

STUDY NUMBER ONE - Genesis 37:1-36

INTRODUCTION:

In our study in the Book of Genesis we come now to a consideration of the life of the fourth great Patriarch that is listed in the book, and with the study of his life we come to the conclusion of the Book of Genesis.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob precede Joseph in this series.

Joseph is one of the most lovable characters in the Old Testament and there is more biographical material in the Bible on the life of Joseph than of any of the other characters with the exception of Jesus Christ.

In ABRAHAM we see the divine POWER displayed in the provision of a son for Abraham and Sarah.

In ISAAC we see the divine CHOICE in the fact that Jacob and not Esau is the one chosen.

In JOSEPH we see that God selects and calls to His administration whom He will, in spite of opposition against His program.

In ABRAHAM we see the POWER OF GOD.

In ISAAC the PROVISION OF GOD.

In JACOB the PURPOSE OF GOD.

And in JOSEPH the PLAN OF GOD.

When I think of Joseph, I think of two special verses of Scripture, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New:

1. First, the one in the Old Testament is

Isaiah 40:31

"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings

like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk, and not be faint."

(The Rebirth of America by the Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation)

For thousands of years, the eagle has been admired for its grandeur, its grace in flight, and its great size and awesome power.

The soaring eagle is also a stirring picture of the true meaning of liberty.

Assisted by his powerful wings, the eagle glides effortlessly to altitudes of over 2,400 feet and is capable of using his wings to carry other eagles to safety.

Turbulent winds only cause him to fly higher and faster.

The eagle's keen eyesight enables him to be sensitive to approaching danger and to protect himself and his family.

The eagle displays the sense of responsibility that is a companion of genuine liberty.

He mates for life and returns to the same nest each year, making necessary repairs and additions. He takes an active role in providing for his family and in teaching his young to fly.

In so many ways, the eagle illustrates the life, victory, power, and freedom that Jesus Christ came to give those of us who place our faith in Him.

The eagle also pictures many of those character qualities that made America great and that must be reinstilled in our generation if we are to preserve for our children and grandchildren the freedom which God has so graciously entrusted to us.

(When the Hurt Won't Go Away by Paul W. Powell)

Some people think that Isaiah's order is all turned around in these verses. They say that soaring should be last. Not so! God knew what He was talking about when He led Isaiah to set things in this order. The most difficult discipline is not to soar like an eagle or to run like a racer, but to keep on keeping on.

This passage is a promise of grace for all the gears of life--the high gear of flying, the middle gear of running, and the low gear of walking.

2. The New Testament verse is

Romans 8:28

"And we are knowing that for those who are loving God all things He is working together for good for those who are called in accordance with His purpose."

It is a timeless principle that all things work together for good to them that love God and to them who are called according to His purpose. Joseph's life is an Old Testament demonstration of Romans 8:28. Even though all things work together

for good for the believer, it is not always evident what God is trying to accomplish in his life. Never has this been more true than in the case of Joseph. In fact, God kept his overall plan from Joseph so that He could teach him needed lessons. God wanted Joseph to have explicit faith in Him in any kind of circumstance. The process which God used was a series of tests in different areas of Joseph's life.

There were the tests of:

adversity,

body,

soul,

prosperity,

and the inner man.

These tests were applied to Joseph in the experiences:

in the PIT

in POTIPHAR'S house

the PRISON

and it prepared him to be:

the PRIME MINISTER of Egypt in the PALACE.

Joseph's life demonstrates how God chooses and molds a man in order to use him to accomplish His overall purpose. It was in God's program to have Jacob's family to go to Egypt in order to become a great nation and later return to the land of Canaan. But to accomplish this, God had to send his servant ahead to prepare the way.

Genesis 15:13, 14

And God said to Abraham, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed

four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions."

(Joseph by F. B. Meyer)

"Behind our life the Weaver stands
And works his wondrous will;
We leave it all in his wise hands,
And trust his perfect skill.
Should mystery enshroud his plan,
And our short sight be dim,
We will not try the whole to scan,
But leave each thread to Him."
C. Murray.

(Joseph: God's Man in Egypt by Leslie Flynn)

The story of Joseph has been called the Old Testament Romans 8:28 ("All things work together for good to them that love God"). Cruelty, slander, ingratitude--these tangled, dark threads were woven by a sovereign Artist into a beautiful, bright pattern. With God, there is no accident or chance. Man proposes; God disposes. Though others may treat us nastily, God is still on the throne, directing human affairs, able to use even dirty deeds against us to effect His perfect will.

(When the Hurt Won't Go Away by Paul W. Powell)

In spite of the current deluge of "health-and-wealth theology," the fact of the matter is that Jesus promised His followers only three things in this life: they would be always in trouble, never alone, ever at peace. The Christian faith was never intended to be merely an absence of human suffering; it is, rather, comfort in the midst of the storm, God's working out His purposes, revealing His grace, blessing with His presence. We get sick, we get divorces, we lose our jobs, our kids go bad like everybody else's. But we don't have to blow our brains out or jump off tall buildings! We have a Saviour who has answers, help, a purpose, and a presence to reveal through it all.

