

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study – Genesis 37:1 – 39:23

Genesis 37:1-11 – Joseph's Dreams – Setting the stage

1. Describe Joseph's family situation. How was a generational sin manifesting itself in this family? (cf. Gen. 25:28)
 - Joseph was one of 12 brothers born to Jacob and his 2 wives, the late Rachel and Leah, and his 2 concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah.
 - Joseph was favored by Jacob, probably because Jacob loved Joseph's mother, Rachel, more than Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah
 - possibly demonstrated by Jacob's reaction (or lack thereof) to Dinah's injury (Dinah being Leah's daughter)
 - Jacob's brothers hated him because he 'told on them' and because of Jacob's favoritism towards him, and even more so after his dreams
 - Jacob got firsthand taste of the bitter feeling of parental favoritism when his father Isaac favored Esau over him
 - Just as Isaac's favoritism brought dissension in his family, the same thing was now happening between Joseph and his brothers.
 - Jacob's improper exercise of headship towards Leah and his children added to the brothers' negative feelings towards Joseph
2. What is the significance of the coat given to Joseph by Jacob? Why did it cause his brothers to hate him more?
 - the coat was probably ornamented distinctively and was given to only one of his children (i.e. Jacob)
 - later, when Joseph was sent to monitor his brothers, it seems to indicate that Joseph was given a special position (i.e. of the eldest son who will inherit the estate). Thus the coat could indicate to whom the future authority of the family would be given.
 - Joseph's brothers already disliked him immensely; now they had physical confirmation of his father's favoritism and a daily reminder of it
3. What were Joseph's dreams about, and why did he have (more or less) the same dream twice? (cf. Gen. 41:28-32) What can we learn about his character/personality by his response to the dreams?
 - 2 dreams: (1) his brothers' sheaves bowing to his; (2) sun, moon & 11 stars (i.e. his father, mother & brothers) bowing to him
 - seemed to indicate that he would take over authority of his family, with his brothers and even father & mother paying homage to him
 - God was revealing the future to Joseph; it was certain and would happen soon, hence the 2 dreams (cf. Gen. 41:32)
 - Joseph told everyone about his dreams
 - seems to have been rather naïve; seemed oblivious to his brothers' feelings towards him
 - assumed everyone would welcome confirmation of his impending exaltation
 - seems self-centered, self-confident and perhaps even arrogant (he had no problems with self esteem!)

Genesis 37:12-36 – Sold into slavery

1. Revisit the events that occurred when Joseph was sent to his brothers. What do we learn about his brothers? How do their lives illustrate the Bible's warnings about hatred? (cf. Matt. 5:21-22; 1 John 2:9-11, 3:15)
 - Jacob sent Joseph to visit his shepherding brothers. His brothers saw the absence of their father as an opportunity to exercise their hatred towards Joseph by plotting his death. Reuben wanted to save Joseph, probably because he was troubled already because of his affair with Bilhah (Gen. 35:22). Joseph was thrown into a cistern, while his brothers ignored his pleas for mercy (Gen 42:21). While Reuben was absent, Judah proposed to sell Joseph as a slave to some passing Midianite merchants, who were on their way to Egypt.
 - we see the intensity of Joseph's brothers' contempt and hatred towards him – to the extent they planned to murder him
 - yet, they still had understanding of right and wrong, seen in hesitation to actually carry through kill him
 - selfish and calculating; in the end, decided not to kill him, not so much because it was wrong, but so they could profit by selling him
 - callous hearts; had a meal (v.25) while their brother pleaded for mercy (Gen 42:21)
 - they were deceitful; conspired to deceive their father and cover up their deed
 - Bible warns us that hatred is tantamount to murder, even if it does not lead to the physical act (Matt 5:21-22, 1 John 2:9-11, 3:15)
2. How did Joseph's life change, and did he deserve what happened to him?
 - went from being darling son of a wealthy patriarch to being a slave; was probably forced to bear burden while marching to Egypt, and later resold as cattle in an Egyptian market to live the life of a slave in an Egyptian household.
 - while he was self-centered and insensitive, his brothers' treatment of him certain was not just

Genesis 38:1-30 – Judah and Tamar

1. What was different about Judah's wife vs. Isaac and Jacob's wives? What does his spousal selection and his interaction with the "prostitute" tell us about his character up to this time?
 - Judah's wife was a Canaanite woman. This is in spite of the knowledge that Abraham forbade intermarriage with the Canaanites, who were for the large part immoral and would come under God's judgment
 - from his sons, we can see that this union did not produce godly offspring (Gen 38:7-11)
 - was not a principled man; had not defended Joseph, but instead sold him to the Midianites
 - seems Judah was a man driven by his sexual desires, not, at this point, by the mind of God (per Abraham and Isaac)
 - his taking of Shuah's daughter seems to have been based on physical attraction ('There Judah saw...' v.2, ESV)
 - there is no question of his motivations from his interaction with Tamar (who appears to have known this about him), where he agreed to the asking of all items that would represent his person (the seal, cord, and staff) so that his sexual gratifications could be met
2. What happened between Judah's sons and Tamar? How did Judah wrong Tamar after his first 2 sons died? (cf. Deuteronomy 25:5-10)
 - it was established practice by that time (later described in Deut. 25:5ff) that if a man died without leaving a son, that the next-of-kin (usually a brother or another close relative) would marry his widow to try to have a son that would inherit his estate
 - prevented the land/inheritance from leaving the deceased man's family/clan
 - also a mechanism for ensuring the widow was taken care of (e.g. see Ruth)

-later amended that if a man only had daughters, they could inherit the land, but they had to marry someone from the same tribal clan, so that the land wouldn't pass outside the clan/tribe (Numbers 36)

-Tamar was the wife of Er – Judah's firstborn. After Er died, of his wickedness at the Lord's hand, Judah's 2nd son, Onan, was given to Tamar to produce an offspring for his brother. Onan took advantage of Tamar because while he lay with her, he avoided impregnating Tamar, so that he may retain his position as the "firstborn". Thus, he was put to death for his wickedness also.

