

# Joseph's Family and God's Purpose

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn now back to Genesis of chapter 37. At the beginning of the chapter again, Genesis 37, 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 pasturing the flock with his brothers. Whenever you come across these words, these are the generations of, in the book of Genesis, it always indicates the beginning of a new section.

And it begins here with these words as well, in verse 2, these are the generations of Jacob. So that tells us this is a new section in the arrangement of what you have in the book of Genesis.

And it's the beginning of the final section, because from here on, it's really all about Joseph as this individual that we begin to find described here from verse 2 onwards.

Jacob is now the chief of the people. He is now in charge of the whole tribe, you might say. His father Isaac has died, previous to that Abraham.

[ 1 : 22 ] And Esau has gone in another direction. So he's left here as the chief of the tribe, we could call him. And that's really how it begins here with the generations of Jacob.

Because having achieved this status, having come to the point in God's providence, where he is the chief of the tribe, the chapter now says these are the generations of Jacob.

This is about him from now on, but especially about Joseph. And what's strange about it is that mostly when you find in Genesis, these are the generations of, you then find a list of the, sometimes the wives, but then also the children or the sons of the person beginning with the oldest.

But that's not the case here. You would expect that these are the generations of Jacob. Jacob begat Reuben or Judah and the rest of Joseph's older brothers.

But it doesn't do that. These are the generations of Jacob, Joseph, being 17 years old. That's what it begins with. And that's really just what goes on from there on, is just to develop the life of Joseph.

[ 2 : 37 ] And from this point on in his life, right through to the end of his life, as you'll find at the very end of Genesis, it's all about Joseph. Every reference to Jacob has something also to do with Joseph.

He's here at the very beginning of this last section of Jacob's life. It's not just the last section of Genesis, it's the last section of Jacob's life too.

And it begins with this reference to Joseph, and the final reference to Jacob is about Joseph. And Joseph coming to close his eyes in death.

Joseph dominates this final section of Genesis, and of the life of his father. You might think that now that Jacob is old, and has reached this point in his life, that God would have left the rest of his life pretty much free from trial.

But that of course is not how it's going to work out. Joseph, and what happens to Joseph, becomes one of the main trials in the whole experience of Jacob.

[ 3 : 48 ] And it reminds us that even mature believers still need teaching from God. And that God's teaching even of mature believers can involve some severe trials even towards the end of the course of their journey through this world.

We mustn't think that just because we increase in age and in experience and in knowledge that our trials decrease in proportion to the increase of these things.

In the providence of God, because he knows we need to be taught to the end of our lives, he chooses the way he teaches us. And if he goes on teaching us through further testings and trials, then he knows that's what we need.

That's how we have to accept it. And that's how it was for the life of Joseph as well. We're going to study the life of Joseph for the next few weeks, God willing, maybe months even, but we'll go through it in a way that tends to pick out the things that are of importance, as Genesis itself speaks

about his life.

And Joseph's life has something for everyone. For everyone here, for everyone whatever age. For example, he is obviously someone that teenagers can relate to because he's 17 years of age at this point.

[ 5 : 10 ] He's a young man entering into adulthood and that's where this chapter begins. That's where the section begins. That's the first thing it says about him. Joseph being 17 years of age.

So if you're a teenager, you want to find out about Joseph and the things that happened in Joseph's life because they're relevant to your life. Joseph's important too as we look into something of his family and his family situation because you'll find much in the life of Joseph that is to do with family life, with the arrangement of family life, with the difficulties that come up in family life.

We'll see something of that in our study today. But there's more than that. There is of course in the life of Joseph as you study it, as you go into it more and more you begin to realize that actually the life of Joseph is part of God working out his big plan.

It's God coming to show himself more and more to his people as the God of redemption. The God who is going to show by bringing his people out of Egypt what redemption really means.

And of course that itself led to finally the coming of Christ and redemption in Christ. But the redemption from Egypt through Moses bringing the people out of Egypt under God, God was demonstrating through that for the Old Testament people.

[ 6 : 38 ] This remained the main illustration or example of redemption and what it means all the way through the Old Testament. But that meant getting the people into Egypt.

