

Genesis Ch37v2-36 - Hated Son, God's Plan

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[0 : 00] Joseph, a young man of 17, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of the other sons because he had been born to him in his old age, and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, listen to this dream I had. We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.

His brothers said to him, do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us? And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. Listen, he said, I had another dream, and this time the sun and the moon and the eleven stars were bowing down to me. When he told his father as well as his brothers, his fathers rebuked him and said, what is this dream you had?

[1 : 23] Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you? His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in his mind.

Verse 12. Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, as you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem.

Come, I am going to send you to them. Very well, he replied. So he said to him, go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks and bring word back to me.

So he sent him off from the valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, what are you looking for?

He replied, I am looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks? They have moved on from here, the man answered. I heard them say, let's go to Dothan.

[2 : 21] So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. Here comes that dreamer, they said to each other.

Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams. When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands.

Let's not take his life, he said. Don't shed any blood. Throw him into the cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him. Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the richly ornamented robe he had been wearing, and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty.

There was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meals, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them to Egypt.

[3 : 24] Judah said to his brothers, What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him.

After all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood. His brother agreed. So when the Median merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for 20 shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, The boy isn't there. Where can I turn now?

Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in his blood. They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe.

He recognized it and said, It is my son's robe. Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.

[4 : 25] Then Jacob tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted.

No, he said, In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son. So his father wept for him. Meanwhile, the Midianite sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Thank you, Sam. Thank you, Jonathan. Good morning, everybody.

Why don't we start by asking God for his help? Sovereign Father, open our eyes this morning to see your wonderful care for us in the places where we may not see it at all.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. I used to watch The Simpsons as a kid. It's a cartoon show, if you're not familiar with it, about this family who basically model how not to do family most of the time.

[5 : 41] They model how to make a mess of it, in fact. I don't know why it's so popular. Maybe it makes us feel better when we compare our families to their family.

Maybe that's why. I'm not quite sure. But in that show, anyway, every episode kind of had a happy ending. You know? Homer and Marge came to some sort of an agreement. Barrett ended up saving Lisa's bacon.

And they kind of, you know, smoothed things over, despite their flaws. But in this chapter, we meet Jacob's dysfunctional family.

But unlike The Simpsons, we don't get a happy ending here, do we? You may remember that this was God's chosen family.

So if we're just thinking about the whole context of the book of Genesis. Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, was a pagan. He did not know God, didn't worship God. But God spoke to him.

[6 : 39] God chose him. Out of all the peoples on the earth, God placed a special favor upon him. And God gave him promises. A promise to bless him.

And to bless all peoples in the world through him. Now, through this family, God was going to send a promised son.

A seed. And he would crush the serpent, who way back in the Garden of Eden, had deceived Adam and Eve. And this son would deal with our rebellion.

And would make a way for us to get back to God. So that was the promise made to Abraham. And God had reiterated that promise to Jacob.

So the hopes of all the nations are resting on this family line continuing. But what a sorry mess we find when we read their story.

[7 : 43] Where we should see them being a blessing, we see only chaos and dysfunction. We see a catastrophic failure in parenting as Jacob's favoritism of Joseph sparks sibling rivalry and jealousy.

Then come Joseph's pride and his immaturity as he shares his dreams of rulership over his brothers. Stoking the flames of their hatred.

Which in turn spirals into violence. And after thinking better of killing Joseph, his brothers finally settle for selling him into a life of slavery.

That's the end of him, they think. Before devising a cruel lie to cover their tracks. Plunging their father into crippling grief for the rest of his days.

And no, God does not spare us from seeing the chaos of this dysfunctional family. Every character fails.

[8 : 59] And while none of us would like to admit to our own families being dysfunctional. When we read the story of Jacob, when we read the story of Jacob, in many ways, it's like looking in a mirror. Because, being brutally honest, we all have our fair share of arguments, jealousy, rage, and lies in our families, don't we?

And here's the thing. The dysfunction in our families, it actually comes from within us. We are all broken by sin.

