

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## “When Dreams Turn Into Nightmares”

Genesis 37:1-36

2003

### Introduction

According to George Fox, author of Foxes Book Of Martyrs, there are three types of dreams:

1. Dreams that result from a multitude of business and an overworked mind
2. Dreams that represent the whisperings of Satan in man in the night-season
3. Dreams that come as the result of God speaking supernaturally to man

Job 33:14-18 “For God does speak now one way, now another -- though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword.”

But sometimes dreams are nothing more than hidden desires of the soul, and as a result, are rarely fulfilled in the manner we might hope:

After waking up one morning, a woman told her husband, "I just dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for our anniversary. What do you think it means?"

"You'll know tonight." he said.

That evening, the man came home with a small package and gave it to his wife. Delighted, she opened it to find a book entitled "The Meaning of Dreams."

We all have had dreams in life:

Visions in the night as well as hopes and aspirations for the future.

In the text of Genesis 37, Joseph experienced both the visions in the night and the aspirations for his future. But before the dreams of God would be fulfilled in his life, Joseph would know first hand the perplexing and agonizing experience of when “Dreams Turn Into Nightmares.”

### I The Account of Joseph, Jacob’s Son

A. Joseph was Jacob's 17 year old son [Verse 1-2]

1. He was tending sheep with his brothers
2. He brought his father a bad report about his brothers

Joseph wasn't simply ratting on his brothers. He was reporting to his father as one who had been entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the work of his brothers.

**Application:** The price of leadership and truthfulness

Jn 7:7 “The world ... hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.”

B. Jacob's favoritism surfaces again [Verse 3]

1. He **loved** Joseph more than his other sons

Favoritism was a sinful and destructive childrearing flaw that was now entering its fourth generation in the line of the patriarchs. And while it was equally destructive in every generation, Jacob's favoritism was about to take his family to a whole new level of self-destruction.

2. He made Joseph a richly ornamented **robe**

**Ornamented robe** = “A long and sleeved tunic”

It was a tunic extending all the way down to the wrists and ankles, as opposed to the ordinary shorter one with no sleeves that working men wore. It was a garment that distinguished its wearer as a person of special distinction, who was not required to do the ordinary work of laborers. It was the garment of a manager or supervisor. Joseph's brothers hated this garment and what it symbolized.

**Application:** Favoritism is strictly forbidden in scripture

James 2:1, 9 “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism ... But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.”

C. Joseph's brothers' response: [Verse 4]

1. They **hated** Joseph

**Application:**

John 15:18-19 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”

2. They could not **speak** a kind word to him

**Could not speak a kind word** = Shalom = “Favorable or peaceable”

## II The Dreams Of Joseph

The Bible indicates that God reveals His will to believers through a variety of means including: His written His Word (2 Tim 3:16-17), prompting by the Holy Spirit, godly counsel, circumstances, and dreams and visions (Joel 2:28).

Every other means of revelation must be measured against the revealed will of God recorded in His Word. Anything that contradicts Scripture must be rejected.

Jer 23:28 “**Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully.**”

A. The dream of the **sheaves**

1. The details of the story: [Verse 5-7]

a. The brothers were all binding sheaves  
It is interesting to note that Joseph's dream involves sheaves, which subtly points to his future role in overseeing all of Egypt's grain distribution.

b. Suddenly, their sheaves **bowed** to his  
**Bowed** = Shachah = "To prostrate oneself in homage"  
The interpretation of this dream was no mystery to Joseph or his brothers. They immediately understood the dream to mean that Joseph would rule and reign over his brothers.

2. The brother's response: [Verse 8]

a. They were **indignant**  
"Do you intend **reign** over us?" = "To ascend the throne as king"  
"Will you actually **rule** us?" = "To exercise dominion or power over"

Amazingly, 23 years later in fulfillment of Joseph's dream, all 11 of his brothers would prostrate themselves in submission to Joseph on at least 5 different occasions (Gen 42:6-7; 43:26, 28; 44:14-16; 50:18).

b. They hated him all the more  
**All the more** = Yacaph = "To add or augment their hatred"

**Application:**

Jn 17:14 "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world."