And getting the people into Egypt and looking after them, God used Joseph. So much tied up with the life of Joseph and we'll see that there are issues as well that remind us powerfully of Jesus Christ himself and what he is as a leader to his people.

So let's look today at two things. First of all, Joseph's family because we need to understand the setting in which Joseph is set. Here for us, Joseph's family and secondly, God's purposes, just briefly.

Joseph's family, first of all, you could say that I'm sure nowadays they would be described as this family would be described as a dysfunctional family. That tends to be one of the descriptions nowadays used, a dysfunctional family, a family that's just somewhat all over the place in certain things as you look into their family life.

For example, there were more than one woman in the life of Moses, in the life of Jacob. There were four wives that competed with each other. There was Leah and Rachel and the two concubines.

[ 8 : 02 ] And all of that created tensions within the family, especially between Leah and Rachel who was Joseph's real mother who had died by this point.

But you can read in previous chapters the tremendous tensions and rivalries and jealousies that existed within this family because one of the things we must never think is that as you look at the life, the family of patriarchs like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that these families were perfect, that they're given to us as models of what families should be like, it's actually at times the very opposite. It actually reminds us that families of godly people are not always the way they should be. They don't have perfect arrangements in the relationships that you find there.

Many of us can say that we are honestly up in time for coming to church without having to rush through things that all our family arrangements are made and for all of these other things I can't. Maybe you can't either. We're not perfect families. We're not perfect in the way we arrange our lives. We're not perfect in the way we relate to each other. And here is Joseph's family as a dysfunctional family.

[ 9 : 21 ] Not only do you find that aspect of it in their dysfunction but of course what you find prominently from this point on is a reference to his brothers. His brothers were part of this dysfunctional family and added to its dysfunction because they hated Joseph.

And there are reasons given as we'll see in a minute why they hated Joseph. But these brothers were not just the best of people. And we'll make a reference to that in a minute but they themselves contributed to the way that this family did not function the way that it ought to have.

The way that you expect believing godly people to behave. Secondly in Joseph's family there was a doting father. Jacob was not an ideal father.

There are many good qualities about him but as you read his own life in the previous sections of Genesis you'll find that Jacob was as his name actually showed something of a schemer.

Something of a supplanter. Somebody who tripped other people up. Somebody who got on by being somewhat skillful and cunning in the way that he sometimes arranged things.

[ 10 : 35 ] And of course God sorted out these aspects of his life. God kept on teaching and meeting him including the famous wrestling with the angel where Jacob came to acknowledge that God had broken him that he needed to give his life more fully to the hands of God.

But Jacob is a doting father and when it comes to his relationship with Joseph he rather unwisely chooses Joseph and publicly and in the presence of his other brothers actually makes him his favourite.

He loved him more than the rest. And that added a certain element of rivalry and bitterness to the family situation. But it's the hostile brothers that want to give a bit more attention to because they feature so much in the way the story of Joseph develops.

The hostility of the brothers is interesting because if you read through the passages we've done we can see at least three things that the passage tells us are behind their hostility to Joseph.

And these three things are themselves important as we learn from the history of Joseph the story of Joseph. First of all their hostility was a reaction to Joseph's truthfulness.

[ 11 : 56 ] Now if you go back to verse 2 there Joseph being 17 years old was pasturing the flock with his brothers and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

And if you tie that in with previous chapters where some of the goings-on that these brothers were involved with are actually set out there you'll find that these brothers were a rather shifty lot that they weren't all that dependable.

Whereas Joseph everywhere you find him spoken about is an upright man an upright boy an upright young man. There is nothing whatsoever in the whole story of Joseph that says to us that this man was twisted that this man was someone you couldn't trust.

