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# **The Dothan Conspiracy**

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**Series: Joseph and the Sovereignty of God**

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## THE PREVIEW

The caravan of history continues its pilgrimage through the land of the living legends of Scripture, and as we who observe its journeys stand often in amazement, we must be continually encouraged that the concept of “real people” is not an invention of the television networks. God produced that program years ago in His far-eastern studios and the re-runs continue to evoke the same responses in man thousands of years later.

I suppose the key to it all is two-fold.

1- God really *does* use real people. His film festival of life is not a make-believe drama made up of cardboard saints performing before a backdrop of canvas skies and artificial lighting. God’s design is not to paint perfect images of sinless saints before us and then shame us into submission because we can’t measure up to unattainable goals. Our God uses *anything*. Our God uses *anybody* (anybody who will let Him). The want ads of God’s classified section might well read:

Wanted:  
Sinners in any condition.  
New owner will cleanse,  
transform and renew.  
Apply at Calvary!

Thus far, our heroes of God’s handbook of happiness have often been the product of broken homes, or troubled homes. They have often been reared amidst conflict, the product of every conceivable form of rejection. They were, before God took control of their lives, deceivers, frauds, and spoiled brats. But God took them and cleansed them and used every experience they ever had to change them. He then used them for His glory. God uses *real people* like you and me, defects and all. That ought to be a source of joy and hope to us. It is to me.

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2- I never cease to be amazed that not only does God use real people, but He uses them one at a time. It is true, God sees us as part of a nation and God has a plan for this nation. It is true, God sees us as a part of a fellowship of believers and God has a plan for each fellowship. God sees us as a part of His bride, the body of Christ, and God has a plan for His bride, and it is a beautiful plan. And, of course, God even sees us as an integral part of the family that we are in and God has a plan for each family.

But God does not see us primarily as the parts of any of those necessary units. God sees us, each one of us, as a special, unique, divinely designed life for which Christ gave His life and for which He would have done so had it been the only life to ever breathe. Each person to God is as if he or she were God's *only* person, the only one who ever lived. The hairs of each of our heads are numbered, the Scripture says. Each of our tears is collected in a holy bottle of God's eternal love, the Scripture also tells us. When we awaken at sunrise, the eyes of the omnipotent One, Scripture says, are focused upon us. He waits for us. He longs for our every prayer. He longs for our every response. He loves us. He always has loved us, each of us individually. God desperately wants us to understand that in the midst of the chronicles of Scriptural history, the focus of the lens is always on people. Then, invariably, He lifts from the pages, from among the nations, from among the bride, from among the family, one solitary character: one person to amplify the detail with which He examines and encourages every single person.

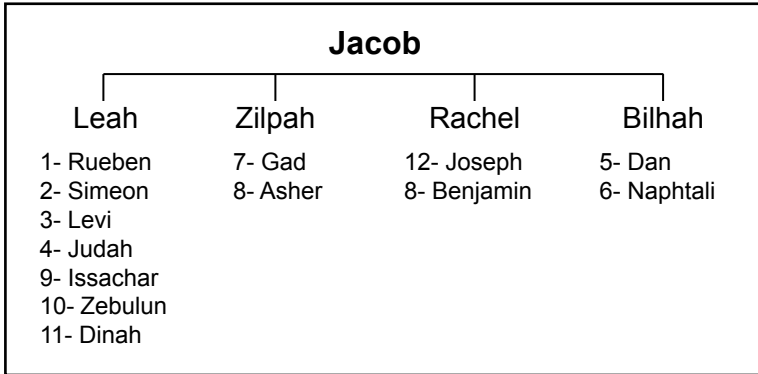
That's what is happening again in this lesson in the living legend of Jacob. Jacob has been blessed with thirteen children, twelve boys and a girl. Can you imagine that? A football team and a cheerleader. But the Holy Spirit takes and personally interviews one man: the quarterback-to-be. He is a young man named Joseph. While He reports the happenings of the whole family, we will look at it all through the eyes of one man. We will look at it through the life of one man. So this lesson will look at part 1 of the life of Joseph.

