

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 28

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 37

INTRODUCTION

This last section of Genesis focuses on Jacob's sons, in particular Joseph. Joseph is the last of the four great patriarchs. His life relates how he, as an individual, expressed his faith in the promises of God through the circumstances of everyday life. After the death of Joseph, the focus shifts to the history of the tribes of Israel and the development of the nation of Israel.

Joseph's life illustrates God's providential overruling of events to fulfil His plans and purposes for the individual and for the world. Joseph is a shining example of godly living. He remained steadfast in his faith, love and service for God despite the trials that he faced. His experiences teach us *how to overcome envy, to face adversity, to resist sexual advances, to plan for the future, to forgive those who wrong us, to dispel doubts about forgiveness, to have faith in God's promises, to recognise the*

*sovereignty of God even in the wrongs done to us by others.*¹

OUTLINE

A. Jacob Lived with His Family in Canaan (37:1-4).

1. Jacob settled in the land of Canaan (v.1).
2. Joseph joined his brothers in tending the family flock (2a). He reported the wrong doings of the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah to Jacob (v.2b).
3. Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other children (v.3).
 - a. Joseph was born to him in his old age. (v.3a).
 - b. Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colours (v.3b).
4. Joseph's brothers hated him (4).
 - a. Jacob favoured him more than them (v.4a).
 - b. They could not maintain a peaceable communication with him (v.4b).

B. Joseph Related Two Dreams that Promised Him Prominence (37:5-11).

1. Joseph related his first dream to his brothers (vv.5-8).

¹ Leslie B. Flynn, *Joseph: God's Man in Egypt* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1979), 5-6.

- a. He told them the content of his dream (vv.6-7).
 - b. His brothers responded by asking him whether he thought he would rule over them (v.8a).
 - c. His brothers hated him even more (v.8b).
2. Joseph related his second dream to his brothers and father (vv.9-11).
 - a. He told them the content of his dream (vv.9-10).
 - b. His brothers envied him (v.11a).
 - c. His father rebuked him but kept it in his heart (vv.10, 11b).

C. Joseph's Brothers Conspired to Kill Him (37:12-20).

1. Joseph's brothers took their family's flock to feed in Shechem (v.12).
2. Jacob sent Joseph to see about the welfare of his brothers (vv.13-14).
3. Joseph, through the help of a man, found his brothers tending the flock in Dothan instead of Shechem (vv.15-17).
4. Joseph's brothers conspired to kill him so that his dreams would not come true (vv.18-20).

D. Joseph's Brothers Sold Him to Some Midianites on their Way to Egypt (37:21-28)

1. Reuben had another plan (vv.21-22).
 - a. He suggested casting him into a pit (21-22a).
 - b. He intended to save him later (v.22b).
2. Joseph arrived (vv.23-24).
 - a. They took him and stripped him of his multi-coloured coat (v.23).
 - b. They cast him into a pit in which there was no water (v.24).
3. Judah shared his plan of dealing with Joseph (vv.25-27).
 - a. The brothers saw some merchants travelling to Egypt (v.25).
 - b. Judah argued that there was no profit in killing Joseph (v.26).
 - c. Judah persuaded his brothers to sell Joseph to the merchants (v.27).
4. Joseph was sold to some Midianite merchants (v.28).
 - a. He was sold for twenty pieces of silver.
 - b. They brought him to Egypt.

E. Jacob's Sons Deceived Him and Jacob Mourned for Joseph (37:29-36).

1. Reuben returned to the pit and grieved when he found that Joseph was not in the pit (vv.29-30).
2. The brothers deceived their father Jacob (vv.31-33).
 - a. They dipped Joseph's coat in goat's blood (v.31).
 - b. They brought it to Jacob and told him that they found the coat (v.32).
 - c. Jacob recognised the coat and believed that Joseph had been killed by a beast (v.33).
3. Jacob in mourning (34-35).
 - a. Jacob mourned for Joseph for many days (v.34).
 - b. Jacob refused to be comforted by his children (v.35a).
 - c. Jacob lamented that he would mourn until the day he die (v.35b).
4. Postscript: Joseph was sold to Potiphar in Egypt (v.36).