Though God does not exempt us from suffering and He does not explain to us why our suffering comes, He does enter into our experiences with us and helps us

through them. God doesn't save us *from* trouble; He saves us *in* trouble. God didn't save Daniel *from* the lion's den; He saved Daniel *in* the lions' den. He shut the mouths of the lions and kept them from devouring Daniel (Dan. 6). God did not save the three Hebrew children *from* the fiery furnace; He saved them *in* the fiery furnace. He entered into the furnace with them and He became their shield to keep the fire from consuming them (Dan. 3). And God did not route David around the valley of the shadow of death; He became David's Shepherd and walked with him through it (1 Sam. 18-29). In the same way God does not save us from sorrow and suffering. But He loves us and enters into life's experiences to help us and to sustain us. Paul declares this when he asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35)

The value of Joseph's life is seen in the fact that:

1. It explains the development of the Hebrew nation in Egypt.
2. It gives proof of Divine Providence overruling evil and leading to complete victory for truth and righteousness.
3. It is an example of personal character.
4. There are many similarities to the life of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of ADVERSITY he manifests patience and resignation.

In TEMPTATION he is inflexible with his firmness. "Daniel purposed in his heart"...

In EXALTATION he is unaffected with simplicity, integrity, humility, and gentleness.

We can say of his life it is:

from the PIT TO THE PALACE

or from RAGS TO RICHES.

His life really shows us that God knows what is best.

And it also shows us that He will honor His word.

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will continue to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:2,3

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that if He should appear, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And every one who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Robert Foster points out,

"Time is one of the greatest tests of a man's success. Like the Swiss railway system, the clock of circumstances keeps perfect time, never too slow and never ahead. All of this is the acknowledging of God's sovereign providence. The events in Joseph's life were days of training. There are no mistakes in the program of the Almighty with His men. There are no tough-luck situations. The ball doesn't bounce crooked with him. In the brief space of 13 years, the unwanted farm boy vaulted to the prominent spot of political leadership. Joseph was 17 years old when he arrived in the country of the Nile. He was 30 years old when he became prime minister of the Egyptian empire. Dispensable to his brothers; indispensable to Pharaoh. In adversity he trusted and waited upon Jehovah's timing. In prosperity he leaned hard upon the sufficient grace of his God by faith. His heart was not tricked by humiliation nor his head turned by exaltation. In the years of injustice Joseph learned the secret of patient submission. In the years of international popularity he learned the secret of humility and faithfulness. In the pit or the prison Joseph had to unlearn the spirit of censoriousness and self-complacency. In the palace and as primate, he had to learn the spirit of graciousness and selflessness. In moments of danger, thy will be done. In moments of promotion, to God be the glory. Suppose Joseph had remained at home with his father. Suppose he had fought with his brothers and had run away across the desert. Suppose Potiphar had not thrown him into the dungeon. Suppose while being set aside he had griped, complained and thrown in the towel. Suppose, suppose--guesses that usually never happen. Our man is a hero of faith. Joseph knew what he believed and that faith carried him through the thick and the thin. The message to all of us...live close to God...Be ever on the watch for God's will...To find our happiness in carrying out that will...to say

from the heart: I delight to do thy will. When this spirit actuates us, all difficulties, trial and hardships will be found only to be the means of training, testing, and preparing us for living by faith...true happiness.

Summarizing Joseph's life we can summarize it with the four F's:

1. FORGIVENESS
2. FORGETFULNESS
3. FRUITFULNESS
4. The FIGURE of principle

This is that Joseph was a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone has said that if you study the Scripture, you will find 400 parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is God's pure delight in transforming us into the image of His own dear Son the Lord Jesus Christ. The crowning glory of Joseph was that with God at work in and through him he so beautifully mirrored the Lord Jesus.

Luis Palau in his book *Dreamer and Schemer* points out some of these parallels:

1. We notice that Joseph was loved by his father and honored over the others. Likewise Jesus was honored by His Father.
2. Joseph was hated by his brothers and sold treacherously for twenty shekels, yet he was honored by the Gentiles.

It is said of Jesus in

John 1:11

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not, but as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God."

3. Joseph was accused falsely but he made no response and was sent to prison. Likewise the Lord Jesus who was accused falsely did not respond and was

subsequently sent to the cross.

4. Joseph was put in prison with two lawbreakers. One was condemned but the other was liberated, just as when the Lord Jesus was on the cross with one thief on each side--one was condemned but the other was saved.

5. Joseph was apparently buried and forgotten. The Lord Jesus was also buried and his enemies thought they were rid of him, but on the third day He rose again.6. Joseph was raised to the highest honor when Pharaoh paraded him down the street. The leaders went ahead and said, Bow the knee, bow the knee. Every Egyptian had to bow before Joseph, a Hebrew.

