

The Sovereign Hand of God in the Pit

Part Three: When Faithfulness Leads Through the Pit

Why does obedience sometimes lead to suffering?

Why do God's people experience betrayal?

Why does the Lord permit seasons that seem to contradict His promises?

Genesis 37 does not ignore those questions. Instead, it confronts them with remarkable honesty. Joseph's life reminds us that the Lord's providence often leads His children through valleys before bringing them into places of blessing. The pit was not a detour from God's purpose. It was part of God's purpose.

As Joseph followed the path that his father had given him, he eventually found his brothers in Dothan. He arrived with a servant's heart, expecting only to report on their welfare. He had no reason to anticipate what would happen next.

Moses writes:

"And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh"
(Genesis 37:18-19, KJV).

The brothers did not welcome Joseph.

They plotted against him before he reached them.

Notice how they referred to him. They did not call him "our brother." They called him "this dreamer." Their contempt had become so deep that they no longer viewed Joseph through the bonds of family. They saw him only through the lens of their jealousy.

Hatred has a way of distorting our vision.

When bitterness is allowed to take root, we begin to interpret everything through its influence. Motives are questioned. Kindness is dismissed. Relationships are strained. What begins as envy can eventually become open hostility.

The writer of Hebrews warns believers:

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:15, KJV).

Bitterness is described as a root because it often grows beneath the surface before anyone notices its presence. Eventually, however, the fruit becomes visible.

That is precisely what happened in Joseph's family.

The brothers' resentment had quietly grown until it erupted into a murderous conspiracy.

Their plan became even more disturbing.

"Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams" (Genesis 37:20, KJV).

The irony of their words is impossible to miss.

They believed they could destroy God's purpose by destroying God's servant.

They imagined that if Joseph disappeared, his dreams would disappear with him.

Yet God's promises do not depend upon human approval.

The Lord had revealed those dreams.

The Lord would fulfill those dreams.

No amount of human opposition could overturn what God had ordained.

Isaiah declared this glorious truth:

"For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:27, KJV).

The same truth strengthens the believer today.

The purposes of God cannot fail.

His promises cannot be broken.

His decree cannot be overturned by the decisions of sinful men.

This does not minimize the reality of evil.

The brothers were fully responsible for what they intended to do. Scripture never excuses their hatred or softens their guilt. They acted according to the sinful desires of their own hearts.

James explains the source of such evil:

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:13-14, KJV).

Sin originates in the fallen human heart.

God is never its author.

Yet even the sinful actions of men cannot escape His sovereign government.

At this critical moment, Reuben intervened.

"And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again" (Genesis 37:21-22, KJV).

Reuben's courage was incomplete, but his intervention was significant.

He hoped to rescue Joseph later and return him safely to Jacob.

Once again, we see the quiet providence of God.

The Lord used an imperfect man to preserve Joseph's life.

Scripture repeatedly reminds us that God accomplishes His perfect purposes through imperfect people.

That truth should encourage every believer.

Our usefulness to God does not rest upon flawless performance.

It rests upon His sovereign grace.

His power is not diminished by our weakness. Rather, He often magnifies His glory through frail vessels so that the praise belongs entirely to Him.

The brothers then carried out their plan.

"And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it" (Genesis 37:23-24, KJV).

The first thing they removed was the coat.

The garment represented Jacob's love.

It symbolized the favor that had stirred their jealousy.

With one act they stripped away the visible sign of Joseph's place in his father's house.

Then they threw him into an empty cistern.

Imagine Joseph sitting in that dark pit.

Only hours earlier he had been walking in obedience to his father's command.

Now he was abandoned by his own brothers.

Confused.

Injured.

Alone.

Scripture later reveals that Joseph pleaded for mercy.

Years afterward, when famine brought the brothers before Joseph in Egypt, their guilty consciences awakened.

They said:

"We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us" (Genesis 42:21, KJV).

Joseph cried out.

He begged them to listen.

His brothers refused.

Few experiences wound as deeply as betrayal by those we love.

Many believers have known something of that sorrow. A trusted friend turns away. A family relationship is broken. Faithfulness is answered with hostility rather than gratitude.

Genesis 37 does not pretend such experiences are easy.

The pit was real.

Joseph's tears were real.

The betrayal was real.

Yet there was another reality that was even greater.

God had not abandoned His servant.

Nothing in the passage suggests that the Lord had withdrawn His covenant love from Joseph. Quite the opposite. The Lord was accomplishing His purpose precisely through the circumstances that appeared most painful.

David later celebrated this truth in Psalm 139:

"If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there"
(Psalm 139:8, KJV).

There is no place where God's presence cannot reach His people.

He is with His children in seasons of joy.

He is with them in seasons of grief.

He is present in the palace.

He is present in the pit.

This truth ultimately directs our attention to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Like Joseph, Christ was rejected by His own.

Like Joseph, He was hated without cause.

Like Joseph, He suffered though He had done no wrong.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the rejection of the Messiah:

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3, KJV).

Yet the suffering of Christ accomplished what no human mind could have imagined.

Through His death came life.

Through His humiliation came exaltation.

Through His cross came redemption for His people.

Joseph's descent into the pit points us toward the greater suffering of our Savior. It reminds us that God's redemptive purposes often unfold along paths marked by sorrow before they culminate in glory.

Perhaps you are walking through a difficult season today.

You may feel as though you have been forgotten.

You may wonder why the Lord has permitted circumstances that seem so painful.

Genesis 37 assures us that the God who watched over Joseph has not changed.

The pit was never outside His sovereign care.

Neither is your trial.

The Lord who sustained Joseph in the darkness continues to sustain His people today. His providence is never absent. His wisdom never fails. His grace remains sufficient.

The child of God can rest confidently in that promise, knowing that the Father's hand is just as present in the valley as it is upon the mountaintop.

The next article will explore Joseph's sale into Egypt and the glorious truth that God's sovereign providence rules even over the sinful decisions of men, accomplishing His holy purposes without compromising His perfect righteousness.

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