

GENESIS CHAPTERS 37 AND 39 DREAMS, BETRAYAL AND A FALSE ACCUSATION

Last week we looked at three tragic tales in the life of Jacob's ten older sons. How would you describe their character? Some that came to mind for me included "deceitful" (like their father), "violent," "self-centered," "dishonest," and "disrespectful." The most surprising thing is that THESE guys are part of God's covenant nation! THESE guys are the direct descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! As God's people you would expect them to be better morally than the idolatrous people groups around them. Sadly, however we observed that they were in many ways worse than their pagan Canaanite neighbors. When it comes to Jacobs older sons you're left shaking your head in disbelief.

Oh, but then there is Joseph...

Before we even dive into our passage this morning, Genesis Chapter 37, what can you tell me about Joseph? We've already noted that his father Jacob favored him because he was Rachel's firstborn and for a long time her only son. But what kind of person was Joseph? You all know his story. So, how would you describe his character? He was a man of high integrity who honored and trusted God. Of all the characters in the Old Testament I see Joseph as the most like Jesus of anyone. We never see him give into peer pressure, never behaving like his older brothers. So, given this obvious contrast in the character of Joseph and his older brothers, what would you expect the relationship between Joseph and his older brothers to be like? Was this a warm, loving, and nurturing family? NO! At Genesis Chapter 37 begins we will see trouble in Jacob's household.

READ Genesis 37:1-2

As his story begins, we're told that Joseph is 17 years old. This makes the youngest son Benjamin about a year old. Big age gap between sons' number 11 and 12. Now, we have no idea what the older sons did in v 2 to have Joseph give their dad the bad report. But given the stories we looked at

last time, Joseph's "bad report" was probably accurate. They were guilty for sure. His brothers undoubtedly did something they should NOT have done.

I don't believe Joseph is just being a little "tattle-tale" here. Jacob is keenly aware of the many sins his sons were capable of. I'm sure that Jacob asked Joseph to keep an eye on them for him. He didn't trust them. So, Joseph is just doing what his father had instructed.

READ Genesis 37:3

Here we see the famous "coat of many colors" as it is called. As has been pointed out before, Joseph is clearly Jacob's favorite son and we can understand why he is. I'm not being critical of Jacob, but just an observation here – any time that favoritism is shown by a parent, this can be a recipe for dysfunction and tension in a family. And so it was in this family.

READ Genesis 37:4

As you might expect Joseph's ten older brothers hated Joseph. In fact, they hated him so much that they couldn't say a nice word to him. Here we have a clear picture of what's going on in Jacob's family. It's not good.

READ Genesis 37:5

Hey, it was only a dream that Joseph had. So, what's the big deal? Well, here's the dream that Joseph shares with his older brothers...

READ Genesis 37:6-8

"They hated him," v 4... "They hated him even more," v 5... and now in v 8, "they hated him even more." Their feelings of hatred toward Joseph are intensifying. It's bad enough that Joseph is their father's clear favorite son. But now he has the audacity to imply that he's going to rule over them some day. "Who does this punk kid think he is anyway?" Well, things don't get any better.

READ Genesis 37:9-10

Here Jacob rebukes Joseph probably because he can see that Joseph's

dreams are riling his brothers up. Jacob basically asks Joseph for clarification. "Are your dreams prophetic about what will happen in the future – will we your family indeed bow ourselves to the ground before you? Is that what you are saying, Joseph?"

Joseph doesn't respond to Jacob's question. He's only 17 years old. Teenagers dream dreams all the time. They don't know why. At this point there is no way that Joseph could even imagine what the future held for him. So, he doesn't know how to respond and, thus, he remains silent.

READ Genesis 37:11

So now we get to the root cause of the brother's hatred of Joseph – jealousy. They envied Joseph. Jealousy and envy are just two sides of the same coin. But his father Jacob ponders the dream Joseph had shared.

But there is no way at this point in time that Jacob knows what the dreams mean either.

