

# **GENESIS 37: JOSEPH'S BETRAYAL**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Have you ever been wronged by someone for what seems like no reason?
  - i. Especially when it seemed like it was for doing the right thing?
- B. This is what happened to Joseph
  - i. He received two dreams that he thought he should tell his brothers
  - ii. In return they tried to kill him and then sold him into slavery

## **II. OVERVIEW**

- A. Joseph was a seventeen year old boy who was Jacob's favorite
  - i. Jacob made him a coat of many colors
  - ii. His brothers hated him because of this
- B. Joseph had two dreams
  - i. He and his brothers were binding sheaves in the field
    - a. His sheaf rose up and his brothers sheaves gathered around and bowed down to it
  - ii. The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him
  - iii. He told his brothers and they hated him more
- C. Joseph's brothers were pasturing the flock near Shechem
  - i. Jacob asked him to go check on his brothers
  - ii. When they saw him approaching, they decided to kill him
  - iii. Reuben heard it and convinced them not to kill Joseph
    - a. Instead throw him in a pit
    - b. Reuben intended to go back and save him later
- D. A caravan of Ishmaelites came by
  - i. Judah convinced his brothers to sell Joseph to them
  - ii. The traders took him to Egypt
- E. Reuben returned and Joseph was gone from the pit
  - i. So they killed a goat and covered Joseph's coat in its blood
  - ii. They told Jacob he had been killed by an animal
- F. Joseph was sold to Potiphar who was the captain of the guard of Egypt

## **III. THE LAND OF HIS FATHER'S SOJOURNINGS – V. 1**

- A. Jacob is still a nomad like Abraham and Isaac

- B. God's promises have yet to be fulfilled

#### **IV. IN THE LAND OF CANAAN – V. 1**

- A. Jacob stayed in Canaan
- B. Compared to Esau in the previous chapter who left Canaan and lived in Seir

#### **V. THE GENERATIONS OF JACOB – V. 2**

- A. This begins the story of Jacob
  - i. Though mostly about Joseph and Judah
- B. Isaac's story began in Genesis 25:19 and ended in 37:1
- C. Two views of when this story takes place
  - i. Before Jacob left Shechem
    - a. Joseph is called “the son of his old age” – v. 3
      - i. Implies Benjamin hasn't been born yet
    - b. The sun and the moon bowed down to Joseph – v.9
      - i. The moon represents Rachel who would have still been alive
    - c. Jacob asks if Joseph's mother shall bow down to him – v. 10
    - d. Jacob's sons pastured their flocks near Shechem – v. 12
      - i. This would have been about 50 miles north of Hebron
        - a. If they traveled that far north to Shechem, they could have traveled the opposite direction
      - ii. The land north of Hebron was good land for shepherding<sup>1</sup>
  - ii. After Jacob arrived in Hebron
    - a. Leah or Bilhah would have been a surrogate mother to Joseph
    - b. Joseph dreamed of eleven stars – v. 9
      - i. Implies Benjamin was already born
    - c. Jacob sent Joseph from Hebron – v. 14

#### **VI. WITH THE SONS OF BILHAH AND ZILPAH – V. 2**

- A. Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher
  - i. Joseph learned shepherding from them<sup>2</sup>
  - ii. Matthew 25:21 ***His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’***

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<sup>1</sup> Vander Laan, R. (2023). *Shepherd Lifestyle*. That the World May Know. <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/shepherd-lifestyle>

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (2010). *Be Authentic: Exhibiting Real Faith in the Real World: OT Commentary, Genesis 25-50*. David C. Cook.

- iii. If we want great things in life, we must start small and be faithful with that

#### **VII. BAD REPORT – V. 2**

- A. Jacob's sons tended to cause trouble
- B. Joseph felt it was important to tell his father about what they were doing
  - i. It probably felt like tattling to his brothers
  - ii. But it was likely something very bad as they were not strangers to murder
  - iii. Joseph had been given the authority to provide this report

#### **VIII. MORE THAN ANY OTHER OF HIS SONS – V. 3**

- A. Jacob's favoritism was already shown in how he protected Rachel and her sons from Esau
  - i. Genesis 33:1-2 ***And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all.***
- B. He should have known better
  - i. Considering the disfunction it caused when he was growing up
  - ii. Children learn disfunction from their parents
  - iii. Just like Isaac learned to lie about his wife from Abraham
- C. Why didn't God appear to Jacob and tell him to stop this cycle of favoritism?
  - i. God had a plan to use this family's sin for good

#### **IX. THE SON OF HIS OLD AGE – V. 3**

- A. Could have been referring to wisdom
- B. So Jacob was calling Joseph the wisest of his sons<sup>3</sup>