For several reasons, he is one of the living legends of all times. Now before we begin, we must remember that Joseph's family was a mixture of Daddy Jacob's offspring from four women. These women included his beloved wife Rachel and her sister Leah. (Leah is the one Jacob didn't particularly want, but she came as a bonus in a packaged deal.) Then there were two servants or

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concubines, Zilpah, Leah's maid, and Bilhah, Rachel's maid.

Let's make a chart that might help give us some perspective of this family, and it might help us to visualize their relationships to one another.



Here is the order in which these children were born. First of all was Reuben. Leah was the first to conceive and Reuben was her son. He was 29 years old when this story takes place. Then came Simeon, then Levi, then Judah. The first four boys were born of Leah. Then Rachel got miffed that she wasn't having children, and she took her maid Bilhah and gave her to Jacob to have children by her. Children number 5 & 6, Dan and Naphtali came from her. Leah was not to be outdone and told Jacob to take her servant, Zilpah. From her came forth Gad and Asher, numbers 7 & 8.

Then, lo and behold, God again opened the womb of Leah and there came forth Issachar and Zebulun. I think by now they were running out of good boy's names. They did the best they could.

Then number 11 came forth the first and only girl, Dinah. As often is the case, God saves his best for last, and at long last He opens the womb of Rachel. Joseph, the twelfth child comes forth. Lastly, baby Benjamin comes. Now baby Benjamin was only 7 or 8 years old as this passage in Genesis begins to unfold.

Rachel died at childbirth when Benjamin was born. You probably need to note that while Reuben was Jacob's firstborn, Joseph, his twelfth born, the child of his true love, would receive the birthright and the accompanying mantle of spiritual leadership. For the second generation in a row, jealousy is going

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to affect the entire family. So this is the outline of the children and how they fit together.

### THE PLOT

First let's look at the plot, the story itself. Until we understand the story, we can't understand the characters in the story or the character of God as revealed through the story, or the portrait of God as reflected by the story. This story is divided into two parts for simplicity. Part I is the Impossible Dream. Part II is the Dothan Conspiracy. Part I takes the first 11 verses of Genesis 37. It begins like this:

Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned,  
in the land of Canaan.

These are the records of the generations of Jacob.

(Genesis 37:1,2 NAS)

This does not imply that we have a complete historical account of Jacob's boys, but rather a God's eye view of how God accomplished His purposes through these boys. As we mentioned, the story now focuses on the life of one man and how life looked from his perspective.

Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

(Genesis 37:2 cont. NAS)

Moms, have you ever had that happen? Never. So from the start we learn a lot about the setting of this living legend. The curtain goes up and here is Joseph, 17 years old. We know his age. He was a young shepherd. We know his profession. His partners in this shepherding enterprise were all of his half-brothers. So we know his framework for fellowship. Now the story begins with tattle-tale Joe, this 17 year old shepherd boy, squealing on his brothers for something they had done. We might call him "the informer".

Now there is no indication that Joseph was giving a bad report. Joseph was giving an honest report and the report happened to be bad. There is a difference. But to his brothers, there was no difference. They had not counted on having a spy in their midst. So here we pick up the first seeds of real conflict between Joseph and his next of kin. To them, he was a traitor. We can already

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see that Joseph was going to be different. Perhaps he was a man of extremely high principles. Perhaps he was a man who thus far lacked the discretion to communicate those principles with wisdom. At any rate, we see a wall of conflict going up between Joseph and all the rest of the boys. Now Dad adds a few bricks to the wall:

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age [this means he was the son who cared for him in his old age]; and he made Joseph a varicolored tunic. (Genesis 37:3 NAS)

Enter another generation plagued by a partial Pop. You would think the pre-conversion scars of Jacob's growing up in a home divided by the conflicts of favoritism would have left their mark. You would think a man would learn from the mistakes of the prior generation. You would think so, but often we don't. We somehow think those principles Poppa broke will only bend beneath the weight of our infractions. Jacob hadn't learned that parental favoritism is a deadly disease. It infects the favored with the venom of pride and presumption. It infects the not-so-favored with the poison of rejection. Jacob missed that. So God decides to make the most of it.

