

Riches to Rags to Riches to Rags

Genesis 34-39

September 13, 2026

Have you ever been falsely accused of something you didn't do and ended up getting disciplined, fined, or fired because of it? If so, you can relate to the man we'll meet today in Gen 37. Please turn there. We are back with Jacob this week after getting stoned in the park last week and youth Sunday before that. Although we weren't able to livestream last week, you can find the message on my Facebook page.

When we last left Jacob, he had just returned to Canaan after having spent 20 years in Haran working for his uncle and father-in-law Laban. He married both of Laban's daughters and ended up with 11 sons and 1 daughter to bring back home. We noticed how he made peace with Laban and then wrestled with God at Peniel where God changed his name to Israel. We also breathed a sigh of relief after finding that his brother Esau, who wanted to kill him 20 years ago, had cooled down and received him in peace. Last we saw Jacob and his family, they were living near Shechem in the Promised Land.

After they had lived there a while, we read in Genesis 34 where one of the men of Shechem violated Jacob's daughter Dinah. In retaliation, her brothers, eager to defend her honor, concoct a deceitful plan that ensures their success having learned well from their father, the master deceiver Jacob. They killed all the men of Shechem and stole everything worth stealing. This, of course, made their family a stench to surrounding Canaanites.

In Chapter 35, God calls Jacob to move his family to where God earlier met him in the dream with the stairway to heaven. God again appeared to him and repeated His blessing to give he and his descendants this land and that nations and kings would come from him. In response, Jacob set up a stone pillar as a memorial, a standing stone, which is another use of rocks in the Bible. He poured out a drink offering, probably wine, as well as oil on it and officially named the place Bethel.

Then they moved again and while they were traveling, his favorite wife, Rachel, gave birth to another son. She named him Ben Oni-son of my sorrow, but Jacob called him Benjamin, son of my right hand. Sadly, Rachel died during childbirth and Jacob set up another stone pillar, a tombstone if you will, where they buried her near Bethlehem. We saw what is called Rachel's tomb when we were in Israel but it is almost certainly not the actual location.

After another round of sexual sin in the family, chapter 35 ends with the listing of all of Jacob's sons and of him finally meeting up with his father, Isaac, whom he had

deceived many years earlier. We also read there of Isaac's death at 180 years of age and how Jacob and Esau together buried their father. The next chapter gives us the full rundown of Esau's family and descendants, the Edomites.

All that brings us to the beginning of Genesis 37 where we will begin today. If you are able, please stand to honor God. 1 Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. 2 This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. 5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." 8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. 9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Say Joseph. Jacob has been the focus of the last several chapters but now the spotlight turns to his son Joseph. We learn a couple key truths about Joseph in this passage. 1. He's in his late teens. A teenager. Say Uh-oh. 2. He tattled on his older half-brothers. Say uh-oh. Not a good way to endear himself to them. 3. He was his father's favorite. Say uhoh. Jacob failed to learn how damaging it is for parents to play favorites. 4. Because he's daddy's favorite, daddy also gave him a richly ornamented robe or as the KJV says, a coat of many colors. Say uh oh. Believe it or not, archaeologists have found this coat and I have it with me today. We are uncertain of the exact meaning of the Hebrew word but it was much more than just a Jeff Gordan jacket. It wasn't a fashion statement, it was a symbol of leadership. Clothing indicated position and this would have announced their dad's choice of Joseph to be family leader over all of them, not the oldest son. You can imagine how that went over. And 5. His brothers hated him. Say hate. They couldn't stand him. They despised him. And to make matters worse, Joseph didn't seem to care. He flaunted his favorite son status in their faces.

This passage shows us Joseph bragging about his dream where his brothers are bowing down to him. What an idiot. If you know your brothers already hate you, don't give them more reason. But he did. Imagine being Judah or Simeon. Grrr. Dad has no idea what a jerk this boy is. He sure has dad snowed. Then he had another dream this

time dad and mom are also bowing down to him with them. And he's dumb enough to tell them about that one too. This time, his father finally gets involved and tells Jr to cool it. You're getting too big for your britches, too conceited for your multi-colored coat. And while his brothers were jealous, his father had had some experience with dreams himself and it says he kept the matter in mind.

