



Genesis 2011 - Lesson 37A

Chapter 37:1-4

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- Having transitioned out of the story of Isaac last week, we turn our attention to the generations of Jacob
 - In particular, we embark upon the most fascinating story in Genesis and perhaps in all the Old Testament – the story of Joseph
 - The story is so well loved because it's great drama
 - More importantly, it follows several important themes that hold our attention and spur a lot of theological debate
 - In particular, the story of Joseph is a story of God's sovereignty
 - In this account Moses holds both sides of God's sovereignty in balance, or some might say in tension
 - First we have the sin of Jacob's sons
 - By their will, they make sinful choices, and these choices plunge the family into crisis
 - But through those sinful desires, God accomplishes a plan He set forth decades earlier
 - In the end, man's sin becomes the means of accomplishing God's will
 - But men have long marveled at how God can accomplish exactly the good He intends by taking advantage of men's sinful desires
 - It leaves us asking, what if a man never chooses to sin, how would God have accomplished the plan? Is man really choosing what he wants freely?
 - If so, then how can a man's free will fit so perfectly into God's plan when we know God isn't the author of sin?
 - The answer, of course, is that there is a mystery beyond our ability to reconcile, yet we accept what the text of scripture gives us
 - Moses' account of Joseph will bring man's will and God's will together to explain the reason for Joseph's departure for Egypt and his brother's eventual following
 - First, Moses shows us this is God at work to accomplish what He told Abraham
 - In Chapters 37 and 39-45, we watch God working to bring Joseph and the rest of Jacob's family into Egypt according to His will
 - Secondly, Moses shows us that Joseph's slavery is made necessary by the sinful will of his brothers
 - They will hate Joseph and conspire to kill him, and later sell him to slave traders
 - More over, Judah's sin detailed in Chapter 38 will give us added explanation for God's purpose in the exile of Israel
 - So our first priority in Joseph's story will be in understanding how God takes evil, sinful hearts and uses them to produce exactly the good outcome God purposed
- Speaking of taking evil and turning it to good, that leads us to the second principle we will follow in the story of Joseph: Joseph as a picture of Christ
 - There is probably no OT character whose life better represents Christ than Joseph
 - Some scholars have found upwards of 130 similarities between Jesus and Joseph

- It's important to note that these parallels to Jesus do not appear in the text in chronological order to match Jesus' life
 - They occur in random order
- These similarities aren't just there for our amusement
 - The similarities are intended to draw our attention to a larger parallel
 - What we see God doing on behalf of Israel through Joseph parallels what the Lord eventually does for the nation of Israel throughout history, especially in the last days of Tribulation
- Finally, we will examine our continuing story of the seed promise and how the Lord moves that promise ever forward toward Christ, in the family of Judah and Joseph
 - We know Jacob has twelve sons, nevertheless, the *toledot* of Jacob is largely limited to the story of Judah and Joseph
 - That tells us immediately that the question of the seed promise is limited to following these two men
 - By the time we reach the end of Genesis, we will have our answers

Gen. 37:1 Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan.

Gen. 37:2 These are the records of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

Gen. 37:3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic.

Gen. 37:4 His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

- The chapter opens with the tenth and final *toledot* of Genesis
 - It begins with Joseph and continues to the end of Genesis
 - It tells how the story of God's redemptive work moved from Jacob to the next generation and beyond
- As we begin, we're reminded of Joseph's place and circumstances in the family
 - Joseph is the eleventh son of Jacob, the first of Rachel
 - By the time we get to Chapter 37, he's about 17 years old
 - In terms of age, he is closest in age to his natural brother Benjamin
 - And Joseph's natural mother, the woman Jacob loved, has died by now
 - These circumstances place Joseph in the difficult situation
 - He is the favorite of his father, because he was first born of Rachel
 - Yet he is very nearly the lowest ranking son in the family, at least by worldly

