

Genesis 37–38

Joseph's Rejection, Judah's Failure, and God's Sovereign Plan

I. Genesis 37 – Joseph and the Beginning of His Suffering

A. Joseph's difficult place in the family

Joseph is introduced as **seventeen years old**, feeding the flock with his brothers. Right away, the narration points out that tension was already growing in the family for several reasons.

First, Joseph brought back an **evil report** concerning his brothers. He was reporting misconduct to Jacob, which naturally made him deeply unpopular. Chuck emphasizes that this made Joseph the family “tattletale” in the eyes of his brothers, and that never endears someone to siblings.

Second, Joseph was clearly the **favored son**. Jacob loved Joseph more than the others because he was the son of his old age and, especially, because he was the son of **Rachel**, the wife Jacob loved most. This favoritism had likely been visible for years.

B. The coat and what it likely meant

The narration gives an important detail here: the “coat of many colors” may be better understood as a **special robe with sleeves**, not merely a brightly colored garment.

Chuck explains that this kind of coat likely signaled **status, privilege, and rulership**, not labor. Workers typically wore sleeveless garments that allowed freedom of movement, but a robe with sleeves suggested someone of rank who did not do common labor.

So Jacob was doing more than giving Joseph a nice gift. He was signaling to the whole

family that Joseph held a **preferred position** and possibly a future place of leadership.

C. The brothers' hatred

Because of Jacob's favoritism, Joseph's brothers hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. Their resentment was no longer mild irritation. It had become relational hostility.

This is an important teaching moment: **unchecked favoritism poisons family relationships**. Jacob's preference was not private. It shaped the emotional climate of the household.

II. Joseph's Dreams and Their Effect

A. First dream: the sheaves

Joseph dreamed that while they were binding sheaves in the field, his sheaf stood upright and his brothers' sheaves bowed down to his.

The brothers understood the implication immediately: Joseph was saying he would **rule over them**.

Their response was not curiosity but anger. They hated him even more, both for the dream and for speaking it aloud.

B. Second dream: the sun, moon, and stars

Joseph then dreamed that the **sun, moon, and eleven stars** bowed down to him.

This time he told both his brothers and his father. Jacob rebuked him outwardly, asking whether he, Joseph's mother, and the brothers would all bow before him. Yet Jacob also **observed the saying**. He stored it away in his mind.

C. Important prophetic insight from the narration

Chuck uses this dream to help interpret **Revelation 12**, where a woman appears clothed with the sun, moon, and stars.

His point is that the imagery is already interpreted for us here in Genesis. The woman in Revelation 12 should be understood as **Israel**, not the church, because this symbolic pattern comes directly from Joseph's dream.

That is one of the strongest doctrinal observations in this section of narration: **Scripture interprets Scripture**.

III. Joseph Sent to His Brothers

A. Jacob sends Joseph out

Jacob told Joseph to go check on his brothers and the flocks and bring back word. Joseph obeyed.

This required a significant journey. Chuck notes that the brothers had gone first to **Shechem**, then on to **Dothan**, which meant Joseph was traveling roughly **ninety miles from home**.

That detail matters. Joseph was not casually wandering into danger. He was faithfully obeying his father at personal cost.

B. The providence of God even in small details

Joseph arrived at Shechem and did not find them. While wandering in the field, a man asked whom he was seeking and told him the brothers had gone to Dothan.

That unnamed encounter is significant. It shows God's providence even here. Joseph does not miss the encounter that will change the course of his life. The Lord is moving the story, even through an unnamed stranger in a field.

IV. The Plot Against Joseph

A. Hatred matures into murder

When the brothers saw Joseph coming, they conspired to kill him. Their words reveal

their bitterness: **“Behold, this dreamer cometh.”**

They were not only angry with Joseph. They were angry with what Joseph represented. They wanted to destroy the dreams themselves, as though killing Joseph could kill God’s plan.

That becomes a major theological point: **human hatred cannot stop divine purpose.**

B. Reuben’s intervention

Reuben, the eldest, did not want Joseph killed. He proposed throwing him into a pit instead, secretly planning to rescue him later and return him to Jacob.

Reuben’s motive was partly protective and partly responsible. As the oldest brother, he would have felt accountable to their father.

C. Joseph stripped and cast into the pit

The brothers stripped Joseph of his special robe and threw him into an empty pit.

Chuck highlights the typology here: Joseph is stripped of his garment, just as Christ was stripped. Joseph is rejected by his brothers, just as Christ was rejected by His own.

D. Judah’s proposal to sell Joseph

Judah then suggested selling Joseph to passing Ishmaelites instead of killing him.

Chuck notes that we cannot be fully certain whether Judah’s motives were partly merciful or mostly self-serving. His actual words focus on profit: **“What profit is it if we slay our brother?”**

The brothers sold Joseph for **twenty pieces of silver**, and he was taken into Egypt.

Again, the narration points to typology with Christ: rejected, sold, and handed over.

V. Joseph’s Anguish and the Brothers’ Hardness

A. Joseph pleaded with them

A major detail Chuck pulls from a later chapter is that Joseph did not go silently. He **begged**, pleaded, and cried out to his brothers.

That insight comes from Genesis 42, where the brothers later say they saw **the anguish of his soul** and would not hear him.

This adds emotional weight to the story. Joseph was not stoic and untouched. He was terrified, pleading for mercy, and his brothers hardened themselves against him.

B. Guilt never disappears on its own

Chuck makes a strong pastoral point here: guilt can be buried, denied, and suppressed, but it does not disappear. Twenty years later, Joseph's brothers still carried the memory of what they had done.

