

JOSEPH: A Study of Destiny

When Life Turns Rotten, Genesis 37:12-36

Introduction. Joseph's story begins in this chapter, and actually interrupts the story of Jacob, whose story resumes in chapter 46. Next to Abraham, Genesis devotes more space to Joseph than any of the other patriarchs. Even though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are traditionally known as Israel's Patriarch's, I believe the reason the Bible devotes so much time to Joseph is because he is, in some ways, more important to Israel's history than his father. So, with this in mind, we will look at snapshots of this man's life and see how marvelous the hand of God is as He moves us through history accomplishing His will despite our best efforts to frustrate His plans.

1. Some Background.

(a) *Jacob.* Jacob had been living in Canaan for some 10 years, and had probably forgotten God's promise to Abraham in **Genesis 15:13**. But, as we shall see, God hasn't forgotten His promise, and even now His is working out His plans. Jacob was about 91 years old when Joseph was born. Joseph was not the son of his old age, since Benjamin was born 9 years after Joseph. It is likely that Joseph cared for his elderly father more than the other children did. Jacob rewarded Joseph's efforts with special attention and a richly ornamented robe, much to the disgust of the other siblings.

(b) *Joseph.* Joseph was Jacob's favorite son. And God favored him as well, being given a special ability to interpret dreams. He unwisely used this gift in **Genesis 37:5-6**. Even God's chosen men can make mistakes, yet they remain God's chosen. Aren't you glad God forgives us when we stray and most of all, that He doesn't cast us away?

(c) *The Brothers.* By the time of this chapter, Jacob is 107 years old, and had been in Canaan 10 years. Joseph's brothers were young, Reuben, the oldest, was around 29 years of age, and Benjamin, the youngest, was around 7 or 8. All the brothers who sold Joseph into slavers were between 18 and 29 years of age. Jacob wasn't the best father, doting would be a good word to describe him. And he was likely not a stern disciplinarian. Reuben had committed the sin of adultery—with his father's concubine—in **Genesis 35:22**, and Jacob was pretty easygoing about the whole mess.

2. God's purposes are carried out irrespective of man's plans.

Remember God's promise to Abraham? It probably wasn't in the mind of Jacob when he settled in Canaan after wandering around for years. But God was bringing to pass His Word.

~~Jacob's fondness for Joseph, the subsequent anger and murderous plans of his brothers could have put an end to God's plans, but instead God used these events to move His plans ahead.

~~Reuben's timid attempt to save Joseph's life may have ended God's plans.

~~Joseph's imprisonment for a crime he didn't commit could have spelled disaster for God plans.

~~The malicious lies of Potifar's wife could have so ruined Joseph's reputation as to make him useless to God.

~~So in the death of Jesus upon the cross—that could have spelled the end of God's plan of redemption for the human race. Yet that sacrifice only fueled the flames by the power of His resurrection.

So it is in the lives of men and women today. God's promises are sure (**2 Cor. 1:20**), you can count on them. We may hinder God's Word (**Psalms 65:3**) or the circumstances around us may hinder God's Word. But we never have to doubt. God's Word is forever settled in heaven (**Psalms 119:89**).

3. God can be glorified in spite of sin, but never because of it.

In other words, the sin of Joseph's brothers brought about the fulfillment of God's will, it was nonetheless wrong. We must never forget that the fulfillment of His promises belongs to God Himself. We are just willing participants in God's grand plan.

4. For each of us, there is a history within a history.

Our actions lead to their appropriate results (*Galatians 6:8*), at the same time they tend to carry out God's purposes, whether we may know it or not. Each one is a factor in the great plan that in the course of time God is working out (*John 5:17*).

Men, all men, wise or foolish, talented or not, famous or not, guided by the Spirit of God or resisting Him, loving or selfish, pressing upwards or following worldly lusts, all are pushed along by a power they cannot see or understand, until God's will is realized (*Psalms 2:2-4*).

But, along with this, there is a history that concerns ourselves, which we write for ourselves. . To each one of us, there has been given a measure of time, knowledge and opportunity. Nothing can turn aside the course of God's will, but our joy and happiness and place in God's kingdom depends on our faithfulness or unfaithfulness.

So, I encourage each one of you: Fulfill the will of God in your lives, work for His kingdom, whether you seem to contribute much or little (*1 Samuel 14:6*). We are all workers for Him, (*2 Cor. 6:1*).

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