Joseph's brothers harboured feelings of resentment, jealousy and hatred against him. There are three reasons for their intense emotion.

Firstly, Joseph felt morally bound to report the undisciplined lives of his half brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, to Jacob. This resulted in their hatred for him.

Secondly, Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other children. Joseph was the firstborn of the wife whom he loved very much. It is also reported that Jacob loved Joseph more because "he was the son of his old age" (v.3). It is also possible that Jacob was moved by the beauty of Joseph's character and his moral integrity and loyalty to him. Jacob bestowed a princely colourful coat on Joseph. The coat was not meant for manual work but rather intended to distinguish a superior or an overseer. Thus, it appeared that Joseph was given the duty and responsibility of overseeing his brothers in the tending of his father's flock.² Whatever the reason, Jacob's blatant favouritism was unwise. The brothers could not communicate with Joseph in a friendly manner. They could not wish him well. They could not greet him with the usual courteous greetings.³

COMMENTARY

Partiality Begets Envy and Hatred

Partiality, envy and hatred usually go hand in hand. People, by nature, are prone to strong emotions when they feel discriminated or disfavoured. We observe them in families, in organisations and even in public places.

² Verse 2—The Hebrew word translated "feeding," all the lexicon give the meaning as "overseeing, superintending, governing, or presiding over." And the preposition "with" should appropriately be "to" So the clause there should read, "Joseph, being seventeen years old, was overseeing the flock to his brothers (the flock given to the charge of his brothers). This evident when the brothers took the flock to Shechem to graze, Joseph remained at home and later Jacob sent him to see how his brothers were doing (v.14).

³ George Bush, 224.

God calls Joseph

Thirdly, Joseph told his brothers about his two dreams. The dreams were one and the same. The second confirmed the import of the first. Through them, God revealed His will for Joseph. The first dream had an agricultural reference. Joseph dreamt that his sheaf stood upright while his brothers' sheaves made obeisance to his sheaf (v.7). The second dream had a celestial reference. The sun, the moon and eleven stars made obeisance to him (v.9). There may have been some subconscious spiritual pride in Joseph when he repeated the dreams to his brothers and Leah. Jacob himself seems to have felt that Joseph was in danger of spiritual pride so he rebuked Joseph though he kept the revelation in his heart. Possibly, he could see the parallel in his personal experiences where he prevailed over Esau in the matter of the birthright. In regard to his brothers, Joseph's revelation was most unwise for it stirred up their hatred of him until they wanted to kill him.

Faithful in Little Things

Joseph's brothers had taken the flock to feed in Shechem, which was about 80 kilometres from where they were living in Hebron. After what had happened there, it did seem strange that they would venture back to Shechem. It is plausible that they wished to check the land which Jacob had bought (33:19). Whatever the reason, Jacob felt uneasy. He sent Joseph to see how they were doing. Joseph willingly obeyed his father. He walked to Shechem. When he did not find his brothers there, Joseph enquired further and chose to go another 24 kilometres

to Dothan to completely fulfil his father's wishes.

The brothers saw him coming from afar. They plotted to kill him, throw him into a pit, and then lie that a wild beast had devoured him (v.20).

God Takes Care

God's providential hand took over. He had chosen Joseph to be His instrument in the preservation of Israel. He would not allow man's evil plans to thwart His higher purposes.

Reuben was against the plan. He persuaded his brothers to simply leave Joseph to die in a pit. He had secretly planned to return later and take him out after the others had gone. There are a few possible reasons why Reuben wanted to save his brother Joseph. Firstly, being the eldest, he may have felt a responsibility for him. Secondly, he might have been convicted of his sexual sin of incest with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and now wished to redeem himself by saving the son whom his father loved the most.

Sold to Slavery in Egypt

The brothers listened to Reuben. When Joseph arrived, they did not kill him. Instead they stripped him of his coat and cast him into a pit. While they were eating, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites journeying to Egypt. Judah, whose conscience was troubled, proposed that they sell Joseph rather than have the blood of Joseph on their hands (vv.26, 27). The brothers agreed. They pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites (the caravan was a mixed group comprising Midianites and Ishmaelites, and their

identities are used synonymously) for twenty pieces of silver. The merchants brought Joseph to Egypt.

