

all for good  
the story of Joseph in Genesis



Genesis 37



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# Introduction

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- Joseph was the second youngest of the 12 sons of Jacob, the older son of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel.
- Joseph was his father's favorite, and his older brothers hated him for it.
- When Joseph was 17, he had two different dreams, both of which symbolically foretold that his parents and all of his brothers would one day bow down to him.
- This made his brothers hate him even more.
- His father rebuked him, but kept the dream in mind.

# Genesis 37:1-2a

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# Jacob and His Sons

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- Jacob and his sons lived in Canaan. Canaan was the Promised Land – the land that would become the inheritance of the descendants of Abraham – but the Canaanites still lived in the land (Genesis 12:6–7).
- So it might seem odd that it's labeled “the land of his father's sojournings.” But Jacob and his family are still sojourners, as their fathers were before them.
- By the end of Joseph's story, the family of Abraham will move to Egypt. That promise of a land of their own was still yet to be fulfilled. They were still only “in the beginning.”

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# Jacob and His Sons

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- The phrase in verse 2a, “these are the generations of ...” is a formula that is repeated throughout Genesis to introduce each new section of the book.
- It is used 10 times (a symbolic number for totality): 1. the heavens and the earth, 2. Adam, 3. Noah, 4. Noah’s sons, 5. Shem, 6. Terah, 7. Ishmael, 8. Isaac, 9. Esau, 10. Jacob / Israel.
- Sometimes this phrase introduced a simple list of the sons of that person – a genealogy. Other times, it introduced a narrative about the sons of that person. This structure makes Genesis one big genealogy of God’s people, from Creation to Israel.

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# Jacob and His Sons

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- You'll notice that Abraham and Joseph have the longest stories in Genesis and yet, there is no "generations of Abraham" or "generations of Joseph" listed in the 10.
- Some scholars believe this shows us that the true purpose of the biblical narratives isn't to give us biographies of Old Testament saints, even though we often make them that.
- The Bible isn't a collection of histories of people. It is the grand story of God's work in human history. God is the main character of the biblical story.

Genesis 37:2b-4

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# Jacob Had Four Wives

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- Jacob had four wives – Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah.
- But Rachel was the one he really loved. He had been tricked into marrying Leah (Genesis 29:21–30).
- He only married Bilhah (Rachel's maidservant) when Rachel couldn't bear him children, and Zilpah when Leah got too old to bear any more children (Genesis 30:3, 9).
- Only after 10 sons were born to the other three did God open Rachel's womb and give her a son, Joseph, and much later, Benjamin.

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# Jacob Had Four Wives

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- Joseph was the older son of the only wife Jacob really loved, and “the son of his old age” (verse 3).
- By this point in the story, Rachel had died in childbirth, so Joseph and Benjamin would have been even more precious to Jacob (Genesis 35:16–20).
- Jacob gave Joseph a special robe indicating that he was given some kind of authority over his brothers (verse 3).

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# Jacob and Joseph

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- Joseph brought a bad report of his brothers to their father (verse 2).
- Since the Scripture doesn't say it was a false report, it's safe to assume this bad report was warranted.
- Whether Joseph was arrogant or boastful about his father's favor is unclear.
- Some think Joseph was bragging about his father's favor and later his dreams, but the text doesn't actually say that.
- It's likely that Joseph was just doing his job by reporting to their father, but it made them hate him even more (verses 12–14).

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# Jacob and Joseph

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- Though the point of this story isn't that we shouldn't play favorites as parents, it is still true.
- Jacob created animosity between Joseph and the other brothers by lavishing attention on him.
- Even if Joseph was mature beyond his years and deserved a position of authority over his brothers, that doesn't mean Israel should have loved him more than the others.