B. The dream of the sun, moon and **stars** [Verse 9]

Why two dreams?

Gen 41:32 "The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon."

If Joseph was unwise in revealing the first dream to his brothers, he was nothing less than foolish to share the second dream.

1. The details of the story:

a. The sun, moon and stars **bowed** down to Joseph  
**Bowed** = Shachah = "To prostrate oneself in homage"  
This is a clear reference to the family of Israel and is repeated in Rev 12:1.

2. The response of Jacob and his sons: [Verse 10-11]

a. Jacob was indignant and rebuked Joseph  
**Rebuked** = "Ga`ar = "To correct or reprove"  
"Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

b. His sons were **jealous**

**Jealous** = Qana' = "To be envious"

Acts 7:9 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt."

**Application:**

James 3:16 "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."

Envy and jealousy are extremely destructive character traits. If you don't resist them and take every thought captive and make them obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:5), they have the potential to destroy your marriage, ruin your career, alienate you from friends and family, and strip you of spiritual joy and contentment.

What stirs up thoughts of envy and jealousy for you?

1. When someone talks about their many accomplishments.
2. When someone tells you about a large inheritance received
3. When someone shows you their new car, boat, computer, house, furniture, etc. or tells you about their recent vacation.
4. When someone gets an award, recognition or promotion that you felt you deserved

c. Jacob kept the matter in mind

Like Mary, the mother of Jesus (Lk 2:16-19), Jacob treasured up all these things and pondered them in his heart.

### III The Nightmares Of Joseph

A. Jacob sent Joseph to **check** on his brothers [Verse 12-17a]

1. Initially, they were in Shechem grazing their flocks

Shechem was approximately 50 miles from Bethel.

Shechem was the city where Dinah had been violated and where Jacob's sons had slaughtered all of the men (34:30). And while the pasturelands of Shechem were rich and fertile, there was always the danger of some angry relative Shechemite seeking vengeance. So Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers.

2. But Joseph eventually found his brothers in Dothan: 12 miles north of Shechem

B. The diabolical plan unfolds [Verse 17b-20]

Off in the distance, a lone figure was approaching. It was probably Joseph's coat that made it possible to identify him from such a long distance. Just seeing Joseph triggered the pent-up feelings of jealousy and hostility toward their Father's favored son – the one they called "The dreamer."

1. The brothers **plotted** to kill Joseph

**Plotted** = Nakal = "To act treacherously, deceive or conspire"

Prov 27:4 “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?”

**Application:**

Matt 5:21-22 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.”

2. Reuben attempted to rescue Joseph [Verse 21-22]

**Rescued** = Natsal = “To snatch away, preserve or save”

If you recall from Genesis 35:22, **Reuben** committed incest with his father’s concubine, Bilhah, stripping himself of the privileges of the first-born son. But despite his previous failure, he still felt the weight of responsibility and was compelled to do what he could to rescue his brother.

But instead of simply standing up to his brothers and saying, "This is wrong! We can't do this!", he tries a more subtle approach by appealing to the logic and advantage of not shedding Joseph’s blood.

**Application:** One of the scarcest character qualities today is courage.

Prov 29:25 “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.”

a. They stripped him of his robe [Verse 23]

The brothers must have taken perverse pleasure in ripping off this sign of their father’s favor and authority from the back of Joseph.

b. They threw him into an empty cistern [Verse 24]

**Application:**

Have you ever felt like you were thrown into the empty cistern of life?

Ps 40:1-3 “I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.”

c. They sat down to eat their meal [Verse 25]

The callousness and cruelty of Joseph’s brothers is shocking!

There is no sense of guilt, no remorse, not even a loss of appetite

For the next 23 years, Joseph's cries for mercy would haunt them in their dreams and ring in their ears.

Gen 42:21 “They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this

distress has come upon us.”

