

**THE GOSPEL PROJECT**  
**THE STORY BEGINS**  
**GOD THE COVENANT-MAKER**  
*The God Whose Plan Involves Suffering*

There are iconic pictures in American history such as the sailor kissing the woman in Times Square at the end of World War II that we instantly recognize. Photographs are a modern invention and yet God's Word is filled with amazing pictures – pictures pointing us to the coming Savior who would save us from our sins.

The Old Testament life of Joseph is an “iconic picture” of Jesus, the Messiah promised in **Genesis 3**. Isaiah prophesied in **Isaiah 53** that the coming Messiah would be a “suffering servant.” Joseph experienced a life of suffering in his early years that helps us visualize how God's plan frequently involves suffering for His children. These Old Testament pictures of God's plan confirm the words of Paul in the New Testament. **Romans 8:28 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup> *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Joseph was the 11<sup>th</sup> of 12 sons to Israel (aka as Jacob). He was the first son by Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. Joseph like his father grew up inside a dysfunctional family. When you live in a family with one father, four different mothers, and 12 sons, you have the ingredients for multiple problems.

**Read Genesis 37:2-4 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *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.* <sup>3</sup> *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.* <sup>4</sup> *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.*

Joseph like Jesus was the special object of his father's love. We read of Jesus in **Matthew 3:17 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup> *and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*

Among his brothers, Joseph's coat screamed favoritism. It is possible that it even indicated to them their father's intention to make Joseph his heir. The oldest son – Rueben, the natural heir, had a sexual encounter with one of Israel's concubines, Bilhah. Simeon and Levi, the second and third sons, murdered innocent people because of the rape of their sister. It would be highly unlikely that Israel would choose an heir from sons of his concubines. Therefore, the likely recipient to receive the double portion of the father's inheritance just might be Joseph, the first son of his beloved Rachel who had died in giving birth to Joseph's brother, Benjamin.

We don't know what evil things his half-brothers did, but whatever their sin, Joseph knew and reported to Jacob. From later events in his life, we learn that Joseph was a man of integrity and truth. Those traits most likely led to what appeared to the brothers as tattling. We see even in our times how those who make conscious choices to do right are often criticized by the world.

In the brothers hatred of Joseph, we are reminded of the hatred Jesus the Holy One experienced. He said in **John 15:25 (ESV)** <sup>25</sup> *But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'* Next, Joseph shared two of his dreams which only added fuel to the fire of the brothers' hatred.

**Read Genesis 37:5-11 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more... <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> 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?" <sup>11</sup> And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.*

In the Old Testament God sometimes used dreams and visions to communicate His Word. Joseph's father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all experienced dreams and visions regarding the LORD's promises. It is likely that Israel had shared those experiences with his family and Israel did keep Joseph's dreams in mind yet he chose to chide his son when he shared them. Perhaps Joseph might have been more diplomatic in sharing his dreams or maybe he should have kept them confidential. However, the dreams reflected God's perfect plan and those dreams were literally fulfilled 20 years later.

Now, let's read about Joseph's willing obedience to his father even though he knew that his brothers hated him.

**Read Genesis 37:12-13 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. <sup>13</sup> And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am."*

Surely Israel recognized the dissension among his sons and yet he sent Joseph out to visit them alone and allowed him to wear that special coat that had caused so much irritation.

As Joseph approached his brothers alone in the field they said: *Here comes this dreamer.* Yes, Joseph was a dreamer and there is nothing wrong with dreaming dreams when they come from God. Much later, a warning would be written in **Proverbs 29:18 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> *Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.*

William Carey who became the father of modern missions was in a Baptist Church in England that was in such a stalemate that they no longer went out to preach the Gospel. Carey, a young man who had a heart to win souls in India, stood in a room of what he considered to be godly, mature men and said: "I want to go and tell these people in India that Jesus died for them and that they need to be converted by the grace of God." And they said: "Sit down, young man, if God will convert the heathen He will do it without your help!" He had a vision, and he suffered for his vision, but he became the first man in modern times to take the Gospel to India. Joseph had dreams of God's plan and I feel certain he did not understand those dreams in their entirety and yet he knew God's Presence would be with him. God is

with us too! We read of Jesus in **Matthew 1:23 (ESV)** <sup>23</sup> “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Next, we see the brothers plotting to kill the very person who would become the very one they could not live without.

