

## **Genesis 37:12-36 and 38:1-30**

In last week's lesson, we noticed a growing problem in Joseph's family.

As his father grew older, he became aware of the fact that none of his 10 sons could be trusted to manage the family business.

And although they were not openly rebellious in his presence, outside the home they were wild and self willed.

On the other hand, Joseph was reliable, honest, an obedient, but he was only 17 years old.

Nevertheless, Jacob finally decided to bypass his eldest son, and indeed all his sons, and place the leadership of the family into Joseph's youthful hands.

At first his brothers could only read between the lines, but already they didn't like what they read.

However, it wasn't long before Joseph's status was made painfully evident.

His father made him **"a coat of many colours,"** a coat that publicly declared that someday Joseph would be the leader in his family, and he was already his father's right-hand man.

V 4 **"And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him."**

And then things went from bad to worse.

Joseph had two dreams, both of which he rather unwisely shared with his family, and the result was **"his brethren envied him."**

Envy and hatred. It was to be a most lethal mixture.

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Now there's no doubt that his father's favouritism had created a great deal of strife in the family, and Joseph's somewhat inflated opinion of himself didn't help either.

However, as we noted in last week's lesson, this very special relationship was the first indication that Joseph's life would foreshadow the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, in Jacob's special love for his son, and Joseph's unwavering obedience--a relationship that gendered his brother's hatred--in that very special relationship, we see the main

ingredients in Jesus' public life among the children Israel.

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And what was his brothers' reaction to Joseph's dream? **"Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?"** And that was the general attitude that Jesus faced in Israel---"**We will not have this man to reign over us.**"

Yes, they rejected Jesus' claims of Messiahship, and branded His special relationship to His Heavenly Father as blasphemy.

It was an attitude that would eventually bring about their demands to **"Crucify him."**

And this was the same pathway that Joseph was walking along.

Yes, it was only a matter of time before his brothers' anger would erupt into violence.

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Genesis 37:12-13 **"And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.**  
**13: And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I.**  
**14: And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem."**

No doubt Jacob was constantly worried about his sons' behaviour among the people of the land, and he was often concerned

for their welfare, so he asked Joseph to make sure everything was all right. I don't think this assignment was particularly appealing to Joseph, for he was quite aware of their animosity. However, he obediently replied, "**Here am I.**"

So Jacob "**sent him out of the vale of Hebron,**" away from the peace and serenity of his home.

The word *Hebron* means "fellowship," and no doubt Joseph would have preferred to stay home in the fellowship of his father.

But I don't think Hebron had the same appeal for his brothers.

They were completely happy in Shechem, even though that part of the country could

be rather dangerous because of their past escapades.

Yes, in spite of the rich pastures in Hebron, they preferred Shechem, and they preferred the fellowship of the world rather than the fellowship of their father.

And also, I'm sure Jacob was fully aware of his sons' ill-will against Joseph.

However, as a father, he was concerned for the safety of his wayward sons.

So when Joseph responded so freely, "**Here am I,**" he was content to let him go.

You can almost hear him saying to himself,

Surely "**They will reverence my son.**"

And in like manner, but with no such mistaken expectations, God the Father said to His beloved Son, "**I will send**

**thee unto them."** And He had replied,  
**"Here am I."**

In obedience to His Heavenly Father, He left the place of fellowship, but never the practice of fellowship.

Forsaking His heavenly Hebron, He left the ivory palaces far behind, and came to a world of woe.

He came to seek His national brethren who had wandered far from their Father's love, and were not at all anxious to see Him.

Yes, **"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."**

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So at his father's command, Joseph went to seek his brethren.

Now Hebron is not really that close to Shechem.



Joseph's home was in the southern part of the country and about 60 miles from Shechem, an area in the hill country of central Canaan.

V 15-17 **"And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou?**

**16: And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks.**

**17: And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan."**

Apparently Shechem was not far enough from their father's house, so they had wandered on down to Dothan.

Jacob's instructions had been to go to Shechem, and at this point, he could have gone home and simply reported that they were not there.

But that would have been obeying his father's *instructions* rather than his will.

So sharing his father's concern for his brethren, he went the extra mile.

Indeed, he went many extra miles, and in hostile country, enduring the heat of the day and the cold of the night, and the possibility of meeting wild animals, or even marauding bandits, but he was determined to find his brethren.

And all the time that he was struggling along, he knew full well the reception he would get.

Well, as it turned out, he didn't have any idea what his reception would be like, but he *thought* he knew.

