their hatred? It's the dream. They don't mention the coat. They don't mention the bad report.

They don't say here comes old tattletale or here comes old royal robes. They say here comes the dream master, here comes the dream lord, here comes the man who would be ruler over us. The dreamer is coming.

Let us kill him. Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams. So this is what really antagonizes him.

We might as well begin now because it would take me months to summarize if we go all the way through this story and then go back and review. But if you think about the Lord Jesus Christ who is obviously being foreshadowed in the career of Joseph, what is the thing that antagonized his brethren in Israel the most? Was it that he went about doing good? Was it that he could perform miracles? What was it that antagonized the leaders of the people, the scribes and the Pharisees and caused people to want to say release to us Barabbas and crucify this man? The religious establishment saw their standing before God disparaged and slipping. Jesus Christ, the thing that really got them is when they figured out that he was claiming to be or acting as though he were the son of God and they wanted to have favor with the Father, God the Father, which they did not have, but that's what they wanted and they saw him as in demonstrations of the power of God and raising the dead and healing the sick and so forth, this jealousy of place.

What is the sign that gets tacked up on the cross? Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. It's the kingship that really annoyed them the most. It's the kingship that they leveraged with the Romans to get Jesus crucified.

This man is a traitor to the emperor. He's a traitor to Caesar because he says he's the king. And so this same issue of rulership or lordship, not wanting to have favor with God, not wanting to acknowledge the will of God with regard to this individual is what sows the seeds of this episode.

Let's kill him, cast him into some pit. We shall say some wild beast has devoured him. We shall see what will become of his dreams.

But Reuben heard it and he delivered him out of their hands and said, let us not kill him. So you get the idea how this happens in a mob scene where somebody shouts something and somebody else shouts something worse and then everybody in the clamor runs and rushes to go hang someone or run somebody out of town on a rail or whatever. And Reuben stops him and you get the idea here that he literally grabs Joseph away from them as they're about to haul him off and kill him.

And he says, let us not kill him. Reuben said to them, shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness and do not lay a hand on him. And his idea was that he might deliver him out of their hands and bring him back to his father.

So we wonder about this. Why does it's Reuben that does this? What do we know about Reuben? The most recent notice we have is that he tried to seize the initiative in the family by laying with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid, mother of two of the brothers. And this is a political move as we saw from other scriptures, other examples in scripture.

And so he was jockeying for authority and his father found out about it. Israel heard of it. And so now Reuben is on the outs with Jacob.

And Reuben is pretty sure that whatever his strategy was here, you don't get the idea that Reuben was all that bright from looking at scripture. But what was he thinking when he took Bilhah? You can't find a good plan that's going to come out of that. And so perhaps here his motivation is, well, if I can rescue Joseph from this evil plot and bring him back safely to my father, Jacob is going to maybe forgive some of these past wrongs.

Of course in the process he would have to communicate to Jacob what the plot had been and put the other brothers on the outs. So this may be another sort of a plan germinating in Reuben's mind to make sure that he's already the firstborn. He already has these things, but he's trying to do things to secure what is already his.

And you think, what is he thinking? But we do the same thing. We have blessings that are already ours in Christ and yet a lot of times we find ourselves getting into spirituality by works. It's the classic pharisaical complex where they're already the people of God.

They already have the promises and the blessings if they just will lay hold of them through faith. But we do things that make no sense. We try to earn our way into God's

favor.

We try to earn our way into the favor of others instead of being obedient to God and letting God sort out opinions. So it's something of a mystery what Reuben's thought processes are both in the first case where he takes Bilhah and here, what is his motivation? The scripture doesn't tell us why he's the one to speak up. Does he fear something or does he see an opportunity for something? It's ambiguous and purposefully so.

He says, shed no blood, cast him into this pit so that he might deliver him out of their hands and bring him back to his father. So that's his goal. It may be that Reuben is just good hearted.

Maybe he's not as evilly disposed. He wasn't in on the plot to go to Shechem and circumcise the men and slaughter them. That was Simeon and Levi.

And Reuben may just be more mercifully disposed as we're going to see Judah may also be in that category. So it came to pass that when Joseph had come to his brothers, so they saw him afar off and had this conversation before he got near. When he came near, they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him.

It's fascinating in this verse because in verse 23, the verb in Hebrew for stripped Joseph of his tunic is the same word that will be used later in Leviticus for skinning a sacrifice. Literally, it says they skinned off his tunic from him and they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty.

