

THE SCROLLS

Making Lemonade: Finding Faith When Life Turns Sour | Genesis 37:12-36

Life Lesson

God's detours are never accidents. What feels like a pit of betrayal, confusion, delay, or suffering may actually be the pathway God is using to prepare you for His greater purpose. Even when God seems silent, His providence is still at work behind the scenes. The enemy may intend harm, but God can transform painful seasons into stepping stones for growth, maturity, and future blessing. Trusting God means believing that the pit is not your final destination; it is often preparation for the palace.

Examine Scripture

12 His brothers had gone to pasture their father's flocks at Shechem. 13 Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers, you know, are pasturing the flocks at Shechem. Get ready. I'm sending you to them." "I'm ready," Joseph replied. 14 Then Israel said to him, "Go and see how your brothers and the flocks are doing, and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the Hebron Valley, and he went to Shechem. 15 A man found him there, wandering in the field, and asked him, "What are you looking for?" 16 "I'm looking for my brothers," Joseph said. "Can you tell me where they are pasturing their flocks?" 17 "They've moved on from here," the man said. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph set out after his brothers and found them at Dothan. 18 They saw him in the distance, and before he had reached them, they plotted to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Oh, look, here comes that dream expert! 20 So now, come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We can say that a vicious animal ate him. Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!" 21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to save him from them. He said,

A Pit, A Palace, and Providence

Most of us live with a specific blueprint or plan for our lives. We sketch out our dreams, map our careers, and plan our families, fully expecting a straight path from where we are to where we want to be. But if the Christian walk teaches us anything, it is that God's geography rarely follows straight lines. In fact, life's greatest lessons and moments for growth rarely come from the planned route; it is the detours that truly reveal God's grace and bring about the greatest growth.

In Genesis 37, Joseph receives a dream directly from God. It symbolizes influence, leadership, and purpose. However, soon after this divine vision, Joseph's path suddenly takes a violent, steep turn. He is stripped, betrayed, and discarded. In his dream, he was to rule over his brothers and his father. Even the idea of the dream enraged his brothers, revealing their hatred and depravity. They wanted blood but settled for chains. They wanted Joseph dead, but chose to see him enslaved and exiled. Not the path Joseph thought his dream would lead him down, but the path God orchestrated. It was a more difficult journey, but it would bear manifold blessings.

Vs. 12-14

Jacob (Israel) sends his favored son, Joseph, to check on his brothers in Shechem. This was dangerous territory; Shechem was the exact site where Simeon and Levi had previously massacred the local inhabitants (Genesis 34). Jacob's concern is practical, but Joseph's response is spiritual. Jacob sent his favored son, the manager, to check on his brothers. Jacob understood the nature of his older sons. They were known to be misdirected at best and, at worst, completely sinful. Joseph's response was "I am ready." It seems to reflect Joseph's desire to be the one in charge, or perhaps this is the beginning of the fulfillment of his dream. However, it rings more of the familiar "Here I am" in response to a divine request. The

He said, "Let's not take his life." 22 Reuben also said to them, "Don't shed blood. Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him"—intending to rescue him from them and return him to his father. 23 When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped off Joseph's robe, the long-sleeved robe that he had on. 24 Then they took him and threw him into the pit. The pit was empty, without water. 25 They sat down to eat a meal, and when they looked up, there was a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were carrying aromatic gum, balsam, and resin, going down to Egypt. 26 Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay a hand on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh," and his brothers agreed. 28 When Midianite traders passed by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took Joseph to Egypt. 29 When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. 30 He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone! What am I going to do?" 31 So they took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a male goat, and dipped the robe in its blood. 32 They sent the long-sleeved robe to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it. Is it your son's robe or not?" 33 His father recognized it. "It is my son's robe," he said. "A vicious animal has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces!" 34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth around his waist, and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said. "I will go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." And his father wept for him. 36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guards.

Personal Notes

latter is the classic biblical posture of absolute availability to a father's will, previously spoken by Abraham and Jacob, and later by Isaiah.

For us, it illustrates how we should respond to any request or command of God: "Here I am." We should adopt the same posture of complete surrender, even in uncertain situations. No matter the territory or the length of the detour, we must always be willing to say "I am ready."

Vs. 15-17

Joseph arrives in Shechem but cannot find his brothers. He is lost, "wandering in the field" (v. 15). Left to himself, Joseph would have returned home to Hebron, and the entire redemptive arc of Israel's migration to Egypt would have halted. Enter the unknown man. The text leaves him anonymous because his identity does not matter—his function does. He is an agent of divine providence. God placed him within earshot of Joseph's brothers as they discussed leaving for Dothan. What seems to be happenstance is, in fact, the providential hand of God placing people exactly where they need to be to fulfill His divine plan.

For us, this is a reminder that, without God's providence and grace, we would be "wandering in the field" as well. Providence is the invisible hand of God moving in our lives to accomplish His will. God often uses anonymous, seemingly random human interactions to steer us toward His divine purpose. Joseph was not lost; he was exactly where God's providence intended him to be to receive the next set of directions.

