

The Sovereign Hand of God in the Pit

Part Four: God Rules Over the Plans of Men

Genesis 37 reaches its emotional climax with a scene that is both heartbreaking and deeply instructive.

Joseph sits helplessly in an empty pit while his brothers gather together nearby. They hear his cries. They know his fear. They understand exactly what they have done.

Yet instead of showing compassion, they continue with their day.

The narrative is remarkably honest about the hardness of the human heart, but it is equally clear about the sovereignty of God. The Lord has not surrendered control of history to sinful men. Even as Joseph's brothers carry out their wicked intentions, God is accomplishing His holy purpose.

That truth gives tremendous comfort to every believer.

Moses records the scene with striking simplicity:

"And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt" (Genesis 37:25, KJV).

Few verses reveal the cruelty of sin more vividly.

Joseph is trapped in the pit.

His brothers are eating a meal.

There is no urgency to rescue him.

There is no evidence of remorse.

The contrast is difficult to ignore.

Sin has a way of hardening the conscience. What once would have troubled the heart eventually becomes acceptable when repentance is continually resisted. This is one of the sobering realities of our fallen nature.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote:

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9, KJV).

Scripture does not flatter humanity.

It tells us the truth.

Our greatest problem is not merely found in our circumstances. It is found within our hearts. Every sinful act begins with a heart that has turned away from God.

Joseph's brothers did not become wicked when they threw him into the pit.

The pit simply revealed what already lived within them.

At the very moment when Joseph's situation appears most hopeless, another group enters the story.

A caravan is approaching from Gilead.

The merchants are traveling toward Egypt.

To the casual observer, this might seem like a coincidence.

Scripture teaches us otherwise.

There are no coincidences in the providence of God.

The caravan did not happen to arrive at the right time.

The merchants did not accidentally choose that route.

The Lord had ordained every detail.

Long before Joseph was born, God had determined how He would preserve the covenant family during the coming famine. The arrival of these travelers was one more piece of that unfolding plan.

God's providence is often quiet.

It rarely announces itself with dramatic displays.

More often, it works through ordinary events that only later reveal their significance.

Judah then proposed a different course of action.

"And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content" (Genesis 37:26-27, KJV).

At first glance, Judah's suggestion appears more merciful than murder.

In reality, it is motivated by profit rather than compassion.

Joseph would not die in the pit.

He would instead lose his freedom, his home, and his family.

His brothers were willing to exchange their own brother for money.

Sin often disguises itself as wisdom.

It persuades us that a lesser evil is somehow righteous.

Yet partial restraint is not the same as genuine repentance.

The brothers still intended evil.

They simply chose a different form of it.

Even so, God's purpose remained unchanged.

The brothers believed they were removing Joseph from their lives forever.

God was sending Joseph exactly where he needed to be.

This is one of the clearest demonstrations of divine providence found anywhere in Scripture.

Years later, after Joseph had become ruler in Egypt and the famine had brought his brothers before him, he spoke words that summarize the entire narrative:

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20, KJV).

This verse deserves careful attention.

Joseph does not deny the evil his brothers committed.

He names it honestly.

"You thought evil against me."

Their jealousy was evil.

Their betrayal was evil.

Their deception was evil.

At the same time, Joseph recognizes that God was accomplishing something far greater through those very events.

"God meant it unto good."

Notice that Joseph does not say God merely used evil after it occurred.

He declares that God intended good through the very circumstances that sinful men intended for evil.

This is the mystery and majesty of divine providence.

God never becomes the author of sin.

The brothers acted willingly according to the corruption of their own hearts, and they remained fully accountable for their actions.

Yet their rebellion could not frustrate God's eternal purpose.

Instead, their actions became the means by which His purpose was fulfilled.

Scripture consistently teaches this truth.

The psalmist declares:

"The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all"
(Psalm 103:19, KJV).

Notice the scope of that statement.

His kingdom rules over all.

Not merely the events we understand.

Not merely the seasons we enjoy.

His rule extends over every moment of history.

Nothing falls outside His sovereign authority.

Solomon expresses the same truth in Proverbs:

"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Proverbs 16:33, KJV).

What appears random to us is never random to God.

He governs every detail according to His perfect wisdom.

The chapter then concludes this portion of Joseph's story:

"Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt" (Genesis 37:28, KJV).

Imagine Joseph watching his homeland disappear behind him.

His future was unknown.

His circumstances had changed dramatically.

He was no longer a beloved son in his father's house.

He was now a slave traveling toward a foreign land.

Everything familiar had been taken away.

Everything except God.

That is the great comfort of this passage.

Joseph lost his freedom.

He lost his home.

He lost the visible blessings he had known.

He did not lose the covenant faithfulness of God.

The Lord who had watched over him in Hebron watched over him on the road to Egypt.

The Lord who had been present in the pasture was present in the caravan.

The Lord who had ordained his steps would continue to direct every moment of his life.

The same confidence belongs to every believer in Jesus Christ.

There are seasons when we cannot understand the path before us.

Doors close unexpectedly.

Plans change.

Sorrows arrive without warning.

We may feel as though our lives have been turned in an entirely different direction.

Genesis 37 reminds us that the child of God is never abandoned to chance.

Our lives are governed by a wise and gracious Father whose purposes cannot fail.

This truth shines most brightly when we consider the cross of Christ.

From a human perspective, Calvary appeared to be the triumph of evil. Judas betrayed the Savior. False witnesses accused Him. Roman soldiers crucified Him.

Yet Peter declared on the Day of Pentecost:

"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23, KJV).

The greatest injustice ever committed became the means by which God accomplished the salvation of His people.

If the Lord sovereignly governed the cross, then we may rest confidently in His government of every lesser trial we encounter.

Joseph's journey into Egypt was not the end of God's story.

It was the beginning of a greater work.

Many years would pass before Joseph understood what God was doing.

Even so, the Lord was faithful every step of the way.

He always is.

The God who ruled over the plans of Joseph's brothers continues to rule over every event in history. His providence remains perfect. His wisdom remains infinite. His grace remains sufficient for every circumstance His people will ever face.

The fifth and final article will draw the series together by showing how Joseph points us to the Lord Jesus Christ and how the doctrine of God's providence provides lasting comfort and assurance for every believer.

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