**Read Genesis 37:23-28 (ESV)** <sup>23</sup> So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. <sup>24</sup> And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. <sup>25</sup> Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. <sup>26</sup> Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? <sup>27</sup> Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. <sup>28</sup> Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

The Ishmaelites are the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Hagar. The Midianites are descendants of Midian, a son of Abraham by Keturah after Sarah died. So technically, the Ishmaelites, Midianites, and Israel’s 12 sons were all related – bonding together to sell one of their own into slavery. Jesus the Messiah was betrayed by one of His closest disciples.

Some would imagine that the mention of both Ishmaelites and Midianites in this slave deal is a ‘mistake’ in the Bible. The most likely explanation is that the Ishmaelites and Midianites were traveling in the same group.

The brothers made the decision to sell Joseph for the price of a slave which was 20 pieces of silver. An interesting parallel is revealed in this sale. It was Judah who proposed the sale for silver and in the New Testament it was Judas (the Greek name for Judah) who sold the Lord out for 30 pieces of silver.

Probably the most significant picture that we should see regarding Joseph’s dreams is how Joseph’s rejection by his brothers is a shadow or picture of how Jesus would be rejected by his “religious” brothers when He came to earth. **Matthew 26:3-4 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered... <sup>4</sup> and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

We need to remember that the providential hand of God often works to accomplish His long-term divine purposes. **Psalms 105** speaks of God’s faithfulness to the nation of Israel over the years. We read of God’s sending Joseph to Egypt in **Psalms 105:17 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup> he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. Joseph’s being sold as a slave was the beginning of God’s plan to preserve a family of about 70 members during a famine that would occur 20 years later. Four hundred later, God would bring out of Egypt a nation of 600,000 men along with their families. Trust in God’s process of preparing for the future.

Although a prisoner, God’s plan brought Joseph safely to Egypt and saw to it that he was sold to one of Pharaoh’s chief officers, Potiphar. Yes, God connected Joseph with a powerful man in Egypt where he

would he would grow in his knowledge of the Egyptian culture but the important thing to remember was *The LORD was with Joseph*,, **Genesis 39:2** Sometimes bad things occur when there is nothing we could have done to have prevented the trouble that befalls us like Joseph's being sold into slavery. Other times the very act of doing what is right brings calamity upon us.

**Read Genesis 39:6-23 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. <sup>7</sup> And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." <sup>8</sup> But he refused and said..., "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. <sup>9</sup> He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" <sup>10</sup> And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her... <sup>11</sup> But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there., <sup>12</sup> she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house... <sup>19</sup> As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. <sup>20</sup> And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. <sup>21</sup> But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. <sup>22</sup> And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners... . Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. <sup>23</sup> The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.

From Joseph's experience in Potiphar's house we see that victory over temptation does not necessarily lead to everything going great like we might expect. Yet, even in the darkest valley of his imprisonment, we read *the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

From the life of Joseph we see a snapshot of how God is in control of the difficulties just as much as He is in control of our good times. The strength of Joseph's actions is a striking picture of what Paul would later write in **Philippians 4:13 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

And perhaps the most glorious picture of all is how Joseph continued to remain the object of God's providential care. God promise to never leave us or forsake is found throughout scripture. **Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *... for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* The only One that God the Father has ever forsaken was His Son. On the cross Jesus the Messiah cried with a loud voice "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (**Mark 15:34**) Jesus was forsaken so that we might be forgiven.

When troubles come, don't immediately say "what have I done to deserve this?" Instead trust in God's plan for the future so that others may see Jesus in your life just like we still see Jesus today in the life that Joseph lived so many centuries ago.