Some time later, and later in this chapter, Jacob sends his favorite son to check on his less favorite sons. They are out pasturing the sheep and goats about 65 miles north of home and when they see him coming, they begin to conspire. Vs 19 "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. 20 "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." Say uhoh. Joseph, sporting his technicolor coat, comes strutting over the hill and has no idea what a bad day he is about to have. He's about to find out.

Vs 21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. 22 "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father." Say Reuben. Not the sandwich, the oldest son who was in charge and who would have to answer for whatever happened that day in the pasture. Even though he didn't care for Joseph either, he knew that murdering their own brother was a very bad idea. So he concocts his own plan to spare his brother till he can get him back home.

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe -the richly ornamented robe he was wearing - 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it." Well, well, well. Proud boy Joseph is down in a well, stripped of his richly ornamented robe. And they all sat down to dinner. During dessert, here come their 2nd and 3rd cousins, their great uncles' children and grandchildren on a spice run to Egypt. Dothan was on a major international highway, an I-81 of the day and these camels were the tractor trailer convoys. (right lane) And one brother has idea- let's sell the dreamer and make us some money! And they all go along. For 20 shekels of silver, they sell their half brother to their cousins confident that this will be the end of him. 20 shekels is about 8 ounces. Half a pound of silver for a human being. This was about 1900BC and this was the exact going rate for slaves at the time, as shown by 2 other sources including the Code of Hammurabi, verifying the Bible. And off he goes 300 miles to Egypt. Imagine how Joseph felt; probably bound and looking back at his blood. Either weeping or scowling or both. Hopeless. Enslaved. Sold out by his own brothers. Whatcha thinking now, dream boy? A very bad day indeed. From riches to rags.

Apparently Reuben was away during dinner and when returns and finds out what happens, he's not happy. He will have to answer to dad! No worries! His 10 scoundrels put their heads together to come up with another deceitful plan. They take the colored

coat, the symbol of their brother's position and their father's love, tear it up and dip it in goat's blood and send it back to dad. "Hey dad, isn't this what you gave to Joseph? We found it all covered with blood. We don't know what happened. Some lion or tiger or bear, oh my, must have ambushed him and torn him up. This was all we found." Say lies. John Trapp has said, "One sin [allowed] makes way for another. He that has fallen down one round of Hell's ladder knows not where he shall stop, till he breaks his neck at the bottom."

But with no DNA evidence to prove otherwise, dad is devastated. His favorite son now dead. Gone. Vs 35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him." Jacob would not get over this for many years. Anyone who has lost a child knows his sorrow. It's not supposed to happen that way. His heart is permanently broken. His hope perpetually crushed. And all Joseph's brothers keep secret lie.

We're not going to preach on chapter 38, at least not now. It's another story of sexual brokenness, but one that God redeemed by bringing from it the future Messiah. Was it His plan for Judah and Tamar to do what they did? Never! But in typical Romans 8:28 fashion, God is able to work all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose as we'll see with Joseph whose story we pick up again in chapter 39. Jacob thinks Joseph is dead, his brothers think they'll never see him again but God is at work even in spite of their sin of selling their brother. Vs 1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there." Just so happens he gets bought by a very powerful and wealthy man named Potiphar. Say Potiphar. As Captain of Pharaoh's Guard meant that he was head of the Secret Service.

Vs 2 The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in **everything** he did, 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care **everything** he owned. 5 From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian **because** of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on **everything** Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. 6 So he left in Joseph's care **everything** he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with **anything** except the food he ate." Say wow! God's watching over Joseph even in a foreign land under foreign rulers. Not only is God watching, He's blessing this young Hebrew and blessing his master through him. It's so apparent, Potiphar gets out of his way and lets him have full reign of everything he owns. He entrusted him, just like our Invitation to give today. Who needs his brothers? From rags back to riches. BTW, the word for attendant in vs 4 is the exact same one found in other Egyptian texts from that time, again verifying the dependability of the oldest book of the Bible.