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# Jacob and Joseph

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- In Jacob's defense, their whole family dynamic was skewed from the beginning, with Jacob being tricked into marrying someone he didn't love, and then marrying the one he did love, then marrying their maidservants just for childbearing purposes.
- But Jacob didn't try to make it better, either. Jacob was not shy about his preference for Rachel. Rachel and Leah hated each other, and who even knows how the maidservants felt.
- The whole situation was a recipe for disaster. So, whether you think Joseph was arrogant or innocent, he was flat-out in a bad situation.

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# Application

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- Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph is in strong contrast with how God loves us and the children of Israel.
  - Romans 2:11 - "For God shows no partiality."
  - Deuteronomy 10:17 - "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe."
  - Acts 10:34 - "So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality."

# Genesis 37:5-11

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# Dreams

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- In the Bible we have many places where God used dreams to:
  - tell people where to go or not go (Genesis 31:10; Matthew 2:12,13)
  - warn global leaders of future events (Genesis 41; Daniel 2,4)
  - provide revelation to His prophets (Number 12:6)
  - warn certain people against certain decisions (Matthew 1:20; 27:19)

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# Dreams

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- It might be easy to assume that dreams are focused simply on an individual.
- However, none of the dreams listed in the references above were purely about one person. Instead, they were more concerned with God's plan.
- The Scripture shows us that God used dreams to reveal His plan, further His plan, or put His people in places of influence for His plan.

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# Dreams

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- This theme of God's preserving human life is pervasive throughout Genesis.
- When Adam and Eve sinned, instead of giving them the wages of sin (death), He preserved their lives. When God destroyed the earth in the great flood, He preserved the life of Noah and his family. In this passage, God again preserves human life, this time through Joseph.
- Even when God had every right to wipe mankind off the face of the earth, He chose to preserve life, to reconnect with His people and even to make a covenant with them. In each story, God chooses one faithful person through whom to preserve life.

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# Dreams

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- This passage is the beginning of a long road for Joseph – from prison to palace. But through it all, Joseph holds on to trust in God, that He will work it -out for good in the end.
- Does that mean that if you or I are going through a “pit” time right now, we should just hold on, because eventually God will give us a position of authority over our enemies?
- Joseph’s exact promise doesn’t translate to our lives directly. And their bowing down to Joseph wasn’t about his getting revenge or vindication. It was about God’s working everything for good (Romans 8:28).

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# Good

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- “Good” is a tough concept here, one that is easily misunderstood.
- Are good things just the things that make us happy? The things that make us feel good?
- The “hard” things or “bad” things make us stronger, make us a better person, make us more disciplined or smarter or healthier.
- God’s purpose for our lives is not to make us happy, but to make us more like Jesus. Whatever will work toward that goal is for our good.

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# Good

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- Mature individuals will not only make themselves exercise, but they will delight in exercise (even if it's painful) because they understand the effect of it; they understand how it is working for their good.
- The same is true in our spiritual lives. There are difficult things in life that are working for our good.
- We may not understand them, maybe not even in this lifetime, but if we know that God is good and that He is sovereign, we must trust that He has our lives in the palm of His hand, and that all things are working for good.

# Conclusion

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# What Good?

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- At the end of this story, Joseph says to his brothers, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). God is so sovereign and so good, that He can even take something that someone purposely meant for harm and work it for good. But look at the rest of the verse.
- He doesn’t say, “You meant this for evil, but God meant it for good, to make me second in command of Pharaoh’s kingdom. Look at how God blessed me and rewarded me and made it good for me.”
- His response was, God meant it for good, “to preserve many people alive.”

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# What Good?

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- Joseph understands what God's definition of good is.
- It's not about God's doing good for him. It wasn't about him; it was about God and God's people.
- In the Big Picture, it was about God's plan, God's purpose, God's covenant with Israel. If Joseph had never gone to Egypt, his family – Israel, God's people – would have died in the famine.
- God worked it all together to fulfill His purpose in keeping His people alive. So that through them, He could save the whole world.

Application:

3 Circles Presentation