In fact it's the very opposite all the way through what the Bible tells us about Joseph it's his integrity it's his truthfulness it's his honesty it's his uprightness it's his holiness of life that's brought before us and where you find holiness of life and uprightness consistently lived in the presence of others whose own lives are not as good you're going to find hostility and the hostility that came from these brothers was a reaction to the truthfulness and to the integrity of their younger brother Joseph because when he came back and told his father gave him a bad report of his brothers he was not telling lies he was not grassing them he was not being something of a spy although in fact his father may well as he did later in sending him to where the brothers were he may well have had concerns for the goings on of these brothers and knew that he could depend on Joseph to tell the truth and when these brothers were away with the flock and away from their father's sight

I think it's fairly obvious from what you read elsewhere about them and even in this passage too that they were not necessarily doing the things they should have been doing and were doing things they should not have been doing and Joseph reported back to his father these sort of things it's not a case of him just telling tales and spilling the beans and just being concerned to tell things about other people that weren't appropriate here was a young man who could not hide from his father things that he knew his father needed to know and where even wasn't meant his brothers so be it it was his responsibility to do it honesty was something that was so much a part of Joseph's life that it couldn't be hidden in his life so it was a reaction to his truthfulness to his integrity to his honesty and that will be the case wherever you find someone of integrity and honesty you're always going to be accused of telling tales you're always going to be accused of opening things up which you shouldn't you're always going to be accused of just getting people into trouble just because you tell the truth just because you're concerned for the upholding of uprightness and truthfulness that's the first element in the hostility the second element is their reaction to favoritism and here as we said

[ 15 : 30 ] Joseph's father I think must have a measure of blame attributed to him because it's understandable that he would love Joseph so deeply not only is he the son of his old age when he might not have expected to have any more children but he was the son of Rachel his beloved Rachel his favorite for whom he had spent all these fourteen years working for Laban till he was given Rachel as his wife it's understandable that this old man would dote upon the seventeen year old son as the son of his old age and the son of his beloved Rachel but he went a bit too far he made him a coat of many colors he showed the favoritism in the presence of the other brothers in a way that really accorded Joseph's status now giving a coat of many colors to him whatever the coat actually looked like we can never be sure of course but what it means effectively is that

Joseph is being given a status it's not just a gift from his father to show how much he loves him it's a gift that really conveys status to Joseph that says about Joseph this actually is not just my favorite son but I'm placing him above the rest of you I'm giving him a status more important than I give to the rest of you of course in some ways that's understandable as well because these other sons were not as trustworthy as Joseph they were people who fell out with each other and people who took revenge on other people and got into trouble themselves and kept things hidden from their father and as we see in the story of Joseph they were very quick to make up a story about what had happened to him to cover up their own tracks they weren't reliable people and it's understandable that Jacob would actually come to love Joseph the way he did from that part of view too but to do it so publicly in the way that he did seems to have been a bit unwise and whatever we say about that it undoubtedly attracted the hostility and increased the hostility of his brothers when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him they did not have a good word to say to

Joseph every time they spoke to Joseph it was always some sort of comment that was either sarcastic or nasty or whatever it was a reaction to their father's favoritism and that of course is something that we are in the Bible council against as Christians not just in terms of our bringing up families and how we are in regard to our children but how we are as Christians together one of the things the New Testament especially makes clear is that we are not to show partiality or favoritism to people who actually come to be part of our fellowship James for example says if you find somebody coming into your fellowship that is rich and is decked out in expensive clothes and then you find somebody else who is a bit of a tramp you don't say to the person who has got the expensive clothes you come up here you sit at the front and you leave the other person away at the back unseen or in a corner somewhere it is attitude it is a matter of actually saying everyone is equal before the Lord every Christian has equal rights in the presence of God you don't go by outward appearance you don't go by social status you don't go by how important they are in the thinking of the world you don't go by how important a place they have in society the highest judge in the land when he sits at the Lord's table if he sits at the

Lord's table is with the most humble housewife on the same level in the eyes of the Lord partiality is a sin favoritism is a sin in the thinking of scripture and that's why the story of Joseph reminds us it powerfully tells us of such things so that we ourselves will avoid them and that we ourselves will take care in our relationships not only in bringing up our families but how we relate to each other as Christians in the world and how we relate in our relationships with other people and how we actually if you think of what people actually make of us what impression we give to people are we giving the impression that somewhere we are more important than other Christians than others in our congregation or in our life if so then that too is wrong and all of that you can find in the description here of

