

God's Hidden Hand

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[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 37. Joseph's dreams.

Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.! These are the generations of Jacob.! Joseph, being 17 years old, was pastoring the flock with his brothers.

He was a boy with the sons of Bilhar and Zilpah, his father's wives, and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a robe of many colors.

But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

[1 : 08] Now Joseph had a dream. And when he told his brothers... Sorry, my technology's trying to film me.

Now Joseph had a dream. And when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, Hear this dream that I have dreamed.

Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.

His brothers said to him, Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?

So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, Behold, I have dreamed another dream.

[2 : 17] Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me. But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, What is this dream that you have dreamed?

Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you? And his brothers were jealous of him.

But his father kept the saying in mind. Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem.

And Israel said to Joseph, Are not your brothers pastoring the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.

And he said to him, Here am I. So he said to him, Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.

[3 : 24] So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, What are you seeking?

I am seeking my brothers, he said. Tell me, please. Well, they are pastoring the flock. And the man said, They have gone away, for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan.

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to kill him.

They said to one another, Here comes this dreamer. Come now. Let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits.

Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams. But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, Let us not take his life.

[4 : 35] And Reuben said to them, Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit here in the wilderness. But do not lay a hand on him, that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.

So when Joseph came by to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit.

There, the pit was empty. There was no water in it. 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.

Then Judah said to his brothers, What profit is it 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, our own flesh. And his brothers listened to him. Then Midianites, traders passed by, and they drew Joseph up and lifted him up, lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver.

[6 : 10] They took Joseph to Egypt. When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes and returned to his brothers and said, The boy is gone.

And I, where shall I go? Then they took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a gold, and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, This we have found.

Please identify whether it is your son's robe or not. And he identified it and said, It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces. Then Jacob tore his garments and put on sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.

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.

[7 : 34] Thus, his father wept for him. Meanwhile, the Minionites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Thank you very much, Faye. I grew up in a small Pentecostal church in the Church of God denomination. And there were no children's church in those days.

And so I literally, as a young boy, heard hundreds of sermons preached on Sunday morning because we rarely missed and I was always there.

Of all those sermons I heard, one of them remains in my mind. And it's a sermon that was preached by a guest preacher who came to our church.

He's dead now. Bishop Harcourt Pinder. My pastor at the time was Bishop Donald Sweeting. Both have passed on. And I vividly remember Bishop Harcourt Pinder preaching a sermon from this text.

[8 : 50] And I remember how he was so animated and lively and he was parading around how he thought Joseph paraded around in his coat of many colors.

And I found that quite fascinating that it's the only sermon I remember. And it's literally about 55 years since I heard that first sermon.

And as I thought about that, as I prepared, one of the desires that formed in my heart for you is that you'll remember this sermon, but that you'll remember it for a different reason.

I didn't think that was funny. But I do pray. You remember it for a different reason because Genesis 37 is not about Joseph and it certainly is not about his coat.

Genesis 37 is about God. Genesis 37 is a part of redemption story.

[10 : 07] And the whole Bible is redemption story. And the whole Bible is about God because God is the main character in redemption story.

But this important truth can easily be missed. And it can especially be missed in a passage like Genesis 37. Because in Genesis 37, there's no reference to God.

And indeed, we'll see this as we work our way through this next section of Genesis.

And so as we continue our sermon series in the book of Genesis this morning, I want us to consider this passage.

And I want us to consider how even though there is no direct reference to God, nobody calls his name, no one prays to him, what is very evident in Genesis 37 is the hidden hand of God throughout the entire account.

[11 : 21] And I want us to consider that this morning. But before we do, would you bow in a word of prayer with me? Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that we are able to gather this morning.

And Lord, how kind of you to preserve your word for us and to ordain that the preaching of your word will be central when your people gather. Lord, would you draw near to us and would you speak to us through your word?

Would you help me to be faithful to your word and profitable to your people? Would you glorify yourself now, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Some of you may not realize it, but we've had a seven-month break in our Genesis sermon series when we went to the Sermon on the Mount, because I thought that Genesis would be a bit too much to try to take in one long sermon series.

So it's been seven months since we were in the Genesis sermon series. And so what I thought would be profitable to us is to just take a couple of minutes right up front and do an overview and a review of the sermon series since some of us would have forgotten and perhaps some may be joining us for the first time.

