

Lesson 9

The Forgiving Prince

Joseph and his brothers, from Genesis 37 - 46

The Jesus Storybook Bible - pgs.76-83

The story of Joseph stretches from chapter 37 through 50 of the book of Genesis. One of the main points of the story is that no one can by sin or disobedience thwart God's saving purposes. Even the enemies of God can only help establish his plans. This was the case with Jesus: when world rulers, religious rulers, and Satan sought to destroy him, they only lifted him up. This was the case with Joseph. If he hadn't been betrayed, his family would not have been saved physically (from famine) or spiritually (from their besetting sins).

Jacob's family was to be the bearer of the true faith and the messianic seed. But, spiritually speaking, it was heading toward shipwreck because of sin. Jacob's emotional rejection of Leah and idolization of Rachel had sown terrible discord in the lives of their children. Jacob built his life around Rachel's child — Joseph — and was cold and uncaring to his other children.

As a result, Joseph was on his way to becoming cruel, shallow, and arrogant, while his brothers were embittered and hateful. But God intervened. God used the brothers' own venomous intentions in order to have Joseph sold into slavery in Egypt and, ultimately, for Joseph to become the instrument of his brothers' physical and spiritual regeneration. Joseph becomes the savior of those who rejected him.

Joseph says to his brothers in Genesis 45:4 – 7: "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. . . . God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

Notice how Joseph twice says "you sold me" and twice says "God sent me." He sets these against one another. Which is it? Is Joseph in Egypt because they sold him or because God sent him? The answer is in Genesis 50:20 where Joseph says, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."

This is a very rich and sophisticated view of how God relates to historical events. On the one hand, Joseph does not say, "You didn't do anything wrong; you couldn't help it; God made you do it." If that were the case, and they had only been God's puppets, then they would not have actually sinned and could not be held accountable for their evil deeds. On the other hand, Joseph does not say, "You did it; God only allowed it; then he had to fix things." If that were the case, and God had been only a bystander, he would not be the sovereign Lord who ordains, plans, and controls all things. Instead, Joseph says that the brothers most definitely chose to betray him, and they are responsible for that action. Yet, God all along arranged to work through their sin to further his good purposes.

Joseph's understanding of human history is remarkably like that of Peter's in Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:27 – 28. In the former Peter says, "[Jesus] was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Notice that the betrayal of Jesus (like the betrayal of Joseph) was completely, actively planned and accomplished by God. It had to happen — it was set. Yet the people who betrayed Jesus were nonetheless "wicked." This is neither "fatalism," where God determines all things in spite of our choices; nor is it "humanism," where we determine all things through our choices. It is a nuanced biblical view, which says that God determines all things through our choices.

Memory Verse

Genesis 50:20

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."

***Lesson taken from *The Jesus Storybook Bible Curriculum*, written by Sally Lloyd-Jones and Sam Shammas.

If you do not have a copy of The Jesus Storybook Bible, we will have them for purchase in Cranmer Hall for \$10.