



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Genesis (Part 2)

Lesson 7: Genesis 37:1-38:30

You made it another week! Welcome back to our study. Last week we mainly covered some major events in Jacob's life including the birth of his son Benjamin, the death of his favored wife Rachel, his oldest son's adulterous act with his concubine, and the death of his father Isaac. The narrative now shifts to Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, as we begin chapter 37. The text will take a sidebar from Joseph's life very briefly in chapter 38 to cover an interesting event in the life of Judah, the son of Jacob who will not only become the father of kings, but ultimately sire the line that leads to the King of kings. If you have prepared your heart and mind with prayer, let's begin.

Read Genesis Chapter 37

We find Jacob living in the land of Canaan and his sons shepherding his flocks at the opening of chapter 37. Joseph is seventeen and brings a bad report about his older brothers to his father. Many people make assumptions here about Joseph and his attitude. Some say he is a spoiled tattle tale, and maybe he was. I do not believe we can make a definitive call on that, but it seems that Jacob is in the habit of having Joseph check up on his brothers. All I know is, if I ask one of my daughters to "report" about the other one, I expect honesty because I trust them. Jacob obviously trusted Joseph.

We all know that Jacob loved Joseph more than all of his other sons as the text states that fact very clearly. He may very well have favored him because of Rachel as well, but the text says he

loved him more because "he was the son of his old age". This brings up an interesting point. Joseph is not Jacob's youngest son. Benjamin holds that spot, which begs the question of why this statement is made. It turns out there may be more to the phrase "son of his old age" than we might think. It actually means "son of an old age to him" which can mean more about the son than the father. That particular phrase can mean that the son was wise beyond his years. Maybe you have heard someone call a young person "an old soul". They are wiser and older in their character than their age would reflect. We have all met a kid like that. They tend to prefer older people's company and tend to do the right thing when no one else does. Does that sound like Joseph to you? Those kinds of kids never seem to fit in with their age group, but they are rare and wonderful human beings.

Of course, no one likes a goody two-shoes because they expose our deficiencies. I think it very probable that this was yet another reason Joseph's brothers hated him. Whatever the reasons may be, Jacob loved Joseph more and made him a special coat. The word translated to "varicolored" actually means a long, sleeved garment that covered from the palms of the hands to the soles of the feet. It is the same word used to describe the long-sleeved dress that the princesses wore during David's era in 2 Sam. 13:18. This undoubtedly added to the brothers' hatred and the text says they could not speak kindly or peaceably to Joseph.



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To add injury to insult, God goes and gives Joseph two prophetic dreams about his future authority over his brothers. Perhaps the dreams really baffled Joseph or maybe they excited him. The text again does not reveal Joseph's spirit in sharing the dreams with his family, but he does and that leads to more hatred and jealousy from his brothers and even a chastisement from his father. We are also not told who is referred to when they speak of Joseph's "mother" since Rachel has already passed. As it would be pure speculation, suffice it to say, Joseph was going to rule over all of his family.

An opportune moment comes for the brothers to get rid of Joseph. Even as he is approaching, their hearts turn to evil against him. They are filled with anger and jealousy. The youngest of them all, who has his father's love displayed in the very coat he's wearing, has come to "check up" on them again. Their very first inclination is murder, but Reuben at least has the heart to spare him and even desires to save him from them later. The rest of the brothers seem content to let him die in the pit. Remember this is an isolated place they are in and Joseph will die without water in a matter of days, if not sooner from exposure. I cannot help but think this was a mob-like mentality. We are not told which brother suggests killing him, but God seems to hold them all accountable in the end. I think that is a good lesson for us that we are just as guilty if we passively go along with evil.

The very first thing they do is strip off that precious coat. Then they hurl him into a waterless pit and sit down to eat. The callousness of it all seems to resonate. If you are disturbed in your conscience, you don't eat. They seem

completely detached and unmoved by what they have done. Surely Joseph was not silent as they stripped him and threw him in the pit. Surely they heard his cry of pain as he hit the bottom of the pit. Surely they heard his fearful pleas for help as they walked away. Just as Jesus was mistreated and killed because His "brethren" were envious of him, Joseph here is mistreated and almost killed by his brothers for the same reason. This story is so sad and evil to me, yet we know God will spring forth something good from it. God used the jealousy of the Jews to put Jesus on the cross and save us, just as he uses the jealousy of Joseph's brothers to send him to Egypt and save the Israelites. What an amazing God we serve!

As providence would have it, some Ishmaelites come by and Judah suggests selling him so that they can make a profit off of him. He further persuades them by arguing that Joseph is their "own flesh" convincing them not to "lay [their] hands on him". Verse 28 calls the traders Midianites while verse 25 calls them Ishmaelites. This is not a contradiction. The names are sometimes used interchangeably as the two groups somewhat overlap. I wonder how loudly and desperately Joseph begged his brothers not to sell him. I would doubt that this was a silent transaction. Where was their compassion? Where was their consideration of what the consequences would be? Gone, hardened by the sin of jealousy.

The chapter ends with Reuben discovering the empty pit. He seems to be the only one concerned at all about Joseph and Jacob's response. He seems very distraught as he tears his garments. He understands he is guilty, but in



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order to hide their sin, they proceed to fabricate an elaborate deception. They take appropriate measures to deceive Jacob into believing Joseph has been “torn to pieces” by a wild beast. Jacob deceived his father for Esau’s blessing and now his sons are deceiving him in an even greater way. I heard a wonderful sermon once about the fact that whatever we sow comes back later and greater, whether good or bad. Those words could not be more true in Jacob’s life.