[12:51] One of the first things I think is important to remember is that Genesis 37 lays an important foundation for the rest of the book of Genesis.

Indeed, it lays a foundation for the second book of Moses, which is the book of Exodus. And some of you hopefully would remember when we started this sermon series, I shared with you that Moses wrote the book of Genesis, and he wrote the book of Genesis to give God's people an account of their history that had been lost to them over 400 years of slavery in Egypt.

Moses wrote for them a divine account of how the world came to be, because in pagan Egypt, they would have had a different account.

In pagan Egypt, they would have had a different account about how the world came to be and how people came into the world and how people found themselves in the situations they found themselves in.

And so we titled this sermon series, How It All Began, How the World Began, How People Came Into Being, and How We Found Ourselves in the Dilemma That We Are In.

[14:10] So in Genesis 1 and 2, we covered the creation account. And then in Genesis 3, we covered the fall of mankind. And we saw how through Adam's sin, the whole world of human beings was plunged into sin.

And we also saw in Genesis 3 how God made a promise. He promised that one day he was going to send the seed of Eve, who was going to crush the head of the serpent, who was Satan himself, who tempted them and caused them to sin.

And that's the first proclamation of the gospel, where God promises, I'm going to send a deliverer. And then in Genesis 4 to 8, we have an account of the effects of sin.

We see Cain killing his brother Abel, and we see this decline into sin. Sin increases so much that when we come to Genesis 6, God announces that he's going to destroy all of mankind and every living thing because of the wickedness of people on the earth.

And in Genesis 8, God brings the flood. And the only persons who were saved were eight persons, Noah and his family.

[15:37] The only animals that were saved were the ones that he took into the ark. And then when you come to Genesis chapter 9, you would think that all would be well because God killed all the wicked people.

And what we soon find out is that while wicked people were killed, wickedness was not killed. And wickedness was found in both Noah and in his sons. In Genesis 9, we have the account of Noah getting drunk and laying naked in his tent.

And his youngest son, Ham, happens to see him. And rather than cover his father's nakedness, he tries to expose it to his brothers. And Noah wakes up and finds out.

And Noah, in his anger, curses the youngest son of Ham, Canaan. Then we come to Genesis chapter 10, where we have the table of nations, 70 nations.

And it is an account of all the people everywhere in the world. It's the table of all the nations.

[16:42] All the people of the world are connected in one way or another to one of Noah's sons. Then we come to Genesis 11. Genesis 11 is the account of the Tower of Babel, where in their arrogance, mankind decided that they were going to build a tower not to reach God, but to make a name for themselves.

And the Bible tells us that God confused their language and dispersed them all across the earth.

And then we come to Genesis 12. Genesis 12 is a pivotal chapter in the book of Genesis.

That's where the narrative slows down. And it slows down on a man by the name of Abraham. And God calls him, called him anyways, Abram, and then changes his name to Abraham.

And God begins to unfold his redemptive purposes in this man, Abraham. God begins to unfold that promise that he was going to send the seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent.

And God called Abraham. He was an old man. His wife was an old woman, and they could not have children. And yet God promised that he would give Abraham offspring, so many that they could not be numbered.

[18 : 05] And he told Abraham that he's going to make a great nation out of him, and all the nations, all the families of the earth will be blessed through him. And this was another pronouncement of the gospel.

Abraham had two sons, his eldest son Ishmael, by a slave who had been given to him by his wife as another wife, and a second son by the name of Isaac.

And Abraham wanted Ishmael to be his heir. And God sovereignly chose his son Isaac to be the heir.

And then likewise, Isaac had two sons. The oldest son was Jacob, and the oldest son was Esau, and the youngest son was Jacob.

And Isaac favored Esau, and he wanted Esau to be the heir. But God sovereignly chose the younger, Jacob, to be the heir.

[19 : 11] And then Jacob had 12 sons, each of whom became a tribe in the nation of Israel. And now we come, that pretty much brings us to where we are this morning, because when you think of Genesis, from Genesis 12 up to Genesis 50, is the account of Abraham and his descendants.

And what we see in this account, what we see in this account of Abraham and his descendants, is a litany of sin, and depravity, and brokenness, and failure.