So with Jesus the Scripture says, "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow" (Philippians 2:10).

7. Last of all, Joseph saved millions from starvation, and he was able to bring his own people into a land of plenty and set them aside in a special place in the same way the Lord Jesus has saved millions of us from eternal condemnation and has a special place for the Jewish people.

Those are just some points, and they are limited parallels, to remind us that Joseph was a beautiful figure and picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a privilege to even slightly resemble Him. The secret lies in the unveiled face:

2 Cor. 3:18

We all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another.

STUDY NUMBER ONE - Genesis 37:1-36

v. 1 Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

Jacob is getting older now, and he has been through many experiences of life. And now he has come to live in the land of blessing, the place where Isaac his father had stayed.

Jacob is 108 years of age as the scene of our story opens. He has 39 years of his earthly pilgrimage left.

Jacob's father Isaac had stayed in Hebron, which is south of Jerusalem--about 30 or 40 miles. This is the location of Jacob's family.

v. 2 This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

The key person to figure into the ongoing seed which was promised initially to Abraham in the covenant which God made with him is going to be JUDAH, the fourth born son of Jacob.

Initially, the covenant was made with Abraham, and then passed on to Isaac, and then to Jacob, and now, as we will see in our series of studies, it will go to Judah.

Joseph will have a tremendous contribution to make toward this purpose, as we will see in the unfolding of the story.

Joseph is 17 years of age. He is the much-loved and first-born son of Jacob's wife Rachel. Rachel, being barren for many years, just had the privilege of mothering two children: the first was Joseph and the second Benjamin. And when Benjamin was born, she died at his birth.

Evidently, Joseph, though he was very young, was charged with the oversight of some of his father's flock, as well as the administration and management of his brothers.

The four brothers that are involved in this circumstance that comes before us are the two sons of Bilhah, the handmaid of Rachel, and the two sons of Zilpah, the handmaid of Leah.

The two sons of Bilhah are Dan and Naphtali.

The two sons of Zilpah are Gad and Asher.

It would be good for us to review here briefly the whole family of Jacob so that we can see all of them in relationship.

Jacob went to serve in Uncle Laban's home after stealing the blessing from his brother Esau. He entered into a contract to work seven years for Rachel, the one he dearly loved. After serving those seven years, Laban tricked him and put Leah, Rachel's sister, in the bed rather than Rachel. Jacob, furious with Laban, entered into another contract for seven years to win the hand of Rachel.

These two girls had two handmaids. Rachel had Bilhah, and Leah had Zilpah.

During the first four years of this marriage relationship, Leah has four children and Rachel is barren.

These four children are Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.

Rachel becomes very angry at Jacob because she is unable to have children, and gives her maid to Jacob. Bilhah has Dan and Naphtali.

Leah, who had stopped bearing, became jealous of this so she gives her maid to Jacob, and Gad and Asher are born.

Following this, Leah has two more boys and a girl: Issachar, Zebulun, and a daughter named Dinah.

Then the Lord remembers Rachel, and she gives birth to Joseph. It is her desire to have another child, and the Lord gives her Benjamin; and she dies in childbirth on the way to Jerusalem.

Joseph then, because he is a son of Jacob's old age, is given the responsibility for the management of his older half brothers born to the handmaids of Rachel and Leah.

As a young administrator, he took his responsibility seriously. This is probably his first job, and he wanted to be sure and get a good reference for his future work. He probably just got his driver's license and his social security number, and he is deeply concerned about being a good administrator. He finds that his four brothers are not a real asset. Their conduct and involvement is not a tribute to their father.

Now he has the problem of deciding whether he should come as a good administrator and report their behavior to his father. I am sure he comes in and finally confesses, "Dad, they are messing around! They're doing some drinking, and some drugs and dirty books, and I know you would like to know about this."

Joseph, like Daniel, purposed in his heart not to defile himself. So with consistent conviction he stands against the conduct of his brothers and pronounces a censure against that conduct by reporting what has been done to his father.

(The Rebirth of America by the Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation)

What can we expect of a society in which passions are riderless horses:
in which there is a desolation of decency;
in which love has become a jungle emotion,
lust is exalted to lordship,
sin elevated to sovereignty,
Satan worshipped as a saint,
and man magnified above his Maker?

v. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him.

It is a natural thing for Jacob to fall into this plight simply because Rachel was his real love. This is her first child and it is a child of his old age.

Here we have Jacob playing favorites in the family, just like his own mother and father had done earlier with him and Esau. Isaac found that Esau was his favorite and Rebekah, his mother, loved Jacob.

I suppose Jacob is giving his favorite son what he never enjoyed, and that was a father who truly loved him.

Who can measure the evils of favoritism in the family. It was said of one father when the child knocked upon the door, "Is that you, pet?" And the little boy said, "No, it isn't pet. It's only me."

The text tells us that he loved Joseph because he was the son of his old age.