-Judah attempted to dispose of Tamar by asking her to go away and live as a widow, to wait for his 3rd son to grow up. However, he had no intention of giving her Shelah, thus condemning her to live a destitute life of a widow, with no land and no one to care for her

3. Why did Judah reckon Tamar as "more righteous" than he? What does this moment in Judah's life indicate?
 - Judah was forced to publicly admit his sexual sins and declare that he was wrong in his treatment of Tamar, which drove her to such desperate actions. Tamar's actions themselves were not righteous, but they caused him to see his own sin
 - the fact that Judah did not sleep with Tamar again indicated a changing of heart and repentance. His dealing with Joseph later would show him to be selfless in his desire to protect his half brother Benjamin (Gen 44:18-34), in contrast to his earlier selling of Joseph.
4. How was God at work even through Judah and Tamar's actions? (Ruth 4:12,18-22, Matthew 1:1-16, esp. v. 3)
 - Because of Tamar, Judah did produce an offspring and future generations that included King David his line
 - Tamar was a direct ancestor in the human lineage of Jesus Christ (one of only 5 women listed in the lineage of Jesus Christ)
 - speaks of the sovereignty of God, that He works all things for the good of His people, even their failings (and sins!)

Genesis 39:1-23 – Joseph in slavery

1. What do we learn about Joseph's character through his conduct in this chapter? How did he attain the success he experienced at Potiphar's house and later, in jail? (see also Psalm 1:1-3; Colossians 3:22-24)
 - Joseph was capable, hard-working, trustworthy; a man of integrity (despite his prior shortcomings and/or naivete)
 - we see in his encounter with Potiphar's wife that, despite his earlier shortcomings, he still feared and believed in God
 - thus, would not commit adultery with her
 - also, as a result, didn't mope around feeling sorry for himself, but no doubt worked hard at everything cf. Col. 3:22-24
 - but he succeeded ultimately because the Lord was with him and gave him success in everything he did (v.2-3)
 - so much so, that God's blessing was apparent even to pagans like Potiphar and the jailer; they trusted him with everything
 - this is a pattern of those who walk faithfully with God; whatever they do prospers (Ps 1.)
2. If God was with Joseph, why did Joseph get falsely accused and thrown in prison? (cf. James 1:2-4)
 - on one level, because of the evil committed by others (e.g. Potiphar's wife)
 - but God was working to shape Joseph's character (perhaps to root out the pride that had been there from being his father's favorite?)
 - building perseverance so that he might be mature and complete (James 1:2-4; cf. also Romans 5:3-4)
 - God also had other purposes for Joseph in prison (e.g. to meet Pharaoh's butler and baker)
 - Joseph didn't know any of this at the time; may have been confusing to him, but these things were all part of God's bringing His will, as revealed in Joseph's dreams, to pass
3. How did Joseph deal with sexual temptation? How does his conduct contrast with Judah's in Genesis 38?
 - he resisted and refused to give in (v.8,10), and as far as possible, he avoided it (v.10 – refused to be with Potiphar's wife)
 - he saw it as not just a breach of his master's trust, but most importantly, as something wicked and a sin against God (v.8-9)
 - when faced with no other options, he fled as quickly as he could (v.12)
 - in contrast, Judah indulged his sexual desires w/o regard to God's will (re the Canaanite wife and the "prostitute" Tamar)
 - didn't need to be persuaded, but sought out opportunity to fulfill lustful desires – saw Tamar and right away went to her, thinking she was a prostitute, and gave away his most personal items to get Tamar to agree

Aliens and Strangers

The story of Joseph marks a new epoch in our journey through Genesis. The competition between Leah and Rachel's children, Jacob's favoritism, and his dreams and insensitivity made Joseph a very unpopular person to his brothers. The tremendous hatred his brothers had for him moved them to murderous intents, and they eventually sold him as a slave. Despite becoming a slave, however, Joseph did not allow himself to be enslaved to anger or self-pity. He lived by faith, while God prospered him. By accepting God's sovereignty in the unfortunate events in his life, he refused to compromise his integrity and regarded God as utmost in his life. In contrast Judah, living in freedom and relative prosperity, chose the wrong friends and gratified his sinful desires, thus bringing great shame to himself and God's name.

In these very ordinary events, God's sovereign grace was not absent. There are no accidents. As we'll see in later studies, Joseph was sent to Egypt ultimately to prepare the nation to save countless people from a forthcoming famine. He became the first of Abraham's descendants to enter Egypt, where they would grow into a great nation. Even in Judah's sin, God was sovereignly preserving the Messianic line, from which would come the Lion of Judah – Jesus Christ.

In our day to day lives, let us follow the example of Joseph. Let us not forget God's sovereignty, and His desire for holiness and righteousness in our lives. Let us also not be surprised at any suffering we will encounter, as it has been granted to us on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but to suffer for Him (Phil 1:29). Because we are aliens and strangers in the world, chosen out of the world, the world will hate us. But we can be joyful because how we endure suffering is how our faith is proven genuine (1 Peter 1:7) and how we ourselves are shaped by God and prepared for His work (James 1:2-4).