Now Jacob's favoritism was blatant. He makes for Joseph a garment arrayed in the splendor of many colors. This was a mark of honor and rank that was usually worn only by the chief of a family or by the one designated to be his heir. It was the mark of royalty and priesthood. You might look at Exodus 28:4; Exodus 39:1, and II Samuel 13:18-19 to get a picture of how these varicolored coats were used to designate royalty or priesthood. So this robe not only set him apart as God's favorite, it also set him apart as Dad's replacement. Although he was the twelfth-born, he was to have the honors of the first-born. Chalk up another gallon of bitter spirits for the boys at Jacob's house. Now how do we know that?

Now his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all the brothers; so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms. (Genesis 37:4 NAS)

This is the normal result of favoritism. The other kids hate the favorite. So Joe wasn't likely to win the congeniality award at Jacob's house. On a scale of 1-10 he was a "10" in Dad's eyes and a "0" in everybody else's. You would think such a standing in the polls would cause Joe to guard his tongue lest he further

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alienate his brethren and his sister. Think again. Discretion was not on his list of character qualities as he approached his eighteenth birthday. Joseph was to have visions of grandeur and guess whom he bores with the details?

Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

And he said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had:

for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."

Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.  
(Genesis 37:5-8 NAS)

So we see the progressive development of the spirit of murder. It begins with envy, progresses to resentment, develops into hatred, and can only lead to taking the life of its object physically or, by destroying his reputation, crucifying his character or rendering him useless. The fire was on high at Jacob's house and the "Let's Fry Joseph" idea was about to hit its fevered pitch. You would think that Joseph would either bug off or zip his lip. Guess again. He keeps egging them on:

Now he had another dream, and related it to his brothers,  
(Genesis 37:9a NAS)

He said, "Hey, I've had another dream, I can't wait to tell you." Now this kid was either dense or dangerous. He was either too slow to realize his life was on the line or too proud to care. Now listen to this dream. He was filled with humility and sensitivity. Wrong. This is the kind of vision you ponder in your heart; you don't broadcast it all over.

"Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

And he related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?"

And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in his mind.  
(Genesis 37:9b-11 NAS)

Now Joseph's dream was understandably disconcerting



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because they understood it. Here is what it meant. The sun represented Jacob. The moon represented Jacob's wives, Rachel, Leah and their two maids. The eleven stars represented the eleven brothers. Joseph was the big star. What Joseph said in his dream was that before long, all of the family would bow down and worship him. The boys just hated him the more. Jacob was disturbed, but the Scripture says that he began to think much about its implications. It was the way Mary pondered in her heart when Jesus said, "I must be about my Father's business." The Scripture says that Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart. Jacob pondered this latest dream in his heart. It isn't so hard for parents to visualize spiritual greatness for their child, but brothers and sisters seldom see a sibling as the King Kong of their generation.

At any rate, one truth surfaces from this incident that we can learn for ourselves. It is the matter of spiritual superiority and the tongue. Our unbelieving relatives are not at all awed by our religious activities. Have you noticed that? Our grade in the Sunday Schools of life do not interest them. Ladies, listen, that unbelieving husband of yours does not develop spiritual hunger because you are at a Bible Study late instead of fixing supper. He develops real hunger and a bitter spirit that this God of yours is in competition with him for your affections. He is not impressed that you go to Bible Study Fellowship or Christian Women's Club or WMS. He is not even impressed with your Scripture verses that you have memorized and plastered all over the kitchen and the refrigerator. He is certainly not impressed when you flaunt your spirituality by throwing around spiritual clichés. That just makes him feel as though you have taken on a new language and by talking that way around him, he thinks you are talking around him. Like Joseph, do you parade your relative religiosity as a Spiritual Wonder Woman and then wonder why he is not impressed by the woman you are? Oh, that I Peter 3:1 might be the standard of evangelism in the home with every unbelieving mate. Paraphrased it says this:

Hush your mouth and live the life and he may be won without a word.