The lose of a child is unnatural and I am sure the pain is indescribably hard and intense. We are told that Jacob “mourned for his son many days”. He was inconsolable despite the efforts made by his sons and his daughters. Yes, Jacob had more daughters than just Dinah. She may be the only one mentioned because of the incident with Shechem. I find it interesting that the text says his sons tried to comfort him, yet they had the means to end the suffering. Jacob basically said he would go to his grave still mourning for Joseph. Jacob wept for days. Yet his sons remained silent. Day after day they watched their father suffer in agony and despair. Day after day, year after year, they lied to him to cover up their sin. Sin hurts and unrepentant sin multplies. Do not be deceived!

Do you think Joseph should have told his family about his dreams? Why or why not?

Describe a time your jealousy of someone caused you to mistreat them.

Why do you think jealousy prompts us to mistreat one another?

What do you think Joseph thought when his brothers returned and lifted him out of the pit?

Read these passages and tell what you learn about jealousy:

- **Prov. 6:34**

- **Prov. 27:4**

- **Rom. 13:13**

- **1 Cor. 13:4**

- **Gal. 5:19-21**



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- **James 3:13-18**

What is the difference between sinful jealousy and godly jealousy (please use Scripture to validate your answer)?

Read Genesis Chapter 38

We are not told why, but Judah moves away from his family and goes to stay with Hirah, the Adullamite. Maybe he could not stand seeing his father in grief anymore or maybe he just started befriending a guy from the world and decided to go that direction. He starts dwelling there, marries a woman from there, and builds a life there for his family. At least two of his children turn out to be so wicked that God takes both of their lives and Judah himself seems to participate in some very ungodly practices. If we move away from God's family, we befriend the world and start down that same progression. It is a good reminder to keep sober, alert, and close to God and His people.

The custom in this chapter of a man marrying his brother's widow "to raise up offspring" for the deceased brother who has no son is known as the levirate marriage. Contrary to what you would think, it has nothing to do with Levi. It comes from the Latin word "levir" which means "husband's brother" and was practiced by many cultures at this time. It was done so that the first-born son from the new marriage would legally be considered the deceased brother's son. As a

result, this son would be the recipient of any inheritance that the deceased brother left behind and carry on his name. This later becomes a part of the Mosaic Law in Deut. 25:5-10.

This information helps us understand how selfish Onan's act was in allowing his semen to spill on the ground when he was with Tamar. Onan showed a disobedience and lack of respect for everyone in this action. He showed no regard for his father, his deceased brother, Tamar, or God. Therefore, God takes his life as well. Tamar has now been widowed twice and Judah is now afraid to give her to his third son, Shelah.

By this point, it is hard not to feel a bit sorry for Tamar. She has had two wicked husbands and is now being overlooked by her father-in-law. She is without children and without husband, which was definitely not a desirable position for a woman to be in at that time. She may have been desperate, but that is no excuse for what she decides to do.

Judah has lost his wife and it is time to shear the sheep, which is typically a celebratory time. Judah unknowingly solicits Tamar as a harlot and impregnates her. She accomplishes her goal of having children and obtains the necessary evidence of who the father is so that she has some protection against burning, which was the punishment for her action at the time. She has Judah leave his signet, his cord, and his staff as collateral for the goat that he promises to pay her for her services. The signet was usually an engraved ring or cylinder that bore an identifying image used like a signature for the owner. The cord usually held the signet and was either hung around the owner's neck or hung from a hole in the top of his staff. A shepherd used his staff



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daily and would have easily been another identifying emblem. I imagine losing all of these items would have been something like losing your driver's license and a favorite coat or hat that everyone knew was yours.

When Judah finds out Tamar is pregnant, he is indignant and immediately ready to punish her to the full extent of the law without even questioning her. It is all very climactic as she sends him his "i.d." while she is being brought out before him to be punished. We must give credit where credit is due. Judah confesses immediately of being the father, as well as his wrong of not giving her to his son, Shelah.

The end of the chapter tells of her twin sons' birth. Perez means "breach" and he is so named because he beats his brother out of the womb despite his brother having his hand out first. Zerah, which means "dawning of brightness", comes out after Perez and our story on Judah and Tamar comes to a close. Why God chose to include this chapter is debatable, but Perez ends up being an ancestor of Jesus (Matt. 1:3). Once again, God shows mercy and uses our mistakes to bring about His good and His will.

What is our initial response when we hear about someone's sin?

What made Judah more humble and compassionate toward Tamar and what can we learn from that?

Can you think of another Biblical example of someone changing their attitude toward a sinner when they considered their own guilt?

Find a verse about keeping your word, humility, compassion, or any other topic that would relate to Judah and Tamar's story. Please share it and commit it to memory to help you in your daily walk.

I believe both of the chapters we have covered in this lesson do a couple of things. They expose some horrible behaviors, but remind us that God can turn our sins into something good. Don't get me wrong, we still have consequences and sin is never the preferred path, but there is the option of repentance. There is the hope of forgiveness and renewed blessings from our great God and Father. Lastly, God will accomplish His will regardless of our decisions. He is sovereign!