We are all the victims of each other's brokenness and sin. Be that in our families, or in our communities. In fact, when you think about it, the whole human race is one big, dysfunctional family.

Hard as we try, we cannot escape it. Generation after generation, does it actually get any better? Think about it. No, it doesn't.

We repeat the same sins. We're just as dysfunctional as the ones who've gone before. Maybe it might look a little bit different. What hope is there? If we cannot escape this endless cycle of dysfunction.

[10 : 18] And as you read chapter 37, maybe there's a part of you that wonders, where is God? And all the chaos of this dysfunctional family.

I mean, after all, this is his chosen family. So where is he? I mean, did you notice? His name actually isn't even mentioned in this whole chapter.

God is hidden. He is seemingly silent. It appears like he's just letting it all happen and he does not care.

Do you ever feel that way in the middle of your chaos and mess? Maybe you've gotten yourself into a sin spiral.

It's been days or weeks since you even talked to God. Or maybe you're in the middle of a chaotic family or work situation and you're suffering under the effects of someone else's sin.

[11 : 20] Maybe it's health issues that are just not getting better. As you walked in the door today, you brought all these situations in with you.

And they're weighing on your mind this morning. And I've got my own too. Situations where very little seems to be going right at all.

In fact, even though you may be an optimistic person, you can't see any good. And you wonder, where are you, Lord?

Can you not see? Do you not hear my cries? See, the big question in Genesis 37 is this. Is God even there in our chaos and dysfunction? Because if this story is ultimately just a series of unfortunate events outside of God's control, then there really is no hope.

[12 : 23] But if we take a step back for a few minutes and view this whole mess from a different perspective, I think we can see that God is present in the chaos.

And he's sovereignly working all things for his good purposes. Even the sin and dysfunction. Now, God's sovereignty, just to explain that word for a second, that means God has total authority and is unrestricted in his control over the universe.

And we're going to test that theory against this chapter here and see what does it stand up. And we're going to see five things in this chapter over which God is sovereign and in control.

Here's the first one. We're going to start with Joseph's backstory and see that God is sovereign over barrenness and tragedy. So, we didn't cover it in this chapter, but Joseph's mother was called Rachel.

Now, Rachel was Jacob's favorite wife. Yes, he had more than one wife. And no, that did not work out well for him. In fact, that's most of the reason for all the chaos and mess in this story.

[13 : 42] But she struggled to conceive for many, many years. Until, finally, God enabled her to have a son, naming him Joseph. Now, if you look down at verse 3, you'll notice that Jacob was elderly at this point.

And he favored Joseph over his 11 other sons. Well, probably because Rachel was his favorite wife. Also, probably because Rachel tragically died, giving birth to her second.

So, this made Jacob value Joseph all the more. And he became so precious to his father.

And we can see what he does in verse 3. Jacob gifts Joseph this stunning robe of many colors, but not without its side effects. Verse 4.

Let's read together. When his brothers saw their father loved Joseph more than any of them, they hated Joseph and could not speak a kind word to him.

[14 : 48] But we have to remember, God was sovereign over the barrenness and the tragedy which led to this favoritism. God could have stopped these things from happening.

But he didn't. And he knew how each character in the family would react. So, we also learn that no sadness or tragedy in our lives is outside of his control either.

God is always working his good purposes, which we will see in this story also. Secondly, he's sovereign over dreams. In verses 6 to 11, Joseph had these very specific dreams.

Now, let me just say, these are not usual dreams that a 17-year-old boy has. I mean, I can think back to when I was 17 years old. I was probably dreaming about scoring the winning goal in the World Cup final, something like that.

And as you can see, it didn't come true. But one could say there's still time, but I think it's very unlikely. But these dreams are different. God gave Joseph two dreams that foretold his rule over his family.

[15 : 59] Look at verse 6. And Joseph says to his brothers, And verse 9 continues this theme of the others in the family bowing down to him.

And while it may appear from the outside that God was absent in this whole story, we can actually see here, very practically, God was sovereignly working in the background, even through the dreams of a 17-year-old boy.