That counsel is not just for wives, it is for all of us. We become so enamored with our visions of spiritual grandeur that we think our kids, our employees, and our neighbors ought to bow down spiritually and be impressed that they have the privilege of rubbing elbows with spiritual giants like us. Like Joseph's

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brothers, they are not at all impressed by our dreams. They are repulsed by our pride. The bottom line is love. Love knows how to keep its mouth closed. So much for “The Impossible Dream”.

Now unfolds the Dothan Conspiracy. Even if you have never heard the story, you can pretty well imagine what is about to happen.

Then his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock in Shechem.

And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “I will go.”

Then he said to him, “Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock; and bring word back to me.” So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. (Genesis 37:12-14 NAS)

Now I don’t know about you, but I think maybe Joseph inherited this disease he had, “Densio in the Noodleo,” from his Dad. Jacob sends his favorite son out to the boonies alone to hunt for his eleven brothers who couldn’t stand him. I don’t think that designates him as Parent of the Year. But at least we know that Joe was either obedient and brave or daring and dense. But he promptly said, “Yes sir.” He packed his razor, deodorant and snake bite kit, hugged Pop, and caught the first mule train for Shechem Junction.

Now when the fog lifts, we find our eager beaver Joseph wandering around aimlessly in a field near Shechem, lost. So God sends a stranger to intercept him. The stranger asks, “What are you looking for?”

“I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock.”

Then the man said, “They have moved from here; for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

And they said to one another, “Here comes the dreamer!

“Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of these pits; and we will say, ‘A wild beast devoured him.’ Then let us see what will become of his dreams!”

(Genesis 37:16-20 NAS)

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So the Welcome Wagon wasn't waiting for baby brother when he got to Dothan. Just the sight of him at a distance triggered this bitter spirit that was still latent in the hearts of his brothers. It is possible that Issachar had just finished a new Perry Mason novel where somebody kills his brother and stuffs him in a well. We don't know where they got the plot, but Plan A to resolve the dilemma of the dreamer now unfolds. Fortunately, there was one dissenting vote.

But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life."

Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. (Genesis 37:21,22 NAS)

Isn't it strange who your friends turn out to be? You remember Reuben. He is the one on our list a few minutes ago who was the rightful first-born. He is the one Joseph usurped on his way to becoming favorite son. He is also the same Reuben who committed adultery with his father's concubine in Chapter 35. No doubt his father, a man of great mercy, had shown great mercy and thus provoked great love. At any rate, Reuben, the eldest of the bunch, sells Plan B with the ulterior motive of later coming back and taking his brother home.

So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him;

and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it. (Genesis 37:23,24 NAS)

Now we don't read anything of Joseph's resistance, do we? Nothing in Genesis 37 gives us any indication, so we might get the mistaken idea that he thought it was all a joke and offered no resistance. But that is not true. If you were to turn a few years down the road, in Genesis 42:21, you will find these boys finally panic-stricken, guilty, and confessing. This is what they say,

Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress in his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen. (Genesis 42:21 NAS)

There is the missing link. Joseph was panic-stricken for his life, but these hard-hearted heavies wouldn't move. So unmoved in fact were they that we read in verse 25 that they even sent

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for a Big Mac with fries and sat down to eat a meal. Here is baby brother screaming his lungs out in a dry well and they are feeding their faces. Now these wells were all over the area. They were hewn of solid rock and they were bigger on the bottom than they were on the top so that they sloped in and it was literally impossible for one person to scale those walls and get out by himself. For that reason you read in many passages, such as Jeremiah 38:6, that they were used often as dungeons so that prisoners could rot and die. This same Hebrew word is translated in more than 15 passages figuratively to mean “a state of sin or death.” So you can imagine what is being said by the use of this well.

Reuben offers a creative alternative when the troops sit down to eat. For some reason he is not there. We will find out in the next verse as this incident unfolds. It is possible that he didn't like a Big Mac and he had gone out for a Reuben sandwich. The other ten brothers were still eating and in verse 25 says:

And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt. (Genesis 37:25 NAS)

What a coincidence. No, no more of a coincidence than the fact that the sun rose this morning. No more a coincidence than the man who happened to be passing by as Joseph was looking for his brothers, aimlessly lost, just happened to know where they were. It may have been coincidental to them, but these guys were some of God's little helpers. They were an unsuspecting band of men and women, believers and unbelievers alike, who just happen to pass by at just the precise moment you need them. You know who and what I mean.

