

THE SCROLLS

Making Lemonade: Finding Faith When Life Turns Sour | Genesis 37:1-11

Life Lesson

God's purposes are never thwarted by human sin, jealousy, betrayal, or suffering. Even in times when life feels unfair or painful, God remains sovereignly at work behind the scenes for His glory and the good of His people. Like Joseph, we may not understand why God allows certain hardships, but we can trust that He is weaving every detail into His greater redemptive plan. At the same time, this passage warns us to guard our hearts against envy, bitterness, and rebellion, while pointing us to Jesus Christ—the rejected Savior who brings grace, forgiveness, and salvation to those who trust Him.

Examine Scripture

37 *Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. 2 These are the family records of Jacob. At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended sheep with his brothers. The young man was working with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought a bad report about them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age, and he made a long-sleeved robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to*

Hold on to Your Dreams

Genesis 37 marks a major turning point in the Book of Genesis. This chapter officially shifts from the toledot (the generations or history) of Jacob to the unfolding story of Joseph and his brothers—a narrative that will ultimately move the covenant family from Canaan into Egypt's furnace.

The story of Joseph is more than just a moral story about sibling rivalry or an ancient self-help guide for family issues. We must interpret it theologically, considering both God's absolute, non-negotiable sovereignty and the complete, radical depravity of the fallen human heart. What appears as a fractured family dynamic on the surface is actually the opening salvo of God's grand redemptive plan. The hatred of man is simply the canvas on which God paints His masterwork of grace. The text presents a terrifying yet comforting paradox: humans can act out of pure, unadulterated malice, yet every step they take perfectly fulfills the perfect will of God. They mean it for evil, but God is already working it for an unimaginable good.

Three distinct theological truths immediately shape the story of Joseph. First, we see God's Providence. In Genesis 37, we see the wheels of providence turning in darkness. Long before Joseph is stripped of his coat and thrown into a pit, God is already arranging the pieces on the grand chessboard of history to preserve the messianic line and provide salvation. What his brothers intended for evil, God used for good. Second, we observe the depravity of man. The passage functions as an anatomical dissection of human sin. We watch as passive envy among the brothers turns into active, murderous hatred. It reminds us that apart from Christ, the human heart is a factory of rebellion against both natural affection and divine authority. Finally, we see Joseph as a type of Christ. The Old Testament serves as a roadmap pointing directly to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Although he saves his family and others, Joseph

him. 5 Then Joseph had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: 7 There we were, binding sheaves of grain in the field. Suddenly my sheaf stood up, and your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 "Are you really going to reign over us?" his brothers asked him. "Are you really going to rule us?" So they hated him even more because of his dream and what he had said. 9 Then he had another dream and told it to his brothers. "Look," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun, moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 He told his father and brothers, and his father rebuked him. "What kind of dream is this that you have had?" he said. "Am I and your mother and your brothers really going to come and bow down to the ground before you?" 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

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is not the Savior; he is a powerful, prophetic shadow of the coming Savior. His rejection by his own kin, his unjust suffering, and his ultimate elevation to the right hand of majesty to save those who betrayed him all echo the Gospel message. As Charles Spurgeon said, "When he was hated of his brethren because he protested against their sins... he was doubtlessly a portrait of the despised and rejected of men whom his disciple betrayed. You shall read the history of Joseph through twenty times, and yet you shall not have exhausted the type; you shall begin again and find still some fresh likeness between this despised son of Rachel, and the Son of Mary who is also God over all, blessed for ever."

Vs. 1-2

In (v. 1), Moses notes that Jacob "lived in the land where his father had stayed." In the land where his father was a "stranger," Jacob lived. While the world (represented by Esau in chapter 36) quickly established kingdoms and titles, the covenant family remains pilgrims and sojourners. They had to constantly depend on God's provision and promises. For the believer, security is never found in cultural dominance or earthly comfort but in the promises of God. We must rely on our promised and provided "daily bread."

At the young age of seventeen, Joseph is thrust into a challenging environment. The "sons of Bilhah and Zilpah" (v. 2) were his half-brothers, likely treating him as inferior. Although the "bad report" Joseph brings is not described, it is clearly not petty tattletelling; it reflects a righteous conscience that refuses to ignore sin.

Vs. 3-4

As if Joseph reporting his brother's behavior wasn't enough to fuel their hatred, here we see the true source of it: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age, and he made a long-sleeved robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peacefully to him" (vs. 3-4). The reason for Jacob's favoritism and love for Joseph was not because of Joseph himself, but because of Jacob's love for Rachel, Joseph's mother. It's likely that after losing Rachel, Jacob tries to honor her and continues to love her through his special attention to Joseph and Benjamin.