The text does not include the fact that his love for Joseph was special because his much-loved wife Rachel was Joseph's mother.

I think it is the natural desire of the parent to spoil the youngest.

I can well remember when Julea, our youngest, was of age to get her driver's license. Her first statement was, "Can I have a 280-Z or a Mazda RX-7 when I get my license?" I said, "Julea, how about a 'vette?" Julea thought I meant Corvette, but I meant Che-vette; and she has driven one now for nearly 80,000 miles. At least she has the privilege of saying, I think I'll go out and get in my 'vette.

"And he made a richly ornamented robe for him."

The robe that Jacob made for Joseph designated that Joseph was to be the heir to the birthright. His brothers knew this and it was the main reason they hated him and could not talk peaceably with him. Add to this Joseph's purity of life and moral growth, and the irritation was unbearable.

The coat was a mark of preferred status. Joseph was in a superior position. It was a regal robe.

2 Samuel 13:18, 19

Now she had on a long-sleeved garment; for in this manner the virgin daughters of the king dressed themselves in robes. Then his attendant took her out and locked the door behind her. And Tamar put ashes on her head and tore her long-sleeved garment which was on her; and she put her hand on her head and went away, crying aloud as she went.

It was probably a coat reaching to the wrists and also to the ankles. It would be like a letterman's jacket in that it would portray achievement and be a symbol of recognition.

(*Joseph* by F. B. Meyer)

Now in those times the father's will was law. When, therefore, they saw Joseph tricked out in his robe of state, the brethren felt that in all likelihood *he* would have the rich inheritance, whilst *they* must follow a life of toil. "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him."

v. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

The brothers naturally became envious, and this sin of envy is the problem throughout the remainder of the passage.

Acts 7:9

And the patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt, and yet God was with him.

Psalm 37:1

Fret not yourself because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrongdoers.

Proverbs 14:30

A tranquil heart is life to the body, but passion is rotteness to the bones.

James 3:16

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

(Joseph: God's Man in Egypt by Leslie Flynn)

James wrote, "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (3:16).

What envy did to Jacob. Envy broke Jacob's heart.

When his sons brought back Joseph's special coat stained deliberately with goat's blood, Jacob recognized the garment immediately and concluded Joseph had been torn to pieces by a beast. Despite the attempts of his children to assuage his grief, "he refused to be comforted" (37:33-36).

Envy separated father and son for two decades. In his tear-stained memory Jacob could still see the ruddy-cheeked lad disappearing over the hill into the blue as he went off to seek his brothers. Little had he realized that that would be his last glimpse of his favorite son for 20 years.

Envy divided father and son. Envy has divided families, friends, churches, and even nations.

What envy did to the brothers. Envy hardened their hearts. After throwing Joseph into the pit, they sat down to eat bread, disregarding his pleas (v.25). Around the table they plotted to sell him, probably thinking themselves righteous because they hadn't killed him.

Envy led them into duplicity. They had to pretend they didn't know how his special coat had become bloodied. They had to deceive their father into thinking an animal had devoured his favorite son, hypocritically weep and try to comfort him, and for over 20 years maintain the lie, and finally, confess it to Joseph before he revealed himself to them (44:28).

Envy gave them a disturbed conscience for over 20 years. Later, when Joseph accused them of being spies, "they said one to another, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us" (42:21).

(cont.)

A Greek story has it that when a statue was erected in honor of a famous athlete, a rival athlete was so envious that he vowed he would destroy that statue. So every night in the dark he chiseled at its base to weaken its foundation. He finally succeeded in making the statue fall, but it fell on him, crushing him. Joseph's brothers fell victim to their own envy.

Christ also faced this problem from the Pharisees who were constantly plaguing his path, being envious of his success.

YOU CAN ENVY PERSONS AND COVET THINGS, and these brothers were envious of the special position and relationship that Joseph enjoyed with his father; and as a result, they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms. Each time they saw him they could not even speak the words of "peace" which is a part of the Hebrew greeting, because of the hatred which they had in their hearts toward him.

Matthew 12:34

You brood of vipers, how can you being evil speak what is good, for the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

v. 5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.

The hatred which the brothers had for Joseph involved several things. The hatred ledger had four entries at this point:

1. The father's love
2. The report on the bad behavior
3. The coat which he had made

4. The dreams which he is reporting to have had.

Jesus warned His disciples about the hatred of the world and not to be surprised by it because it hated Him first before it hated them. They needed to be of good cheer, for He had overcome the world. The world oftentimes feels that the nonconformity of the Christian is a result of his pride rather than the principles which he lives by; and as a result, he is persecuted accordingly.

v. 6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had:

Joseph is not preparing to tell them the dream to put himself in a superior position but just to share an experience without any ulterior motives.

v. 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

The impact of this dream was very plain to the brothers and was like rubbing salt into an open wound.

v. 8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

There is really no problem for the brothers to interpret the meaning of Joseph's dream, and so there are two big questions which are spewed out in hatred:

1. "Do you intend to reign over us?"
2. "Will you actually rule us?"