But more than that, what we see in this section of Genesis, from Genesis 12 to 50, is we see an account of Abraham and his descendants, who were the recipients of the grace of God, though they were undeserving of that grace.

And so this section of Genesis is filled with evidences of a faithful God, a merciful God, who keeps his promises, despite the many sins, and the many failures, of Abraham and his descendants.

And I pray that we would not engage this biblical content as a distant story, because brothers and sisters, this is our story.

[20 : 46] This is our story as well. God was faithful to his people then, despite their sins, despite their failures, and he is faithful to his people now, despite our sins, and despite our many failures.

Over that overview and review, let's now consider Genesis 37. Notice that Genesis 37, verse 2, begins with the words, these are the generations.

And you may recall that as we worked our way through Genesis, I pointed out that Genesis is divided into 10 sections, and we are alerted to those 10 sections by this formula of words, these are the generations.

The last one was in chapter 36, where it says, these are the generations of Esau. And that closed out Esau into that latter section, and then now become, these are the generations of Jacob.

This is the 10th and final section of the book of Genesis, and it's the longest section. From Genesis 37 to 50 is the longest section, it's the final section, and this is where we see the purposes of God coming into fruition in a very clear and in a very obvious way.

[22 : 23] When we read Genesis 37 for the first time, if we have no knowledge of what happens after Genesis 37, so imagine for a moment you're reading this story, but you don't know what happens beyond Genesis 37.

I think for most of us, that's not the case. We know the story. We know the story ends. But if we didn't know the end of the story, it is easy to read Genesis 37 and see an account that seems to be nothing more than a dysfunctional family.

A dysfunctional family that's divided by favoritism and arrogance and jealousy and selfishness and heartlessness and all kinds of other sins. But because we know the rest of the story, we know how the story ends.

We know that God is sovereignly and providentially at work in this dysfunctional family. And God is orchestrating events and God is bringing His purposes to pass in the midst of it all.

And because God's sovereignty and God's providence are so prominently featured in Genesis 37 and indeed to the rest of the book of Genesis and in fact in all of human history, I think it's helpful for us to be reminded of what is meant by God's sovereignty and His providence.

[24 : 02] And I want to lean on Dr. Wayne Grudem for the definition of each. First, here's how Wayne Grudem defines God's sovereignty.

God's sovereignty is His exercise of rule as sovereign or king over His creation. Simply put, God rules over everything and everyone that He has created and He does so in accordance with His will. He consults no one else. He does as He wills in all of His creation. and then Dr. Grudem defines providence this way, that it means God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that He, one, keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them, two, cooperates, He cooperates with created things and every action directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do, and three, directs them to fulfill His purposes. So, we think of these two doctrines of Scripture, God's sovereignty and God's providence, we can say that God's sovereignty is God willing to do what He wills, and His providence is the way He brings to pass what He wills.

God works in every single thing. There's nothing that is left to itself to operate separate and apart from the sovereignty and the providence of God.

[26 : 04] And so, with that introduction and those two definitions, I want us to consider three ways that God's hidden hand was at work in Jacob's dysfunctional family.

First, we see God's hidden hand at work in family brokenness. This is what we see in verses 2 to 11. Jacob's family was broken, it was dysfunctional, and it was Jacob's fault.

Jacob had four wives, two he married, Leah and Rachel, and two were given to him by his wives. They wanted to have children, they weren't bearing at the time, and so each of them, starting with Rachel, gave him a wife.

Rachel gave him Bilhah, and Leah gave him Zilpah. Leah bore six sons and one daughter to Jacob. Rachel bore two sons, and each of the wives, the slave wives given to him, bore! two sons. Jacob had a total of twelve sons. You might recall from earlier accounts that Rachel was the favorite wife.

[27 : 28] She was the wife who Jacob loved above his other three wives, and he didn't hide it. And you might recall as well that Rachel is now dead.

she died back in chapter 35. And so when we come to Genesis 37, Jacob has a mature family. All of his sons, except for Joseph and the youngest, Benjamin, they were grown men. We're told here in verse 2 that Joseph was 17, Benjamin was younger than him.

Look again at the introduction that we have to Jacob's dysfunctional family, starting in verse 2.