Have you ever stopped to note the “God's little helpers” that have passed through your life? Have you ever praised God for sending them? They are angels unawares. They are heaven-sent ambassadors who pass that corner just as the car quits, who come into your life just as you need them, who so often pass through and out of your life just as quickly as they enter. Maybe a broadcaster on a radio station that just happened to be on the day you were so desperate. A friend who just happened to appear or re-appear just when your life had scraped bottom and there seemed to be no hope. Then this voice from nowhere lovingly says, “Try Jesus.” Life begins all over again.

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God's little helpers. Who would have thought that an unbelieving group of Ishmaelites would be a part of the split-second timing of God? And what must Joseph have been thinking? Surely at the time these men must have seemed like agents of Satan himself to him. This was a caravan of Arabian merchants on their way to Egypt with drugs the Egyptians used for both embalming and for medicine. These groups would have had four camels abreast, each one tied to the other in teams. The whole body would be called a caravan. Each of these caravans would be sub-divided into separate companies they called "cottors". Each "cottor" would have its own name and might consist of several thousand camels itself. Each camel had a bell around its neck. So the camel drivers would go on foot and sing along to these bells. You can just imagine it now.

So no doubt Joseph, even twenty feet down in a dry well heard this symphony of uninvited bell ringers. I am sure the notes turned sour quickly as Joseph overheard Judah talking to his brothers. It was almost as if God said, "I have some good news and some bad news." The good news starts in verse 26:

And Judah said to his brother, "What profit would it be to kill our brother and cover up his blood?"

(Genesis 37:26 NAS)

"Amen brother, preach on!" you could hear coming up from down in the well. But the bad news was only a second behind:

Come let us sell him instead to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hand on him, for after all he is our brother," and they listened to him.

(Genesis 37:27 NAS)

Joe's "Amen" turned into "Hey, man, you've got this all wrong." But here comes some Midianite traders looking for slaves. There was a big profit in slaves in Egypt. Up comes Joseph out of the pit and is going, going, gone for the healthy sum for \$12.40. It was about \$6.00 less than Judas got for selling The King of Glory. So as we see the dust settle, we see Joseph in the hands of a band of Ishmaelites heading to Egypt as a slave. To him, it looked like the end. To God, it looked like the beginning.

Joseph thought he was bound for oblivion, but he was being hand-carried at another's expense right into the center of the will of God. That is precisely how it is often in your life and in mine. How often we think those unexpected traumas in our lives are the signals of an unhappy ending when they are nothing

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more than God-designed miracles to transport us to the middle of God's will where the Master intends to fulfill His plan. How deceiving are the circumstances of life. They are God's camels to transport us into the center of His heart.

Now comes the cover-up. It is Jacob's Watergate. Reuben returned to steal Joseph back and take him home, but he was gone. Reuben begins to mourn. This boy turns out to be a winner. But it was no accident that he was gone when the Ishmaelites came through. Now whether Reuben went along with this scheme, we don't know. But this loyal, loving pack of brothers take their brother's coat of royalty, kill a male goat, dip the coat in the goat, and send it to Poppa with this memo: "Dear Dad, could this be Joseph's? Love, the Boys."

As Jacob had deceived his father with the skin of animals, so now his boys deceived him with the blood of animals. Verses 33-35 tell us that Jacob went to pieces and mourned for days. These cagey conmen arrive on the scene to comfort Dad. For some reason we read in verse 35 that they were no comfort at all. Verse 36 sets the transitional stage for the next lesson. It simply reads:

Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard. [Literally this is the chief executioner.] (Genesis 37:36 NAS)

### THE PORTRAIT

Please tune in next lesson for the next episode in one man's family. God isn't finished yet; He is only beginning. But, what is God trying to say through all of this? He is saying take a quick look at Joseph. Carefully watch the imprint that he bears. He is a type of Christ. He is the beloved of his father, rejected of his brothers, sent to certain death to fulfill the will of God.