#### **X. ROBE OF MANY COLORS – V. 3**

- A. Or, robe with long sleeves
- B. This word is used in only one other verse about Tamar, David's daughter
  - i. 2 Samuel 13:18 ***Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves, for thus were the virgin daughters of the king dressed. So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her.***
  - ii. Possibly a robe of one with royal blood, rather than a shepherd
    - a. Certainly a robe that signified privileged status<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kugel, J. L. (2020, December 12). *His Father's Face*. James Kugel | Author, Professor, Religious Scholar. <https://www.jameskugel.com/weekly-torah-reading-vayyeshev-december-12-2020-2/>

<sup>4</sup> Guzik, D. (2018). *Genesis 37 - Joseph Is Sold Into Slavery*. Enduring Word. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-37/>

- iii. Likely meant that Joseph was to be Jacob's heir<sup>5</sup>
  - a. He was the youngest but elevated to the position of the oldest
  - b. Another reason why his brothers hated him

#### **XI. THEY HATED HIM – V. 4**

- A. Hatred leads to many worse sins
  - i. Proverbs 10:12 ***Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.***
  - ii. 1 John 2:9 ***Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.***
  - iii. 1 John 3:15 ***Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.***

#### **XII. COULD NOT SPEAK PEACEFULLY – V. 4**

- A. This is often the result of favoritism in the home

#### **XIII. JOSEPH HAD A DREAM – V. 5**

- A. First dream in the Bible in which God does not speak

#### **XIV. HE TOLD IT TO HIS BROTHERS – V. 5**

- A. Probably not the best idea
- B. Unclear if he told it to them to antagonize them or if he was naive

#### **XV. SHEAVES – V. 7**

- A. Joseph's first dream is connected to the circumstances of the eventual fulfillment
  - i. Joseph and his brothers are binding sheaves of wheat in the dream
  - ii. Joseph's brothers would eventually come buy grain from him in Egypt

#### **XVI. RULE OVER US – V. 8**

- A. Implies royalty and kingship
  - i. Joseph already seems to have received the authority of the birthright
  - ii. The question is not whether Jacob's sons would bow to Joseph
  - iii. The question is will they do it willingly
    - a. The dream implies they will
- B. Implies Joseph would receive the covenant blessing
  - i. But it would actually be Judah

#### **XVII. ANOTHER DREAM – V. 9**

- A. Purpose of the second dream is to emphasize that they have been established by God
  - i. Same reason God gave Pharaoh two dreams that meant the same thing

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<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe

- a. Genesis 41:32 ***And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.***

**XVIII. TOLD IT TO HIS BROTHERS – V. 9**

- A. The first time he told them his dream it could be considered a mistake
- B. Now we see a trend
  - i. Joseph is prideful regarding his elevated status
- C. Just because we receive a dream or word from the Lord doesn't mean we should always share it with others

**XIX. THE SUN, THE MOON, AND ELEVEN STARS – V. 9**

- A. These were created to rule the heavens
  - i. Now the sky rulers are bowing down to Joseph

**XX. HIS FATHER REBUKED HIM – V. 10**

- A. Even Jacob couldn't see how his favored son could be elevated above his own father and mother

**XXI. YOUR MOTHER – V. 10**

- A. Indicates this possibly takes place while Rachel is still alive
  - i. Before they left Shechem

**XXII. NEAR SHECHEM – V. 12**

- A. Where Jacob had been living in compromise

**XXIII. BRING ME WORD – V. 14**

- A. Because Joseph had previously brought Jacob a bad report
- B. Jacob was having his youngest son check in on his brothers and tattle to his dad
  - i. This would not sit well with his brothers
  - ii. He was essentially the foreman

**XXIV. SEEKING MY BROTHERS – V. 16**

- A. Joseph's brothers were keepers of sheep
- B. Joseph was a keeper of brothers
  - i. Opposite of Cain
    - a. Genesis 4:9 ***Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"***

**XXV. DOTHAN – V. 17**

- A. About 10-15 miles west of Shechem<sup>6</sup>
- B. On a major trade highway between Egypt and the Near East<sup>7</sup>

**XXVI. CONSPIRED – V. 18**

- A. Hebrew *nakal*
  - i. Means crafty, deceitful<sup>8</sup>
  - ii. Like the snake in the garden

**XXVII. KILL HIM – V. 18**

- A. They would commit the sin of Cain
  - i. Cain was jealous of his brother's acceptance by God
  - ii. Joseph's brothers were jealous of his acceptance by Jacob