These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being 17 years old, was pastoring the flock with his brothers.

He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. The very first introduction that we have of Joseph is not a good one.

[28 : 40] Joseph brings a bad report and what that word literally means is that he brings a report that though it was accurate, he brought it in such a way to bring harm to them.

It was a malicious way of reporting what happened. And obviously this was raised by Jacob to them and it was the source of contention in the family.

and still though you had this son who was acting in this particular way, Joseph was loved by Jacob. Jacob loved him above all of his other sons and he didn't hide it.

He made him, it would have been enough if he had just given him a special robe. but he gave him a multicolored robe, a robe with the brightest colors you could ever see and he wore it and paraded around the family in this robe.

Commentators say that it was a kind of royal robe that he actually wore. And the whole intent was that this robe would identify Joseph as the special child, the one that his father Jacob loved above all the other children.

[30 : 03] And what we see right away is that Jacob had not learned his lesson. Jacob himself was one who was subject to this favoritism in his family.

His father Isaac loved his brother Esau and favored him and his mother loved him and it brought about sibling rivalry and it brought about hostility between them and eventual separation and estrangement.

And that's exactly what we see happen in the case of Joseph and his brothers. And in this we see the hardness of heart of Jacob.

That Jacob was unrepentant about favoritism even though he'd experienced it. He still practiced it in his own family. And I dare say he practiced it in a more obvious and aggressive way than his mother and his father seemed to have practiced it.

And Joseph's brothers hated him. They hated him so much that they could hardly speak a peaceful word to him. They could hardly say good morning to him. but behind Jacob's favoritism, behind the special treatment that he was giving to Joseph, God's hidden hand was at work.

[31 : 29] God had sovereignly chosen Joseph out of the twelve sons of Jacob to be the one through whom he would preserve the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And through whom he would fulfill this promise that he had made to them to make their offspring great and to make them into a great nation. So when we think about the account of Abraham and Isaac, both had two sons.

Both had two sons they could choose from. And you could say, well, it's 50-50, you can choose one of those. And we could say, well, it really wasn't so much God choosing because it's one of two.

But here what we see is among twelve sons, it is very clear that God chooses one of the twelve and he chooses Joseph to be the one.

And God was sovereignly and providentially at work in Jacob's favoritism and in the hatred of the brothers of Joseph to bring to pass his purposes and his plans for Joseph and indeed for the children of Israel.

[32 : 47] But God didn't leave it just to Jacob's favoritism. God went further.

God revealed his plan and his purpose for Joseph in two dreams that he gave to him. These were vivid dreams. These were the kinds of dreams that you knew they had some significance when they happened.

So we've all had those kinds of dreams. We've had dreams where we just wake up and go about our business and then we have other dreams that grip us and grab our attention and we wonder about them, we ponder over them.

Jacob's dreams were very vivid. His first dream is recorded in verses 5 to 7. And he has this dream that he and his brothers are out in the field and they are binding wheat, sheaves of wheat, and he says in this dream his wheat stands up, probably lying on the ground, it stands up and then the sheaf of his brothers gather around him and they bowed down to him.

The wheat of his brothers, they gather around him. Clary Joseph understood this to be significant, he shares it with his brothers and the fact that they were upset with him shows that they understood that the dream had some implication.

[34 : 14] Look at how they reacted in verse 8. And his brothers said to him, are you indeed to reign over us or are you indeed to rule over us? So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Again, if his dream was meaningless, they just brushed it off and gone about their business. But somehow they understood that this dream was significant. And they probably also understood that it supported this preferential place that Joseph had in the eyes of Jacob and in their family.

So they hated him even more. But God was providentially at work in their hatred bringing to pass his plans for Joseph.

And Joseph was so arrogant. Joseph disregarded the unfair manner that his father was treating his other brothers. And even though they hated him more, and I think it had to have been obvious to Joseph that since he told them this dream, they were hating him even more, and in his arrogance and his indifference to them, he tells them a second dream.

The second dream is in verse 9. He tells them in his second dream, the sun and the moon and eleven stars, and notice he doesn't say the eleven stars bow down to my star.