Here are just a few of the portraits of Jesus engraved on the life of Joseph. Look at the picture. He was the beloved of his father, even as it was said of Jesus in Matthew 3:17; "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased. Hear ye Him." He was appointed heir of his father even as we read in Hebrews 1:2 about Jesus; "Whom He hath appointed heir of all things." He was a shepherd boy even as we read of Jesus in John 10:14; "I am the Shepherd, the good one." He exposed the sins of his people even as we read of Jesus in John 1; "In Him was life

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and that life was the light of men. The light came into the world and the darkness comprehended it not.” He was rejected by his brothers even as Jesus was in John 1:12; “He came unto His own and His own received Him not.” He was envied and hated even as we read in John 15:18-25; “It is written they hated Him without a cause.” He was envisioning a coming kingdom even as we read in Matthew 24 at the end of verse 30;

and they shall see the Son of man coming in clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (KJV)

He left his father’s house in obedience to find his brothers even as we read of Jesus in Philippians 2:

[Though He was God,] ...thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But made Himself of no reputation,...

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death.

He left his father’s home for his brothers’ sake. His brothers conspired to slay him even as we read;

(from Philippians 2:6-9 KJV)

And they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth, and kill Him. (Matthew 26:4 NAS)

He was stripped of his robes of royalty even as we read of Christ in Matthew 27:28-31. He was sold for a few pieces of silver even as Jesus was in Matthew 27:6. Joseph, too, saw his murderers vow their innocence as we read in Matthew 27:24;

...I am innocent of this man’s blood. (NAS)

This is just a first of several portraits that we will be seeing of Jesus as the portrait of Joseph unveils. He is a foretaste of the coming King. Small wonder that he is a living legend. So now as we close, we have seen the preview, the plot and the portrait. What about the plan? What else might God be saying to us through this first episode of Joseph’s life? He is saying at least two things. The first is this: that the seeds of greatness come in unexpected packages. The character of greatness is often borne of weakness transformed, rather than strength magnified. Here was an informer with an unbridled tongue, totally insensitive to how he was alienating those about him. He had visions of grandeur and more than a cupful of pride. He evoked jealousy, bitterness and resentment among even those closest to him. He misused spiritual insight for his own glory. He was so insensitive

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to danger that he marched headlong into the jaws of death with a smile on his face. The marks of a leader? The seeds of greatness? From man's perspective, hardly. From God's perspective, certainly.

God was to turn that insensitivity into survival, the vision into foresight, the pride into leadership, the misused insight into discernment. That is God's way. Not only were his characteristics in question, his circumstances also bore the marks of defeat. The circumstances of partial parents, peer rejection, and even attempted murder were to be the brands God used to shape a life that could bear the burdens of life. The seeds of greatness come in faded packages planted by God in the garden of adversity, but they bloom into fullness that puts the bouquets of this world to shame.

The second point is a cousin to the first. There is a great future in failure when God is in it. From where man stands, Moses was a failure; he blew his big chance. From where man stands, Abraham was a failure; he couldn't even produce a son. From where man stands, Joseph was a failure, he was rejected by his brothers and sold as a slave. Peter was a failure; he cursed his Lord and folded when the heat was on. Paul was a failure; his goal was to reach the world and he ended up in jail. From man's perspective, Jesus was a failure. He came to His own and His own received Him not. He came to establish a kingdom and the King ended up on a cross.

But death is God's key to life. Earthly failure is the dynamite He uses to blast open the future to a yielded life. Moses, Abraham, Joseph, Peter, Paul, and Jesus had the greatness of God revealed through what the world sees as ruin. Out of the ash heaps of life's defeats come the birth pangs of new life, real life, spiritual life. The world is amazed.