Joseph in relationship with his brothers and with their father so there's a reaction to truthfulness they hate him because he's a man of integrity and honesty and righteousness they hate him too because he's his father's favorite and thirdly there's a reaction to what we can call revelation that's revelation from God in this passage of course we read about the two dreams that Joseph had from verse 5 down to verse 11 and when he told his brothers about these two dreams they hated him we read even more the first one his brother said 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 and the second time his father was involved in his telling about the dream and shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you your mother there probably refers to [ 21 : 36 ] Leah his stepmother because Rachel his natural mother had died by that point and his brothers were jealous of him but his father kept the saying in mind there's a number of things in this passage there that tell us give us a little insight into the reaction of his brother because verse 8 there it doesn't say they hated him even more for his dreams it adds and for his words so there was probably more than what you find recorded in the passage that Joseph actually said to his brothers Joseph must have had an understanding from this time that he would be significant in the hands of the Lord and indeed Joseph Jacob rather himself understood there was something about that in what Joseph was saying because it says at the end of verse 11 his father kept the saying in mind that's the kind of thing you've got with Mary when she was given the announcement that she would bear the son that she was going to bring out in the world was going to be the saviour she pondered these things in her heart as she did later when she found them in the temple at 12 years of age disputing with the doctors of the law she pondered these things in her heart she kept them she kept

thinking about them it was something that registered with her she thought there's something in this that's significant that's what it was for Jacob as well he didn't just pass off the dreams neither in fact did the brothers although it seems to begin with they just passed them off and said this is rubbish you're not going to be more important to us you're not going to rule over us there was something in Joseph and what he was saying and what his dreams were about that registered in their minds something to do with Joseph's prominence in the hands of God and they didn't like that it's a reaction to his dreams and his words dreams in the Old Testament especially in Genesis were very often associated with God revealing himself especially a combination of two dreams like this and although there's nothing here to refer to God and nothing here to say that this is what God was revealing through the dreams of Joseph you'll see you'll still get the idea that because you know what's coming in the rest of Joseph's life and because you know that these dreams are going to be fulfilled actively in the way that things work out you know as a reader of Genesis that actually there's something here that's significant and his brothers have an inkling of it and they don't like it they hated him for his words now we also have that sort of reaction because God has given us not dreams but words and witness he's given to us as his people as a congregation to witness for him to bear testimony to him he's given in your life if you're a Christian and follow the Lord and follow him in his ways he's given to you in your life something that you know you pass on to the world something that you know interacts with the world around you and very often you'll find that kind of reaction that reacts to the revelation that is in you and the revelation that comes through you a revelation about God about the significance of God about how God actually has something which pulls us up short and makes us think about our lives we don't like that naturally I didn't like it when I first experienced the truth of God hitting my conscience that wasn't something pleasant it wasn't something that said thank you Lord I'm welcoming this that was something that I wanted to put away something that I didn't like something that I thought well this is exposing my life this is actually something that disturbs things that I'd rather keep covered up and undealt with and that's how these brothers felt because what was coming through Joseph and his dreams and his words were things that really brought to life their own shoddy lives the lives that they lived that they wanted to keep covered up and protect even from their father and Joseph being a man of God and a humble and holy young man exposed their lives they felt vulnerable in his presence that's how we are when we come into the presence of someone that you know to be holy you feel yourself very small and you feel your life is being opened up even and you have a kind of reaction to that that's scared that this person is going to see through you and it's especially so when you realize that God is in it because God is seeing through you and God is seeing into your heart and God is exposing the things that are there in order that they might be addressed and that's why the message of the gospel angers people that's why people have a violent reaction to it it's not that they don't understand it but it's that the measure they do understand it makes them uncomfortable it makes them angry because it invades their lifestyle and because it calls upon them to change it to begin again to do away with the things that God himself says are not acceptable and so it was with Joseph he belonged to a dysfunctional family was dysfunctional in the relationships in the way that his father doted on him and especially the way the hostility of his brothers was seen in the reaction to his truthfulness and to the favoritism of the father and to the revelation from God that came through him Joseph's family but just enclosing Joseph's purpose God's purposes now it's interesting God's not mentioned here at all you read all the way down through the chapter God's not mentioned in fact in the life of Joseph chapter 38 if you leave that chapter and go to chapter 39 as far as the account of Joseph's life is concerned God is not mentioned till you reach 39 verse 2 the Lord was with Joseph in other words God you get the impression of course is here in chapter 37 but he's not seen very open he's not actually making himself known explicitly or clearly he's not referred to he's in the background of these events and that fits in sometimes with what you find in Joseph's life