So even though Joseph is 300 miles away from home and separated from the father who loves him, God is still watching over him. "Now Joseph was well-built and handsome," Say uh oh. Joseph has it all. In addition to wisdom and God's blessing and youth, he's well-built and handsome on top of it. He's ripped! The KJV says he was a goodly person and well favored. The Hebrew means beautiful, comely, fairest one. No wonder his brothers hated him. Vs 7 and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" Joseph, who could have perhaps fared very well from this arrangement says no way. She keeps trying. Vs 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her." Sexual harassment is nothing new. Don't believe all women or all men. We're all sinners.

Say integrity. His father wouldn't know. His brothers wouldn't know. And after all he'd been through, didn't he deserve a little fun? Maybe this was God's reward! A 1000 times no! See how we justify sin? **My** situation's different. No one will know. Yes they will! The truth always comes out! Always! And Joseph knew that! Instead of following his heart and his lust, Joseph followed the Lord. In Vs 9 he recognizes that not only would this be a sin against his master, but ultimately a wicked sin against God. It's not just between he and she. It involves families and community and church and God. Think! Joseph did the right thing, unlike his brother Judah in the previous chapter or his brother Reuben earlier, with his dad's concubine or the men of Shechem in chapter 34. And he tries to avoid Marilyn Monroe, I mean Mrs. Potiphar as much as possible.

Vs 11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. 13 When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, 14 she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. 15 When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." 16 She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told **him** this story: "That Hebrew slave **you** brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." She accuses **Jacob** of attempted rape and calls him "that Hebrew slave" as an intentional racial slur, inferior to us free Egyptians! She even tries to blame her husband for bringing this guy home.

See what happens? Young man, young woman? That person who says they really love you? No! They really lust you! And as soon as they don't get their way, they'll turn on you in a heartbeat. Joseph can be very thankful he hadn't given in or who knows what this woman would have done if he failed to meet her expectations? Don't flirt with sin. Don't even go near it, like Joseph. As I Cor 6:18 says, "Flee from sexual immorality. All

other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.” And 2 Tim 2:22 says, “Flee the evil desires of youth.” Don’t walk, do what Joseph did and **run** away from temptation as fast as you possibly can!

Vs 20 “Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.” It sounds to me like his master might have suspected she was lying. Why else would he not kill Joseph? He knew his wife and by now he knew Joseph. Vs 19 does say he burned with anger but it doesn’t say at who. At any rate, this Hebrew servant who went from riches to rags to riches is now back to rags in an Egyptian prison where he will be for quite some time.

So where is Jesus in all this? We say the whole Bible is about Jesus and we can certainly see Him as the watermark on each of these pages. For like Joseph, Jesus spent time in Egypt. Like Joseph, Jesus came to His own brothers, the Jews, who hated and rejected His Father’s choice. They stripped him and sold Him to the Gentiles for not 20, but 30 pieces of silver. Inflation. Before His ministry He was tempted 40 days in the desert, and although sexual temptation is not mentioned, we’re told that He was tempted in **all** points, just as we are, yet without sin. Tradition also tells us that Jesus was put down in a cistern in Caiaphas house. There are many parallels between the two. Joseph was a type of Jesus.

But Joseph’s story is not over. Jesus’ story wasn’t over. And neither is yours. Maybe you’ve been mistreated by your siblings, misjudged by your parents, taken advantage of by your boss and lied about by others. You may be living in a prison of shame and abandonment. Everyone has done you wrong. God knows. God sees. And God cares! He’s not done with you. Because we have the Bible, because we have Jesus, we know the rest of their stories. Joseph didn’t. But he remained faithful, honest, and pure in spite of it all. And while there are many similarities between Jesus and Joseph, only Jesus died for all the sinners in this story. For Reuben’s and Judah’s lust, for Jacob’s deceit, for Joseph’s conceit, and for Mrs. Potipher’s lust and lies. Friends, He even died for all the sinners in your story and mine, including you and me. For your sin and my sin. If you’ve never accepted Him, do it today. Because He wants to take the rags of your sin and turn them into the riches of His glory.