So no matter where you are in life today, God can use you. You may be bankrupt. Your marriage may be in shambles. You may have failed in your career. You may be hopelessly addicted to some evil. Today God is saying to you, "You are My kind of person. These are the kinds of circumstances I love. I can take them and change you. I want to take you from the well of defeat, from the caravan of slavery into the freedom of new life in Christ." You may feel that you have failed at the Christian life. You are in a big club. But, praise God, you are still on the team. God



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never trades you. He wants you for the first string. Joseph is on the sidelines as we leave him in this lesson. He is in a seemingly hopeless condition. But do you know what? God is getting ready to make him the captain of the team.

So it is that Joseph, God's living legend, beckons to us to ask ourselves this question:

### WHAT IF I'M JUST A FAILURE?

What if I am just a failure?  
What if all I've seemed to do  
Is travel on and leave in shambles  
What I've touched as I've passed through?

What if as a parent  
Or a mate I've seemed to fail?  
What if I've to crime resorted  
What if I've been sent to jail?

What if I have lost a fortune?  
Foolish waste has cost it all.  
What if every turn I've taken  
Led me up against a wall?

How can ever in this life  
Jesus use someone like me?  
How can Jesus use a failure?  
What good on earth could my life be?

Friend, Jesus shops for future leaders  
Often in the failure store.  
Often those He picks to cherish  
Have been tried and failed before.

But through failure's crushing signals  
Oft' there breathes a dying breath;  
And a God of resurrection  
Has a life to bring from death.

From the rubbish heap of failure  
Sovereign Holiness will choose  
Men and women oft' defeated  
Saying, "Here's one I can use."

*(continued next page)*

### The Dothan Conspiracy

So it was to be with Moses  
“Lead My people out,” his chore  
Not until he’d failed completely  
Could God open up the door.

So it was with Abraham  
Father of the world to be  
Childless still at 90; then  
God’s miracle his eyes could see.

So it was as well with Joseph  
Dad’s beloved, dreamer, fool  
Not till he was sold into slavery  
Could he really be God’s tool.

That’s the message oft’ repeated  
From the Holy Spirit’s pen  
God delights to turn life’s failures  
Into His successful men.

What if I am just a failure?  
What if all my marks are poor?  
You may very well be  
Just what God is looking for!

FOR FOCUS AND APPLICATION

1- If you were writing a book highlighting the value of a transformed life, would you have included the failures of those who supposedly had found the way? Why is God so transparent in Scripture? Why does He show the failures of even His most trusted servants? Aren't you glad He still uses "real people"?

2- Study the chart of Jacob's family on page 5. Can you see why Joseph was so important to him? How could he have handled his favoritism differently? Why is partiality as a parent so deadly? What does it do to the favorite? To the others? How does God use this very mistake for His glory? Does this give you hope as a parent? As a child?

3- Do some additional research on the meaning of that coat of many colors. Why would Jacob choose his next to youngest to bear the honors of the firstborn? How familiar was he with the role of the firstborn?

4- At first, the boys' hatred of Joseph was based on his father's partiality. How do we know that? Verse 4 tells us that. But soon Joseph added nails to his own coffin. He began to dream and he told his dreams to his family. What might he have done differently? How did God use his mistake? What can you teach your children about humility and discernment through this passage?

5- Why is it so important for new believers or believers with unbelieving mates to use discretion in their testimony? Why aren't our unbelieving mates or friends impressed by our newfound enthusiasm? What are they looking for? Why is I Peter 2 and 3 so important to men and women alike?

6- Why did God place that man in the field who knew where Joseph's brothers were? Why did that caravan of camels come along *just when it did*? Has God sent "little helpers" along in your life? Do you acknowledge them and praise Him when He does?

7- What is so unusual about Reuben being the brother who wanted to save Joseph?

8- Why does the brothers' cover-up seem like the natural follow-up to their sin? Why do we so often lie to cover-up what we have done?

9- Memorize Genesis 37:4. If you are prone to be partial or

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prejudiced at home or at work and demonstrate that partiality, meditate on that verse for at least one month.

10- Begin a list of the weaknesses in Joseph's life. As his life progresses, make a note of how God turns each of them into strength. Stop and praise Him for each time He does.

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