

## **Overcoming betrayal – Genesis 37**

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**First of five in “Overcoming series”**

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### **Introduction**

We are going to start a five part sermon series on the life of Joseph, a young man from the book of Genesis, who is favoured by his father, hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, jailed for a crime he didn't commit, forgotten by those he helps, and yet through it all, stays true to God.

God uses him to accomplish great things, but not without Joseph enduring great hardship for many years.

Joseph's story is one of overcoming the hardships he suffers through faith and hope in a God who is faithful to him.

As we work through his story, we shall see how he overcomes betrayal, temptation, disappointment, success and bitterness.

By learning his story, seeing his hardships and understanding his persistent faith and hope in God, I hope to give us all direction and encouragement to overcome the hardships that we endure by turning the God he looked to throughout his ordeals.

Today we turn start with looking at how he overcomes betrayal.

## **Background (vs.1-11)**

**37** Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

<sup>2</sup> This is the account of Jacob's family line.

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.

<sup>3</sup> 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 an ornate robe for him. <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: <sup>7</sup> 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."

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> Then 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."

<sup>10</sup> 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?" <sup>11</sup> His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Joseph, the favoured son of Jacob

- Jacob had ten sons through his other wife, Leah,  
and two servants Zilpah and Bilhah,

but only two through the woman he loved most, Rachel

- Joseph and his younger brother Benjamin born last,  
and end up “most treasured”

Joseph grows up with his father unabashedly showing him off as his favourite

- the infamous “richly ornamented” or “multi-coloured robe”

- same termed used of royal apparel later in OT.

He doesn't ask for this kind of treatment,

but we don't see him chaffing under it either

He doesn't make himself very lovable to his brothers,

for as we see in verse 2, he does what all little brothers do:

he tattles on his older brothers.

The details are scarce, all we know is that they had been engaging in some wrongful activity, and Joseph reports this to Jacob, also known as Israel.

So even as the story just begins, his brothers feel betrayed two ways – through Jacob's favouritism and Joseph's loyalty to his father, and they hate him for it.

The hate deepens as Joseph grows up,

for he has two dreams in which it becomes apparent that he will grow up to become the dominant member of the family:

1. (5-7) during the harvest, he and his brothers in fields, their sheaves of wheat come and bow down to his

- hate intensifies (8)

2. (9) – second dream – sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him

- gets trouble from Jacob, and deeper hate from brothers

## The Plot

<sup>12</sup> Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem,  
<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, <sup>15</sup> a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

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

<sup>17</sup> "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. <sup>18</sup> But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

<sup>19</sup> "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. <sup>20</sup> "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."

This hate festers into Joseph's young adulthood, and it boils over in the passage we've read this morning

Joseph is sent to bring supplies to his ten older brothers,  
who are maintaining the family herds in a distant area.

- Ben, the youngest, is still a boy
- by the time Joseph find them, they are over 100 km. from home

They see him from a distance, and plot to be rid of him once and for all.

It's amazing how bitterness can simmer until it gets an opportunity to boil over; the distance for home and isolation are perfect for their desire to be rid of Joseph.

Their initial thoughts are murderous – kill him, toss the body down a deep hole, and blame wild animals for this death.

### **The interventions**

But two of the older brothers, Judah and Reuben, moderate this plan somewhat.

<sup>21</sup> When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. <sup>22</sup> “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

<sup>23</sup> So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—<sup>24</sup> and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? <sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

Reuben gets them to hold off on killing him, so they toss him down a cistern, which is a deep hole dug to collect rain water for the animals

He then leaves the group and waits for an opportunity to save Joseph.

I believe that his motives are not pure;  
I think that he sees an opportunity to earn favour with his father by saving Joseph. He is the first born of all the sons, and is thinking of his inheritance.

While Reuben is off planning to betray his brothers plan by rescuing Joseph, Judah convinces the other brothers to sell Joseph to a traveling caravan.

### **The sale and the ruse**

So Joseph is hauled out of the cistern and sold to the caravan for 20 pieces of silver. Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen has discovered that this is the going rate for a healthy slave at the time that this events are thought to have occurred

<sup>29</sup> When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. <sup>30</sup> He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?”

<sup>31</sup> Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. <sup>32</sup> They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, “We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.”

<sup>33</sup> He recognized it and said, “It is my son’s robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.”

<sup>34</sup> Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. <sup>35</sup> All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.” So his father wept for him.