There was no water in it. These cisterns would be cut out of the rock and were used to catch water. Ideally, there would be a spring there and this cistern would be carved around the spring so that it would be fed from the water table that rose above the bedrock there.

Or if there was a spring, it would be a spring fed thing and it would be more like a well. But in order to prevent evaporation in that arid climate, the opening would be very small and they would dig down a vertical shaft several feet and then they would dig out. And so this would be shaped like a, you've seen these round vases with a little narrow neck.

Well, this would be the shape of the hole in the ground. It would have a narrow shaft and then it would open out to a larger space below. And you can imagine if you get dropped down into something like this, there's no possible way to climb up and get out because the upper surface is actually curved toward the narrow shaft and unless someone lets down a rope, there is no, you can't fight mean old Mr. Gravity there and climb up the sides and get out.

When we think of a pit, we think of an open pit with slanting sides, but this is a cistern. These were often plastered on the inside to waterproof them. And there are examples

you can see even today that have been excavated where the plaster is still there.

But occasionally there would be shifts or the results of temperature and cracks would develop in these and they would no longer hold water. And that appears to be the case with this one because it's a dry cistern and it's not in use. There's no civilization around this.

It's out in the wilderness. So at one time it might have been in use and then it cracked and it's just an empty cistern. So this is what they do.

They drop him in there. There's no water in it. You can go over, if you know the career of Jeremiah, you get over in Jeremiah, I think it's around chapter 23, where he's dropped into a similar cistern and it isn't full of water, but it's full of muck.

There's mire in the bottom of it and they drop Jeremiah down there and he's in danger of sinking in the mire. Somebody goes and appeals to the king on his behalf and they drop some clothing down to him to put under his arms and they drop down a rope and he uses the clothing to pad the rope and they have to pull Jeremiah out of the muck that he's, this quagmire at the bottom of this cistern to save his life because he'll die of starvation down there. So this is Joseph's situation.

And then in verse 25, they sat down to eat a meal. And you think, well, if this is not the height of callousness, this may even be, you remember when Jesse sent David to his brothers out on the battlefield and he brought figs and dates and things from home, brought them a little box lunch, brought them some provisions. And it may be that Joseph had brought some of these provisions along those same lines.

It was traditional when you went to check on someone to bring them a little care package from home. And so they open up the care package needed and Joseph is trapped down in the well. Then they lifted their eyes and looked.

And you know from our previous experience in Genesis that whenever someone lifts their eyes and looks, something really important is about to happen. They lifted their eyes and looked and there, this is sort of like behold, there was a company of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead with camels bearing spices. We know a lot about this.

We know who Ishmael is. We know where the Ishmaelites live. We know where Gilead is because that's where Laban overtook Jacob, the mountains of Gilead, just on the other side of the brook.

And they're coming with their camels bearing spices, balm and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. And these substances that are mentioned here, these spices and balm and myrrh and so forth, were products of the region of Gilead. There was a great trade route that went from the region of Syria and beyond and cut down through Palestine and went to Egypt.

And these men had taken a detour off of that trade route and had gone through Gilead and had picked up these spices and things on their way down to Egypt to sell them, at a profit obviously. So Judah said to his brothers, what profit is there? What gain is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brothers listened.

So Judah has this idea. Let's sell him. And you get the idea that Reuben has somehow left the scene because Reuben's plan is to pull him out of the pit and take him back to his father.

When Judah makes this suggestion, there is no reply from Reuben. So the argument from silence here is that Reuben is off someplace. So then verse 28, it says Midianite traders passed by.

So the brothers pulled Joseph and lifted him out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver and they took Joseph to Egypt. We'll notice it says the brothers there in italics, in your New King James, and those words are not in the original. And if you read this more closely, we started out with Ishmaelites being cited far off, but now it says Midianite traders passed by.

So they pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites. So before you make any changes in your Bible, this is not the position I'm advocating, but people that have looked at this closely have thought, well, there are two different groups of foreigners here. You've got the Ishmaelites and you've got the Midianites.

And the Ishmaelites were a long way off. The brothers say, well, let's sell him to them. But before they can do so, some Midianite traders come by and maybe hear Joseph or they stop by to see if there's any water in the well.

And it says they, and the nearer subject in context is the Midianites. And so you think, well, there are two groups of foreigners. And before the brothers can implement their plan, and maybe this is why Reuben is surprised when he goes back to the pit, because it says they pulled, somebody pulled Joseph up, lifted him out of the pit, sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver.