[35 : 52] He says the eleven stars and the sun and the moon bowed down to me. So he had interpreted his own dream. He knew, he knew that from the first dream, this repetition, that somehow that's what this means.

I'm that star, and that's my, the authorities in the family, the sun and the moon, and my eleven brothers bowing down to me.

And Jacob didn't just, sorry, Joseph did not just repeat this dream once, he repeated it twice. He told his brothers, and then when his brothers and his father were together, he told them again, and his father said, what is this that you dreamt?

And when you look at it, it's almost like they're blaming him for his dreams. You know, we can't blame people for our dreams. But I know there's some people who blame others for a dream. I know that someone, husband, had a dream that he somehow got involved with another woman and she blamed him for the dream.

But we're not responsible for our dreams, and clearly Joseph was not responsible for his dream. But his brothers understood they were significant, his father understood they were significant. [37 : 13] In verse eleven, we're told his brothers were jealous of him, and his father, we're told, kept the saying in mind.

So there's a clear recognition, brothers and sisters, by Joseph's brothers and by his father that something out of the ordinary is happening beyond Jacob's favoritism, and that somehow God has a plan to elevate their brother Joseph over them.

That was the message of the two dreams. And so in the midst of this dysfunctional family, when it appeared that this was just a hopeless family, and the only thing that was going on in their midst was sinful conduct, favoritism, arrogance, jealousy, strife, division, God's hidden hand was at work. God was at work in the midst of it all, in the midst of the sin, in the midst of the strife, in the midst of this dysfunction, and he was bringing his sovereign purposes to pass.

His purpose was to make a great nation out of the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Brothers and sisters, I pray that we are gaining hope in our own hearts as we consider this account.

[38 : 39] God is a faithful God who keeps his promises and not even dysfunction in our families, not dysfunction in our lives, can stop his purposes.

I think for so many of us, it's easy to think that the circumstances of our birth, how we were born, where we were born, the parents we have, the siblings we have, how they treated us, the things we experience, the injustice perhaps even that we experience, just make it impossible or difficult at least for us to see how God could possibly be at work in the midst of all of that.

But even when his hand is not seen, brothers and sisters, he is at work. Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 11 describes God as the one who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

All things. All things. The good things, the bad things, the hard things, the sinful things. He works all things according to the counsel of his will.

That's the first point. God's hidden hand in family brokenness. The second way we see God's hidden hand at work in this passage is in the midst of sinful schemes, which is my second point.

[40 : 18] God's hand was at work in the sinful schemes of Joseph's brothers. We see their sinful schemes in verses 12 to 22.

And what we see in these verses is that despite the dysfunction in Jacob's family and the obvious hatred of Jacob's brothers, of Joseph's brothers, that they had for him, both Joseph and Jacob seemed indifferent to it.

And that's the only reason that this particular section of the narrative opens with Jacob sending his son Joseph on a very dangerous errand, sending him to his brothers who hated them, who hated him, sorry, to check on their welfare to see how they were doing.

They'd gone to Shechem. They'd gone to pasture the goats, the flock, and unsuspectingly Joseph goes and he doesn't know what awaits him.

The first thing that happens is that Joseph arrives at Shechem and he wanders around and he can't find his brothers and he happens to run into this man and the man says, what are you doing?

[41 : 47] What are you looking for? What are you searching for? And he says he's looking for his brothers and the man tells him, well, I overheard them saying they were going to Dothan and Joseph goes off in search of them.

I think it's important to see God's hidden hand even in this seeming filler detail in this narrative.

God's sovereign hand was involved in Joseph wandering around in Shechem and this unnamed man encountering him who just happened to overhear his brothers in conversation to say they were going to go to Dothan.

And so Jacob heads to Dothan. Look at what it says in verses 18 to 20. They saw him afar, they saw him from afar, and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to kill him. they said to one another, here comes the dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will come, what will become of his dreams.

So Joseph's brothers conspired to kill him and then to lie about his cause of death. But notice what's at the forefront of their minds. Not so much the hatred from, although that's very obvious, but for their minds, at the forefront is his dreams.

[43 : 26] They hated Joseph because of his favoritism, but they especially hated him because of these dreams that he had. And once again, notice how irrational his brothers were.

Joseph was not responsible for his dreams. And it's very clear that the dreams were of divine origin. And the contents of the dream confirmed what was already taking place among them, what they were already experiencing.

