

The Story of Joseph: Seeing the Bigger Picture

Week 2: Joseph Sold into Slavery

Scripture:

Genesis 37:18-36

Motivation (Why You Need This):

Joseph's story isn't mainly a family drama or a coming-of-age story.

It's closely tied with God's promises to Abraham (land, nation, blessing) that have us asking...

Will God keep His word even when His people are a mess?

Here's what we saw...

- **God's promises are the bigger picture** (land, nation, blessing)
- **The family is broken** (Jacob favors; brothers are filled with hate and jealousy)
- **God speaks anyway** (Joseph's dreams hint at an unknown future)
- **Joseph obeys** (Jacob sends him but Joseph doesn't see what's coming next)

If last week showed us a fractured family, this week will show us the fallout.

- Hatred and jealousy turn to betrayal
- Words turn to action
- ...and Joseph is sold into slavery

It will look like the story is moving backward—like God's promise is failing.

But here's what we should learn to trust in today's sermon...

With God, a step that feels like it's in the wrong direction can be the very step that moves His promise forward.

Let's look at Genesis 37 and watch what God is doing when life seemingly takes a step backward for Joseph...

...and ultimately for God's promises.

Information (What You Need to Know):

Three Truths about Joseph's Story...

■ The enemy seeks to steal, kill, and destroy

There is something greater here at work than just Joseph's brothers trying to harm him. The enemy himself is trying to destroy any hope of God's promises.

John 10:10 (ESV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

- ✓ The brothers determine to kill Joseph (words turn to action)

Genesis 37:18 (ESV) They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. **19** They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. **20** 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.”

- ✓ Reuben proposes an alternative plan

Genesis 37:21 (ESV) But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” **22** 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.

“Reuben, the eldest of the brothers, argues against killing Joseph, so that he might restore him to his father. Reuben possibly hopes to regain his father's favor so that he will be confirmed as the firstborn, or perhaps Reuben has no other motive than to show mercy to Joseph.” – ESV Study Bible

- ✓ The brothers listen to Reuben (sort of)

Genesis 37:23 (ESV) So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. **24** And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

- ✓ Judah comes up with another plan (while Reuben is away from the brothers)

Genesis 37:25 (ESV) 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. **26** Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? **27** 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. **28** Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

All of this seems like a step backward...

▪ **Human sinfulness, when left unchecked, continues to progress**

- ✓ Reuben returns and discovers what his brothers have done

Genesis 37:29 (ESV) When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes **30** and returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?”

- ✓ The brothers lie to their father, Jacob, about what happened to Joseph

Genesis 37:31 (ESV) Then they took Joseph’s robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. **32** 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.” **33** 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.” **34** Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. **35** 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.” Thus his father wept for him.

▪ **The enemy seems to have won, but God’s promises will not be defeated**

Genesis 37:36 (ESV) Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

- ✓ Doesn’t this seem like a step backward to you?
- ✓ Instead of Joseph being in Canaan, he was now a slave in Egypt
- ✓ God wasn’t caught by surprise by this...He let Abraham know that his descendants would end up in a land that was not their own

Genesis 15:13 (ESV) Then the Lord said to Abram, “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 four hundred years. **14** But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

“The words of God in this covenant ceremony assured Abram that his descendants would definitely be in the land, although a painful detour into Egypt would delay fulfillment until long after his demise.” – MacArthur SB

Application (What You Need to Do):

Although this story might feel like defeat, God’s promises move forward unaffected by sin. So, when our lives feel like they’ve taken a step backward, God hasn’t failed. He calls us to repent, obey once again, and trust that His faithfulness is still carrying the story forward.