The result of that is "they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said."

I am sure you could often hear from the brothers:

"Well, look who's too cool to cook!"

or

"Careful, guys, the big man is around!"

Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher had already had enough of his leadership and what he had done to their relationship with Jacob by telling on them.

It is one thing to have someone rule over you who is older and superior in intellect and in strength and who has earned the right to such leadership. But it is quite another to have someone whom you consider as equal or inferior and who is quite a bit younger to speak of these things which he has had in a dream.

All of the boys are simply saying, "He's my baby brother."

Psalm 75:6, 7

For promotion comes neither from the East, nor from the West, nor from the South, but God is the Judge. He puts down one and sets up another.

You will notice in these dreams which Joseph has there is nothing of the adversity that he is going to go through. Those whom God wishes to exalt He first tries, purifies, tempts and humbles. These dreams which are being given to Joseph at this time are dreams to prepare him for the rough days which are ahead and also to give him courage to trust the promises of God that God will be faithful to the fulfillment of these dreams.

2 Cor. 2:14

Now thanks be unto God who always leads us in a constant pageant of triumph.

v. 9 Now he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing

down to me."

The implications of this dream are very clear, and that is that Joseph once again is going to be in a place of supremacy. It is the same old story of a slave boy who rose to Premier, a country boy who works his way to the Presidency, or a peanut farmer to President in one big step.

Joseph is certainly playing into the hands of their hatred with being so naive in their response to what he is telling them. He will certainly learn a whole lot more about this as he grows up a little bit.

v. 10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

Now his father being involved in the situation has his questions as he rebukes his young son. "What is this dream you had?" And then the next question, "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

It is interesting here that Joseph's mother Rachel has already died. Perhaps Leah has taken over that function and Jacob is referring to Leah on this occasion when he asks his question, "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

The father does not reject that which is spoken by Joseph. He just rebukes him for talking about it and then raises these couple of questions.

v. 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

There is a contrast between the response of the father and the sons to Joseph in this 11th verse. The reason the brothers are jealous is because of all of the previous reasons we have seen. And his father, because of love, takes the position of Mary who ponders these things within her heart. And he keeps this saying in the back of his mind.

v. 12 Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem,

I am sure Jacob felt the temperature in the situation arising and that the brothers needed to be involved in some constructive projects, and he commands them to pasture his flocks near Shechem.

Just as Rebekah sent Jacob away to Uncle Laban's house when Esau became so angry he wanted to kill him over the birthright and the blessing, so Jacob sends the boys out with the flocks on a destination near Shechem.

Shechem is 60 miles north of Hebron, so it is no small cattle drive that is involved in this situation.

Shechem is a city of bad memories. It was five years ago, recorded in Genesis 34, that Dinah, Leah's daughter, was raped at Shechem High School by a young man who later wanted to marry her. Simeon and Levi, brothers #2 and 3, took it upon themselves to slaughter the whole male population of the area.

v. 13 and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

How similar these circumstances are to the life of David when old Jesse is concerned about his sons fighting in the battle with the Philistines in the Valley of Elah, and he asks David to take supplies and go to check on his brothers. The difference is significant, however, because David was being asked to only go about 16 miles southwest of Bethlehem to the Valley of Elah, and Joseph is being asked to go some 60 miles north of Hebron to find his brothers on the ranching operation near Shechem.

The brothers had been gone for quite some time and Jacob is becoming concerned about them. So he commands Joseph, and Joseph immediately responds with a gracious, submissive spirit by saying, "Very well."

We are impressed with the promptness of his obedience and the submission to his father's authority.

God always blesses the obedient heart and the submissive spirit.

How graphically this displays the uncertainty of the human existence. The Scripture tells us in Proverbs 27:1 that "we know not what a day may bring forth."

I can remember a young man in my first youth group many years ago who was in a tragic car accident, and the father of the son who drove the car, with tears in his eyes in the emergency room, said, "Just remember: a split second can change lives."

I have an orthopedic doctor friend whose practice was jeopardized by the breaking of a luggage strap that snapped and hit him in the eye, damaging his vision enough to make it impossible for him to continue in his practice.

It is going to be well over twenty years before this aged father is going to see his much-loved son again.

If there are some deeds of kindness that we have planned to do, we need to do it today.

Joseph was ever ready to comply with his father's wishes as soon as they were intimated to him. Jacob, deeply concerned for the welfare of all of his children, although he entertained a peculiar regard to the best of his sons, sends Joseph to Shechem to bring him intelligence whether all his brethren were safe and well. As soon as Joseph was called by his father, he said, "Here am I." He loved and honored his father and would have gladly gone anywhere to please and serve him. He loved his brethren and was happy to receive a commission to go and to inquire after their welfare.

