

# Worst brothers ever

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[ 0 : 00 ] And with Genesis 37 open in front of us, what a tangled, wicked family mess, don't you think?

Genesis 37 is well over three and a half thousand years ago, but it is so painfully bang up to date. Maybe plotting to kill one of your brothers is the extreme end of family life, like it should be. But the effect of a favoured child and bubbling jealousy, refusing to speak kindly to another family member, ganging up on one person, cutting someone out of family life, terrible, bitter weeping in a family for what's gone wrong.

That is how it can be, isn't it? In a family, in a church family, in a family of nations. I was wandering around Orchard Park this week and I bumped into a guy who said to me, I've had a tough one. I said, why? He said, my daughter's written me a letter and said she wants nothing more to do with me ever. He's gutted. I've been to funerals where family members are barely able to sit in the same room together.

[ 1 : 15 ] You think, what damaging, sometimes wicked messes we make of family life. And yet, well, I've probably mentioned before how in the Lowe family we like watching Poirot on TV.

You ever watch him? The guy on the left, the Belgian detective, he solves murders with his fingers kind of dirty in human misery. And listen to this from the lips of Hercule Poirot.

There is nothing in this world so damaged that it cannot be repaired by the hand of Almighty God. I love that. That's not just Poirot wisdom from Agatha Christie.

It's true, it's biblically, wonderfully true that. Through Genesis 37 onwards, as we dive into the, well, straight off, the muck of Jacob's family history, we will discover that God is able to repair a family like this.

He can take a family like this from hatred and division to forgiveness and reconciliation. Our God is able to put families together again. But more than that, through this story, Genesis 37 to 50, we'll discover our God is more than able to repair and restore our world.

[ 2 : 36 ] And that is because that is what he's promised to do. And here's the background to Genesis 37 onwards. Back in Genesis chapter 12, God had singled out and chosen one man called Abram.

Abram was one nomadic shepherd living out his days in the Middle East, but God chose him and made to him great and precious promises.

He said to Abram in Genesis 12 verse 2, I will make you into a great nation and I'll bless you. I'll make your name great and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you, I will curse and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. These words, this promise here is massive.

And from Genesis 1 and 2, the creation of the world, Genesis 3 onwards tells of how we live now in a world of sin and family hatred and weeping and death.

[ 3 : 35 ] We live in a world under God's curse. In Genesis 12, the Lord God stepped in and spoke and promised to bless. And he promised to bless not just Abram, but through Abram, all peoples on earth.

These words here in Genesis 12 are foundational promises which shape the whole Bible story and shape the whole of human history. God promised here to deal with sin and family hatred and weeping and death.

God promised to save and bless families again. God promised to restore our world to himself for good. And he promised to do it through Abram and his family.

We're reading Genesis 37. Through Genesis to this point, Abraham's family grew. And these promises passed down from generation to generation to Isaac, then to Jacob, who himself had 12

sons who will become the tribes of Israel.

And so now this morning today, we arrive at Genesis 37 and verse 2. Do you see how it starts, this whole story in the Bible in front of us? Genesis 37 verse 2.

[ 4 : 53 ] This is the account of Jacob's family line. This is what comes now of the family who are carrying the promises of God. Question. Questions.

Is God able to keep his promises? Is he able to work in and through a family like this? Is the Lord God able to reconcile a dad and a daughter in Orchard Park and a daughter who wants nothing more to do with him?

Is our God able to overturn sin and death and bring blessing and life to his world? And Genesis 37 onwards will say to us, you can bet your life he is.

You can bet your life he's able to do that. Because the truth is nothing will derail God. It's what we'll discover through the Joseph story, wonderfully for ourselves.

Nothing and no one can stop God's good plans. Not even a family like this. Not even a family like ours now. Because he is God Almighty. He's the sovereign Lord of all.

[ 5 : 53 ] And having promised to repair our world and restore it through the family of Abraham, he absolutely has and he absolutely will keep his promises. To families like ours and to you and me.

And so with all that in mind, come down now into the story. Genesis 37. Which begins just terribly, really.

As we discover the sons of Jacob, a gang of brothers, hating their brother jealously. See what happens.

Look, verse 2. This is the account of Jacob's family line. This is what comes from the one who carries God's promise. Joseph, straight up front.

He's a main player in this story. Joseph, a young man of 17, was tending the flocks with his brothers. The sons of Bilhar and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And he brought their father a bad report about them.

[ 6 : 57 ] Think straight away. Is Joseph being a telltale brat? Trying to damage them? Maybe their father needs to know and he's taking responsibility. There's trouble brewing though.

Now Israel, that's another name for Jacob, loved Joseph more than any of his brothers. Because he'd been born to him in his old age and he made an ornate robe for him.

Well, if you know this, lots of us will know what it feels like to be in a family where there's a favourite child. Don't we? Don't we? Maybe when you were growing up, your brother was daddy's special boy, so you felt, not you.