And they, the Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt. Then Reuben returned to the pit and indeed Joseph was not there. He tore his clothes, returned to his brothers and said, the lad is not there.

And so people have decided, well, these Midianites got there first and they're the ones that actually sold Joseph into slavery. Well, you might think that, and it is possible to read the text that way, except for a couple of things. First of all, turn with me to the book of Judges.

Verse chapter 8, verse 22. Judges 8, 22. We're in a section here dealing with Gideon or

Jerubbaal, his other name.

The men of Israel said to Gideon in verse 22, rule over us, both you and your son and your grandson also, for you delivered us from the hand of Midian. Remember, that was the big enemy that Gideon defeated, was the Midianites. But Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you, the Lord shall rule over you.

Gideon said to them, I would like to make a request of you that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder. For they had golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites. The Midianites are Ishmaelites.

So, the Ishmaelites, the Midianites, were Ishmaelites. You find that out over in Judges and that tells us that this does not require understanding two different groups. And in the same way that you see Joseph afar off and you can identify him by his tunic, his coat of many colors, when they see this caravan approaching from a long distance away, they say, well, those are the Ishmaelites.

That's the more generic term. There are many different sub-tribes or subsets of the general category Ishmaelite. These Midianites that Gideon is talking about, they have earrings and things that were taken as plunder when they were killed because they are Ishmaelites.

And the Ishmaelites, whether they're Midianites or any of the other ites that are a part of that, live in that region, they all wear these earrings. So, when it says in verse 28 that the Midianite traders passed by, well, now they're closer. When they saw them afar off, they said, well, these are the Ishmaelites.

The Ishmaelites are the ones that ran these caravans. They were the cameleers and guys with camels hauling stuff back and forth. They were the truckers of the ancient world and that's Ishmaelites.

That's the general term for them. But when they get closer, they can tell what kind of Ishmaelites they are. They are Midianite traders.

And this will have significance for us in a moment. But the other clue that helps us out here is a pattern of storytelling in Hebrew. We've seen how there are distinctives in the way stories are told in Hebrew literature and the Bible in particular.

A lot of times there will be a general statement of what happened and then a more specific retelling that gives you more detail. That's one of the features. Well, another common feature is that when a new character is introduced in a story, their name will be given.

And then the second time that they're referred to, they'll be referred to by name again. And almost always, a character will be referred to twice by their formal name before the

narrator will start using pronouns to refer to them. And this is when they are actors, when they're the subject of a verb.

We know that they saw the Ishmaelites afar off and they said, let's sell them to the Ishmaelites and so forth. But when they come near and when they become the subjects of a verb, as they pass by, this is the first formal reference to them in the nominative case where they are the subject of a verb. And so they're the Midianites.

Well, in the normal course of Hebrew storytelling, you would expect them to be referred to by name again before you use the pronoun they. And so the they that pulled Joseph up and lift him out of the pit, you would not expect in the normal Hebrew story that they would refer to the Midianites because their formal name has only been used once. Later in the verse, when it says that he was sold to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver, then they, now you can use the pronoun because you've been referring to these Ishmaelites, they've been referred to now three or four times in the story.

Now they start to use the pronoun they. So the Ishmaelites, the first time they're a subject is back in verse 25. The Ishmaelites are coming from Gilead and so they talk about it in the Ishmaelites, but then the Midianite traders are passing by.

And so the brothers, and we would agree with the smoothing out that the NKJV people put in here, that the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out. And as a final clincher, if there's any doubt as to who pulls him out and sells him, turn over quickly to chapter 45 of Genesis. Chapter 45.

This is after Joseph has revealed himself to his brothers. In verse 4 he says to his brothers, please come near to me. So they came near.

Then he said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. So it's not like, well, you know, we had you in the pit and we were still trying to make up your mind, but along came these Midianites and pulled you out and sold you to the Ishmaelites. Joseph says, no, you sold me into slavery in Egypt, but don't be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here.

God sent me before you to preserve life. So he says it two times in those two verses that they are the ones who sold him. But it's helpful to us to realize, and there's also a reason why we have these Ishmaelites referred to both in their general name and in their specific name.

I will grant you it may be a little fuzzy about the two times being used before you use a pronoun because in the English it doesn't look that way. It's a lot clearer in Hebrew is all I can say. I could take 20 minutes and write this all out for you in Hebrew and show you that it's not time for the Midianites to be used with a pronoun yet, but you'll have to trust me on that because as we move forward, they sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels

of silver.