[ 28 : 49 ] Abraham had dramatic experiences where God revealed himself to him Isaac had the same Jacob certainly had these in many occasions God met with Jacob in dramatic fashion and they're recorded for us in these chapters of Genesis Joseph didn't have any such thing at least they're not recorded he had to trust in the Lord when if you like the Lord was rather unseen in his experiences in his life these dreams had come to him he understood something of them that they were from God that they revealed something of his importance in God's scheme in God's plan but

there was no message from God saying this is what they mean at least not in the ways recorded for us God Joseph needed to trust in God even when God in his providence in arranging his life was not very visible to him and psalm 105 reminds us of something like that we sang these verses that we don't sing very often

I'm sure but psalm 105 in verses verse 19 especially and the surrounding verses speak about Joseph but in verse 19 you find this saying until what he had said came to pass the word of the Lord tested him and that's interesting it could be that what it means by until his word came to pass that could be Joseph's own word the things that he said he had dreamed about the things that he had seen and then spoken about until that came to pass and remember that did not come to pass for a long time because even after Joseph reached Egypt as we'll see he wasn't immediately put in charge of the country a long time and yet he had to live with these dreams with what he understood of God's meaning and purpose in his life through them he had to wait a long long time until his word became fulfilled and all that time the word of the

Lord tested him he was being tested by God not making things all that clear and yet clear enough for Joseph to trust in God and it's like that very often in you life and mine sometimes we just simply have to trust God because he's in the background of all of these events he's ruling over all of these events he's in charge of the providence of Joseph's life the arrangement of all of these details of his life they are all arranged by God Joseph knows that and Joseph must trust in him and he must go on trusting in him even when the way takes a long time to be made more clear for him how many times in your own life have things happened when you can't really see the meaning of it when you don't really get to grips with how such a thing can be to your benefit when the providence of God is mysterious to you not just mysterious in the way that you don't really know what's happening to you but mysterious in the sense that you can't really see God in it very clearly yet you know he's in it you know he's about it you know he's in charge of your life you trust him because he's arranged your life but you'd like to get more information more of a knowledge of his purpose in regard to this you have to go on trusting him until his word is fulfilled until he brings you more light until he gives you a better understanding so he's the unseen

God but he's also the redeeming God this is a bit like a map where you have from a satellite above the ability to zoom out here we've been zoomed in on Joseph Joseph being 17 years of age and the dreams that he dreamed in these opening verses of the chapter and the way he told them to his brothers we've got to zoom out again and see that this is part of the bigger picture especially the bigger picture of God and of God's plan and of God's purposes and God's purposes as we said that he's going to show redemption and what redemption means and his covenant care of his people but in order to do that they have to be in Egypt they have to be looked after there for a while by someone who knows them until they grow and increase and multiply they will then be abused and they will be led forth they will be redeemed from that bondage and on to a land that God has promised as an inheritance that's

God's plan that's God's purpose that's what God has in store that's what their future is as God already knows it and all that begins with Joseph and Joseph going to Egypt and then Jacob and his family following him that's where God is in the bigger picture Joseph fits into the plan of God that's so it is with you and I as well our lives may appear as a very small detail on the big map of God's plan but you're in his plan and it's important that you know that you're in his plan that you're in his plan for a purpose and that he's fulfilling his bigger plan by the inclusion of yourself and what you're doing in his name let's pray bless to us

[ 34 : 44 ] Lord we pray your word once again bless to us we pray things that happened so long ago that are recorded in your word so that we might learn from them and profit ourselves spiritually by them hear us now we pray for Jesus sake Amen