

**Genesis in Biblical Perspective:
The Gospel of Christ from Genesis –
The Life of Joseph #1: From Divine Dreams to Sin’s Nightmare**

Genesis 37

By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)

We are in the study of Genesis and we have come to the life of Joseph which takes place from Genesis 37 through Genesis 50. We will see the sure hand of God’s providence and in today’s study we’ll look at the divine dreams and sin’s nightmares that happen from this text. We will cover the entire chapter of Genesis 37 but initially we’ll start with the first four verses. This is God’s Word and it’s the Truth. Genesis 37:1–4 says

[1] Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. [2] These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. [3] Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. [4] But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

The grass withers, the flower fades, this is the Word of our God, it abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

When I was converted God used a man who I have always called God’s bloodhound from heaven to track me down. His name was Harold and after I became a Christian he became a spiritual mentor and spiritual father to me. Whenever I was around him I wanted to be spiritual since he was my spiritual mentor and he would say “Harry, how are you doing?” I would say “I’m doing well. God has been good to me.” One day he said “God has been good to you? Ok can you tell me a time when God has not been good to you?” I think we just went from comments to theology.

We tend to say all the time “God is good” and yet as we confess that operationally we look at the things that are happening in a broken world when they hit us and we say “God is good to us when things are going good” but when there is a death, a sickness or a lost job then we think God isn’t good to us, as if

God quit being good to us in this broken world. My favorite Old Testament character is hands down Joseph. He is an imperfect man and you'll see some of his imperfections in this study. He is a sinner saved by grace but boy is he interesting. He is confronted with adversity in pits, in prisons, kangaroo courts, conspiracy of his brothers and all kinds of things.

Joseph not only has adversity but he has prosperity for he ends up as Vice President of Egypt. He is an amazing guy yet no matter the adversity he was never deterred from following the Lord and no matter what the prosperity he never resorted to idolatry and he wasn't polluted by the blessings in his life. Blessings and prosperity did not pollute him and adversity did not deter him. He is in a pit. He is in a prison. He gets a false conviction but the Bible never records a single complaint from his lips, from a pit or a prison, nor does the Bible ever record that he compromised his confession and his commitment.

He is inspiring, a model, an example and he is so important that he has the same amount of chapters devoted to him in the book of Genesis that is devoted to Abraham the father. If you add up words you'll see that 25 percent more material is given to us about Joseph than even Abraham. Interestingly though he is only quoted four times in the New Testament. He is so interesting and intriguing that I'm really looking forward to walking through his life with you.

Here is the one thing I want you to know about Joseph. The life of Joseph will show us something about a doctrine that is referred to in Romans 8:28 which says *[28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* The Bible does not say that all things are good. The Bible says all things work together for good. Why? It is because God causes it. For whom? He causes it for His people, those who love Him and have been called by Him. It is a very specific promise to a very specific people. We are going to see that in the life of Joseph and we'll get a better handle on the doctrine of Divine Providence.

Most of think when we hear the doctrine of Divine Providence something like "Wow, when I asked for rain God sent the rain at that moment" or "My boss gave me a promotion on the day that my rent was due." We think of providence usually in terms of miracles. God wanted Israel to win so He made the sun stand still in the valley they were fighting in. Except for two dreams of divine revelation to Joseph, we're not going to see what we call a sign, wonder and miracle from Genesis 37 to Genesis 50. I'm not talking about the supernatural hand of God, just no miracles. A miracle is when God reaches in and suspends the natural law, does something supernaturally, pulls His hand out and everything goes back to the way it was.

You will see the unbelievable hand of God and His providence. When God's providence is present it does three things. God secures His glory. He achieves His purposes and He takes care of His people. God's providence isn't just around

when miracles occur but it's in everyday life, everyday situations, even malevolent acts of conspirators who kill people, God uses. Pits, prisons, palaces, God uses them all. Pagan emperors like Pharaoh and Godly people like Joseph all are in the hand of God. God's providence is in every day actions and every day occurrences. We will also see that God's providence in those moments are much grander and greater than what you glimpse.