Joseph was going to be first among them. And yet in their minds they believed that they could somehow frustrate the plans of God by killing Joseph.

Joseph. We read in verses 21 to 22 that his brother Reuben heard of it. And he opposed the plan, telling his brothers not to shed Joseph's blood, but to throw him in a pit instead.

And this pit was a cistern that they would use for holding water, but this pit had no water in it. And Reuben's plan was really to rescue him once they would put him in the pit.

[44 : 41] But even in this event, we see God's hidden hand exposing once again that Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, was not fit to lead the family.

Reuben could have opposed them altogether, but he didn't. It appears that what he wanted to do was to be a hero in his father's eyes. And if you recall, back in Genesis 35, there's good reason why he was not favored in his father's eyes because of his violation of his father's wife, Bilhah, back in Genesis 35.

And Reuben, no doubt, was trying to get into the good graces of his father. And from the account as it fills out, he wasn't genuinely interested in saving Joseph's life.

And so what we see in this second part of this chapter is that in the sinful schemes of Jacob's sons, Joseph's brothers, is God's hidden hand at work.

God was providentially bringing to fulfillment plans for Joseph and ultimately plans for the children of Israel, promises that he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[46 : 10] But again, on the surface of it, all we would see is just sinful scheming of Joseph's brothers. Brothers and sisters, promises, what peace can come to our minds, what comfort can come to our minds when we are aware that not even sinful schemes in opposition to us, in opposition to God's plans, can derail those plans and purposes that God has for our lives.

What we see is that God is sovereignly and providentially at work in the midst of their sinful schemes. He's bringing his purposes to pass. All of this is pushing forward to the purpose that God has for the life of Joseph.

And perhaps some of you may find yourself this morning in very hostile and difficult circumstances. Maybe there are forces, human forces, that are plotting and scheming and planning against you.

Take courage and trust the Lord that he is at work in the midst of it, even though his hand may not be seen. And so we see in this passage God's hidden hand and family brokenness.

We also see his hidden hand in sinful schemes. And third and finally, we see God's hidden hand in personal tragedy. This is my third and final point, and we see this starting in verse 23.

[48 : 02] We see the tragedy that befell Joseph starting in verse 23. Look at what it says. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore, and they took him and cast him into a pit.

The pit was empty. There was no water in it. Then they sat down to eat. What a sad sight. What a sad account this is.

Joseph goes to check on the welfare of his brothers, but they have no concern for his welfare. They show no regard for his well-being.

They ruthlessly stripped his robe of many colors, and they cast him into a pit. The idea is they didn't just kind of lower him into the pit.

They threw him into the pit, and they left him there to die a slow but sure death. Notice the depth of the depravity of their hearts.

[49 : 07] After doing that to their own brother, they were able to sit down and eat. They were able to sit down and enjoy the good gift from God, the gift of food, especially knowing that they had just thrown their brother into a dark, damp pit with the intention of starving him and letting him die from thirst.

But at the right time, a caravan of Ishmaelites who were traders who happened to be on their way to Egypt taking their wares for sale.

They happened to be passing by. And Joseph's fourth brother, Jacob's fourth son, Judah, he says, what would we profit if we just leave him in the pit?

Let's make some money off him. Let's not kill him. Let's make some money off him. Let's sell him to these Ishmaelites. Look again at what Judah says starting in verse 26.

Then Judah said to his brothers, what profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites. And let not our hand be on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh, and his brothers listened to him.

[50 : 36] What irony. What profit is that we kill our brother. He's calling him their brother. He's saying don't let our hands be upon him because he is our brother.

What heartless words from the lips of Judah. But bear Judah in mind, because Judah is one of the prominent characters who features in the remainder of this narrative.

Indeed, we'll look at Judah. The whole chapter is dedicated to him next week in chapter 38. We're told in verse 28 that what he and his brothers do is they sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites and they sell him for the price of a slave.

A slave in those times we're told went between 10 and 15, between 15 and 30 shekels. They sold him for 20 shekels. And notice what it says in verse 28.

They took Joseph to Egypt. Joseph the dreamer has his dreams turned into a nightmare. At first in the hands of his brothers he was thrown into a dark pit where he had a certain death of starvation and thirst.

