



SWAT PRAYER

SPIRITUAL WARFARE ATTACK TEAM



STORMING THE GATES

Welcome to Promise Land Bible Church
We're glad you're here!



An open book is shown from a low angle, looking up at the pages. The pages are filled with text, but it is out of focus. The background is a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds. The text is centered over the book.

Misery and Mystery

Scripture text: **Genesis Ch 37**

In the previous chapters, we have seen, very clearly, that the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob **was living under the unparalleled mercy of God. It was “unparalleled”** because no one else on the face of the earth was receiving promises like: “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (12:3) or “Two nations are in your womb” (25:23); and **it was “mercy”** because **all that God did and promised was utterly undeserved.** Abram twice put his wife in a position of compromise and danger. Isaac did the same, and bred a mutated family through his favoritism.

And Jacob was a dishonest, greedy con man. All these facts combine to make the account of this unusual family not a story of godly heritage so much **as a story of mercy!** Thank God that, in his Son, he is just as merciful to poor, stumbling sinners today!

The misery of sin

But it also needs to be pointed out that, as much as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were **under the mercy of God, he still reserved the right to chastise them for their sin!**

Hebrews 12:6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

So, very often, the Lord allowed the sins of the Israelite fathers to blow up in their faces. Think of the quarreling that went on between Sarai and Hagar. Was it not the fruit of Abram's sin? The same could be said of the hostility between Jacob and Esau. This kind of enmity would be a natural and expected consequence in any family in which the parents had obvious favorites.

So, as much as God shows mercy to sinners, he also often (because he loves us) **makes us absolutely miserable in our sins!** Sin—whether we are among God’s chosen people or not—is a miserable, spreading, spoiling thing. It is like a cancer that eats, then spreads, then eats some more. God has designed it this way, **attaching earthly consequences to our sins, so that the pain might urge us to repent!** And if there is anything that is clear in Genesis 37–38, **it is the misery of sin.** What dissension, pain, lingering guilt, and embarrassment sprang up from the polluted soil of sin in the lives of Jacob and his sons!

Genesis 37:1-4 Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. 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.** 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.** 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.**

Jacob's Love:

Since Rachel was Jacob's favorite wife, and Joseph was her firstborn son (30:22–24), it is easy to see why Jacob favored him in his old age. This kind of partiality in a home is bound to cause trouble.

Joseph at seventeen was helping with the sheep, but soon Jacob relieved him of that duty and made him an “overseer” by giving him a “tailored coat.” Jacob wanted to make Joseph a ruler before he had really learned how to be a servant! The result—Joseph's brothers hated him (v. 4) and envied him (v. 11).

Notice the misery of sin in the various characters in this portion of God's story:

Joseph's slavery

Joseph comes across as a spoiled, arrogant, know-it-all in 37:5–11. He had two dreams, both of which seemed to indicate that one day he would be the patriarch and head of his father's family. One day he would be the one to whom they all would look. Now we must assume that, in some way, **the dreams were from God. After all, they were fulfilled in startling detail later in his life.**

Joseph's dreams (vv. 5–11).

That these dreams came from God, there is no question; and certainly the assurance that one day he would rule helped to keep Joseph faithful during those many years of testing in Egypt. Note that the first dream had an earthly setting, while the second dream was set in heaven. This suggests Abraham's earthly children (the Jews) and his heavenly seed (the church). Joseph's brothers did one day bow down to him!

Genesis 37:5-8 Now Joseph had a dream, and **when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more.** He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 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." 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.

Genesis 37:9-11 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.**" 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?**" And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

But the question is: **How should Joseph have responded to these dreams?** Perhaps he should have taken them as a subtle warning about the place of pride in his own life. It seems that strange dreams are often sent our way to reveal some sinful fixation in our lives. And even beyond that, Joseph certainly should have taken these indications about the future as an opportunity to **prepare himself for the leadership role** that God was going to give him. These dreams might have signaled him **to cultivate concern for this family** he would one day lead; to **cultivate the humility** and **wisdom** needed in leadership.

Instead, he used the dreams simply as wind to **further inflate his already puffed-up self-opinion.**

Joseph took gifts from God—his dreams—and **turned them into tools of self-promotion!** And aren't we also prone to take the good gifts of God—our positions, our possessions, our intelligence, our education, our sexuality, our ability to pray—and use them, not for the benefit of others and the glory of God, but only to make ourselves feel better? **Think it out. What good gifts has God given *you* which *you* are tempted to use solely for yourself?**

As you think it out, notice the obvious: **Joseph's sins came back and bit him!** He ended up in a pit, in a slave caravan, and in slavery because he abused the good gifts of God. **If he was to be God's leader, he would have to learn humility somehow.** So God let him stumble; "whom the Lord loves, He disciplines."

Remember: it is better to humble ourselves, then to be humbled by Almighty God!

Judah's scheme: We are not told which of the brothers first suggested doing away with Joseph. Possibly it was Simeon, who resented Joseph's intrusion on the rights of the firstborn (which would finally be taken away from Reuben, 49:3–4). We know from chapter 34 that Simeon was crafty and cruel, and in Gen. 42:24, Joseph was rather harsh on Simeon. At any rate, the brothers were back in the region of Shechem (where they had gotten into trouble before, chap. 34), and they plotted to slay Joseph. It is to Reuben's credit that he tried to spare Joseph's life, although he used the wrong method to accomplish a noble deed.

God overruled the hatred of the men, and Joseph was sold into slavery instead of slain in cold blood.