In contemporaneous documents and clay tablets and things that have been dug up in the 2000 years before Christ time period, this was the average going rate for a slave, 20 shekels of silver. It gradually gets higher as you go forward in history. By the time you get down to the time of the Exodus, Exodus 21 verse 32 for example, we find that the price has gone up to 30 shekels of silver.

Exodus 21 verse 32, If an ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master 30 shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned. You basically have to buy the servant if he's disabled because an ox has gored him. By the time you get down to the monarchy days in 2 Kings chapter 15 and verse 20, the price has risen to 50 shekels.

But here they give 20 shekels of silver for Joseph and you get the idea that he will probably sell for more than that down in Egypt. By the time he gets sold to Potiphar, there's going to be a markup. That's what they do.

You can probably guess at the amount, it's not stated in the Bible, but I would not be at all surprised if there was about a 50% markup and it went from 20 shekels to 30 shekels by the time Joseph got down to Egypt. The fact that he is purchased, he is sold by his brothers to these Ishmaelites results in him leaving the scene. So Reuben then returns and he's apparently not been around for this and indeed Joseph is not in the pit and he tore his clothes.

He returned to his brothers and said, the lad is no more and I, where shall I go? In Hebrew this literally says, and I, where shall I come in? How am I going to come back in to Jacob is the idea. I'm far enough on the outs and I think he had figured that he would do a good deed to kind of balance the scales of his bad deed earlier and now he's party to a second and far worse deed even than what he's already done. He said, I'm not even going to be able to go in.

So they took Joseph's tunic, they killed a kid of the goats and dipped the tunic in the blood. Then they sent the tunic of many colors and they brought it to their father and said, we have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not? This seems like a little bit awkward wording in the beginning of verse 32.

They sent the tunic and they brought it. Well, did they send it or did they bring it? Well, they sent it and the ones who were sent brought it. Just like Reuben says, how can we come in before our father? Well, we'll let him get over the shock before we show up.

So we'll put this in the hands of some servants and send them back first. Let Jacob draw his own conclusions and then we'll show up and say, well, you know, we found this and we sent it right to you to see if you could recognize it or not because we think it might be something you recognize. So then they come in after when Jacob has already seen the

tunic and already gotten the initial shock.

They said, we found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not? Notice whether it is Joseph's. They didn't say that.

Whether it is our brother's. They didn't say that. It's your son's.

And there's a distance between themselves and Joseph there. But they say, do you know? And this is not the word for know, which might be Yadah or something in Hebrew. This is Nakar, which means to recognize.

Do you recognize this or not? And he recognized it and said, in fact, it's not even a question. It's actually a hyphal imperative. They say, recognize this or examine this for the purpose of recognition and see whether it is your son's tunic or not.

He recognized it, Nakar, and he says, it is my son's tunic. And that's the hyphal imperfect of Nakar there in verse 33. A wild beast has devoured him.

Without doubt, Joseph is torn to pieces and they don't even have to tell the lie. Jacob draws the conclusion that they wanted him to draw when they poured the blood on the tunic. And so Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist and mourned for his son many days.

This is the second time someone has torn their clothes over Joseph's fate. Reuben did it first and now Jacob does. But do you not find in this a tremendous additional example of turnabout and irony in the career of Jacob? We saw that irony when he went up to Laban and the rights of the firstborn were reversed on him with Leah and then Rachel and where he learned many of the things that he had obviously not known when he was living down with his father.

Well, when's the last time we had a kid of the goats associated with Jacob for purposes of deception? He went in to Isaac and what was wrapped around his arms and his neck? It was a skin of goats that Rebecca, the goat that she had slaughtered to make the meal for Isaac. And he wrapped the skin of the goats around him to deceive his father. Now the blood of a goat has been poured on this coat which was skinned off of Joseph.

That's the verb. Same word used to take the skin off an animal. The coat has been skinned off of Joseph and goat's blood has been poured on it and it's presented to Jacob to deceive him about the fate of his son.

And so the Jacob who wore those goat skins and deceived his father is now being deceived by the blood of goats on the coat that has been skinned off of his son. And you get the idea that Jacob is still having to learn things that God is still at work on him about this idea of deception and some of his shortcomings as a father and in paying attention to his sons and so forth and he's having to learn this the hard way. This is not a matter of

old sins being dredged up and revisited, but it is an irony that God can use to...