His lesson is that **guilt will surface somehow unless it is truly dealt with before God**. Only confession and forgiveness can resolve it.

VI. Jacob Deceived by His Sons

A. The bloody garment

The brothers dipped Joseph's robe in the blood of a goat and brought it to Jacob, asking whether he recognized it.

They did not directly lie in words. They allowed Jacob to draw the conclusion himself that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast.

B. The deceiver is deceived

Chuck strongly emphasizes the moral pattern here. Jacob, who deceived his own father Isaac, now becomes the victim of deception himself.

He was deceived by:

- Laban in the marriage matter
- his sons in the matter of Joseph

This is a vivid example of **sowing and reaping**.

C. Jacob's grief

Jacob mourned deeply and refused comfort. His sons and daughters rose to comfort him, but he would not be comforted.

This is not theatrical grief. Jacob truly believed Joseph was dead, and the grief was overwhelming.

VII. Genesis 38 — Why This Chapter Is Here

Chuck makes the point that Genesis 38 feels like an interruption, but it is included for a very important reason: it shows how the **Messianic line** continued through **Judah**, not Joseph.

Joseph may be the admirable figure, but the line leading to Christ comes through Judah. That reveals something vital about grace: God's purposes move forward through flawed people, not idealized heroes.

VIII. Judah, Shua, and the Wrong Direction

A. Judah's marriage outside the covenant pattern

Judah took a Canaanite wife, the daughter of Shua. Chuck notes that this appears to be a self-directed choice, not a God-directed one.

Judah simply saw her and took her. The implication is that she was not God's chosen instrument for the line that would eventually lead to Christ.

B. Sons born, but the line is not yet settled

Through this union came sons, including **Er, Onan, and Shelah**.

But God would not allow the Messianic line to proceed casually or wrongly. Er was

wicked, and the Lord slew him.

IX. Onan and Misused Obligation

A. Onan's responsibility

Under the custom of the time, Onan was obligated to raise up offspring in his deceased brother's name through Tamar.

He refused to do this faithfully, and the Lord judged him.

B. Clarification from the narration

Chuck is very careful here. He says this passage is often misused in discussions of contraception or masturbation, but that is not the central issue of the text.

The real sin was **rebellion against the God-established duty** to raise up seed for the dead brother. Onan wanted the pleasure without the covenant responsibility.

That is the issue emphasized in the narration.

X. Tamar's Desperation and Judah's Hypocrisy

A. Tamar sent away and forgotten

Judah told Tamar to wait until Shelah grew up, but when Shelah matured, Judah still did not give him to her.

Tamar realized she had been denied justice.

B. Tamar disguises herself

Tamar dressed herself as a prostitute and placed herself where Judah would pass by.

Judah, now widowed, did not recognize her and went in to her. As a pledge, he left his signet, bracelets, and staff.

C. Judah exposed

When Tamar was later found to be pregnant, Judah reacted harshly and self-righteously, calling for judgment against her.

Then Tamar produced the identifying items. Judah immediately realized the truth and confessed, **“She hath been more righteous than I.”**

This is one of the strongest moments of exposure in Genesis. Judah, who wanted to judge publicly, is forced to see his own guilt.

XI. Why Tamar Matters

A. God’s providence in a messy story

Tamar gave birth to twins, **Pharez and Zarah**, and it was through **Pharez** that the line continued toward Christ.

Chuck’s emphasis is clear: this chapter shows that God’s purposes can work through failure, scandal, poor choices, and very broken circumstances.

B. The genealogy of Christ includes imperfect people

Chuck highlights that Matthew names several surprising women in Christ’s genealogy, including **Tamar, Rahab, Ruth**, and **Bathsheba**.

His point is not to dishonor them, but to show that Christ entered a human line marked by weakness, brokenness, and complicated history.

That helps ordinary sinners identify with Him. The Messiah did not come through a polished, spotless human story. He came into real human brokenness.

XII. Key Teaching Themes from Chuck Smith’s Narration

1. God’s plan cannot be stopped by human sin

Joseph's brothers tried to destroy the dream, but the dream came from God. The pit, the betrayal, and the sale into Egypt were not the end of God's purpose.

2. Favoritism destroys peace in families

Jacob's unequal love helped create division, jealousy, and resentment.

3. Guilt does not fade by itself

Joseph's brothers lived with unresolved guilt for years. Only truth and reconciliation can deal with guilt properly.

4. The deceiver often reaps deception

Jacob's own life becomes a study in sowing and reaping.

5. God works through imperfect people

Genesis 38 makes that unmistakably clear. Judah and Tamar's story is not neat, but God's purpose is still at work.

6. Scripture explains Scripture

Joseph's dream helps interpret the imagery of Revelation 12. This is a key example of letting the Bible explain itself.

7. God's grace reaches into messy histories

The Messianic line includes moral failure, painful stories, and broken people. That magnifies grace rather than human merit.

XIII. Closing Application

Joseph's brothers hated him, betrayed him, and tried to erase the future God had shown him. Judah made impulsive choices, Tamar suffered injustice, and the whole family line was marked by weakness and moral failure. Yet through all of it, God was still at work.

Genesis 37 shows that **suffering does not cancel God's calling.**

Genesis 38 shows that **human failure does not cancel God's redemptive plan.**

That means when we look at our own lives, our own families, and our own regrets, we should remember this: God is not limited to perfect people or perfect circumstances. He is sovereign in suffering, gracious in brokenness, and faithful to His promises.