

New Series – The life of Joseph – Genesis Chapter 37-50.**Genesis Chapter 37.****Title: “ Favoured Son, Hated Brother.”**

Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. ²This *is* the history of Jacob. Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of *many* colors. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. ⁵Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and they hated him even more. ⁶So he said to them, “Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: ⁷There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.” ⁸And his brothers said to him, “Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. ⁹Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, “Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.” ¹⁰So he told *it* to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What *is* this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” ¹¹And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind*. ¹²Then his brothers went to feed their father’s flock in Shechem. ¹³And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers feeding *the flock* in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” So he said to him, “Here I am.” ¹⁴Then he said to him, “Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me.” So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem. ¹⁵Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, “What are you seeking?” ¹⁶So he said, “I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding *their flocks*.” ¹⁷And the man said, “They have departed from here, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan. ¹⁸Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹Then they said to one another, “Look, this dreamer is coming! ²⁰Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, ‘Some wild beast has devoured him.’ We shall see what will become of his dreams!” ²¹But Reuben heard *it*, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, “Let us not kill him.” ²²And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit which *is* in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him”—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father. ²³So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph *of* his tunic, the tunic of *many* colors that *was* on him. ²⁴Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit *was* empty; *there was* no water in it. ²⁵And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry *them* down to Egypt. ²⁶So Judah said to his brothers, “What profit *is there* if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh.” And his brothers listened. ²⁸Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt. ²⁹Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. ³⁰And he returned to his brothers and said, “The lad *is* no *more*; and I, where shall I go?” ³¹So they took Joseph’s tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. ³²Then they sent the tunic of *many* colors, and they brought *it* to their father and said, “We have found this. Do you know whether it *is* your son’s tunic or not?” ³³And he recognized it and said, “*It is* my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.” ³⁴Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, “For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.” Thus his father wept for him. ³⁶Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh *and* captain of the guard.

Introduction

Before we start the series on Joseph I would like to give you three reasons why it is important that we study the life of Joseph.

1. **Joseph is the most complete type of “Christ”.** In Luke Chapter 24: v. 27 Jesus said that He is revealed in all the scriptures to the strangers on the road to Emmaus.
Part of this revelation included the book of Genesis.
We will discover that the things that happened to Joseph, also happened to Jesus. Also the character of Joseph eventually reflected that of Jesus.
So we will see “Jesus” hidden in the story of Joseph.
There are many types of Christ in the Old Testament but Joseph is the most **“complete”** type of Christ.
2. **Joseph was born into a “dysfunctional family”.** Joseph had one father, named Jacob. However, he had four Mothers. Jacob had two wives and two concubines.
Joseph’s mother Rachel had another son when Joseph was quite young, but Rachel died giving birth to that child.
As Joseph’s real mother was Rachel, he grew up not really knowing his true Mother. All Joseph’s brothers were much older than himself, so he had no real close relationship with them.
This is encouraging for any of us who were brought up in a family that was not the ideal. We may have had abuse by our parents, they may have divorced, we may have been treated badly in some way. We may not even have known our mother or father.
Although the experiences for us may have been hurtful, the life of Joseph teaches us that it need not affect our future or ministry opportunity with Jesus.
Jesus can heal the wounds of the past concerning our family upbringing, transform our lives and use us in His eternal plans.
Please be encouraged about this fact, I am.
1. **The life of Joseph has much to teach us about important subjects in the Christian life.**
We learn about **“forgiveness”, “resisting temptation”, Reaping the rewards of righteousness”, “Grace”, “Hard Times – with Jesus”, “God’s provision in a foreign land”, “Reaping what we sow”, “repentance” and much more.**
These important doctrines from the Bible are played out in a person’s life.
They are not abstract, but very real and can help us today if we apply them to our situation.
There are lots of transferable truths that can help us to grow in “Grace” and the “knowledge” of God’s will for our lives NOW.
With these thoughts in mind let us proceed to Genesis Chapter 37.

Chapter 37 quite neatly divides into three sections.

In v. 1-11 we learn about a child who was favoured by his father and hated by his brothers. We also learn about Joseph who appeared to have a prophetic dream.
Then in v. 12-28 we discover that Joseph’s older brothers seize an opportunity to kill him. However, his death is prevented by “Reuben” who suggested an alternative punishment. Initially he was thrown into a pit and later sold as a slave to trading merchants who were on their way to Egypt.
Finally, in v. 29-36 we read of deception, lies and the bereavement of Jacob.
Let us now unpack these three sections and develop them more fully.

