

Then Jesus answered and said to them... “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;”

“And These Are They Which Testify of Me”

Sermons on Genesis
Bruising Joseph’s Heel
Genesis 37:23-36

With Study Questions

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Preface

We have previously learned that Joseph was Jacob's favorite; hence he was the least favorite of his brothers. Making him even less popular among his brothers were his prophetic dreams of dominion over his entire family. His father had sent him to Shechem to check on his brothers who had since relocated to Dothan. Upon seeing Joseph arriving they conspired to kill him. Reuben, seeking to save Joseph, recommended they not kill him, but merely put him in a pit from which Reuben would later rescue him. The story now continues.

Stripped and Cast Into a Pit

So 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. ²⁴ Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it (Genesis 37:23, 24).

Persecuted for Truth

Things are looking pretty dismal for Joseph. The difficulty of Joseph's life was simply due to his speaking the truth as he knew it. Yet he is surrounded by a family of anger and rebellion. His mother, father, and brothers had been unanimously unfaithful in their methods of dealing with life. And the accumulation of their garbage is now poured upon his head.

The Gold Will Shine

His coat, a coat no doubt made for him because he was a model child—being his father's favorite, is stripped from him. But simply because the exterior emblem of his favored status is stripped from him, doesn't mean the interior basis of this favored status is stripped as well. Just the opposite is true. The interior basis of Joseph's favored status will actually begin to shine.

Undo Introspection

Joseph wouldn't view his brother's savagery as an indictment against himself. He never said to himself, "Boy my brothers are sure upset, what did I do wrong?" Upsetting murderers, or other evil people, isn't necessarily a cause for introspection. It may be God's way of exonerating you. The integrity of one's moral fiber can often be measured by the character of their enemies. We must always be more concerned with

the judgment of God, rather than men. Joseph never viewed anything to be outside of God's providential hand (Genesis 50:20); this, no doubt, aided in his faithfulness.

Sold to Ishmaelites

And 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. ²⁶ So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit *is there* if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come 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. ²⁸ Then 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 (Genesis 37:25-28).

No Fear of God

That his brothers were able to sit and eat a meal reveals that they had no fear of God in their eyes whatsoever. They are continuously more concerned with catering to their own anger and deceiving their own father than they are with honoring God.

The Ordination of God

As we read this story we so clearly see the hidden counsel of God extending into history. The prophecy given to Abraham, of his descendants ending up in slavery in Egypt, would surely come to pass. Joseph's recalcitrant brothers would sit where God ordained, eat what God ordained, look up when God ordained, see the Ishmaelites, who God ordained to pass, and have the very idea God had ordained, to sell Joseph into slavery. But they meant it all for evil, God, however, meant it for good.

Source of Comfort/Anger

For Joseph's brothers to be informed that they were merely clay in the Potter's hands would, no doubt, have caused them great anger. All who have an abbreviated view of God rage against the notion of His sovereignty. But for Joseph to know that he, and his brothers, were clay in the Potter's hands would be a source of joy, comfort and strength.

The Lord has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom (Proverbs 16:4).

Reuben's Lament

Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. ³⁰ And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go" (Genesis 37:29, 30).

Reuben's plan to overturn the rage of his brothers fails. Indeed, every effort of man to subdue the evil of our fallen race is doomed to failure. Reuben's plan was to rescue Joseph from his brothers. But it was God's plan to rescue his brothers through Joseph. How similar to Peter who sought to rescue Jesus from the cross.

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. ²² Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" ²³ But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:21-23).

So redemptive and glorious are the plans of God that to seek to usurp them, even in the name of humanitarianism, is of the enemy. I am not suggesting that Reuben's plan to rescue Joseph was wrong. What I am suggesting is that the counsel of God in history will always stand. And it will always stand in the name of the bride of Christ and glory of God.

Premature Fruit

There was a time in the life of Christ when He appeared to have lost. The kingdom of darkness was bearing its fruit and the kingdom of God was scattered sheep. But we should not be deceived by the early blossoming of premature and sour fruit among those who walk in darkness. Neither should we be discouraged by the slow growth of the genuine seed, which in the fullness of its hour, produces a leaf which does not wither.

Joseph had his hour in the waterless pit. Jesus had His hour when hell was rained upon Him. His bride, like Him, will have her seasons of grief. But deliverance is nigh so don't lose heart.

Deceiving Jacob

So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. ³² Then 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" (Genesis 37:31, 32)?

Jacob had once deceived his own father with the skins of a goat. Here he is deceived with the blood of a kid of a goat. Sin and iniquity lurks from generation to generation like a cancer. Heaven help us that we, by the grace of God, make every effort to rescue our children from our own despoiled characteristics.

Comforting Jacob

And he recognized it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.”³⁴ Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days.³⁵ And 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 (Genesis 37:33-35).

Undo Mourning

Some would argue that Jacob’s mourning went beyond godliness and I would agree. For although sorrow is to be expected in the face of severe loss, to commit oneself to a lifetime of sorrow is to curse the divine decrees of God.

Poor Comforters

Here we are further introduced to the evil of Joseph’s brothers. All they had to do was bring forth the honest declaration of what had transpired and their father would have been immediately comforted. But they persisted in their conspiracy.

Sold to Potiphar

Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard (Genesis 37:36).

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, the plan of God unfolds. As Judas sold off Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, the Midianites sell Joseph into Egypt. From the perspective of man, the heel of God’s seed is being bruised. But from the divine perspective the head of God’s enemy is being crushed (Genesis 3:15). May we take comfort in the sure victory of God’s promised seed.

Questions for Study

1. Why was Joseph so treated by his brothers (page 1)?
2. How did Joseph respond to his brother's behavior (page 1)?
3. Do you think Joseph viewed his trials to be a result of mistakes he made (pages 1, 2)?
4. Discuss Joseph's main concerns with his brother's (page 2)?
5. How do you suppose God's sovereignty in all these events would be viewed by those who don't believe in God's sovereignty? What about those who do believe in God's sovereignty (page 2)?
6. How was Reuben's plan to rescue Joseph thwarted (page 3)?
7. How did Peter seek to thwart Jesus' plan (page 3)?
8. How can the success of the world be compared to premature fruit (page 3)?
9. How did Jacob's own past sin come back to haunt him (page 4)?
10. How can Joseph's trials be compared to the bruised heel of Genesis 3:15 (page 4)?