So, the stage is set for the next part of Joseph's story. I'm going to point out something in the next few verses that you probably never noticed before – something that speaks to the providence of God. Here we go...

READ Genesis 37:12-17

Did you catch that? Do you see the providence of God at work here?

Joseph has just traveled 70-plus miles north from his home at Hebron up to near Shechem to check on his brothers. When he arrives, they aren't there. His brothers aren't where they're supposed to be. At least they're not where his father assumed they would be. So how is it that Joseph finds out where they are? "A man" tells him. Who is this man? Where did this man come from? Think about it. Joseph is wandering around out in the middle of nowhere looking for his brothers when he meets this man. If this man isn't there, then what happens? Joseph goes back home and reports to his father that he couldn't find his brothers. And everything from this point on in the story never happens!

That, my dear friends, is the providence of God at work in the life of Joseph.

Our mystery man, whoever he is, informs Joseph that his brothers are likely up in Dothan. That's some 15 miles north of Shechem, so, another 15 miles further from home. Joseph being the trusted son he is makes his way north. He winds up traveling a total of 85 miles or so by the time his brothers spot him coming over the hill.

READ Genesis 37:18-20

They are NOT happy to see Joseph at all. His ten older brothers conspire together to kill their younger brother. "Here comes that dreamer. Let's kill him and see what becomes of his dreams!" They have it all figured out, every little detail. But then Reuben, the oldest son speaks up...

READ Genesis 37:21-22

So, let's give Reuben a little credit here. He convinces his brothers NOT to kill Joseph. Once again, we see the providence of God at play here. If Reuben had not spoken up and they DID kill Joseph, none of the stories we know and love about Joseph would ever have happened.

Well, Joseph approaches his brothers completely unaware of their evil intentions. And the reception he gets, let's just say it's not exactly what he expected.

READ Genesis 37:23-24

So now Joseph is trapped in this pit a long way from home. Though the text doesn't say it here, we know that Joseph cries out to his brothers in distress. How do we know this? Because... later, in Genesis Chapter 42, the ten brothers are talking among themselves while they're in Egypt. This is what they say: "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us" (Genesis 42:21). So then, we now know that Joseph in distress pleads with his brothers to let him out of the pit. They can hear him. So then, what's their reaction to Joseph's cries for

deliverance? They had lunch. Look at the next verse...

READ Genesis 37:25

The brothers completely ignore Joseph. Like Cain centuries before, they do not see themselves as being their brother's keeper. Well, suddenly their lunch is interrupted by the sound of hoof beats and a cloud of dust in the distance. Again, we see God's providence here. This caravan of Ishmaelites (also referred to as Midianite traders), just happen to pass by this obscure location on this particular day and time.

READ Genesis 37:26-28

Nine of the ten brothers seize upon the opportunity to rid themselves of their brother and make a few bucks in the process. Reuben, the oldest son, is not there when all this occurs. He left earlier probably because he could not stand to hear Joseph's cries for help. Reuben is a conflicted man and has gone off by himself. On one hand he's probably trying to figure out how he can rescue Joseph from his brothers and return him to his father. We know this from v 22, "that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father." On the other hand, Reuben is intimidated by his brothers. While Reuben is away the nine other brothers pull Joseph out of the pit and sell him as a slave to a band of total strangers. Joseph is completely betrayed by his own brothers! You wonder, "How can these guys live with themselves after they do such an awful thing to their own brother?"

Anyway, that's how Joseph winds up down in Egypt. We will resume his story shortly. Meanwhile Reuben returns to the pit where he last saw Joseph.

READ Genesis 37:29-30

Reuben is upset that Joseph is no longer in the pit. He has no idea what has happened to him. We know from the verses that follow that at some point the brothers must have informed Reuben what they had done.

READ Genesis 37:31-35

All ten of the older sons, Reuben included now make the 90-mile journey back home. On the way they come up with a story to tell their father in order to conceal what they did to Joseph. They certainly can't tell their father the truth. Remember, we saw earlier that they are just as deceitful as their father had been.