Years ago I pastored a church that was full of saved hippies and this was in the 70s when I was a student pastor. Back then everyone did Amway, Shacklee and natural childbirth. Another thing most women did was needlepoint and my wife led the way. Sometimes I would look at her needlepoints and I would look at the backside of it that had all those threads sticking out. The backside didn't look like much of anything but the front side was a whole different picture and that's the way God's providence is. We are almost always looking from the backside. Every once in a while God will flip it around and let you see quickly what the front side looks like but even in the glimpses we still haven't seen everything. We don't even see two percent of it. We have no idea of what all is happening and who it's affecting.

A man is attending a church so he can convince a woman to marry him. An elder's wife dies. The man goes to the funeral and gets converted. That was me and fourteen years later I go back to Charlotte, North Carolina to plant a church and I give my testimony. A young girl is hiding in the back and she is one of the four daughters of the elder's wife who had died. Through that testimony God brought her to Christ. She said "I have hated God for 14 years for taking my mother but I did tell Him that if He could show me just one good thing that came from that I would come home to Him." There were fourteen years of connections just in that moment.

We are going to see that in Joseph's life. In the verses we just read Joseph is 17 years old. Joseph's mother is Rachel. He and Benjamin have the same mother. She is dead. Rachel was Jacob's favorite. He loved her more than Leah. In fact, his love was so great for Rachel that he actually hated Leah. His love for Rachel has clearly transferred in his love for Joseph. He is an associate shepherd with his other brothers from Jacob's other wives. We also see that Joseph has a big mouth. We're not going to sugar coat it.

We don't know what his brothers did but he decides he is going to go tell his dad. According to the text he brought a bad report. So we call that a tattletale. The Hebrew word for report used in the text means that it has a modicum of truth in its essentials but clearly has been slanted to malign the one who is being reported. In other words, Joseph was a journalist. He is giving the essence but he has slanted it to malign the one he wanted to malign. As he does that his brothers hate him.

Then they see him with this robe on. It is a many colored robe and is very difficult to translate but it basically is a sign of love that could even be seen as Jacob's signaling that he is going to be the primary heir. In other words, that robe to these eleven boys that surrounded him was like a red cape in front of a bull every time they saw it. Jacob loved Joseph more than all the love he had for the brothers and the brothers realized that. So this special child to Jacob has now become the object of their hatred. Now what else happens? Joseph has two dreams. Let's look at those dreams. Genesis 37:5–11 says

[5] Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. [6] He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: [7] Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." [8] His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. [9] Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." [10] But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" [11] And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

So God divinely communicates His plan for Joseph and what He's going to do through a dream. Joseph is not only a big mouth but he's also stupid. He goes and tells his brothers. With all due respect, I'm not sure I would have done that. The sheaves that start bowing down with the grains on them, mine doesn't flop over or bows down but mine stands up straight but all those eleven others bowed down to me. They not only hated him because he was the favorite but they hated him because of his robe and now his dreams and his words explaining the dreams have all contributed more to their hatred of him. Then he tells them about his second dream about the sun, moon and stars and now his dad gets in on it. Joseph doesn't take time to interpret the dream he is just reporting it but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure these dreams out. They hate him even more and his father is even being turned aside but then it says his father did not forget the dreams of Joseph.

Jacob knows a thing or two about divine dreams. He knows about God's fidelity to what He reveals and he remembered it. Now what happens? There is an astounding betrayal. Let's look at the rest of the chapter. Remember two years before they were at war with Shechem but now they are tending their fields. Genesis 37:12–36 says

[12] Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. [13] And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at

Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “Here I am.” [14] So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.” So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. [15] And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” [16] “I am seeking my brothers,” he said. “Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” [17] And the man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. [18] They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. [19] They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. [20] Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.” [21] But when Reuben (the first born) heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” [22] And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. [23] So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. [24] And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. [25] Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. [26] Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? [27] Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. [28] Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt. [29] When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes [30] and returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?” [31] Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. [32] And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, “This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not.” [33] And he identified it and said, “It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.” [34] Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. [35] All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him. [36] Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

You can see that Jacob is a little concerned when his sons are tending in Shechem since they were at war with them two years earlier and he wants someone to go check on them. Joseph says “Here I am Father.” So he goes and

kind of loses his way at first but then a man points him in the right direction. His brothers see him, the favorite, the snitch, the dreamer, the robe and they say "Let's kill him." They have a conspiracy to kill him but Rueben has a pain of conscience since he is the firstborn, knowing that he would be held responsible for whatever happened to Joseph, yet with a plan to rescue him later.