Isn't that amazing? And next, we also learn that God is sovereign over foolish mistakes. The first mistake, we could say, was Joseph foolishly boasting about his dreams, which caused his brothers to hate him all the more.

I mean, let's face it, he should never have done that. That was immature of him. And the second big mistake, verse 13 this time, was Jacob, who foolishly decided to send Joseph off alone to check on his spiteful brothers.

Now we stop here and ask, Who in their right mind would send Joseph into harm's way like that? Did this father not realize the brother's hatred?

[17 : 19] Was it not obvious? But in God's purpose, Joseph churns up his brother's hate, and Jacob sends off his beloved son into grave danger, not knowing it was the last he would see of him for 20 years.

It was a terrible mistake. How else can you put it? But God was working his good purposes, which would only be revealed later.

And God is sovereign over our worst mistakes too. Now that doesn't make them right. That's not an excuse for us to act sinfully without care.

No, no. But what a comfort it is to know that God will save his chosen people despite our mistakes, and even through them.

Wow. Isn't that amazing? Next thing, we learn that God is sovereign over seemingly chance encounters. I put inverted commas around the word chance there for a reason.

[18 : 33] We can imagine Joseph, right, he's maybe hesitantly setting off to see his brother saying, okay, dad, if I have to. I don't think this is a great idea, but yes, I'll go. And when he arrives in Shechem, the brothers have already left.

They've moved their flocks on somewhere else. And in verse 15, we find that he's aimlessly wandering around the fields, but then he bumps into someone. And this person just happens to know exactly where the brothers have gone.

Now if you just stop here and think about this for a second, if Joseph had never met this man, he just would have gone back home, and the rest would never have happened.

When you think about it, but according to God's purpose, Joseph bumped into this man, and he found his brothers in Dothan.

So remember, God is sovereign over all the people that you meet during the day. There are no chance meetings in God's kingdom, and we must keep our eyes open and be ready.

[19 : 43] I think the last thing we can see God is sovereign over in this chapter is sin. And I think this is the one that could be hardest to understand. In verse 18, if you look down there, God knew the violent thoughts that the brothers would harbor now that they had Joseph alone to themselves.

Let's read from 18. But the brothers saw Joseph in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. Here comes that dreamer, they said to each other.

Come now, let's kill him. Let's throw him into one of these cisterns, and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams. You know, God was in control.

Both over their plot to kill him, and Reuben's intervention. Read in verse 21. When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue Joseph from their hands.

Let's not take his life, he said. Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him. Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

[21 : 02] So the brothers threw him in the cistern. And we know that Reuben, he's wanting to get Jacob whipped up out of that cistern, sorry, get Joseph whipped up out of that cistern and back to his father as soon as possible.

And surely that's what God will, right? I mean, that the boy will be saved. No. No. You see, what happens next just illustrates God's amazing sovereignty all the more.

God was able to see to it that Reuben was present to save Joseph from death. But then that he was absent when the Midianite traders came along and Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery.

Maybe Reuben had to take a run to the well for water or maybe he forgot his cloak in the other field. Who knows why he wasn't there? The writer doesn't tell us the reason why he wasn't there.

All we know is he wasn't there. Whenever it was dinner time and whenever the traders happened to come by. And the rest is history.

[22 : 16] Look in verse 29. When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, the boy isn't there.

Where can I turn now? If Reuben had been there Joseph would never have been sold and he never would have got to Egypt.

But it was God's purpose that Joseph would get to Egypt. So God made sure Reuben wasn't there for dinner. God was even in control over the cruel sinful betrayal of Joseph into the hands of those traitors in everything achieving his good purposes.

Now let's just stop here for a second and ask the question is all of this chance? Is it all just coincidence? I believe the answer is no.

When we dig beneath the surface we find God's fingerprints his sovereign work all over this story.

[23 : 36] God had a purpose behind every single one of these sinful actions. He is sovereign over sin. Now we must be careful not to accuse God of causing people to sin or saying that God is morally responsible for sin.