**XXVIII. PITS – V. 20**

- A. Or, cisterns
  - i. Usually very deep with narrow openings
  - ii. Made it nearly impossible for a prisoner to escape without a rope<sup>9</sup>
  - iii. Possibly the reason the place was called Dothan<sup>10</sup>

**XXIX. FIERCE ANIMAL – V. 20**

- A. Like the fierce animal crouching to attack Cain<sup>11</sup>
  - i. Genesis 4:7 ***"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."***
- B. Except now the brothers were now acting like fierce animals

**XXX. WHAT WILL BECOME OF HIS DREAMS – V. 20**

- A. Joseph's dreams are the motive for wanting to kill him
- B. They are unaware their plot will lead to the fulfillment of the dreams
- C. They didn't oppose Joseph's dreams for his own life
  - i. But they opposed God's plans for Joseph's life

**XXXI. RESCUE HIM OUT OF THEIR HAND – V. 22**

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<sup>6</sup> Guzik

<sup>7</sup> Armstrong, S. (2012, December 18). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 37C*. Verse By Verse Ministry International. [https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis\\_2011\\_lesson\\_37c](https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_37c)

<sup>8</sup> Armstrong, S. (2012, December 18). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 37C*. Verse By Verse Ministry International. [https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis\\_2011\\_lesson\\_37c](https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_37c)

<sup>9</sup> Wiersbe

<sup>10</sup> Armstrong, S. (2012, December 18). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 37C*. Verse By Verse Ministry International. [https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis\\_2011\\_lesson\\_37c](https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_37c)

<sup>11</sup> Guzik

- A. Reuben's plan wasn't to convince his brothers to not kill Joseph
  - i. But to rescue him once they tried<sup>12</sup>

**XXXII. RESTORE HIM TO HIS FATHER – V. 22**

- A. This would never happen
- B. Because Reuben wouldn't take a stand against evil
  - i. He only tried to work around it
- C. Reuben knew his father would hold him responsible for Joseph's death<sup>13</sup>

**XXXIII. NO WATER IN IT – V. 24**

- A. Otherwise Joseph would have drowned

**XXXIV. THEY SAT DOWN TO EAT – V. 25**

- A. Reveals the extreme hardness of their hearts
- B. They could even hear Joseph from where they ate
  - i. Genesis 42:21 ***Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us."***

**XXXV. WHAT PROFIT IS IT – V. 26**

- A. Judah was concerned about what they could gain
  - i. Not just ridding themselves of an annoying brother
  - ii. Especially since they were going to ruin Joseph's and Jacob's lives
- B. Reveals how morally corrupt Judah was

**XXXVI. OUR OWN FLESH – V. 27**

- A. This is a terrible way to justify selling Joseph into slavery

**XXXVII. HIS BROTHERS LISTENED TO HIM – V. 27**

- A. Unlike Reuben who was the firstborn
  - i. Reuben would try to take authority in the family by force
    - a. Genesis 35:22 ***While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine. And Israel heard of it.***
  - ii. But it was Judah who the brothers listened to

**XXXVIII. MIDIANITE TRADERS – V. 28**

- A. Midianites were descendants of Midian son of Abraham and Keturah

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<sup>12</sup> Guzik

<sup>13</sup> Armstrong, S. (2012, December 18). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 37C*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.  
[https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis\\_2011\\_lesson\\_37c](https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_37c)

- i. Genesis 25:1-2 **Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.**

B. Seem to be interchangeable with the Ishmaelites

#### **XXXIX. LIFTED HIM OUT OF THE PIT – V. 28**

- A. Joseph must have thought it was a joke by now
  - i. Or that they changed their minds
  - ii. Maybe he was even apologetic for telling them the dreams<sup>14</sup>

#### **XL. TORE HIS CLOTHES – V. 29**

- A. Expression of extreme grief and despair
- B. This is empty despair
  - i. Reuben could have stopped this but didn't

#### **XLI. WHERE SHALL I GO – V. 30**

- A. Reuben was more concerned about what would happen to him rather than Joseph
  - i. Proves he saved him out of selfish motives
- B. We are asking the question of where did he go when Joseph was sold
  - i. Now he is asking the question of where shall he go now that Joseph was sold
  - ii. He was probably angry that he left in the first place
- C. He thought he was doing the right thing by saving his brother
  - i. But it wasn't God's intention for Joseph to be freed<sup>15</sup>

#### **XLII. SLAUGHTERED A GOAT – V. 31**

- A. Jacob killed a goat to deceive his father
- B. Now his sons are doing the same thing
- C. This is actually the second goat in this story
  - i. Joseph was the first
  - ii. Leviticus 16:7-10 ***Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.***