In the minds of the brothers, that was the end of Joseph. They thought that they had removed the thorn in their flesh for good. The wickedness of man knows no boundaries!

Hypocrisy, Lie, & Hurt

Reuben, who was away when Joseph was sold, grieved when he found out what had transpired.

The brothers dipped Joseph's colourful coat in goat's blood. They brought it to Jacob and said, "This we have found: know now whether it be *thy son's* coat or no" (v32). Note the reference to Joseph's coat—*thy son's coat*, not our brother Joseph's coat. This is the height of disrespect and impudence to their father. It was also brutal cruelty. They intended to hurt Jacob for he had loved Joseph more than them. Jacob recognised the coat and believed that Joseph had been killed by a beast. It was a great blow to him and the sons saw how their father grieved and sorrowed over the death of Joseph. They tried to comfort him (v.35), but it was all a hypocritical show.

Thus we see how one sin begets another sin. The brothers sold Joseph away. Then they lied to Jacob so as to cover up their sin. Next, they pretended to comfort their father. They resorted to lies upon lies to guard against detection.

SUMMARY

Joseph is one of the most beautiful characters in the bible. He obeyed his father and went in search of his brothers even though he knew that his brothers were unkind to him. When he was stripped of his coat and thrown into the pit, he must have been bewildered. His soul was in anguish. He pleaded with them but they ignored him (Gen 42:21). His suffering started when he was sold and lasted for the next thirteen years. Instead of being hardened by suffering, his heart remained tender. The two dreams, undoubtedly, also helped to sustain his faith throughout all his unexplained suffering.

We also observe God's providential hand moving to prevent the brothers from doing their worst. It was no accident or coincidence that Reuben's proposal against killing Joseph was accepted. That bought some time for Joseph. Then the passing of a caravan of merchantmen en route to Egypt and the eventual selling of Joseph saved him from an early death. God directs and guides the seemingly insignificant events in the daily lives of people to accomplish His good and great purpose. Here we see how He turned the evil and wicked deeds of Israel's sons to bring about the migration of Israel to Egypt. Romans 8:28 is especially relevant here: *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

The chapter ends with the downgrading of Joseph from the heir apparent of his father to the position of a slave in Egypt. He was sold to Potiphar,

the commander-in-chief of the Pharaoh's army.

Joseph must have been puzzled and tormented by the turn of events. Where was the fulfilment of God's promises in the two dreams? Where was the God whom he trusted? Yet God had deliberately allowed this to happen. Through suffering, Joseph is being moulded by the Potter for the exalted position of leadership in the land of Egypt. AMEN

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DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Genesis 37:1-4; Titus 3:1-9; Proverbs 14:30.

Tuesday: Genesis 37:5-11; Titus 1:15-16; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

Wednesday: Genesis 37:12-22; 1 Peter 2:12-16; Proverbs 10:12;

Thursday: Genesis 37:23-28; 1 Corinthians 10:11-13; Matthew 5:38-48.

Friday: Genesis 37:29-36; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; James 3:13-18; Romans 8:18.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you understand by the following two phrases?

a. *feeding the flock with his brethren* (v.2)

b. *son of his old age* (v.3).

2. Can Jacob's special love for Joseph be justified?

3. What is meant by the brothers "could not speak peaceably unto him"?

4. Did Joseph's brothers believe in the revelation of his dreams?

5. Although Jacob rebuked Joseph when told of the dream, why did he "observe the saying"?

6. What character quality of Joseph is shown in verses 12-17?

7. What was the original plan of Joseph's brothers regarding him? Why?

8. Why did Reuben disagree with the plan?

9. What was Judah's plan?

10. How was God's providence evident in this episode?

11. What is behind the thoughts and feelings of Jacob's sons when they said to their father, "know now whether it be thy son's coat or no"?

12. Illustrate the truth of this statement: "Lying seldom fails to accompany other sins" in the context of the brothers' revenge on Joseph and Jacob.

13. What attitude can destroy harmony and happiness in a family?