Vs. 18-20

Distance often provides perspective, but for the brothers, seeing Joseph "in the distance" (v. 18) only worsens their deep-rooted hatred. They do not view him as a brother; they see him as a "dream expert." Clearly, this is a sarcastic nickname given to him because of their hatred. Their plan is premeditated murder, masked by a calculated lie: "let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We can say that a vicious animal ate him" (v. 20). Their ultimate goal is not just Joseph but God's sovereign word: "Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!" (v. 20).

This highlights the doctrine of total depravity. Sin so corrupts the mind that humans believe they can oppose God's decrees. Their hatred of Joseph led them to murderous thoughts and

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then to sinful actions. They thought that killing the dreamer would destroy the dream, but they did not realize their conspiracy would become the very catalyst God used to accomplish it.

Vs. 21-22

Reuben, the firstborn, bears the ultimate responsibility for his younger brothers. He objects to physical bloodshed but lacks the moral courage to order them to stop completely. Instead, he suggests a compromise: throw him into a pit. Reuben is playing politics with sin, trying to appease the mob while secretly planning a rescue later. Whether his goal was to truly save Joseph or simply to win his father's favor, Reuben wanted to spare Joseph and return him to their father.

Compromising with sin never works. Reuben attempted to control evil rather than defeat it. We cannot bargain with sin or culture. Partial obedience still counts as disobedience.

Vs. 23-28

Judah steps forward not out of righteousness, but out of pragmatism and greed. He realizes a dead brother pays nothing, but a living slave generates profit. Joseph is pulled out of the pit only to be sold for twenty pieces of silver—the standard price for a minor or damaged slave under ancient Near Eastern law. The caravan of Ishmaelites then transports Joseph to Egypt.

To the brothers, this was simply a business deal to get rid of a nuisance and make a little profit. To the traders, it was just another cargo load. But to God, this caravan was part of a divine transportation plan. Egypt was chosen as the place where Jacob (Israel) would grow into a mighty nation. Human greed unknowingly advanced God's greater purposes.

Vs. 29-32

Reuben returns, finds the pit empty, and tears his clothes in grief and fear of his father's wrath. The brothers then craft a masterful lie. They slaughter a goat, dip Joseph's coat in blood, and present it to Jacob with cold, passive-aggressive cruelty: "We found this. Examine it. Is it your son's robe or not?" (v. 32). They do not even call him our brother; they call him "your son."

There is a profound sense of divine irony here. Decades earlier, Jacob had deceived his own father, Isaac, by using goat skins and his brother's clothing to steal the blessing (Genesis 27). Now,

Personal Reflection

1. Have there been times in your life when God's plan looked totally different from what you expected? How did those detours shape your faith or character?
2. What areas of your life could God be asking you to say, "Here I am," with greater trust, obedience, and surrender?
3. Can you recall a time in your life when God later showed that what seemed random was actually part of His plan and purpose?
4. Are there areas in your life where you are trying to manage, excuse, or negotiate with sin instead of fully surrendering it to God?
5. If you are currently experiencing betrayal, grief, confusion, or disappointment, how might God be using this season to prepare and shape you for His greater purpose?

Commentaries

Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament
Edited by Kenneth Barker

New Bible Commentary Edited by D. A. Carson

NIV Application Commentary: Genesis by John H. Walton

Mt. Zion's Mission

Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to
MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jacob's own sons use a slaughtered goat and a brother's clothing to deceive him. Sin leaves a legacy, and what a man sows, he will inevitably reap. What is tolerated in one generation will be celebrated in the next!

Vs. 33-36

Jacob falls into the trap of deception perfectly. He speaks the words the brothers wanted him to say: "A vicious animal has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces!" (v. 33). Jacob enters into deep, inconsolable mourning. The ultimate hypocrisy is exposed when the very sons who committed the crime "tried to comfort him" (v. 35). The chapter ends not in Canaan with a weeping father, but in Egypt with a purchasing officer. Joseph is sold to Potiphar. Joseph's journey is far from over.

This illustrates the collateral damage of sin. The brothers aimed to hurt Joseph, but they ended up destroying their father. Jacob mourns a death that has not occurred because he relies on circumstantial evidence instead of divine revelation. We, too, often look at our painful circumstances and assume God's promises are dead, when in truth, God is working behind the scenes.

Verse 36 is the ultimate literary cliffhanger, but more importantly, it offers the strongest evidence of God's providence. Joseph was not sold to a random peasant, a distant farmer, or a nomadic worker who would forget him over time. He was sold into the political heart of the ancient world's superpower. The pit was deep, the deception was dark, but the destination was carefully planned by God. Chapter 37 ends in a slave market, but the foundation for the palace has just been laid.

In these verses, God neither speaks a single word nor performs a miracle nor visibly intervenes. Yet, His invisible hand is the loudest presence in the text. When you go through seasons where God feels silent, don't mistake His silence for His absence. He is working behind the scenes in your life right now.

Joseph's story shows us that God often takes us down before He lifts us up. The pit was painful, but it was a necessary detour on the way to the throne. If you find yourself in a pit of betrayal, confusion, or grief today, take heart: it is a transit point, not your final destination. What the enemy designs as your grave, God often uses as your corridor to the palace!