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<sup>14</sup> Guzik

<sup>15</sup> Armstrong, S. (2012, December 23). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 37D*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.  
[https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis\\_2011\\_lesson\\_37d](https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_37d)



- iii. Joseph is the goat sent away and the second goat is sacrificed
- iv. Jesus would eventually become both goats
  - a. He was crucified outside Jerusalem
  - b. His blood was poured out as a sin offering

#### **XLIII. DEVoured HIM – V. 33**

- A. Jacob was convinced Joseph was dead
  - i. His brothers found the coat without finding the bones
  - ii. This is why Jacob didn't try to find him

#### **XLIV. GO DOWN TO SHEOL – V. 35**

- A. Jacob would eventually go down to Egypt
  - i. Genesis 46:3-4 ***Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."***
- B. He would die in Egypt
  - i. Genesis 49:33 ***When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.***
- C. Egypt is synonymous with the grave

#### **XLV. SOLD HIM IN EGYPT – V. 36**

- A. Foreshadows what would happen to the rest of his brothers in a few generations

#### **XLVI. CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD – V. 36**

- A. Pharaoh's personal bodyguard
- B. In charge of executions<sup>16</sup>

#### **XLVII. POINTS TO JESUS**

- A. Joseph is a picture of Jesus
  - i. He was loved by his father
    - a. John 3:35 ***The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.***
  - ii. He was obedient to his father
    - a. John 6:38 ***For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.***
  - iii. He wore a royal robe

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<sup>16</sup> Wiersbe

- a. Mark 15:17 ***And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.***
- iv. He was destined to be worshipped by Israel
  - a. Romans 11:26 ***And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”***
- v. All Israel would bow to him willingly
  - a. Ezekiel 20:40 ***“For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord God, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings.***
- vi. He was hated and rejected by his brothers
  - a. Isaiah 53:3 ***He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.***
- vii. His rejection would lead to Israel’s exile from the land of Canaan
  - a. Matthew 24:1-2 ***Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”***
- viii. The dispersion of Israel would result in the salvation of the Gentiles
  - a. Romans 11:11 ***So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.***
- ix. He was with his father before he was sent
  - a. 1 John 1:1-2 ***That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us...***
- x. He was sent by his father to Israel
  - a. John 6:38 ***For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.***

- xi. He was wandering alone
  - a. Luke 9:57-58 ***As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”***
- xii. His brothers conspired against him
  - a. Luke 22:3-6 ***Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.***
- xiii. He was stripped of his clothes
  - a. Matthew 27:28-30 ***And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head.***
- xiv. He was placed where he could never be rescued
  - a. Matthew 27:41-42 ***So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.”***
- xv. He descended below the earth
  - a. Ephesians 4:8-10 ***Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)***
  - b. Matthew 12:40 ***For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.***
- xvi. He was sold by his brothers
  - a. Matthew 26:14-16 ***Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And***

***they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.***

xvii. He was as good as dead

- a. Luke 23:46 ***Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.***

xviii. He was sent to Egypt as a child

- a. Matthew 2:13-15 ***Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”***

#### **XLVIII. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

- A. Have you ever been tempted to show favoritism toward a child or a parent? What kind of dysfunction could this potentially cause?

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- B. Do you think it was right for Joseph to tell his brothers about the dreams? Why or why not?

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- C. Do you believe God speaks to people in dreams today? Why or why not? If so, what is the purpose of a dream from God?

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- D. Have you ever had a parent show favoritism toward another sibling? How has that affected you? How have you dealt with it?

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E. Why did God choose to use Israel's sin instead of confronting it and stopping it?

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F. Have you ever done the right thing for the wrong motives? How can we avoid this?

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G. Is it hard for you to accept that God will allow people to sin and then use that sin for good?  
Why or why not?

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H. Do you believe God allows people to exercise free will? Why or why not?

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**XLIX. FURTHER STUDY**

A. Read Luke 2. What are some similarities between Joseph and Jesus between this chapter and Genesis 37? Why do you think Luke is drawing attention to these details?

- B. Read Jeremiah 38. What are the similarities between Jeremiah and Joseph? What does this say about Jeremiah and his message?

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- C. What are the images in Revelation 12:1 that hint at the identity of the woman in this chapter? How does this information assist you in interpreting the symbolism of the rest of the chapter?

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- D. Read Psalm 73. What did the psalmist do when he started to feel jealous? How did he resist this sin?

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- E. Do you think Joseph's brothers are exercising free will in this chapter? See Psalm 76:10; Proverbs 16:9; Proverbs 19:21; Isaiah 64:8.

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