Rebellious and self-willed, his brothers had wandered far from home, and the last person in the world they wanted to see was Joseph.

And that's exactly how it was when Christ came seeking **"the lost sheep of the house of Israel."**

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Dothan was 20 miles north of Shechem and 12 miles north of Samaria on the caravan route to Egypt.

Its name means "two cisterns," but apparently one of them had already dried up.

And that's always the way it is when we wander away from our heavenly Father--

"They have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

But Dothan was not a complete disappointment. In fact, I am told that it is a small, oblong plain with good pasture.

V 18-20 "And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.  
19: And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.  
20: Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

Yes, "**they saw him afar off,**" and began to make their plans.

This was no fit of rage that suddenly claimed them. No, this was premeditated, cold-blooded murder.

Away from their father's influence and protection, they quickly realized that this was their chance to rid themselves of Joseph.

Yes, this was their grand opportunity to free themselves of the slightest possibility that he would ever rule over them.

Like the scribes and Pharisees, they were determined to rid themselves of the Father's Son.

So not only was Joseph a type of Christ, but his brethren perfectly pictured the Jewish nation that Jesus confronted.

In their rebellion, they crucified Him, but  
they could not get rid of Him.

God raised Him from the dead, and 40 days  
later, He set Him on His own right hand  
in the glory.

They rejected a ruler, but the world gained  
a Saviour.

And that is how it was with Joseph's  
brethren.

They meant it for evil, but God meant it for  
good.

They intended to kill him and bury him in a  
pit, but God completely changed their  
plans.

By an absolute coincidence, if you believe  
in such things, he was raised from the  
pit and sent forth to be the saviour of  
the Gentile world and his own family.

Satan thought that he had seen the last of Christ when the crowd cried out, *Crucified him!*--but God raised Him from the dead and set Him on His own right hand.

Satan meant Calvary for evil, but God meant it for our good.

V 21-22 **"And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. 22: And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again."**

In spite of the fact that Reuben had sinned so grievously against his father, he

didn't have the same murderous heart  
that his brethren did.

And he was the one that had been replaced by  
Joseph, so you would have thought he  
had the biggest reason to be jealous,  
and yet he planned to rescue him.

And even though his brothers hated him  
intensely, they probably weren't overly  
anxious to actually plunge a knife into  
his heart.

It would be much easier to just throw him  
into a pit and let him starve, so they  
accepted Reuben's plan, or what they  
thought was Reuben's plan.

Now they were ready for him, and they  
settled down in grim anticipation of  
his arrival.

V 23-25 **"And it came to pass, when Joseph  
was come unto his brethren, that they**



stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat  
of many colours that was on him;

24: And they took him, and cast him  
into a pit: and the pit was empty,  
there was no water in it.

25: And they sat down to eat bread."

The very first thing they did was to rip  
that wretched coat off his back.

They just couldn't wait to rid themselves of  
that hated symbol of their father's  
love and Joseph's dominion over them.

Then, with Joseph's cries ringing in their  
ears, **"They sat down to eat bread."**

And they would turn a deaf ear to his pleas  
once more as they bargained away his  
freedom.

But his cries would not fade away with the  
sounds of the retreating caravan.

For years, those cries would disturb their rest and haunt their dreams.

And those same cries would still be there as if they had heard them only yesterday when they stood trembling before the governor of Egypt: **"We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us."**

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V 25 **"And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.**  
**26: And Judah said unto his brethren,**

**What profit is it if we slay our  
brother, and conceal his blood?**

**27: Come, and let us sell him to the  
Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be  
upon him; for he is our brother and our  
flesh. And his brethren were content."**

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Psalm 76:10 says, "**Surely the wrath of man  
shall praise thee: the remainder of  
wrath shalt thou restrain."**

When Judah saw the caravan passing by, a  
great idea popped into his head. But  
was it really his idea?

And was it just a coincidence that the  
caravan just happened to be passing by  
at that particular moment?

Actually God used Judah's callous suggestion  
to deliver Joseph from the jaws of

death and propel him towards his destiny.

In the space of an hour, Joseph went from the prospects of a violent death at the hands of his brothers to a slow death by starvation, and then to a pathway to slavery that would lead to the highest post in Egypt.

However, like Christ Himself, he must walk the pathway of suffering before he could walk the path of exultation.

For Joseph, it was a journey into the unknown. For Christ, it was the pathway of obedience: **"Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."**

And unlike Christ, Joseph would need those early years in Egypt to teach him humility and patience before he could be a useful servant.