<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

When Reuben returns, he is initially dismayed, probably because his opportunity to earn favour with his father is gone, but they all quickly come up with a plan to deceive their father.

Tearing up the special robe and soaking it in animal blood is like a final act of spite, and the perfect way to deceive the rest of the family.

The body itself need not be produced, for it would be “assumed consumed.

Jacob believes the report his sons bring back to him, and the betrayal is complete

- Joseph has been betrayed by his brothers, and is alone in his captivity
- Jacob has also been betrayed, and is alone in his grief
  - a grief which he lives in for years and years

### **Now what?**

Joseph has been through a betrayal of epic proportions, and it would be easy to assume that his treatment has left him destroyed and alone.

His own flesh and blood have betrayed him, and he is completely alone, a slave in a Egyptian soldier’s home.

However, the rest of Joseph’s story, which we will be looking at for the next four weeks, show us that he is able to overcome this betrayal.

How does he do it?

Not by his own resources – he doesn’t have any!

- he is stripped of all he owns or would have owned
- he is dropped from favoured status to no status

He has lost everything that would have distinguished him apart from anyone else. But even so, he does overcome his betrayal and live to be a part of greater things than he could ever imagine.

There are three essential elements to his recovery – faith, time and the ability of God to make good come from evil.

## **1. his faith in God**

We hear nothing about his faith in the first chapter of his story, but as he is taken away from everything that he had on the outside, we soon learn that the faith he has on the inside is what really holds him together.

His faith doesn't come out in the first chapter because it doesn't have to, he is the pampered, favoured son of many, and he lacks for nothing.

Even so, he is obviously not spoiled, for the faith he turns to has been nurtured in his life so far, and is full and bold and strong when he finally needs to rely on it

It is often true in our lives that our faith in God doesn't really show itself until we really need to turn to it and rely on it above everything else.

## **2. Time**

We will also see in Joseph's life that his "overcoming" takes a great deal of time.

There is no quick fix for deep hurts – Joseph doesn't get one and we won't either.

Just like a deep wound takes longer to heal than a scratch, betrayal takes longer to heal than many other wrongs, because it is essentially a hurt delivered by someone we trust.

We all know that the deepest hurts come from those closest to us. But time and faith can make a huge difference in how that betrayal affects us.

## **3. Good from Bad**

We also see in Joseph's life that his worst moment, his betrayal, becomes the catalyst for his greatest success.

Now, there's too many ways to make this a cliché,  
but the truth remains that Joseph would not have been able to rise to  
greatness if he had not been betrayed.

His story is one of great good coming out of a great evil.  
In many ways, his story is a fore-runner of the greatest story of all time.

Jesus himself was betrayed, and his betrayal leads to his greatest act of love  
for all of us – his death and resurrection.

In our lives, we can let betrayal keep us isolated and bitter.  
Many people do, and in doing so allow the bitterness,  
hate and pain to gain more and more strength.

They have been wronged, but they cope with it wrongly and allow the  
betrayal to keep on hurting them.

If we can find another perspective, one that keeps us real about our pain but  
also sees the potential for it to make us better,  
we can slowly begin to overcome it.

I say this fully realizing how hard it is; I'm not making light of anything here.  
But I also say it fully believing it –  
God can take the worst of what we've been through and make our lives  
better for it.

## **Conclusion**

Joseph shows us another way to react to, and eventually overcome, betrayal

He relies on a faith in God that keeps him sane during insane times.

He takes time to let his wounds heal

– there is no quick fix for what he's been through

And God eventually takes his worst moment and uses it to accomplish great things through him.

This can happen in our lives as well. We can overcome betrayal, if we're willing to let God work in the same way that he worked with Joseph.

We need to rely on God instead of ourselves, for turning inward will only intensify the pain.

We need to see relief and victory coming slowly, over time. Life's hurts are not solved in 30, 60 or 90 minute intervals, such as TV and movies would have us believe.

And, as hard as it is to accept, we need to believe that God can take the worst betrayal and use it to do the greatest good.

That is what he did with Joseph.

That's what he did with his own son Jesus.

That's what he can do with us, too, if we let him.

As we think to our own stories of betrayal, let us take heart in knowing that betrayal can be overcome.

The three key elements are Our faith in God, a willingness to wait for his timing, and a trust that even the worst things in our lives can eventually be used for good.