And it's marked you to this day. Israel made his son a special ornate robe. Expensive and technical and precious, just for you, Joseph.

I wonder how you respond when someone else gets the special love and not you. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him.

[ 8 : 04 ] And they couldn't speak a kind word to him. It gets worse. 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 corn out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright while your sheaves gathered round mine and bowed down to it.

And his brothers know exactly what the dream is that he's sharing. And they say, 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'd said. Three times in the text, they hated, they hated, they hated him. And then look, Joseph had another dream and he told it to his brothers.

And you think, Joseph, stop, be quiet. Listen, he said. I had another dream. And this time the sun, moon and 11 stars were bowing down to me.

[ 9 : 03 ] When he told his fathers as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, what is this dream you had? Will your mother and I, moon and sun and your 11 brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?

Now notice in the text, his brothers, they don't just hate him. They were jealous of him. Jealousy or envy is when you see what someone else has got which you haven't.

And you think it's not fair. And it eats away at you. And you think I should have that. Or even take it away from them.

Jealousy is really, really powerful. Like I see your lifestyle. I work out that you're richer than me. I see your family situation.

And I resent you. Because I should have that. In a family, jealousy is really toxic. Your sister got more love than you did.

[10:15] She got the better job. She got the praise. And deep down, you hate her a little bit for it. Because you should have that.

And so when you hear that something goes wrong for her, you say, I'm so sorry to hear that. But a little part of you thinks, huh, it's been taken away from her.

And you're very slightly happy inside. Do you know anything about that? In your own relationships. Jealousy. It's horrible, that.

Like it drives so much of life and culture. Why are we glued to the Philip Schofield story? He's being taken down.

Why do people resent the coronation? We're jealous of the famous and the rich. And he's got it and we haven't. If we can't have what they've got, we'll bring them down.

[11:16] Now, in the Joseph story, in this family, there's hatred. There's jealousy. There's something a little bit more here, though. Because you might just think about Joseph.

What a jumped up little daddy's boy he is. Rattling on how he's going to be the family ruler. And so fair enough, a little bit of disliking him. Except these dreams that Joseph has, they're not Joseph bigging himself up.

He's not manifesting. He's not like willing his goals into existence. But because in Genesis, dreams come from God. They are God's revelation of what will happen.

And we'll see this again in a few weeks' time with Pharaoh's dreams. Dreams come from God. And more than that, two dreams together from God is super, super significant.

Joseph will say to Pharaoh in a few weeks' time in Genesis 41, The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God.

[12:22] And God will do it soon. See, right at the start of the Genesis 37 story, we hear Joseph's God-given dreams.

And the truth is, at this point in time, God has firmly decided that Joseph will rise and rule and reign over his family as Lord and will bow down to him.

That is God's plan. Firmly decided for this boy wearing an ornate kingly robe. But the brothers hate that.

And they jealously hate him, the one whom God has chosen to rule. We will not have him rule over us. And I want to say, with that in mind, I don't think it's too early in the Genesis story here to start thinking about Jesus.

Who will come into the world 1700 years later as the one to whom every Old Testament book points. Because in the Joseph story here, as you see this Jewish boy, loved by his father, destined to be king and lord of all, who came into the world.

[13:46] And, well, how were people towards him? Like, for sure, some followed him. But for his brothers and his relatives and many others, they just couldn't stomach his claims.

They hated Jesus, jealously, as people do today. Like, not that many people would put it like that. But do you think this might make some sense of our culture's rejection of Jesus? That hearing that Jesus Christ is Lord and hearing that before him every knee should bow, there rises within the human heart a, no, I'm not having that.

Because I want to be king, not him. Because I should be the focus of the universe, not him.

Because I should get the praise, not him.

It's not fair. And I'm not having it. And so, in the story, hating him jealously, like the brothers with Joseph, what comes next?

[15:07] What comes next? Well, see these brothers getting rid of him wickedly. As Miranda wed, I thought to myself, I've heard this story so many times and I've read it in children's Bibles.

And I think sometimes it loses a little bit of its punch, what takes place. Listen again. Because what they do to Joseph, it's so wicked. 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'm going to send you to them. And he replied, very well. 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.

And then he sent him off from the valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived in Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, what are you looking for? He replied, I'm looking for my brothers.

Can you tell me where they're grazing their flocks? They've moved on from here, the man answered. I heard them say, let's go to Dothan. So Joseph went after his brothers. You think, don't, don't do it.

[16:15] And he 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.

Not, here's our brother or anything like that. It's his dream that's everything to them now. And they have to shatter it. We will not have him reign over us.

And so they agree what to do. Come now, let's kill him. Just as Cain killed his brother Abel. Let's kill him.

And throw him into one of these systems and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams. This is where jealous hatred ends up for Joseph.

As it did for Jesus Christ. As humanity got together and said, we'll get rid of him for good. When Reuben, the eldest son, heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands.