1. Joseph the teenager, dreams of greatness, envied by his brothers – v. 1-11.

Firstly, we need to notice v.3

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of *many* colors.

It is clear in this verse that Joseph was treated in a special way by his aged Father.
The coat of many colours that was bought for Joseph by his father had a big significance in this culture.

The significance of the coat was that it indicated status as well as favour.

It marked Joseph out as a manager rather than just a worker.

It also gave the impression that Jacob might even favour Joseph when it came to his inheritance.

From birth to the age of 17 Joseph's family was in complete transition.

Everybody was unsettled and on the move.

We don't have time to read about this period, but if you want to read Genesis chapter 30: v.24 – 37: v.2 you will discover that it was a difficult family time for everybody.

There were arguments, Jealousy, rape, killings, hatred and much more.

Joseph grew up within this dysfunctional family.

Joseph's first mistake is revealed in v. 2. The text in the N.K.J. version tells us that Joseph brought a bad report to his father about his brothers.

In the N.L.T. it says "Joseph reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing"

This did not help the situation which was getting very heated between Joseph and his elder brothers.

In v. 4 we are told that Joseph's brothers hated Joseph and couldn't say a kind word about him.

Joseph's brothers were like a box of fireworks, just waiting for someone to light a match and set the fireworks off.

It wasn't going to take much to ignite a flame in the hearts of the brothers to kill Joseph.

On top of all this conflict, Joseph had what appeared to be two "**prophetic dreams**"

⁶ So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: ⁷ There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf."

⁹ Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me."

These dreams made the situation worse between Joseph and his brothers.

In v. 10 we are told that Joseph also told these dreams to his father.

His father rebuked him for his expectation concerning these dreams.

In v. 11 we are given a little insight that Joseph's father was quite discerning concerning Joseph's dreams.

¹¹ And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind*.

I am sure that Jacob felt that God was saying something to Joseph about his future in these dreams.

Jacob didn't totally dismiss the possibility of a great future for Joseph.

There is another place in the Bible where we have a similar expression made after a perplexing situation.

Luke 2: v. 47-51.

⁴⁷ And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. ⁴⁸ So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." ⁴⁹ And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. ⁵¹ Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.

When Jesus was 12 years old, his Mother, Mary discerned that there was something really special about Jesus.

The expression that she used is similar to the way that Jacob reacted to Joseph's dreams.

Q. So what can we discern spiritually from this first section and apply to our lives here today.?

God's word is revealed and it is hated.

In this section God's word clearly speaks through the dreams of Joseph.

On the surface Joseph's dreams do not seem spiritual, they seem selfish and worldly.

However, what we now know, because we know the whole story of the life of Joseph, is that these dreams were God witnessing to everybody.

God speaks to the world in every generation.

In the culture of this day, dreams such as these were often thought to be a means of divine communication and prediction.

Dreams were a demonstration of God's sovereignty, a declaration of the fact that He rules the world and the lives of individuals.

We know now that these dreams are going to be fulfilled, they did not.

These dreams correctly outline the future as it is going to unfold.

These dreams are the word of God, whether we like it or not.

One interesting fact to observe in this situation is that the dreams came in pairs.

This was done by God to suggest certainty of fulfilment.

Later in the history of Israel, any message or word had to be established by the mouth of two witnesses.

The two dreams acted as two witnesses to Joseph's family of God's ultimate intentions.

However, these dreams were rejected by Joseph's brothers, and also by his father.

Now to the application for us.

The Bible is God's word, whenever we declare it as truth, people are going to get angry and reject many of the things that we say. One of the reasons for this is that to them they sound arrogant.

We as Christians declare that there is only one God. This statement sounds arrogant to people who follow other gods. Isn't their god worth something?

We say that we have put our faith in Jesus Christ, and He has forgiven all of our sins, and that when we die we are assured of a place in Heaven.

This sounds very arrogant to many people that you can be 100% sure of your Salvation.

We say that the Bible says that if you reject Jesus then you are going to Hell when you die. Now this sounds very arrogant to most people, except Christians who believe in God's word the Bible.