(Joseph by F. B. Meyer)

On Joseph's part there was not a moment's hesitation. In the flash of a thought he

realized the perils of the mission--perils of waters, perils of robbers, perils of wild beasts, perils in the lonely nights, perils among false brethren, who bitterly hated him. But "none of these things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto himself." As soon as he knew his father's will, he said, "Here am I." "So Jacob sent him; and he came."

v. 14 So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." So he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem,

v. 15 a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

The Lord directed him on his way and a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

The Lord has a wonderful way of giving us direction by bringing people into our lives who can help us.

v. 16 He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

v. 17 "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan.

Dothan is 12 miles northwest from Shechem. You know, Joseph could have stopped but he hung in there. Some people give it one lick and then they quit. There are many who will never hear "Well done" because they never finished.

It would have been easy for Joseph to have stopped at this point and have felt that he had fulfilled his part of the mission in having gone as far as his father had commanded him, and yet he was still without success. He continued to pursue because of his concern for his brothers and the successful conclusion to the mission.

v. 18 But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

I am sure that Joseph probably was quite a spectacle in the distance. As you know, he wore his richly ornamented robe. He probably even found times to have an excuse to sleep in it.

When the brothers saw him coming, they literally saw the color RED because of their jealousy and their hatred which they had toward him.

John 1:11

He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.

Who can measure the surprise this must have been to Joseph who had sacrificed time, his life, and had extended much effort to complete the mission, only to find that his brothers were plotting to put him to death. He, like Jesus Christ, came as the King of the Jews, and they his brothers said, "We will not have this man to rule over us. Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"

(Joseph by F. B. Meyer)

But Joseph's grief was a true anticipation of Christ's. "He came to his own, but his own received Him not." They said, "This is the heir, come let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours." "They caught Him, and cast Him out, and slew Him." "They parted his raiment among them." They sold Him to the Gentiles. They sat down to watch Him die. The anguish of Joseph's soul reminds us of the strong cryings and tears wrung from the human nature of Christ by the near approach of His unknown sufferings as the scapegoat of the race. The comparative innocence of Joseph reminds us of the spotlessness of the Lamb who was without blemish, and whose blamelessness was again and again attested before He died. No victim destined for the altar was ever more searchingly inspected for one black hair or defect than was Jesus, by those who were compelled to confess, "This Man hath done nothing amiss."

v. 19 "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other.

These brothers have it in their minds to thwart the counsels of Omnipotence. Their conduct is in direct defiance to dreams which have been given.

It would be far easier to arrest the sun in its course than to hinder the performance of any promise God has made to His people. His counsels shall stand forever, the thoughts of His heart through all generations.

You can slay the dreamer, but you cannot touch the dream.

Although they were seeking to defeat God's purposes, they were unconsciously helping to fulfill them.

Satan did the same thing in thinking that he had accomplished his great victory when Christ was placed upon a cross. And out of God's marvelous plan came a RESURRECTION and the REDEMPTION of mankind.

It was the "Merry Mexican" Lee Trevino who, struck by lightning while playing golf, said nonchalantly, "I should have held up my one iron because even God can't hit a one iron." And then after thinking about it, he thought further, "When God wants to play through, you let Him."

God is always a winner.

Romans 8:31

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

Romans 8:37

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

v. 20 "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say

that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

I am sure it probably shook Joseph up a little bit to see them in a huddle when he's coming. They see him coming and they are in a little planning huddle, whispering together about what they are going to do to kill him and to take care of those dreams. How inconsistent this all seemed in comparison to what he had just so recently dreamed.

Had Joseph been looking only at the circumstances, he would have despaired of all hope. But his trust was in God. God's ways are mysterious. They are beyond man's comprehension. God sovereignly works. Man is often unable to understand why he is being led down a certain path.

1 Cor. 13:12

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.

(When the Hurt Won't Go Away by Paul W. Powell)

As a kite rises highest against the wind, so I want to let the troubles of my life carry me to new heights with God. Since this is true, don't spend your life counting your blessings on your fingertips and your burdens on your pocket calculator. Don't wallow in self-pity. The posture of a Christian in today's world ought to be "knees down and chin up." The wonderful promises of God ought to make us beautiful and not bitter--gracious and not grumpy--cheerful and not complaining. That's the way to live--and to die.

Proverbs 20:24

Man's goings are of the Lord, how can a man then understand his own way?

Believers need confidence in God, that He will accomplish His will whether they understand it at the time or not.

Romans 8:28-30

And we are knowing that for those who are loving God, all things He is working together for good, for those who are called in accordance with His purpose. Because whom He foreknew, He also decided upon beforehand those who were to be like His Son in appearance to the end that He might be the first-born among many brethren. Now those whom He decided upon beforehand, these He also called and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Even when the circumstances look hopeless, the believer can have confidence that God knows what He is doing and that He is working out His perfect will through the believer's life.

Job 13:15

Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.

Job 5:8,9

But if it were I, I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before Him. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.

Job 19:25-27

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes; I and not another. How my heart yearns within me.

We can understand a little bit better now that one who hates his brother is also guilty of murder. It all began with envy which turned to hatred and now it has moved into the realm of murder.

