

"The one thing I ask of the Lord - the thing I seek most - is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in his temple." Psalm 27:4



WEEK 1

TRIUMPH OVER BITTERNESS

Genesis 37

It was the Sabbath and many were making their way to the Synagogue. Jesus was among the crowd when he encountered a man with an afflicted and disfigured hand. Moved with compassion, Jesus called this man forward from the crowd. The Pharisees and Sadducees who stood in the crowd looked intently on Jesus, anxiously waiting to see what He would do. Jesus knew their hearts and the hardness therein; hearts tied up in envy, pride, bitterness and anger. He was jeopardizing their very position as the religious elite and their power over the people. Jesus knew they were watching. After probing into the hearts of the onlookers and exposing what was there, He healed the sick man's hand. The Pharisees were enraged. How dare Jesus heal on the Sabbath, going against "their law" and man-made traditions! How dare He make a spectacle of them and undermine their authority as the religious elite! Their power, position, and influence was teetering in the balance. We are told in Matthew 12:14, "The Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him." As we will see today, bitterness in the hearts of the religious elite during Jesus' day echoes of sin in previous generations as "nothing is new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

We are going back in time to Genesis 37 and meeting Joseph whose life we are studying. He was the first of two sons born to Jacob and Rachel, and he had ten older half brothers. Joseph was loved deeply by his father who openly esteemed him among his brothers. His position was one that his brothers envied. It bred jealousy and a sense of entitlement to power that angered them. Who was Joseph to take what was theirs, especially from Rueben, the firstborn? Just as Jacob stole Esau's birthright years before by receiving his father's blessing, history would now be repeated in Jacob's own sons. We will see the older brothers' bitterness breed envy, anger and ultimately violence against Joseph as they cast him into a pit, sell him to the Gentiles, and then watch him be carried off to Egypt as a slave.

Just as we saw the religious elite embittered toward Jesus, so too, we will see Joseph's brothers embittered toward Joseph. As we study Scripture, we often see types of Christ revealed. Through Joseph's life, we will find a type of Christ repeated through Genesis 37-50. Joseph shines forth from the pages of Scripture as practically flawless. We know he wasn't, but God chose not to speak of those flaws, instead God emphasized his steadfast faith and godliness.



James Montgomery Boice says this regarding the life of Joseph, “Thus begins one of the remarkable life stories of the Bible and all literature. [Joseph] He was loved and hated, favored and abused, tempted and trusted, exalted and abased. Yet at no point in the one-hundred-and-ten-year life of Joseph did he ever seem to get his eyes off God or cease to trust him. Adversity did not harden his character. Prosperity did not ruin him. He was the same in private as in public. He was a truly great man.”

It has often been said that bitterness is a poison we drink every day hoping the other person will die. Instead, it slowly kills us by creeping into relationships, attitudes and responses. It is ugly. But take heart, God has the remedy for bitterness, and we will see throughout our study that the evil meant by Satan to destroy can be used by God for His eternal good and glory. Brenda and I, Stacy, pray God will use this study to heal your broken relationships, restore fellowship, and increase your faith in Jesus Christ.



R RECEIVING God’s Word

Open in Prayer

Read Genesis 37:1-36



E EXPERIENCING God’s Word

Experience 1: Genesis 37:1-11

1. Read Genesis 37:1-2. In these verses we learn about Jacob (also known as Israel) and his father, Isaac. We are told in verse 1 that Jacob lived in the land of Canaan where his father was a stranger. Isaac’s father was Abraham (Abram) and he also was a stranger in this land.
 - a. Read Genesis 12:1-7. What command and what promise was given to Abram from God that involved Canaan and Abram’s descendants?



b. Read Genesis 17:1-8. Why is it significant that Jacob is living in the land where his father and grandfather were strangers?

2. In Genesis 37:2 we are introduced to Joseph who is one of Jacob's twelve sons. Read Genesis 35:22-26 and fill in the names next to the bullet points below to understand the family genealogy of Abraham.

Abraham – married Sarah (Genesis 11:29)

Isaac – married Rebekah (Genesis 24:67)

Isaac and Rebekah had two sons — Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25:24-26)

Jacob married Leah and they had six sons. List their names:

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Jacob also married Rachel and they had two sons. List their names:

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Jacob had relations with Bilhah (Rachel's maidservant) and they had two sons. List their names:

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Jacob had relations with Zilpah (Leah's maidservant) and they had two sons.

List their names:

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3. Read Genesis 37:2-4. Joseph is 17 years old and went out to the field with his half brothers to take care of the flock. Joseph observed something about their behavior and told his dad.

- From these verses, what are we told about Jacob's (Israel) relationship with Joseph?
- How does Jacob make his affections and partiality known publicly regarding Joseph?
- What effect does Jacob's affections and Joseph's behavior have on the half brothers? In answering this question, consider the biological family line of Jacob, his multiple wives/maidservants and his many children.



4. Read Genesis 37:5-8. Describe Joseph's dream and the impact it had on his older brothers. How did they respond?
 - a. This dream will be significant as we move through the life of Joseph. Consider the specifics of the dream and the symbolism.