Meanwhile Rueben has gone somewhere and the rest of the brothers are eating and see slave traitors. Judah whether out of kindness, wanting money or what, he says "Let's don't kill Joseph let's just sell him into slavery." Selling someone into slavery in that day was a death sentence. They would just work the slaves until they died and they would capture more later. So Judah and the brothers agree to sell Joseph for twenty shekels of silver into slavery. Then they think of way to get out of that. They develop a ruse and they deceive Jacob by tearing the colorful robe, dipping it in goat's blood, giving it to him and then letting Jacob make the decision in his analysis of it, letting him think Joseph had been killed by an animal. Jacob will mourn until the end of his life until he goes to the grave. He would not be comforted.

What can we learn from this? I want to give you three things to learn from this text as we study the life of Joseph. This first one is so obvious I can't pass it by even though it's not the thrust of the text. Someone asked me if I believe in generational curses. I told them no but here is what I do believe. I do believe in generational sins. I believe the sins of the fathers can be visited down to the third and fourth generation. I don't know of a more dysfunctional family we can study in the Bible than this one through which God is bringing the line of redemption. This I believe qualifies for our pop psychology term today of a dysfunctional family.

At the root of this family is a generational sin that keeps coming up. Abraham loved Isaac more than Ismael. Isaac loved favoritism because he loved Esau more than Jacob. Isaac's wife Rebekah also showed favoritism with Jacob more than Esau to the point of deception and thievery, stealing the covenant blessing. Jacob showed favoritism where he loved Rachel more than Leah even to the point of disregarding Leah, his first wife. Now Jacob's favoritism goes to Joseph.

I want to speak to those who are parents here for a moment. I know our children are different and I know there are levels of intimacy even within a home but there cannot be levels of commitment, dignity and respect. We must love with our children, all whom God has given us. We must love them with equanimity, dignity and respect. They must know they are accepted and loved. By the way, if I love you that doesn't mean I'll accept all your behavior but I do accept you. You are mine. Look at what the sins of favoritism where the parents historically in this family have continued to make relationship idolatry above their commitment and trust in the Lord. Favoritism and the inability to love with diversity but love with equity is really a sign of idolatry. While I would say that generally to parents, Dads, I say it to us in particular.

I would enlarge this. Are you a coach? Are you a teacher? Are you an administrator? Are you an employer? Are you in a position of leadership? I know you have to recognize people on the basis of their achievements. I'm not into giving everyone a trophy for self-esteem. I also know you can recognize these people and still treat everybody with respect, equity and dignity. Dads I want to come back to us in particular. You live in a culture that despises masculinity. Having seen the way women are treated in our culture there is now a reaction in order to elevate femininity, supposedly there is the despising of masculinity and we're watching the feminization of churches of the culture, of schools and everything. No one loves the blessings of Biblical femininity and the glorious call to treat people with equity, male and female, more than me, but you don't have to despise manhood and masculinity to do it.

Dads, we need you to be husbands where children can see their fathers fulfilling their covenant vows by God's grace to their moms. It's not a matter of his self-esteem or what my mother is for him. It's a matter of whether God is going to use him. Dad is going to love me enough to spank me if I need it. He is going to love me enough to encourage me if I need it. He is going to love me enough to affirm me but my dad is here. I know he is here. As much as this favoritism, this sinful relationship brought sinful results then flip it around for by God's grace with consistency and faithfulness what do you think God will do with fathers who raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We will reach out whenever children are without that but one of the greatest things we can do as a people is raise up Godly families, with husbands committed to their wives, wives respecting their husbands and then in unity and intimacy raising their children who have both a dad's guidance and a mother's nurture. That is missing all because of the idolatry of a relationship and a child. There is the frustration of the eleven brothers and I don't excuse them but I see what they are reacting to.

The second practical thing we can learn from this text is two words for God's people. The first word requires an unbelievable balance so I want to encourage you in this. Number one is we must confess Christ and His victory and His triumph without being triumphalistic and without engaging in triumphalism. Do you believe God has blessed you by His grace with the victory of Jesus Christ, if you're a Christian today? Do you believe God's blessings have been given to you? Do you believe God's truth has been given to you and God has given you a hunger for this truth? Do you believe the Bible is true? Do you believe God has revealed Himself? If you believe all of that then you and I are called to confess Christ is victorious, Christ is triumphant, Christ will bless, keep, guard and guide His people. I am Christ and Christ is mine. I confess Him to this world and what He has revealed as true but it must be done with humility and gentleness.