One sin begets another. One lie breeds another.

v. 21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said.

Reuben is the firstborn and the oldest, and naturally feels the full responsibility for anything that is about to happen. Since he was responsible, his first statement is, "Let's not take his life."

Here the Lord provides us with some of his protective providence as He prompts Reuben to speak. How strange this should be that this proposal should come from Reuben, who originally had the birthright.

v. 22 "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

Reuben wanted to have them place Joseph in one of the empty pits or cisterns so that eventually he could come back and rescue Joseph out of their hands and take him back to his father Jacob. These were Reuben's plans for sparing Joseph a premature death.

v. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe--the richly ornamented robe he was wearing--

You can just feel their hatred because their first reference to him as they catch sight of him is to his dreams, and now as soon as they lay hands upon him it is immediately the stripping of the richly ornamented robe that had been given to him by his father.

One of the things which they hated the most was this emblem of his position. And so they immediately stripped him of that evidence in preparation to casting him into the pit.

(Joseph by F. B. Meyer)

It is very sweet, as life passes by, to be able to look back on dark and mysterious

events, and to trace the hand of God where we once saw only the malice and cruelty of man. And no doubt the day is coming when we shall be able to speak thus of all the dark passages of our life.

v. 24 And they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

Who can measure the dismay and heartbreak of Joseph as he cries from the pit, and there is no one to hear and no one to respond. Actually, the sounds of his agonizing cries fell on their ears at this time, but it finally reached their hearts some 22 years later when they are confronted by Joseph in Egypt with that which they have done.

It's falling on their ears now, but will on their hearts 22 years later.

Who can measure the impact this has on Joseph. He's only 17 years of age. He's never been away from home, and now here he is in a pit. Naturally his thoughts are thoughts of some wild beast coming or starving to death in the pit and how hard it is at this time to remember the dreams and claim the promises of God.

Someone has said, "When you find yourself in the cellar of affliction, you need to look around for the wine of His purpose." That's tough to do when the hurt and the pain is so real.

How similar this is to the experience of Jesus when He is hanging on the cross and the sky has grown black as night, and we hear His orphaned cry from the cross: "Eli Eli lama sabachthani!"--"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

v. 25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Oh, the supreme callousness of their hearts is revealed in the fact that after doing this dastardly deed they can now sit down and enjoy a meal together. I am confident that it was pretty tough to find someone among the group to express thanks for the food, especially since the food was probably brought to them by the

brother who is in the pit.

Right on schedule there is a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead.

Gilead is about 20-25 miles east and north from where they are. This caravan is probably heading westward toward the coast and then south down the main route until they get far enough to begin to turn westward toward Egypt.

Egypt is about 250 miles southwest from this present location.

Amos 6:6

Who drink wine from sacrificial bulls, while they anoint themselves with the finest of oils. Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.

Let us not judge of God's word by His providence, but rather judge of His providence by His word. We must not think that the promise of crowns and of rivers of pleasure is made void because at present we are subjected to the cross. Many promises have seemed to be forgotten by the promiser, and yet have been exactly fulfilled in their season. God's Word is established in the heavens although it may seem to our narrow views to be buried under the earth. Joseph no doubt lived like his fathers in faith and died in faith, and his faith supported him under every trial however severe. He that believeth shall not make haste.

Joseph's being alone in the pit where God could deal with him is a reminder of the way God worked with Jacob. God dealt with Jacob when he was alone at Bethel, and some twenty years later when he was alone at Peniel.

Both of these were significant in the progress of Jacob's life. Frequently God is able to best deal with us when we are alone. Christ spend agonizing hours alone in Gethsemane before He was betrayed and finally crucified. For Joseph the night in the pit was not a night of defeat but a night of victory. If there were any selfish ambition and dreams of self-importance left in Joseph, the night in the pit in hopeless despair would have removed them. Therefore Joseph's experience in the pit was the beginning of a victorious life. He was now completely under God's control, for any selfish desires had been reckoned dead. Joseph realized that his dreams were God's responsibility to fulfill. Joseph was not to try and fulfill the dreams on his own but he was to make himself available to God so that God could fulfill the dreams through him. Because he was only seventeen years of age when the dreams came to him perhaps there was some youthful pride in him. If so, the

experience of the pit would completely remove it.

Little did he think then that hereafter he should look back on this day as one of the most gracious links in a chain of loving providence of that he should ever say, "Be not grieved or angry with yourselves. God did send me here before you."

God did not prevent him going through difficult circumstances but He went with Joseph through them. In the midst of his adversity he waited and trusted God for Him to do it in His time and in His way. Here we have a young man filled with youth, ambition, handsome, and yet in the days that are before him he is going to have to face the experience of temptation, jealousy, slavery, imprisonment, hatred, suffering, and sorrow; and from it all we are going to see the beauty of the Christ displayed in his ability to forgive and his generous spirit.

