

Genesis 37: Joseph and His Brothers

An Outline

- I. Jacob's Favoritism: He loved Joseph more than his other sons (37:1-4)
- II. Joseph's Folly: He shared dreams that demeaned his brothers (37:5-11)
- III. The Brother's Murderous Intentions: They seek to kill their brother Joseph (37:12-27)
- IV. Ishmaelite Traders' Commoditization of their Brother: They bought and sold their relative even though they shared the same ancestor Abraham (37:28-36).

Observations

1. **No one looks good in Genesis 37:** Jacob loved Joseph more than his brothers because he was birthed to his favorite wife in his old age. He acted on it by singling out Joseph to give him an ornate robe (v. 3). This caused his brothers to jealously hate him so that they could not say one kind word to him (v. 4). **Jacob's favoritism was wrong.** Joseph gave a bad report about his brothers to his father. Whatever his motivation, it did not help his standing with his brothers. What is more, he related to them two dreams, one of sheaves and another of stars, where they bowed down to him. As innocent as sharing dreams may be, Joseph was unwise to relate such unflattering dreams to his brothers. Although Joseph would be counted as wise in later years, **his early judgment with respect to his brothers was supremely foolish.** The brothers, including those of his mother's handmaid Bilhah, collectively hate Joseph. They hate him so much that they plan to kill him and then lie about it to their father. Reuben's input delays their murderous intention and Judah's input diverts it. They agree to sell him as a slave to some Ishmaelite traders from Midian. Then they concoct a false story to hide their actions from their father. These brothers had very shallow morals, for **their murderous intentions and their collusion to deceive their father were clearly evil.** Finally, the Ishmaelite traders from Midian were related to the brothers and Joseph through their common ancestor Abraham, yet they had no qualms buying their brother and then selling him to Egyptians. **Their commoditization of their brother was evil.**

There is nothing good here. No one is prudent or wise. No one is moral or good. From the father to Joseph to the brothers to the relatives, all were either foolish or evil. We are meant to see God's amazing grace and providence, that He could bring about such good from all this folly and wickedness. Joseph would recognize this and declare in Genesis 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

In the New Testament, we get a similar promise from Scripture in Romans 8:28,

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose (NAS).

We are meant to see the depth of the depravity of man, even in the Patriarchs, God's holy people. At the same time, we are shown the sovereignty and grace of God, who always accomplishes His purposes in spite of the depravity of man. So we read in Isaiah 55:11,

So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.

Jacob, the brothers, the people of Israel were God's chosen people. God would not allow them to self-destruct without His promises being fulfilled. And we are also God's chosen people; therefore, God will not allow His promises to fail in our lives. We read this in Ephesians 1:11,

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

Why does He do this? Ephesians 1:12 tells us it is for His glory:

in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Discussion Questions

These questions stem primarily from our study of Genesis 36, but there is an overall relevance to the other events we have studied in the life of the Patriarchs.

1. In a culture, where there is such strong pressure for us and our kids to succeed academically, athletically and financially, how do we make sure that their spiritual success is the priority? (relevant verses: Matthew 6:33; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Deuteronomy 6:4-9)
2. Most people have a natural desire for financial success. Can this desire be reconciled with our God-commanded pursuit of spiritual success? (Matthew 6:25-34; 1 Timothy 6:3-10; Matthew 6:19-24 with Luke 12:22-34; Luke 12:12-21; Luke 16:1-14; Hebrews 13:5; Acts 2:45; Ephesians 4:28; 1 John 3:17; James 2:5; Hebrews 10:34)
3. As Christians we may not be so concerned for great wealth or fame, but we want to be "stable and happy" and we want our children to be "stable and happy." Yet, we are confronted with some very challenging commands from Scripture, like "deny yourselves" (Luke 9:23), "give up everything (Luke 14:33), "hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life" (Luke 14:26). All of these are conditions for being a disciples of Christ, which is not only what we are called to be but also called to make (Matthew 28:19-20). How are we to understand such a radical demand for loyalty from Jesus?