When they tell Jacob the lie and show him the bloody coat he is, of course, completely distraught at having lost his favorite son in such a tragic way. It says that Jacob "refused to be comforted." His grief runs so deep that he is completely inconsolable. Jacob's sons have done many terrible things in their life, but this one here has to be the worst, at least for Jacob. It tears him up inside.

With that gut-wrenching scene we leave Jacob and his sons behind and now we will shift our attention to Joseph down in Egypt.

READ Genesis 37:36

"Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar" directly connects us to the beginning of Genesis Chapter 39. That chapter opens with, "Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar...had bought him from the Ishmaelites..." So, this is where we pick up the Joseph narrative.

READ Genesis 39:1-6

Despite all the bad things that have happened to Joseph up to this point, it says that "the LORD was with Joseph." God makes Joseph successful in all he does. His master, Potiphar an Egyptian official, recognizes this. Over time he puts Joseph in charge of his household. Everything seems to be going well.

READ Genesis 39:7

Mrs. Potiphar (we are never told her name) comes on to Joseph. She is not the least bit discrete about her intentions.

READ Genesis 39:8-10

Joseph refuses Mrs. Potiphar's advances in no uncertain terms. He reminds her that to for him to do what she's asking him to do would be a sin against her husband and against God. So, Joseph takes a stand for righteousness. And the result of standing for what is right proves to be extremely costly for him personally.

Well, Mrs. Potiphar refuses to take "No" for an answer. She is used to getting whatever she wants and she is very persistent.

READ Genesis 39:11-12

Joseph does what the New Testament will later teach US to do – He fled immorality! Isn't that what 1 Corinthians 6:18 tells us to do? It says, "Flee from sexual immorality." Joseph literally turns and runs away!

Well, Mrs. Potiphar isn't happy about this one bit.

READ Genesis 39:13-16

When Potiphar arrives home, she tells him the exact same lie (v 17-18) that she had told the others. And what is Potiphar's reaction to his wife's false report?

READ Genesis 39:19-20

Potiphar doesn't go to Joseph to get his side of the story. He doesn't conduct an investigation to learn the truth of the matter. He immediately believes his wife's version of events and has Joseph thrown into the royal prison.

READ Genesis 39:21

Again, God is with Joseph even here in an Egyptian prison hundreds of miles from his home. God gives Joseph favor with the prison warden, "the keeper of the prison."

READ Genesis 39:22-23

Just as before in Potiphar's house, in the course of time Joseph proves himself to be trustworthy and is given greater responsibility. God gives Joseph success. And that's where we leave Joseph until next time.

So then, where is Joseph? He's not living in some luxury hotel. Lest we forget, Joseph is still a prisoner in a foreign land and there is no sign that he will ever get out. It is so easy to look ahead because we all know the story of Joseph. We want to reach out and say, "It's going to be OK, Joseph." But put yourself in Joseph's shoes. Here he is. He doesn't know how all this is going to play out. All he can do for now is trust God and pray. All he can do is be the best Joseph he can be right where he' is. That is not an easy thing to do under these circumstances, is it?

Application from Chapters 37 and 39:

- God's hand of providence is at work all around us in what seems to be the routine things of life, though we may not always be aware of it.
- Life is NOT fair, but we can choose our response to it. Feelings of anger, envy, jealousy and strife will not change our circumstances and they lead to nothing good. In fact, these "normal" human reactions are the "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21).
- During the worst times of our life God wants us to "stay the course." God's desire is that we continue to have faith in Him and trust Him in all aspects of our life – EVERYTHING!
- Just as God was with Joseph in his darkest days, so He will be with us. Jesus promised: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).
- Being in God's will, finding favor with Him is no guarantee that we will be free from temptation or trouble. Just read your Bible, the stories of Joseph, Jeremiah, Stephen, John the Baptist and even our Lord Jesus Himself. That's just the fallen world we live in. But God promises to be with us and to guide, to sustain, to encourage and to help us along the way.