The darkest moments are only short corridors leading us to sunlit rooms. They looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead.

Here we have God's providential provision in this situation, as well as in numerous others that are going to be before us.

The caravan is right on schedule.

v. 26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?"

Judah is the fourth-born son of Jacob, and he raises the question that everybody's thinking about: "What are we going to get out of just killing him and covering it up?"

He now has a proposal. Here Judah is similar to his Biblical counterpart in the New Testament, Judas Iscariot.

v. 27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

What glorified double talk we have in this verse.
What a mixture of MORALITY and IMMORALITY, of CONVICTION and CONFORMITY. Let's don't kill him because he's our brother, but it's okay to relieve ourselves of the responsibility of him by selling him into slavery.

v. 28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Joseph, you do not understand what I am doing right now, but I must get you into Egypt before I can fulfill the dreams which you had.

This is all part of the big plan, and you're going to just have to trust me now that I know what is best.

Some have been troubled by the terms "Midianite" and "Ishmaelites" interchanged in the passage. The term "Midianite" refers to the area from which they have come. They have come from the land of Midian. And they are Ishmaelites--they are descendants of Ishmael rather than of Isaac so they are Arab traders from Midian on their way down to Egypt.

We would say they are Jews from New York come down to Dallas to sell their clothing.

Whereas Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ for 30 pieces of silver, Judah and the boys sell Joseph for 20 shekels of silver in this experience.

v. 29 When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes.

Reuben's plans had failed, but certainly not the Lord's. Many times we would shed fewer tears if we were more trusting of the Lord's ability to accomplish His ultimate purpose, even if many times they run counter to those which we have. Each of us

look back on our lives and we raise the question, What might have been had we only walked closer to the Lord and been sensitive to that still, small voice: This is the way, walk ye in it, when you turn to the right hand and you turn to the left.

Evidently, something must have happened with the flocks, and Reuben was away giving attention to the livestock when these traders came by and Judah and the other brothers sold him.

v. 30 He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?"

Reuben as the firstborn felt the ultimate responsibility which was his for his brother, and now he is deeply concerned and wants the information as to Joseph's whereabouts.

v. 31 Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.

One sin demands another, and now we must be involved in the sin of a lie and deceit by making Jacob live on the basis of a false promise.

v. 32 They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."

v. 33 He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

False assumptions lead to unnecessary anxiety.

Here Jacob forgets the dreams and believes the worst. His son has been killed by some ferocious animal.

When we look only at the present circumstances, we most generally come up with a

wrong conclusion.

How difficult it is for Jacob to face this additional trial in his life. It is a trial that God did not intend for him to bear, but is just the reflection of Jacob's earlier life, when he deceived his own blind father and gained the blessing, and now his sons deceive him. Live in deception and die in deception.

For Grandfather Abraham it was to surrender his Isaac.

For Father Isaac it was to surrender his Esau.

And now for Jacob it is to surrender his Joseph.

His tears are tears of unbelief, for if God had spoken through Joseph's dreams, he would realize that Joseph of necessity must still be alive. And with his grandfather Abraham, even though Joseph be dead, God would raise him up in order to be faithful in His promises to continue the seed, even to Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 3:5, 7

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

(*Genesis* by Donald Grey Barnhouse)

How many tears are shed because of unbelief! God spoke through Joseph's dreams, and Jacob should have understood that the Lord had not led him to give the birthright without His divine protection. Had he not had a lifetime of experiences centering around this theme? And yet, in spite of the promises, Jacob believed a rag dipped in blood. When shall we learn to base our belief not upon experience but upon the Word of God? The basis of theology is not what we see in life but what we see in the Book. Lord, keep us in the simplicity of faith.

v. 34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days.

Here this mourning is premature. It is a mourning which believes the worst and is a mourning on false assumption.

v. 35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him.

v. 36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Tune in tomorrow for the next exciting episode of "As the World Turns."

CONCLUSION:

There are a number of lessons that we can learn from this particular study:

LESSON #1: The Father's PROMISE, POWER, and PURPOSE are all at work in this study.

LESSON #2: We have been made aware of the overruling power of a sovereign God which is wonderful in its counsel and mighty in its operation.

LESSON #3: One sin begets another. We have seen envy change to hatred, and hatred changed to murder, and murder lead to falsehood.

LESSON #4: Just because God gives a promise it does not mean that He is not going to do a work in our lives to prepare us for the reception of the promise.

LESSON #5: The dreams were designed to sustain in the time of trial.

LESSON #6: All things work together for good to them that love God and who are the called according to His purpose.

LESSON #7: Be sure your sins will find you out. Jacob is bearing the fruit of his own deception in this experience.

LESSON #8: Joseph is an example of submission to his father's authority and obedience to his command. He is submissive to the Father's will and obedient to His Word.

Hebrews 11:24-26

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time; he regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward.

Job 23:10, 11

But he knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed His steps; I have kept to His way without turning aside.

1 Peter 4:12, 13

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.