The point that I am making here is that we must not let opposition to the Bible and its truth stop us from declaring God's word to our generation.

We may be declaring God's word to the last generation, we never know.

Matthew 24: v. 3-14.

³ Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" ⁴ And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these *are* the beginning of sorrows. ⁹ "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. ¹¹ Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. ¹² And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But he who endures to the end shall be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

2. Joseph sold as a slave for twenty shekels of silver – v. 12-28.

The story of Joseph moves on to the next section.

Jacob who is also called Israel told Joseph to go out and check on his elder brothers. He was told to check that all was well with his brothers as they were away taking care of a large flock of sheep in an area that had previously been hostile to their family.

In those days, you had to keep moving around the area in order to find good pasture food for your sheep.

Joseph was told by his father that the brothers were out in the valley of Hebron.

He arrived at the town of Shechem, but his brothers were not there.

A man told Joseph that his brothers had moved to another area. This area was called "Dothan". This area was about 50 miles or about 80 Kilometers from where Joseph started. Remember it was quite a dangerous situation.

In v. 18 we are told that Joseph's brothers, as soon as they saw Joseph in the distance, conspired to kill him.

They planned to kill Joseph and put him in a deep pit.

Reuben, the oldest brother, came to the rescue of Joseph and said **"Let us not kill him."**

Reuben suggested that the brothers must not shed any blood, but only put him into a pit but not to hurt him physically in any way.

Reuben had planned to secretly take Joseph out of the pit and return him to his father.

It appears that Reuben must have gone off to another place and left the other brothers, and Joseph safely in the pit.

During the time that Reuben was away, Judah said to the rest of the brothers,

"what profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?, come let us sell him to the Ishmaelites."

That is exactly what the brothers did, they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver. Joseph was then transported to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders.

So what can we learn from the story that is presented to us here?

a) The providence of God must be trusted, whether it is good or bad.

There are three clear things in this part of the story that help us to see the providential hand of God working in this situation.

Firstly, Joseph is wandering around in the fields on his own. A man found him and bothered to ask him what he was looking for.

We must remember that the people of Shechem were old family enemies with Jacob.

For a family enemy, who appears in the middle of nowhere, advises you where your brothers have gone and claims to have heard them making plans to go to a specific area, is somewhat unusual.

This could have been an Angel, we don't know, but it was certainly God's providence.

Secondly, we have a real wild bunch of brothers, determined to kill Joseph.

Suddenly Reuben the elder brother saves his life and he is put into a pit.

Finally, Joseph is rescued from the pit and sold to some traders as a slave for 20 shekels of silver.

There are three incidents here that in another person's life may not be acknowledged as God's providence, or God's guiding hand.

However knowing the whole story of Joseph's life we can't deny that these incidents were the **hidden hand of God, guiding all concerned for God's purposes.**

This brings us to the conclusion that everything that happens in our lives, good or bad is part of God's ultimate plan for our lives.

This can be very encouraging to us in the difficult times of our lives and also humbling to us in the times of great blessing and the happy times of our lives.

So whether you are having a really good time at the moment or a really hard time, please remember that God is working his purposes out for your good and for His glory.

b) A Type of Christ starts to appear in the life of Joseph.

Joseph is sold as a slave for 20 shekels of silver. At this time this amount of money was the price of a slave. If we fast forward to the New Testament we discover that the price of a slave has gone up to 30 shekels of silver.

Matthew 26: v. 14-16.

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.

There are many things that happened to Joseph that also happened to Jesus.

So you can't help thinking that very early on in scripture, God is introducing us to a person who has some of the hallmarks of His Son Jesus Christ.

A hallmark is a stamp that is applied to a product that guarantees that it is genuine and not a fake.

All Gold and Silver products are hallmarked. (show slide here)

The challenge for all Christians is to bear the hallmarks of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives.

If we do bear these hallmarks then we are not fakes, our faith is real.

As we carefully examine the life of Jesus Christ, we discover that the call to follow Him is very challenging.

Mark 8: v. 34-38.

³⁴When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

When we take up the challenge to follow Jesus, God stamps his hallmark upon our lives. It becomes real, we know the pain but we get the gain.

1 Deception, lies, and bereavement – v. 29-36.

We now come to the final section of chapter 37.