[52 : 15] And then later he's taken out of the pit and he's sold to strangers and not just any strangers the descendants of Ishmael the descendants who are referred to as Midianites and also as Ishmaelites.

And they sold him into an uncertain future. He did not know what awaited him and he was separated from his brothers. He was separated from his loving father.

But God's hidden hand was at work. in the midst of this tragedy. God was the one who caused Joseph's brothers to decide to move from Shechem to Dothan because that was the way that the Ishmaelite traders were going to pass on their way to Egypt.

And this is a very interesting narrative. the Ishmaelites were the means of transportation that God was going to use to take Joseph to Egypt where God was going to unfold this dream that he had. Where God was going to fulfill the purposes that he had for both Joseph and for the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God was the one who providentially caused the man to overhear Joseph's brothers saying they were going to Dothan to cause him to go to Dothan.

[53 : 57] Later in Genesis 45, when Joseph becomes second in command in Egypt and he reveals himself to his brothers and he's reconciled to them, he tells them, God sent me ahead of you into Egypt.

But he couldn't see it right at this particular point. He couldn't see that God was the one working in this tragedy in ways he couldn't see or even understand.

God was the one who was sending him. to Egypt by the means of his cruel brothers. He had no idea God was at work in the midst of it all.

As far as he was concerned, he was living a personal tragedy. Again, brothers and sisters, perhaps some of us this morning are walking through hard things.

We're walking through what we may call a personal tragedy. things happening to us that we would wish were otherwise. Things happening to us over which we have no control.

[55 : 09] And it's so easy to be unmindful that God is at work in the midst of it. See, Joseph doesn't have the benefit of what we have.

We have the benefit of Joseph. We have the benefit of his life, how God was at work in this tragedy. But I don't think Joseph was thinking about his dreams when all this was going on with him.

But we, benefiting from Joseph's life and benefiting from this account, we need to hold in mind that there is a sovereign God who providentially works at his purposes in the lives of his people, even in the most tragic set of circumstances.

And when we remember this, brothers and sisters, we have great peace, we have great comfort in the midst of it. This account concludes with Joseph's brothers devising a lie to deceive their father.

They deceived their father, but what happened to Joseph. They took his multicolored coat, they killed a goat, and they dipped the coat into the blood, and then they send it to their father.

[56 : 31] They don't even have the courage to go to him. They send it to him, and they say to him, is this your son? Identify if this is your son. And he does.

And he weeps and puts on sackcloth, mourning for his son. And his hypocritical sons, pretending to be of comfort to him. They go to him, and they pretend to comfort him when they knew full well what they had done with Joseph.

And he says to, Jacob says to them, I will not be comforted. I will go to my grave mourning for my son. But even in this, God's hidden hand was at work.

God and Jacob's sons deceiving him, we see God rebuking Jacob, rebuking Jacob for his own deception of his father Isaac many years later.

In the very same way, Jacob deceived Isaac with the clothes of his brother and with a goat, the skin of the goat on his arms to make it hairy and also the meat of the goat to make him think that it was a meal that Esau had prepared for him.

[57 : 53] And now his own sons would take the clothing of their brother and a goat and they would deceive the deceiver. And in that, God was rebuking him for his deception of his father.

In that, a sovereign God caused Jacob to reap in that situation what he had sown. But the good news is that Jacob didn't reap all that he sowed.

God was merciful to him and God is merciful to us. We don't reap all that we sow. If we did, we would all be dead.

God is gracious and merciful and kind. But there are times when he works in particular ways, as he did with Jacob to rebuke him for what he had done to his father, Isaac.

Verse 36, sets of the rest of Genesis. Look at what it says. Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

[59 : 11] You know what's interesting about that verse? This verse represents the first step to the fulfillment of the dreams that Joseph had.

It represented the first step in the fulfillment of the promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but we couldn't see it. You cannot see it on the face of this.

This is a tragedy. This is a sad situation of brothers turning against a helpless brother, 11 to 1, or at least 10 to 1.

dream. This was Joseph's first step towards the fulfillment of that dream, but if we could interview him at that point, he would say, no, I'm living a nightmare.