The brothers' guilt

Now yes, in a roundabout way, and through his brothers, Joseph got what God had coming to him. But let's not give the brothers a free pass. Their plan of revenge was even more despicable than was his conceit. In 37:25, we find that, even though they had just dumped their brother in a pit and thought about killing him, they had the callousness of heart to be able to sit down and enjoy a nice meal!

Their blood seems to have run completely cold. God had offered them a way out through the protestations of Reuben (37:21–22). **This episode could have ended as nothing more than a prank against their little brother.** A mean-spirited prank, but a prank nonetheless. But they did not take God's way of escape. **Instead they wallowed in their bitterness,** and everything got away from them in the matter of just a few hours! **And the same may happen to us who are walking too close to the cliff-edge of some sin.**

Notice that the sin of Judah and his brothers haunted them for the rest of their lives. You won't find that here in chapter 37. But read on in the story and you will discover that these brothers never got over the guilt of having sold their youngest brother as a slave—and having deceived their aging father. Oh yes, there is forgiveness with God. If we are in Christ, our sins will not damn us eternally. **But they may haunt us as long as we live on this earth.**

Yet somewhere, amid all the temptations we face, is a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). And what misery we avoid if we take it!

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands **take heed lest he fall.** No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. **God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.**

Reuben's regret

You will notice in 37:21–22 that, in the midst of all the madness, the only voice of reason was that of Reuben. **It was his voice alone that kept Joseph from being slaughtered on the spot.** We should praise him for that. But did you notice, in 37:22, that he was not as bold as he should have been? The rest of the brothers wanted to kill Joseph and throw him into a pit. As the oldest brother, Reuben should have stood up and said, “Listen, I know Joseph has been a pain in the neck, but we’re not going to do *anything to harm him.*”

But he only went half way. To his credit, Reuben said, “Shed no blood.” But he still allowed them to throw Joseph into the pit. So yes, Reuben kept Joseph from being killed. But when he had the opportunity to squelch the situation entirely, he buckled.

Reuben had good intentions. But, presumably out of fear of what his brothers might say, he did not fully carry them out. So he stayed in the land of good intentions while his brother was carted off to the land of slavery.

And Reuben, like the rest of his brothers, **lived with regret the rest of his days.** All because he did not stand up for the right when he had the chance! And that **regret will follow us all of our days if we are content to drive in circles through the land of good intentions.** Do we intend to share the gospel with that co-worker? Do we intend to stop looking at pornography? Do we intend to make things right with that estranged family member? Do we intend to begin reading the Bible with our children? Do we intend to someday turn our lives over to Jesus? **Now is the time! Good intentions without follow-through lead only to the misery of regret.**

All sin, in fact, leads eventually to misery—especially in the lives of God’s people. God will not allow us to stay content in sin. And the difficulty of his discipline ought to motivate us to obey!

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jacob's sorrow

Years before, Jacob had slain a kid to deceive his father (27:9ff), and now his sons deceived him the same way. **We reap what we sow.** Jacob **spent the next twenty-two years in sorrow, thinking that Joseph was dead.** He thought that everything was working against him (Gen. 42:36), when in reality everything was working for him (Rom. 8:28). God had sent Joseph ahead to prepare the way for Israel's preservation as a nation.

Romans 8:28 And we know that **for those who love God all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Genesis 50:19-21 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? **As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.** So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

The mystery of providence

In the events of Genesis 37–38, God seems completely absent from the minds of Jacob and his sons. But that by no means indicates that God was not actively involved in what was happening! Let me ask you: Who was the “man” who directed young Joseph when he was looking for his brothers (37:15–17)? Maybe it was the same “man” who wrestled with Joseph’s father back in chapter 32—God himself! Or maybe it was just a man. But in either case, it was no accident in Joseph’s life that “A man found him” and helped him find his brothers! Just as it was no accident in 37:25 that, at just the right time, a caravan of traders came along to bring Joseph down to Egypt!

That is right! At just the right time, those traders came along. Why? **Because God wanted Joseph in Egypt!** Therefore, God superintended everything that happened in his life to make sure he got there! How do we know that? Well, because, in chapter 50, we learn that God's plan all along was that Joseph might come to power in Egypt and thus keep his family alive when famine hit many years later! God wanted to rescue his chosen people from the impending famine—to keep the bloodline of the Messiah alive. Therefore he **sovereignly controlled all the events** of Genesis 37—the man in verse 15, the caravan in verse 25, and, yes, even Joseph and his brother's sins—in order to get Joseph to Egypt!

Jacob's sons were trying to kill their baby brother. But **God was turning their actions into a chain of events that would save their own lives! What mercy!**

God truly does cause “all things”—including those seemingly random things; including others' sins against us; and even including our own sins—“to work together for good” to his people (Rom. 8:28)!

If we really believe that, then we won't feel the need to throw others into the pit when they hurt us—and **we will also have hope in the midst of guilt and regret over our own personal sins.**

Maybe we weren't the faithful parents we should have been. Maybe we wasted our youth in riotous living. Maybe we didn't speak up for Jesus when we should have. But if we are God's children, we should know this: God works all things—even our failures—for the good of his people. He will work something beautiful out of the mess that we have made.

Now this does not excuse our disobedience—for **surely God would rather accomplish his good purposes through obedience** rather than sin.

But the sovereignty of God over the sins of Joseph and his brothers does **teach us that God is bigger than our sins.**

He is **big enough to forgive our sins through Jesus Christ.** He is **big enough to help us overcome our sins.** And he is even **big enough to re-work our sins as part of his larger plan to do us, and the rest of his people, good!** We may have meant it for evil, but **God will work it for good!**