Reuben returned to the pit to rescue Joseph but discovered he was gone.

He immediately tore his clothes. Why did he do this?

It was a Jewish expression of grief or loss. This is actually the first time that it is mentioned in the Bible, but later on there are many other incidents of Jewish people tearing their clothes to signify grief or loss.

Reuben returned to his brothers to discuss the situation. As the oldest brother he would have to take responsibility for what had happened to Joseph.

Now what could they do?

They only had two choices, the first was to tell the truth and get into trouble with their father, and the second was to cover up the incident and lie and deceive their father Jacob.

They made the wrong choice and lied and deceived their father.

The brothers took one of their small goats, killed it, dipped some of its blood all over Joseph's coat and returned to their father to try and cover up what they had done.

Jacob believed that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal and went into severe mourning. Remember Joseph was Jacob's favourite son.

Jacob was in such a bad state that he declared that he would mourn for the rest of his life for the death of his favourite son Joseph.

The chapter ends in v. 36 by informing us that the Midianite traders had sold Joseph as a slave to Potiphar who was an officer of Pharaoh.

He was also a captain of all the guards. He held a high position.

Let us look at some practical applications in these last verses.

a) Sin which is unconfessed, makes our hearts harden towards God.

The brothers conspired together to make it appear that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. They lied. This was a sin committed by all of them.

However, when they saw the distress that their father was in and how he was suffering deeply with an uncontrollable grief, you would expect at least one of the brothers to repent and confess what had really happened.

However, they kept it a secret until many years later.

We will discover much later how God confronted their sin.

Many Christians, including myself have discovered that when we commit a sin, regardless of how small it might be, we must confess it immediately, or very soon after the event. If we do not confess our sin immediately then our relationship with God starts to decline and we slowly drift away from a close relationship with Him.

We may not realise it, but slowly and surely the devil starts to get a strong hold in our lives. Slowly we drift away from attending Church and having fellowship with Christians. We may put up a façade of being a Christian but our hearts are not with God and His word. The longer the process goes on the harder it becomes to confess our sins.

If you are not yet a Christian, the thing that is holding you back is the fact that you find it very hard to confess your sins to God.

There is something holding you back from doing this.

You may not realise it but there is a battle going on behind what you can actually see with your eyes.

It is a battle for your eternal soul.

The devil wants you to follow him, he does this by offering you to remain as you are and doing whatever you wish in your life.

He offers you pleasure but these pleasures don't bring heart satisfaction in your life.

God says to you today. I will offer you a life of forgiveness and joy whatever circumstances come into your life.

God says I love you so much that I sent my own Son Jesus Christ to take the punishment for your sins.

If you will only confess your sins, and believe in Jesus Christ and all that He has done by dying on the cross for your sins, you will be set free from the devil's power to follow Jesus.

You will know God's love in your heart, have peace with yourself and know full forgiveness in your heart.

The choice is yours, I can only encourage you to take a step of faith and trust Jesus for yourself.

Becoming a Christian will not make you perfect, but it will bring you into a personal relation with God and through His Holy Spirit, you will know God's peace and forgiveness.

The great blessing for all Christians is that once we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(1 John 1: v.9)

b) Even evil things that happen to us can eventually be one of God's instruments for blessing.

Romans Chapter 8 :v. 28

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

I am sure that at the time Joseph had no idea that God was preparing him for future responsibilities which required this sort of training.

However later on in his life in Genesis Chapter 50: v. 19-20 Joseph says these words;

¹⁹ Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God? ²⁰ But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.

When we go through difficult times as a Christian, none of us know what God is preparing us for in the future.

However, if we embrace these difficulties as God's training ground, then we will get through the trial with a greater sense of God's hand upon our lives.

Sometimes we don't always see the result of our trial until we get to Heaven.

Sometimes as we get older we look back and see God's hand clearly guiding our situation.

When we can't see God in our situation, we need to have the faith that God is in the situation, guiding and directing all that happens.

There is an old poem written by Frederick Faber that echoes this valuable truth.

**He hides himself so wondrously,
As though there were no God;
He is least seen when all the powers
Of ill are most abroad.**

**Thrice blessed are they to whom is given
The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field when He
Is most invisible.**

Frederick William Faber (1814 – 1863)

May God bless us as we apply these truths to our lives now and in the future.