And we'll see this starting in chapter 39 because Egypt is the place where God works to raise up Joseph and to preserve the nation of Israel.

[60 : 20] It's the place where he fulfills this word spoken to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 15. Here's what he said to Abraham back in Genesis 15 verses 13 to 16.

Then the Lord said to Abraham, Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for 400 years.

But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, as for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace.

You shall be buried in a good old age, and they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

God was laying the foundation for the fulfillment of his promise to Abraham. But again, without knowing how the story ends, you would never see that in this account.

[61 : 30] This account on its face is nothing more than a grave tragedy. But it's more than a grave tragedy, brothers and sisters.

This account is Israel's story, but more than Israel's story, this account is God's story. And God's story is redemption story.

Humanly speaking, Joseph's arrogance provoked his brothers to hate him and reject him and to treat him as they treated him. But this account points us to one who is better than Joseph.

It points us to the Lord Jesus Christ, who unlike Joseph, was perfect in all of his ways. And yet he was rejected. The Apostle Peter says about him in 1 Peter 2, 22, he committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

The Apostle John says in first, in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, verse 11, he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

[62 : 50] Brothers and sisters, his own people rejected him without a cause. Joseph's brothers, humanly speaking, rejected him for a cause, but not so with Christ.

He was rejected without a cause. One of the very interesting things about this account in Genesis 37 is that there is no indication of any kind of protest from Joseph in the face of the horrific

treatment that he experienced at the hands of his brothers.

No words of protest, no words of distress. We have no indication that he even tried to defend himself against their mistreatment and the violence inflicted upon him.

it points us to another one. The prophet Isaiah prophesies about him in Isaiah 53.

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its share is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

[64 : 09] that's the Lord Jesus. He was the true lamb who was taken to the slaughter. And although in this account we don't have any words of Joseph crying out, later as we read through the narrative in chapter 42, Joseph's own brothers recount how Joseph cried out to them, how Joseph was in distress.

They said, we saw his distress and he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. The Lord Jesus did not plead. The Lord Jesus, his only words on the cross that were directed to people, his father, forgive them, for they know not what they're doing.

Joseph was stripped of his robe. And here again, this points us to one better than Joseph who was stripped of his robe. But he was stripped of more than his robe.

Evidently, Joseph was just stripped of the robe that his father gave him that he wore over his other clothes. The Lord Jesus was stripped of every piece of garment and he hung on a Roman cross naked, bearing sin and shame for sinners like you and me who deserve to die.

And who deserve to die that very death that Jesus died because he was our substitute. Joseph's death was a stage death. It wasn't a real death.

[65 : 45] A goat was killed in the place of Joseph. Christ's death was a real death. He was God's lamb who was slain in the place of sinners like you and me.

And we see through Joseph his descent into Egypt, through him God saved the people. God preserved a people.

a people. And through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, God saved the people. God preserved a people for himself. A people who he gave to the son before the foundation of the world.

A people whose lives like the people God preserved through Joseph in Egypt, whose lives were riddled with sin, riddled with brokenness, people who did not deserve to be saved.

And he saved them through his son. Brothers and sisters, Genesis 37 is God's story.

[66 : 58] It is part of redemption's story. And God's hand is through and through every detail of it. God's life.

And I pray it fills our hearts with faith that whatever you're going through this morning or whatever you go through in the days ahead, remember that there is a sovereign God who works providentially,!

Bringing his purposes to pass, even when all seems lost, even when there seems to be only utter tragedy.

there's a sovereign God who's at work and family brokenness cannot stop it, sinful schemes cannot stop it, and personal tragedy cannot stop it.

I pray that this would bring comfort to our hearts this morning. I pray to bring comfort to our hearts in the days to come. let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you are God who's always present with your people.

[68 : 10] We thank you that you're with us even when your hand cannot be seen. We thank you, Lord, that you are the God who keeps your promises, you work out your purposes, you bring them all to pass.

I ask, oh Lord, that you would help us, in particular those of us this morning who look at our lives and they seem as bland and as empty and even as tragic as the situations we see in Joseph's dysfunctional family.

Lord, would you help us to by faith believe that in the midst of it all, there's a sovereign God who's working providentially for our good, for his glory, bringing his purposes to pass.

we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.