And Egypt would be necessary in the shaping of his brothers also.

They would learn genuine repentance, an ingredient that would make them much more acceptable as the founders of God's chosen people.

Oh, no, that caravan didn't just *happen* to pass by. It was sent.

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V 25 says "-- a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt."

The great plateau of Gilead was located east of the Jordan, and extended from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea.

It was a lushly forested region, specially known for its balms and spices.

So it is not surprising that these Ishmeelites were coming from Gilead to bring these wares down to Egypt.

However, what does require some explanation is the fact that V 25 calls them, "**a company of Ishmeelites**," while V 28 speaks of both Midianites and Ishmeelites.

V 28 **"Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt."**

Actually, there's no contradiction here,  
because both the Midianites and the  
Ishmeelites were descendants of  
Abraham.

Ishmael was born to Hagar, Sarah's maid,  
while Median was one of Abraham's sons,  
born in his old age to Keturah, his  
second wife.

So, Ishmael and Median were half brothers,  
and a study of scripture will show that  
these two peoples were often found  
together.

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I don't think Judah would have driven a hard  
bargain, for his main purpose was to  
get rid of Joseph, not make a lot of  
money.

As it turned out, the brothers sold Joseph  
for 20 pieces of silver, which would

probably be the normal wholesale price for a slave.

And I'm sure his retail value in Egypt would have been at least 30 pieces of silver.

At least in later years, that was the standard replacement value of a slave killed by accident in Israel.

We see that in Exodus 21:32 **"If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned."**

And by the way, that was the price Judas accepted for the Lord of Glory--just the price of a slave!

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V 29-30 **"And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes."**



**30: And he returned unto his brethren,  
and said, The child is not; and I,  
whither shall I go?"**

No doubt, being the eldest son, he felt responsible to his father for his brother's safety.

However, not having the moral authority that an eldest son should have in the family, he had resorted to deception.

Reuben was completely devastated when his plan didn't work, but as it turned out, they would have all been devastated if it had worked.

And certainly Joseph was devastated as he was hauled off to Egypt in chains.

As he trudged down that dusty road with his hands tied behind his back he would have never imagined that he was being

"called according to his purpose," but  
he was.

For Joseph, the road to slavery was the  
pathway to his dreams.

And, it is very hard for us to see---"**that  
all things work together for good to  
them that love God, to them who are the  
called according to his purpose,**" but  
they do.

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Well, Joseph was gone, and good riddance!

But there would be some explaining to  
do when they got home.

V 31-32 "**And they took Joseph's coat, and  
killed a kid of the goats, and dipped  
the coat in the blood;**

**32: And they sent the coat of many  
colours, and they brought it to their  
father; and said, This have we found:**

**know now whether it be thy son's coat  
or no."**

I think it was particularly cruel of them to use his coat as Exhibit A.

They could have brought his sandals, or some other piece of clothing, but with a grim air of satisfaction, they chose his coat of many colours.

All of Joseph's hopes and dreams had been centred in that coat.

It was Joseph's coat, the coat of leadership, and as Jacob held its torn remnants in his hands, he realized that his own life was in tatters.

V 33 **"And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces."**

Poor old Jacob. He had lost his Rachel, and now he was fully convinced that he had lost his Joseph.

He had been fooled by the blood of a kid, as he had deceived his own blind father with **"two good kids of the goats."**

V 34-35 **"And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.**

**35: And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him."**

Certainly his daughters were kind and sincere, but his sons were absolute hypocrites.

Day after day, their father's cries mingled with the haunting memory of their brother's pleas for mercy. But they hardened their hearts.

Oh, they tried to comfort him with their words, but they would never tell him what he really needed to know.

They would never admit that Joseph was alive, for that would uncover their sin.

And there was always the chance that they could find him in Egypt and be able to buy him back, for certainly their father was rich enough, but they held their peace, if, indeed, there was any peace to be had.

V 36 **"And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's,**

**and captain of the guard."** And that's the last we'll hear of Joseph for now.

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As we begin chapter 38, the spotlight shifts from Joseph to his brother Judah.

I believe Judah, like the rest of his brethren, understood, at least to some degree, the unique place that his family held in God's plans, although you would have never known it by their conduct.

And certainly Judah was as rough as the rest of them, but he did have some redeeming qualities.

For instance, when his brothers were fully prepared to murder Joseph, it was Judah who intervened.