standards

- Within this delicate situation, Joseph will have a tremendous challenge
 - He will have the great love and affection of his father, a man who sees Joseph as his greatest gift from his beloved departed wife
 - He will also have to deal with his brothers' jealousy and resentment, and they will expect to lord over him since they are older
- This family saga is directly the result of Jacob's own character flaws
 - Jacob has always shown favoritism, creating jealousies
 - And he was a man who didn't rest in God's work and will, but fought against family and foe to obtain what he wanted
 - Now, his sons struggle to gain what they want, never seeking the Lord
- The story opens in v.2 with a curious account of Joseph and his brothers working together
 - Joseph is out in the field shepherding with his other young brothers, which would be typical
 - The youngest are often the ones tasked with shepherding flocks, as David is doing when he was anointed by Samuel
 - But Joseph is said to be pasturing or feeding the sheep, an indication that he was in charge, even among older brothers
 - Apparently, he had been placed in a position of authority even at an early age by his father
 - Then in v.3 we're told Jacob loved Joseph the most
 - And at first we are probably tempted to assume this favoritism as just another in the long line of such poor relationships
 - Isaac had showed preference for Esau, Rebekah for Jacob, Jacob for Rachel rather than Leah, and now Joseph over his brothers
 - Certainly, Jacob does have that sinful tendency to show favoritism, but there is likely much more going on here
 - Jacob loves Joseph more than the other sons because Joseph was the son of "his old age"
 - Some have taken this to mean that he loved Joseph the most because Joseph came late in Jacob's life
 - But if that were the case, logic would dictate that Benjamin would have been the most loved not Joseph
 - Benjamin was also a son of Rachel, and he was born last and his birth included the death of Rachel
- In reality, the phrase "son of his old age" in Hebrew is *ben zaqun* which literally means wise son
 - In fact the word *zaqun* can also be translated as beard or bearded, a sign of both age and wisdom
 - So Jacob's love for Joseph was a reflection of Joseph's wisdom

- Jacob's other sons had already shown a terrible track record in Schechem, hardly endearing themselves to their father
 - But Joseph had apparently demonstrated wisdom and maturity beyond his years, earning his father's confidence
- No doubt, Jacob appreciated having someone he could trust working for him
 - Jacob even went so far as to make his appreciation for Joseph's leadership plainly known, by granting him a special coat or robe
 - The word for multicolored is *pas* and has no clear meaning
 - It could just mean long-sleeved
 - But it's meaning was clear to the family
- Joseph's robe represented Joseph's authority over the sons
 - Robes were an ancient sign of authority and honor
 - A robe also signified the holder of the birthright, something the oldest would normally possess
 - Remember, the prodigal son who returned was awarded the ring and robe, which angered the older son
 - To the older son it communicated that the place of honor was going to the younger son
- Jacob is awarding the place of honor and authority within the family to Joseph, though this was very much against the customs of the culture
 - It may have also been easier for Jacob to make such an award having been the youngest in his family too
 - But nevertheless, it enraged his brothers, who likely saw Jacob's decision as merely another example of Jacob's unfair favoritism
- It's ironic that Jacob seems to be rewarding Joseph for the right reasons in this case, but his sons still react negatively
 - The lesson here is obvious
 - It's like crying wolf
 - After a while, no matter how hard you try to change perceptions, your reputation matters more than the facts
 - Let's work to protect our witness and Christian reputation, otherwise we neutralize our opportunity to influence others for Christ
- At some point in his shepherding duties, Joseph brought back a bad report of his brothers according to v.2
 - We don't know what the report was about, but it's not hard to imagine
 - We know Jacob's sons are prone to misbehavior, including little weaknesses like murder, rape, and general mayhem
 - So it's not hard to imagine how they may have misbehaved while shepherding the flock
 - As jealous as they were of Joseph, perhaps they had been intentionally lazy and rebellious, leaving all the work to Joseph