[17:22] 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.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe. The ornate kingly robe he was wearing. And they took him and threw him into the cistern.

A big bottle-shaped pit in the ground. The cistern was empty. There was no water in it. And as they sat down to eat their meal. You think, that is such a cold-hearted thing to do.

As he's there in the pit next to you. As they sat down to eat. They looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. And their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh.

And they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. And now Judah, who's starting to emerge as a leader. He says to his brothers, what will we gain? What kind of profit if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?

[18:27] 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. And his brothers agreed. Kidnapping, then selling into slavery, is utterly wicked too.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern. And sold Joseph for 20 seces of silver to the Ishmaelites.

Who took Joseph to Egypt. When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph wasn't there. He tore his clothes. And he went back to his brothers and said, the boy isn't there.

Where can I turn now? And now finally, having surely got rid of him once and for all. The cruel deception.

Then they got Joseph's robe. Slaughtered a goat. Dipped the robe in the blood. Took the ornate robe back to their father and said, this we found. Examine it to see whether it's your son's robe.

[19:34] He recognised it. Said, it's my son's robe. Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces. And verse 34 on lastly is just devastating.

Then Jacob tore his clothes. Put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons, I guess with silver in their pockets.

And daughters came to comfort him. But he refused to be comforted. No, he said. I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.

So his father wept for him. Because his dearly loved son is surely gone. And that's where Genesis 37 ends up.

With Jacob's family life to this point. Deep hatred. Bitter envy. Cold-hearted plotting. Ganging up and grabbing. Getting rid. Lying. And terrible sorrow.

[20:38] And it's a dark day. It's a wicked day. And the brothers are sure it's all over. The one who would rule is dead. He's gone. Makes me think of Harry Potter 7 part 2.

Harry Potter is dead. He's gone. Or fast forward to another dark day. Come, let's kill him, they said. And sold for 30 pieces of silver. Not 20. The Lord Jesus Christ was stripped. And crucified. And those who'd got rid of him were sure it was all over.

The one who would rule us is dead. He's gone. Or think of today. And so many who see Jesus as just a figure of history.

See what came of his dreams. He's dead. He's gone. I don't even believe he existed. Hating him jealously.

[ 21 : 39 ] Getting rid of him wickedly. Except. Except Genesis 37 isn't the end.

And the crucifixion of Jesus wasn't the end. And that is because when God has a plan. And when God's plan is firmly decided.

No one and nothing can stop him. Look at the end of the chapter here. Even as Jacob weeps over the death of his son. Verse 36 over here.

What's going on? The Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar. One of Pharaoh's officials. The captain of the guard. The story goes on. Joseph's story goes on.

Of course it does. Because God has said in a dream that Joseph will rise and rule. And so as we will see 20 years later after this.

[ 22 : 44 ] The brothers who thought they'd done away with him. Will get the shock of their lives. When they realise they hadn't got rid of him. Because they'll come face to face with Joseph. And bow before him.

And they will realise that Joseph is not only their ruler. He is actually also their rescuer. Saving them from famine and death.

Unbelievably. Stunningly. They will come to see that the one whom they'd wickedly got rid of. Is their God given saviour. And as it was with Joseph then.

So it is with the Lord Jesus Christ. Because the Lord God has decreed that Jesus Christ is Lord. And that he will reign as King of Kings.

And Lord of Lords. And so having been wickedly put to death. We've got rid of him. On the third day God raised his dearly loved son from the dead.

[ 23 : 45 ] And installed him as King and Lord of all creation. The one before whom all people should bow. And unbelievably really.

The message of the gospel. To hating and jealous people. The message of the gospel.

To people whose families are a tangled and damaged mess. The message of the gospel. To those who spent years happily thinking. That Jesus is dead and gone. To those even who've hated him. The message of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is alive. And he is Lord. And he can be your God given saviour.

Because however it has been with you. And your relationship with Jesus Christ to this point. You will one day meet him face to face. As we all will. Whether we believe in him or not.

[ 24 : 38 ] Or love him. Or hate him. And so the gospel command today is. Turn away from your rejection of him. And turn to him.

And bow before him. And take him as your Lord. This one who was wickedly crucified. Yet wonderfully risen. And this gracious ruler will forgive you.

And he will receive you. And he will save you forever. And let me lead us in a prayer. Let's pray together.

Almighty God. We praise and thank you. That you're a God of promise. And a God who plans. And that your plans cannot be turned back.

We may see something of ourselves. In the hatred and jealousy of the brothers. Either with people around us.

[ 25 : 50 ] Or sometimes a hatred of the Lord Jesus Christ. And a jealousy of him. Thank you that Jesus having been crucified. Was raised from the dead.

Thank you that he is our Lord. And our saviour. And thank you that in him. We can find the salvation.

And blessing. That you promise. Make us those who come humbly to him. And bow before him. And rejoice in him. We pray. In Jesus name.

Amen. Thank you.