Although he was still quite willing to sell his brother into slavery, he had

stopped short of murder: **"let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh."**

It was a small mercy, but it did show a difference between Judah and his brothers.

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Genesis 38:1 **"And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah."**

I think the phrase **"at that time"** refers to the period of Jacob's mourning for his son.

During that dark time, with his brother's pleadings invading his nights and his father's cries filling his days, Judah did what many men do. He tried to run away from his sin.

Yes, Judah decided to leave home, to move his tent to a new location just outside the family circle.

Adullam was a small Canaanite settlement only about 8 miles northwest of the family home.

So no doubt Judah hadn't left the family business, or his daily association with his brothers, but his leisure hours were spent with the Canaanites, and with his good friend Hirah.

And so it was during the time he lived in that pagan society that he met Shuah. No doubt she was an attractive young woman, but she was totally committed to her Canaanite religion and its evil practices.



There's no indication that the couple spoke to her father or even his father to obtain the parental consent.

V 2 simply says **"And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her."**

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Judah and Shuah had three sons, whose names were Er, Onan and Shelah.

The fact that Judah named the first son, and his wife named the other two, sort of indicates that she eventually took the leadership in the family.

No doubt Judah, even in his backslidden condition, would have told his wife about his unique position as one of the heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant.

However, as is often the case when a believer marries an unbeliever, she had no interest in his God.

And certainly his actions didn't match his words.

And not only was she confirmed in her way of life, it is evident from the way their children turned out that she had raised them in her pagan religion.

Yes, Judah had drifted a long way from his roots, and now he was presiding over a pagan family with no use for his God or for His covenant.

V 6 says "**Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar.**" And at this point in our account, we can only read between the lines.

It seems probable that Judah, conscious of his godly heritage, and very conscious

of his wife's indifference, chose a daughter-in-law that would be more suitable and more willing to raise his grandchildren in the fear of the Lord.

However, although he could choose a daughter-in-law, he could not choose a son, and it was now quite obvious that Er had taken after his mother's side of the family.

As a matter of fact, V7 plainly says, "**And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him.**"

So Judah's attempt to carry on the line of Abraham through his eldest son never materialized.

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Apparently Tamar shared Judah's aspirations, even though she had come from a pagan background.

This is not clearly revealed in scripture, but her actions seem to indicate that at least in her way, she wished to carry on the Abrahamic line.

So Judah decided to give her in marriage to his second son, and Tamar agreed.

V 8 **"And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother."**

However, because of Onan's wickedness, God slew him also, so in the end, both brothers died childless.

V 11 **"Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also,**

**as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house."**

Then tragedy struck again.

Shortly after the death of his two sons, his wife died also, probably as quite a young woman.

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In the meantime, Tamar had been faithful to her promise, and had been willing to remain a widow until Judah's younger son would be grown.

This was quite a commitment on her part, and indicates that she was serious about marrying into Judah's family.

However, as time went on, it became painfully apparent that Judah had changed his mind, and had no intention of keeping his promise.

In desperation, Tamar resorted to trickery, and disguising herself as a prostitute, she enticed Judah, and the result was he became the father of twin sons.

You've probably noticed that I have been passing over some of the more sordid details, and I will continue to do so.

Well, we certainly can't condone Tamar's actions or Judah's sin, but in a way, given her heathen background, Tamar was much like Jacob.

Jacob deceived his brother and his father in a most dreadful manner, but in his heart, he wanted God's blessing.

Tamar was also wrong, but she did value spiritual things, although that was the end of their relationship.

Yes, she wanted to be part of the Abrahamic line, and part of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Thus a generation was bypassed, and Judah and Tamar became the parents of Pharez and Zarah.

And it was from this unlikely union that their eldest son Pharez entered the Messianic line leading to Christ.

We find that recorded in Matthew 1:2-3

**"Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;**

**3: And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Tamar; and Phares begat Esrom"--and so on.**

Yes, in spite of man's depravity, and by the grace of God, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah was born of Judah's line.

And not only that, but of the four women that are specifically named in the Messianic line, that is Tamar (whom we have just read about), Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, all were Gentiles, and most of them entered the Messianic line under less than ideal circumstances. Certainly God's grace has always been His *unmerited* favour.

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But why Judah?

Why was Christ born of the tribe of Judah, when God had a man like Joseph in Jacob's family?

Well, there is an answer, but we will have to wait until we get to Chapter 44 to find out what that answer is.