Joseph confessed his favored position that God had revealed to him but he confessed it in exalting himself. You and I may speak as Christ triumphant and all of the blessings that are in Christ but when we speak we are not triumphalistic.

We don't exalt ourselves but we exalt the Lord. Peter tells us to always be ready to give an account for the hope that is within us yet with gentleness and reverence. God's Word is true. God's blessings are sure. Our place is secure in Christ. We confess the triumph of Christ without triumphalism of ourselves. We are sinners saved by grace. Joseph confessed to his brothers what was true but as he confessed it, he put not God's grace forward, but himself.

You may be sure that Satan will always respond to the message of the Gospel. Here is a promise that God will bring a Seed. Satan is a murderer and a liar and the first thing he does is kill Abel. Later on he'll go after Moses and in between he goes after Joseph but in the midst of that we must learn from Joseph how to confess God's grace, mercy and truth that He has given to us without ever being triumphalistic – the triumph of Christ without triumphalism of ourselves.

A second word to God's people from this text is God's Word is filled with truth. Here is a man being sold into slavery. He is going from a pit to a prison and eventually to a palace but as all of this is unfolding God has a plan. His ways are not our ways and He is accomplishing something. I want to show you something from Genesis 15. Joseph is headed into slavery, servitude. A dream came to Abraham and the covenant was given.

Genesis 15:12–13 says [12] *As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.* [13] *Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.* How will this happen? Joseph will go into slavery to Pharaoh. Behind him will come those who sold him into slavery because of a famine and they will end up going into slavery. This God who promised a family to Abraham which will become a nation will be given a land. This land goes from Abram to Isaac to Jacob, now the sons, now the favored son goes off into slavery will end up with Pharaoh and those who sold him go off into slavery and they will then serve under Pharaoh.

This embryonic nation of a nomadic family will go off in just as God said to Abraham and they will be there for four hundred years. When God brings them out they will be two million strong to take the land that He has promised. God's ways are not our ways but He will always fulfill His Word. Believe, trust and follow His Word. What He promised Abraham is about to happen but not the way Abraham thought it would happen but the way God designed it to happen. They think God has removed His hand as they go into slavery. Why did He do that? It was to prepare His people for the land and then He will use them to judge the nation who held them in slavery as He fulfills His Word.

The third and final word is three words about Jesus. The first word about Jesus is that Jesus does the work in the lives of people that we can learn from. We fix our eyes on Jesus but Jesus does a work in people like He did a work in Paul that

Timothy could learn from and He did a work in Joseph that you and I can learn from. Here is Joseph in slavery and he never complained, compromised and clearly he is not a perfect man and he is a sinful man. We have tried to be honest with that in the text even as the text is honest but God is doing a work in the lives of His people. As God does a work He raises up people to be an encouragement and an example to others. So it is with Joseph. Here is a man with passions like us, growing up in a family that's not perfect but God's grace sustains him. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound.

Secondly, see God's providence here. What does God's providence do? God's providence secures His glory, it achieves His purposes and it takes care of His people. Here goes Joseph into a pit, into slavery, into a prison and then God brings him out and through it. God is doing something more than we could ever see. Someone showed me how to use Google Earth and I get the Briarwood directory and look up some of your addresses just to see what you're doing from a satellite. What is happening to your yard? Are you out there playing in your yard? Some of you older than 35, are probably thinking "Google what?" Just talk to a kid and they'll get you started on it. One time when I was on Google Earth I saw these buttons that said 'interstates' and 'highways.' As I pressed those buttons all these interstates and highways like a spider started spreading all over the map. It's God's providence. Every once in a while you see a glimpse but one day when we get to heaven we'll finally get to see all those connecting points where we only got a small glimpse.

I think we'll get to see how everything was connected through God's providence. A man goes and becomes a medical missionary. I was reading a commentary on this passage from James Montgomery Boyce who pastored Tenth Presbyterian Church, who in preparing his commentary listened to an old sermon from a previous pastor at Tenth Presbyterian named Donald Gray Barnhouse. The sermon was titled the Life of Joseph in prison. Barnhouse gave this same lesson about providence. He said "A man walked in preparing to be a doctor in medical school so he came over to church at Tenth Presbyterian while Barnhouse was pastor. He was converted and was married. She was converted and then he went off into WW II as a doctor. He came back to Pennsylvania and wanted his old pastor Barnhouse from 12 years earlier to come to where he was to do a conference. He was able to get him over to speak at the conference."