The Bible is clear that God is holy. He hates sin. So this is tough to understand but in one sense he wills that no one would sin.

and yet there is another sense in which he ordains that some evil acts take place in his perfect plan to save. But the Bible is always clear that people are always held responsible for their sin.

sin. And I think there is a verse later in this story which Joseph says it is from Genesis 50 20 and this helps us to understand this it is on the board there.

And Joseph is saying this to his brothers 20 years later when the whole saga is over everything has been smoothed over and this is what he says you brothers you meant it for evil against me.

[24 : 58] So he's like you chose that sinful course of action you are responsible for that and yet equally so Joseph says God meant it for good this was in God's plan it's not one or the other somehow both of these are true.

My brothers you committed the evil act because it was what your sinful hearts wanted most and God ordained that sinful act for his good purposes to save all of you.

God is 100% sovereign people are 100% responsible. Now if anything this drives us to our knees in humility and all because our finite human brains cannot fully comprehend this and we are called to trust God with the things that we don't yet understand and let me just say I think we have more than enough reason to trust I mean step back and survey what's happened in this story the brothers they wanted to kill the very person who ended up rescuing them from starvation 20 years later and in their attempt to get rid of him once and for all where did they send him to the very place from where he could rescue them how extraordinary are the plans of our sovereign God may his awesome sovereignty and control be a comfort to you in in the midst of your chaos and dysfunction no one in this story would have imagined how these evil acts could have turned out for good

I mean as this chapter finishes where's Joseph well he's changed to the back of a camel his throat is parched he is trudging his way down the dusty road to Egypt wondering how on earth did I get here and where is that God who made the promise where is he now and I don't need to tell you how difficult it is to trust God I don't need to tell you how difficult it is to trust God in the chaos in your life those situations where you've tried but just cannot see how any good could possibly come of this it doesn't make sense to us at all but this passage gives us hope because it sure didn't make sense to

Joseph and yet God was present in his chaos working out his good purposes we tend to think God is only at work in the times of blessing health happiness or success but not so God is also working through our deepest pain he is sovereign over our tears and chaos though you may ask him time and time again to take it away he may choose not to do so to fulfill his good purposes in your life he has not rejected you just like he had not rejected Joseph now this all begs the question what are those ultimate good purposes of God well in this story

[28 : 56] God was saving Jacob's whole family from starvation 20 years later but ultimately God wasn't just saving this family he was preserving the promised seed who was to come through this family line this son came from a different sort of family the father son and spirit have existed for eternity in perfect love there is no dysfunction in this family and our sin always prevented us from entering into the love of this family but the most astounding reality of the bible is that God the son the promised seed stepped into our dysfunction and chaos he became a human being and lived in a dysfunctional family and community he knows what it's like and amidst all that dysfunction around him he lived the perfect life of obedience to

God that we could never live and then on the cross he took the blame for our dysfunction and rebellion against God's loving rule rising again he won the victory over death for us and then even more astonishingly John chapter 1 verse 12 tells us that anyone who receives this son who believes in his name they are given the right to become children of God that is we can be welcomed into God's perfect family forever there will be no more sin or dysfunction or chaos instead caught up in the eternal love joy and peace of the Trinity tell me one thing that could be better than that so when you cry out and ask why

God seems absent in your chaos look to the cross he stepped into our chaos to ultimately rescue us out of it for eternity and it was all achieved through that promised seed who came through the family line of Jacob preserved through the suffering and pain of Joseph yes now we see all the more that God was sovereign over all that evil and pain in Joseph's life working his good purposes to save his chosen people and our God is still working those purposes here and now in our lives so as we walk out that door today and back into our different messy situations we have hope that the outside world can never know because God is present in our chaos sovereignly working all things even sin and dysfunction to save his people bringing them into his family forever now that is good news for you and for me let's pray thank you sovereign lord that you are in control over all things give us your grace to trust you in the places we can't see you increase our faith in your sovereign care fulfill your purposes to save all your chosen people and help us remember who we are as precious and dearly loved sons and daughters of the king it's in

Jesus name that we ask amen going to return to the past the next we will mais Kevin you
huh yeah peace c again again to peace to rest best love all