

**LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text - Part three - Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024**  
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**JOSEPH - TRUSTING GOD WHEN LIFE IS UNFAIR - Genesis 37:1-36**

- 1) **THE CHOICE OF JOSEPH AND THE RESULTING FAMILY BITTERNESS - Genesis 37:1-11** - "Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. [2] These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. [3] Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. [4] But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. [5] Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. [6] He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: [7] Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." [8] His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. [9] Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." [10] But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" [11] And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind."

Several factors complicated the family situation: **FIRST, Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons (37:3)**. Jacob, of all people, should have realized the perils of a divided home. His mother had always favoured him more while his father preferred Esau. Jacob had also loved Rachel more than Leah.

**Second, God had chosen Joseph for a special role in the nation Israel (37:5-9)**. This position would clearly place him over all of his brothers and other family members. It's never easy to watch the call of God flourish in someone else's life. Envy spreads like poison among even Godly people.

The writer of Hebrews clearly warns of the particular dangers of the **"root of bitterness"** springing up and defiling many - **Hebrews 12:15** - **"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled...."**

When the writer says bitterness has the tendency to **"defile many"** he means the results of the bitterness growing in our hearts will be far more sinister than we would have ever thought. First, we have a tendency to allow secret sins more time to grow and infect. Secret sins effect our attitude more than any other. Until a sin is **exposed** it's much more difficult to summon a genuinely repentant heart, as can be seen in the sins of various prominent religious leaders. Usually, they're broken and repentant **after** they've been caught in their sin.

And second, because this sin of bitterness is usually a ***secret, inward*** sin we can deceive ourselves into thinking its ***consequences*** will also remain invisible. Such is never the case. As with Joseph's case, the family always suffers most and suffers first - even when our bitterness isn't against them.

***Bitterness is a loaded gun in our hearts.*** It makes us restless for more wickedness. The truth of this is seen in **verses 19-28** of this same chapter - **Genesis 37:19-28** - **"They [Joseph's brothers] 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." [21] 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; cast 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. [23] 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 cast him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. [25] 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."**

Bitterness and jealousy will always work their way to the surface of our lives. The older brothers probably hadn't planned that morning to sell their younger brother into slavery before supper.

- 2) **REAPING THE FRUITS OF DECEPTION - 37:29-35** - "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?" [31] 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."

Jacob had been a deceiver all his life. Now he is on the receiving end of the same. ***Just as he had once used a dead goat to deceive his father Isaac, his brothers killed a goat and used the blood to break Jacob's heart.*** It seems we really do reap what we sow.

- 3) **WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?** - Life seems very unfair to poor Joseph. He has done nothing to deserve the kind of treatment he is getting. There seems to be no relation between cause and effect in his whole story. This always makes faith challenging. **We** know God is preparing him for a role of authority and power on the throne of Egypt. But **Joseph** doesn't know that.

This is an issue that all of us will face at one time or another.

***Adversity is most painful when it's unexplainable.*** It's important to remember that Joseph spent many years not knowing ***what*** God was doing nor ***why***. All he could see was one disaster after another.

***Latter on*** Joseph will come to the understanding that ***"You meant evil against me but God meant it for good"***(Genesis 50:20). But right now he doesn't have all that information.

***Many times the essence of faith is working without answers.*** It means giving God the benefit of the doubt - **Hebrews 11:1** - ***"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."***

4) **BEING THE KIND OF PERSON GOD CAN USE WHERE YOU ARE INSTEAD OF WHERE YOU ARE NOT** - There are three verses that give us a picture of the kind of person Joseph was:

- a) ***He was faithful running errands for his father - 37:14*** - ***"So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem."*** Our first look at Joseph isn't very impressive or glamorous. But he's a pretty good errand boy.
- b) ***He was faithful as he served as servant in Potiphar's house - 39:4*** - ***"So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had."*** It's important to remember that Joseph is not there by choice. This would not have been the first desire of his heart. He has a willingness to be all that he can be in any situation.

- c) ***He was faithful as a prisoner in jail - 39:22-23 - “And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. [23] The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.”***

Again, Joseph puts himself in the place where God can use him regardless of his circumstances. He is not in prison because of anything wicked he has done. ***He's been framed.*** But he patiently makes the most of where God has him at the moment.

The reason it is so important to note these details is they prove Joseph was genuinely the kind of person God could use effectively - with total trust - when bigger opportunities arose. Joseph's future calling was huge. His faithfulness in ***smaller*** things was crucial. In this part of his character Joseph was no dreamer.

- 5) **THE AMAZING WORK OF THE HAND OF GOD BEHIND THE SCENE OF OUR LIVES - 39:17-23 - “And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.' " So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. [18] 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.”**

[21] “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; cast 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. [23] So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.”

This seems nothing short of disaster. It is unfair, cruel, and unjust. You know the question everyone asks at this point. “***Where is your good and loving God?***” He’s right there with Joseph. Why isn’t He doing something? He is, but not what we’re expecting. Many years earlier the Lord promises the land of Canaan to Abraham, but not until they had suffered under the Egyptians for four hundred years - **Genesis 15:13** - “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.”

Then God told Abraham something else - **Genesis 15:16** -“And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

This is really interesting. God told Abraham He would bring His children out of Egypt and give them the land the Amorites were currently inhabiting. When God told Abraham this, Abraham was not ***strong enough*** to deliver God’s people and the Amorites were not yet ***wicked enough*** to have the land justly taken from them. Four hundred years would change all of this. But, of course, God’s people had to live ***somewhere*** until all this was accomplished and the land was ready for them.

Do you see it? God had a divine ***timing issue*** in the outworking of His promises. Before God could accomplish all this - before He could bring them ***out*** of Egypt - He had to get them ***in***. This is what God was doing in the circumstances of Joseph's life. In spite of all appearances, God was not ***absent***. Nor was He ***inactive***.

The trick is to remember ***not to judge God by isolated events*** - **Romans 8:28** - ***“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*** We are never promised that a good God necessitates that every circumstance, taken as a stand-alone event, is good. But the whole plan, seen from His timing and perspective will be good in the end. God works all things ***“together.”***