5. Read Genesis 37:9-10. Joseph has a second dream and shares it with his brothers and father. Describe the dream.

6. Read Genesis 37:11. Describe the response of the father and the brothers.



Experience 2: Genesis 37:12-36

1. Read Genesis 37:12-14. Jacob is curious about his sons who are out tending sheep in Shechem, which is about 40 miles away. Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers. Why is this a curious command given the known family dynamics?
 - a. What do you notice about Joseph's response to his father's request?

2. Read Genesis 37:15-17. Joseph travels to find his brothers but cannot locate them in Shechem. From these verses, how do you see God ordering Joseph's steps?

3. Read Genesis 37:18-24 and answer the following questions:
 - a. What do the brothers call Joseph when they see him approaching?

 - b. What action verbs are used to describe the brothers' evil plan for Joseph?



- c. Reuben, the firstborn in the family, comes to Joseph's defense. Reuben appears to assert his position as the family heir sensing it might be in jeopardy. Read Genesis 35:22. What did he do to try and secure his birthright?

 - d. In verses 18-22 Reuben tries to alter the evil plot. What is his motive and how might this benefit him and his position within the family?

 - e. What did the brothers ultimately do with Joseph?
4. Read Proverbs 6:12-19.
- a. How is a worthless person described?

 - b. What are the things God hates according to these verses?

 - c. How do the brothers demonstrate some of these attributes toward Joseph?

5. Contrast Joseph's situation in Genesis 37:24 with his brothers' position in Genesis 37:25.
 - a. Read Genesis 42:21. What additional details do you learn in this verse about Joseph's emotional state when in the empty pit?

6. Read Genesis 37:25-28 and answer the following questions:
 - a. Judah intercedes on Joseph's behalf. There seems to be two motives at play in these verses. Describe the possible motives.

 - b. What do the brothers do with Joseph and where is he going?

 - c. How were the Ishmaelites a way of escape for Joseph but temptation for Joseph's brothers?

Ishmaelites were descendants by Abraham and Hagar (Gen 16:15) and the Midianites (Gen 37:28) descended from Abraham by his concubine Keturah (Gen 25:2). The term Ishmaelite became a general designation for desert tribes, so that Midianite traders were also known as Ishmaelites. (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Old Testament, p. 88)



TIME STAMP

Before the digital age, when important paper documents were received, a clerk would use an ink stamp to mark the time and date on them to stand as an official record of an event. It has been said that life events can also be like “time stamps” upon our hearts. Incidents that happen in life, both good and bad, leave an indelible stamp upon us and are not easily forgotten.

Joseph has many “time stamp” moments in his life. As you look back on this week’s lesson, what events would you say are “time stamp” moments for Joseph?



ACTING on God’s Word

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”
Hebrews 12:14-15

“Root of bitterness.” What an interesting analogy used in the book of Hebrews to describe how bitterness can be a hidden emotion, much like the roots of a plant are hidden in the soil. Bitterness, when allowed to fester, becomes like a poison to the spiritual growth of a person. It can grow rapidly and becomes toxic to overall health. Further, bitterness can be a hidden sin which fosters sarcasm, passive-aggressive behaviors and careless words. As the root of bitterness grows a stronger and thicker root system, other sins branch from it. Those sins can quickly escalate into highly detrimental behaviors that may eventually be witnessed outwardly as anger, retaliation, unforgiveness and violence.



Based on our text today I, Brenda, believe it is safe to say Joseph's brothers had a root of bitterness toward Joseph. They hated him (Gen 37: verses 4 & 8), could not speak peaceably with him (v4), envied him (v11), and were sarcastic (v19). These were observable sins and the precursors to their eventual desire to kill him (v20). Each person played a part in the unhealthy interactions in chapter 37. Sin rarely takes only one person down. Sin has a nasty and predictable pattern. When sin is left unchecked, it eventually leads to death as James 1:15 tells us, "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." It is vital we recognize bitterness when it is being conceived in our hearts and then cut it off at the root.

1. How could Joseph, his brothers and Jacob have tried to "pursue peace" (Hebrews 12:14a) with one another? List your ideas below:
 - a. Joseph -
 - b. Joseph's brothers -
 - c. Jacob -

2. Have you ever tried any of the suggestions you listed above with someone with whom you were having difficulty? How did your efforts work out? Explain.



3. Despite our best efforts, in reality, it is only through the power of God's Holy Spirit that relationships are cleansed and restored. If we go back to Hebrews 12:14, we are told to first pursue peace and then holiness. I see this as a twofold process. First, we are to go to the person (Matthew 18) and, if for some reason you cannot restore peace, then you are to pursue personal holiness. Now, I am not describing pious, self-righteous "holiness." Rather, I am suggesting "Be holy, as I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16) kind of holiness; Christ's holiness. What practical ways can you be holy even in a situation when you cannot restore peace in a relationship?
4. If we do not try to pursue peace and holiness, the conclusion to Hebrews 12:14 tells us we may "fall short of the grace of God." What does it mean to fall short of the grace of God? How does bitterness and unforgiveness demonstrate falling short of the grace of God?



DELIGHTING in God's Word

From today's verses, how has the Lord prompted you to pray?

Write a verse from the chapter that God has spoken to your heart.

Close in Prayer