Barnhouse said how that was amazing to see God's providence in all of that but that was only about four percent of it. There is something about that doctor that Barnhouse would never know about in his lifetime. That doctor had a son and the son heard Barnhouse preach at that conference. The son committed his life to Jesus and was called to the ministry. He felt like God had called him to be a pastor of a church in the city. He went to high school, college and seminary. He joined the magazine staff of Christianity Today as an associate editor. The current editor wanted to make him editor in his place but he said "No, years ago at this conference God called me to be a pastor at a city church." This editor was

in Philadelphia one day visiting Tenth Presbyterian and found out Barnhouse had died and they were looking for a head pastor. The editor told them he had a person on his staff who felt called to be a pastor and he had high respect for him and told them to contact him.

The staff from Tenth Presbyterian called him to come speak, heard him and hired him. The man's name was James Montgomery Boyce. Isn't that amazing the connecting points of God's providence? I can't wait to get to heaven to find out all these connections. You find yourself sometimes in that situation when you run into someone that you make all these connecting points with and we wouldn't believe all the connecting points in God's providence in our life.

Here is Joseph who gets lost in Shechem and a man comes up to him and says "Who are you looking for?" He says "I'm looking for my brothers." This man knows who he is looking for and points him in their direction. Isn't that amazing? Here Joseph is walking in a field and sees a man who over heard his brothers talking about a place called Dothan. Wasn't Joseph lucky? No, God put the man there. He gave the message. God sent him there. It's the hand of God in the everyday affairs of life. God is sending Joseph over there so He can send him into to slavery so that He can get the whole group down there and make them into a nation and then bring them back. When He brought them back He brings us a Savior through those people. That is the hand of God's providence and why we are resting, even as we live and work for Him.

So here is the hand of God working through a Rueben, a Judah, a man in a field, through this and that in accomplishing all of His purposes, but I'd like to share one last word with you. Joseph is not a type of Christ. The reason I say that is because types must be treated as such and identified as such in the Scripture and the Bible never identifies or treats Joseph as a type, but he is an illustration. So rejoice with me as we see God's providence and know that adversity is not His judgment for adversity is just God working in us and through us. Prosperity is God working in us and through us and we walk through both with our confidence in the Lord. I want you to see this Jesus as Joseph peels Him back as an illustration because ultimately that's where we are headed, from Genesis to Jesus.

We open with light and life in Genesis 1 and we're going to close with embalmed mummy in Genesis 50 and all the time we're being pointed to Jesus. Here in Genesis 37 we start in the fields of Canaan and we're going to end up on the banks of the River Nile. God is doing His work even through pagan kings, but what I really want you to see is Jesus. See Joseph, he is loved by the father, sent to his own, rejected, conspiracy not with 30 pieces but with 20 and he'll end up in a pit and then into slavery. Then he'll be rejected by his own. He'll end up in a prison between two criminals, one on his left and one on his right. One will be delivered and one will be condemned and then he is exalted. Praise God for just a little illustration of the One the Father loved and sent Him, who was despised

and rejected, hung between two criminals, one delivered, one lost, buried, rose and exalted, not at the right hand of a pagan king but to the throne room of God. There is your Savior. Trust Him who will provide for you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be in Your Word and thank You for the privilege to see its glory and majesty. God, there is so much here and it's so rich. Feed Your people beyond the ineptness of this vessel who has preached. Holy Spirit speak to our hearts. For those who haven't come to Christ there is a Savior who calls you, who will mold you and make you, who will sustain you and take you through adversity and as your days are so shall your strength be and He'll take you to glory. This Savior of Joseph can be yours. Put your trust in Him. Jesus for those who know You, love You and trust You may Joseph encourage us and inspire us to see what You do with a sinner and how You sustain them, not because all things are good but because all things work together for our good, Your glory and Your purposes and in that we rejoice. Count us as having lost all things to trust You, follow You, who will keep us and grow us that the world might see and hear You, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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