To make matters worse, Jacob gives Joseph "a long-sleeved robe" (v. 3). Most of us know it as the "coat of many colors," but it

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was much more than that. It was a very ornate robe, symbolizing more than just favoritism. It signified status. In other words, the long-sleeved coat indicated Joseph as a manager rather than a laborer. So, his reporting of his brothers to Jacob was not tattletaling; it was the act of a manager reporting on his workers. Joseph had his father's love, favoritism, blessing, and trust. This made his brothers hate him even more. They hated him so much that they couldn't even give him the traditional greeting of "Shalom" or "Peace to you." The brothers' hatred reveals the natural human heart when faced with grace it did not earn. When God chooses a vessel for His glory, the world's immediate response is hostility.

Once again, we see a type of Christ in Joseph. Just as Joseph was uniquely loved by his father and dressed in majesty, Jesus is the Beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased (Matthew 3:17), yet He was despised and rejected by His own brothers (John 1:11).

Vs. 5-8

Obviously, Joseph cannot read a room. His brothers are already filled with fiery hatred, so what does he do? He tells them about his dreams in which he rules over them. In the ancient world, dreams were considered to come from the heavenly realm. Often, dreams contained theophanies that provided divine revelation or prophecies. As a result, they were taken very seriously. Throughout the Old Testament, we see dreams and their interpretations as ways to understand God's will.

For Joseph, he possessed a divine gift for dreams and their interpretation. This was not just a hopeful dream of significance; it was God communicating His divine plan to Joseph—to elevate him so he could provide for His people. It was a dream of hope and future grace. However, his brothers did not appreciate the implication that they would be ruled by Joseph. In fact, if God truly spoke to Joseph, it meant He had completely bypassed the elder brothers to speak to and through Joseph. This was yet another offense to them. This dream made them hate Joseph even more.

Regarding the dream, the sheaves binding in the field serve as a direct prophecy of the upcoming famine in Egypt, where these same brothers will bow for grain. Even the brothers were able to interpret the dream; hence their anger. In the dream, God reveals the end from the beginning. Joseph is destined to save his family during the famine, and without their knowledge, their actions will set this plan in motion.

Personal Reflection

1. In which areas of your life are you tempted to doubt God's sovereignty when circumstances seem unfair, painful, or confusing? How does Joseph's story challenge your view?
2. Joseph's brothers allowed envy and resentment to grow into hatred. Are there relationships in your life where jealousy, comparison, or bitterness might be taking hold in your heart?
3. Joseph stayed true to the truth even when it made him unpopular. When have you felt tempted to stay silent instead of standing up for what is right because of fear of rejection or conflict?
4. Can you identify a difficult season in your life where you now see God working good through hardship, betrayal, or disappointment?
5. Joseph points to Jesus—the rejected Son who eventually became the Savior of those who rejected Him. How does Christ's willingness to forgive and save sinners influence the way you respond to people who hurt or wrong you?

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.*

The brother's response of "Are you really going to rule us?" (v. 8) reveals our depravity. It is the cry of the unregenerate heart against Christ's lordship. They hated him for his dreams (God's decree) and his words (God's revelation). Similarly, apart from Christ, we are completely rebellious against God's decree and revelation.

Vs. 9-11

Once again, Joseph either fails to read the room or his dreams come with a divine urgency to reveal what God is showing him. The latter seems more likely. The first dream involved earthly elements (sheaves), while the second is cosmic (sun, moon, and stars). God indicates that Joseph's future exaltation will not be limited to a family affair but will have cosmic, redemptive significance. The sun represents Jacob, and the moon represents Joseph's mother. The "twelve stars" symbolize more than just the brothers; they symbolize the complete covenant people, all twelve tribes of Israel.

Like with the brothers and the first dream, Jacob easily interprets the dream, which leads him to rebuke Joseph: "Am I and your mother and your brothers really going to come and bow down to the ground before you?" (v. 10). Jacob rebukes Joseph to keep peace in the family, but note the important phrasing: "His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind" (v. 11). This mirrors (Luke 2:19), where Mary reflects on the mysteries of Christ in her heart. Despite his flaws, Jacob recognizes the powerful, serious voice of God when He speaks.

God did not give Joseph these dreams to boost a teenager's ego; He gave them as an anchor for the soul. Joseph would soon spend years in an Egyptian prison. When darkness closed in, the memory of the divine decree—the dreams—reminded him that God's purpose cannot be thwarted by human malice. What man intends for evil, God is already working for good (Genesis 50:20). The same God who decreed the stars to bow before a teenage shepherd is the God who orchestrates the microscopic details of our lives today. Human rebellion, familial betrayal, and the boiling envy of the carnal mind cannot derail, delay, or diminish the purposes of God.