3. The brothers refine their plan [Verse 25-28]
  - a. They sell Joseph to Midianite traders for 20 shekels of silver  
*20 Shekels* = The price Moses later fixed for a young slave (Lev 27:5).  
 Ex 21:16 “Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.”
  - b. They fabricate a story for their father [Verse 29-32]  
 “We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe.”  
 Lev 19:11 “Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.”
4. Jacob falls for the deception [Verse 33-35]
  - a. He is convinced that Joseph has been torn to pieces by a wild animal  
 The brothers undoubtedly prided themselves in the fact that they never said Joseph was dead. They simply “deceived” their father into believing this. Isn’t it ironic that this deception involved the killing of a goat, just as the deception of Isaac had (Gen 27:9,16-17, and 19).
  - b. He put on sackcloth and mourned for his son  
*Sackcloth* = Saq = “Coarse, loose clothing made from grain sacks”

**Illustration:**

Job 1:20-21 “At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”

- c. He refused to be comforted  
 Jacob seemed to have handled the death of Deborah (35:8) and Rachel (35:16-19) with a fair degree of composure, but the death of Joseph simply overcame him.

**Illustration:** The death of a father’s or mother’s son is unimaginable!  
 While Jacob’s grief is understandable, his utter despair is not.

**Application:**

1 Thess 4:13-14 “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”

5. The Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potipher [Verse 36]
  - a. He was one of Pharaoh’s officials - Gen 39:1

b. He was the **captain** of the guard

It was not coincidence that Joseph ended up in the home of one of the most responsible officers of Pharaoh's administration.

Hidden from the logic of man's limited perspective, God was orchestrating His eternal and divine purposes for the preservation and deliverance of the people of Israel.

But it would be 23 years of nightmare before Joseph's dream and God's ultimate plan for his life finally came to pass.

### **Conclusion:**

Lessons from Genesis 37:

#### **1. Living the Christian life is costly and will result in persecution**

2 Tim 3:12-14 "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."

#### **2. Most dreams die many deaths before being fulfilled**

Why? Because God is not only interested in the accomplishment of His goals, but also in the spiritual development of his people.

James 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

#### **3. God is sovereign over all the events in our lives – good and bad!**

In its simplest terms, the sovereignty of God is the working out of His plan through sinful and willful men, even when they are actively striving to resist Him and His purposes.

Rom 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Eph 1:11-12 "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."

"If Joseph's brothers never sell him to the Midianites, then Joseph never goes to Egypt. If Joseph never goes to Egypt, he never is sold to Potiphar. If he is never sold to Potiphar, Potiphar's wife never falsely accuses him of rape. If Potiphar's wife never falsely accuses him of rape, then he is never put in prison. If he is never put in prison, he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh. If he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh, he never interprets their dreams. If he never interprets their dreams, he never gets to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. If he never gets to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, he never is made prime minister. If he is never made prime minister, he never wisely administrates for the severe famine coming upon the region. If he never

wisely administrates for the severe famine coming upon the region, then his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine. If his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine, the Messiah can't come forth from a dead family. If the Messiah can't come forth, then Jesus never came. If Jesus never came, you are dead in your sins and without hope in this world!"

Guzik, D.

[https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide\\_Gen/Gen\\_50.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Gen/Gen_50.cfm)

#### **4. The life and ministry of the Messiah is foreshadowed in the life of Joseph**

There are numerous Messianic parallels in the life of Joseph.

Like Joseph, Jesus was:

1. He was despised and rejected by his brothers - Isa 53:3; Luke 19:12-14
2. He was a threat to the established authority - Matt 21:23;
3. He was envied and mocked - Matt 27:18; Luke 23:35-37
4. He was sold for the price of a slave - Matt 26:14-15
5. He was treated brutally by his brothers - Matt 21:38-39
6. He was stripped of his royal robe - Ps 22:18
7. He was given up for dead - Matt 27:1
8. He was "raised" from the dead - Acts 10:39-40
9. He would be the source of deliverance for his people - Heb 5:8-9

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