

Can God Work Through That?

Genesis 37

In Old Testament narratives, we can see the worst of human passions as characters interact. The question becomes how God can have an overarching plan when so many of His people behave irresponsibly.

The favoritism that causes pain (v. 3)

The dysfunction of this family comes from the father Jacob's favoritism. What is so striking here is that Jacob had witnessed the problem of favoritism first-hand as a young man. Isaac loved Jacob's brother Esau while his mother loved Jacob (Cf. Gen. 25:28). We see here the tendency of generational sin.

Jacob's children came from four women but he "loved Rachel more than Leah" (Cf. 29:30). Did he like Joseph because he looked like his mother?

Jacob's favoritism is captured by the gift of the many-colored coat. It is the kind of "robe" that would be suited to a person of leisure.

The envy that spills over into contemptible actions (v. 11)

Joseph's brothers "hated him" and could not say a kind thing to him (v. 4, 5, 8).

Does Joseph make things worse? He snitches on them (v. 2). He tells them the entire content of these dreams (v. 5f). What was the point of that? There is a difference between openness and honesty. He also wears the robe of many colors on the expedition to check in on his brothers (v. 12f)!

There is a failure to "coach" the young Joseph, who is only 17. Is their response an overreaction to the dreams of a teenager? Could they have helped him?

We see in the brothers a kind of entitlement that forces us to question what it means to play a certain role in any family.

In an effort to keep a clean conscience, they choose to sell Joseph into slavery instead of killing him. But selling a family member to foreigners would incur a serious punishment (Lev. 25:46, 2 Chron. 28:8-15).

The perversion of truth that enslaves (v. 31f.)

The ten brothers (Benjamin is too young here) carry out an elaborate lie. They form a plan of deception and even join in the “comforting” of their father. Jacob would live in grief for 22 years!

Reuben is particularly interesting here as we see him as a torn figure. Is there a flicker of compassion in him or is this only to save himself as the one who would be responsible (v. 21f)? Why didn't he as the oldest brother stick up for Joseph?

We see again how our sins can come back around to hurt us. Jacob plotted against his blind father Isaac, deceiving him into a blessing by using garments (Gen. 27:1-46). Here we see the trickster tricked.

Key Take-Away: God can use the worst of human passions towards His plan.

Application Questions:

What about this passage gives me hope when I have struggles with family members?

How do these passions contribute to our self-destruction (Cf. 42:21)?

How does the completed work of Christ help me to seek forgiveness from those who I have hurt? How does it help me to forgive those who have hurt me?