- Whatever the offense, Joseph decides to report it to the father
- What would have been the consequence of such a report?
 - These young men are too old to physically punish
 - Perhaps the family inheritance was at stake
 - Perhaps something much more serious was at stake (remember Jacob's threat to kill whoever stole the idols)
- Joseph's situation raises one of the more interesting questions every family faces sooner or later
 - When is it right to inform parents of another's misbehavior, or to overlook a transgression for fear of being labeled a tattletale?
 - For example, was Joseph right or wrong here to inform his father of the brothers' indiscretion?
 - When we read this account to our children, should we end by telling them, "See what happens when you tattle...your brothers will sell you into slavery."
 - Or perhaps we might say, "See, if you tell me everything that your brothers do wrong, I'll give you the best clothes."
 - Or in my case, "If you don't tell Mommy you saw me drinking orange juice from the jug in the refrigerator, I'll give you a dollar."
 - In fact, what is a tattletale?
 - I looked the word up in the Webster's Dictionary, and it gave me the very helpful definition of "one that tattles"
 - It goes on to define tattling as gossiping or repeating hearsay
 - In other words, a tattletale is someone who gives false reports of someone else
 - It involves dishonesty
 - What can we know about Joseph's behavior in this case?
 - We have no evidence that Joseph was giving a false report to Jacob
 - And knowing his brothers' past indiscretions, we have every reason to assume Joseph was reporting the truth
 - We could even go so far as assuming Joseph carried himself with a bit of arrogance – or perhaps he lacked diplomacy as a leader
 - If that was so, it certainly wouldn't have helped him win his brothers
 - Nevertheless, even if these assumptions were true, it wouldn't give justification for his brothers to resent Joseph's report
 - Scripture's description of Joseph's actions is entirely neutral, without any negative slant or commentary
 - If anything, his actions are portrayed as the burdens of a young man rising to the difficult challenge of ruling over rebellious men
- So what do we tell our children about Joseph's situation? Was he tattling or was he doing the right thing?

- The simple answer is Joseph was giving a truthful report to his father
 - More over, Joseph had been given the position of authority and had a duty to let his father know about his brothers' inappropriate behavior
 - Joseph did his job
- As parents, if we choose to place an older child in a supervisory role over siblings, let Joseph's situation be your model
 - First, he was a wise and mature young man, according to scripture
 - Make sure your children are ready for the responsibility
 - Can they execute their leadership duties in fairness and with restraint?
 - Secondly, every child should understand that you expect all misbehavior to be reported
 - Such a report is not "tattling" if it is truthful
 - If we are going to stand for righteousness, then we must stand behind those who seek to reveal unrighteousness
 - Obviously, we need to be careful about raising little busybodies
 - We can discern between helpful reports and those that have no good purpose beyond causing trouble
 - But let's be sure we don't cause those who report the truth to be fearful of the consequences
 - Instead, let's make those who misbehave fearful of your discipline
 - Finally, make clear that the child in authority has no latitude to take the law into their own hands
 - Joseph made no attempt to discipline his brothers
 - He simply reported and allowed the father to act
- In Joseph's situation, we don't know what consequences Jacob handed out, but v.4 makes the critical point
 - The brothers saw clearly that Jacob loved Joseph more
 - We understand Jacob had sensible reasons for favoring Joseph
 - But those reasons couldn't overshadow the reality that bred their intense hatred to the point that Joseph's brothers didn't even speak to him
 - Joseph was a pariah within his own family
 - Even at this early point, we have some clear pictures of Christ we can see
 - Joseph's birth happened only after a supernatural intervention by the Lord
 - Jesus was born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit
 - Joseph was the son Jacob loved
 - Jesus was the beloved Son of the Father
- We can also see our other themes emerging at this early point as well
 - The sin of Joseph's brothers is already beginning to percolate
 - They despise their brother, but not for any fault of his own

- As far as we can tell, Joseph is blameless in this relationship
 - Likewise Jesus was hated by Israel and those in leadership, even though he had authority over them
- There's another parallel to Christ from John

John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

- Joseph was sent by his father to oversee the sons
- Joseph's 11 brothers were the nation Israel and therefore they represent the entire nation prophetically
- Next week the plot thickens as Joseph alienates not only his brothers but also his father