

Genesis Chapters 37-38 Summary - John Karmelich

Sometimes we should remember God's key promises to believers regarding life on earth: That a king is going to rule the world one day forever from Jerusalem. If that king's God, (who is fair and just) it'd be the best and most efficient way to run the world! Christians, refer to this "eternal king" as Jesus Christ, (which means God is Salvation, the Messiah). If God's going to rule from Israel, that means there must be an Israel when He rules! The Bible's clear only God Himself knows when that'll occur! That is why the Bible goes to lots of trouble both through predictions, patterns, and statements that it will occur. All that leads to my favorite question, "Now what?" Christians already accept this, so what do we do in till that occurs? Jesus answered (Matthew 28:19) that we're to be His witnesses to Judah (those close to us) then Samaria (places we don't want to go) and the ends of the world! Assume we know that so what are we to do about it? I always state, the prayer God loves to answer is one of total surrender of our will to His and then ask for His guidance!

That leads me back to the key promises and how they relate to these two chapters. We begin a study of Joseph, who'll be the main character from Chapter 37 to the end of the book, with one exception: In 38, we get a special study of Joseph's half-brother named Judah. I'll just say in both chapters they're full of horrible stories that we wouldn't wish on our worst enemies! Despite the sins of mankind, notice God's getting His will accomplished for both goals of Jesus to rule over the world and a nation (Israel) to rule from. Joseph's story (one of Jacob's sons) has lots of parallels to Jesus! It ends with the nation of Israel being prominent in the world. Judah's story is prominent in Chapter 38 and yes, it's full of sin. Despite that, God's plan to bring the Messiah into the world continues despite sin! The lesson is despite the sins we commit, God's still going through with His plan. and we're saved in spite of our sins, not due to our "good works". The ultimate goal is to bring Jesus into the world and then eventually create a world for Him to rule from!

Before I start sharing the details about these chapters, I'd like to share one of my favorite comments by my favorite Jewish Bible commentator Dennis Prager. He's famous for saying, "Whether the Christians or the Jewish Bible scholars are correct, either way the Jewish people win!" As we study these chapters we will see "both winning" both by patterns and predictions. With that said, time to discuss lots of sins that occur in both chapters and despite of that, God's plan is still going forward! Keep that in mind the next time you falsely think "I sinned so bad I could never be saved". It's never true and if God works in the lives of these "losers" that means God can work through you and me despite all we've done wrong!

First let's remember where we left off. Chapter 36 listed the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau. Back in the last part of Chapter 35, it listed Jacob's sons. The first two verses of Chapter 37 just say in effect, Here's the story of Jacob's family as that's the focus of the text till the end of Genesis. Then Chapter 37 gets sinful as I'm about to share: The first thing we read is that Jacob, the father of 12 boys if you don't know the story to date (all of which are in their 20's except Jacob who's 17). There's also a baby named Benjamin. Anyway, 4 of these men were out working with the family sheep farm. Joseph, the 17-year old reported to dad that somehow those four were messing up! We're also told of Joseph's special coat. (Most likely translation: It had sleeves as opposed to most coats that did not). Anyway, let's continue:

The next thing we read is Joseph telling his brother that he had a dream that effectively means all 10 of Joseph's brothers will bow down to him! You can tell how well that'd go over! Then Joseph had a 2nd dream that his father correctly interpreted, which meant his father (and late) mother would bow to him as well as the brothers. Realize prophecy in the bible isn't just things that come true once. Often it is a

pattern. As most of you know, in a matter of chapters that family will bow to Joseph as he became the #2 man in the most powerful country in the world at that time. It's also a pattern, as the bible speaks of another Israelite (The Messiah, or Jesus) ruling over the Israelites and the world one day! In that day it will also be the Israelites and the world bowing to Jesus. Back in Genesis, Joseph thought about it, but he didn't say anything, still his other sons were ticked off at their little brother!

OK sin time as promised: All of the older brothers were grazing the sheep a good 60 miles from where they lived near the place where they killed all the men because the leader's son raped their sister (that is in Chapter 34). Dad sent Joseph to check on them. Joseph found them further north. The brothers then decide to kill him. The oldest (Reuben) not wanting to tick dad off, didn't go along! They threw Joseph in a pit. Then some travelers came by, and they sold Joseph to them. In order to lie to dad, the brothers took that special coat and dipped it in lamb's blood. The irony is many chapters ago, Jacob deceived his own father claiming he was his older brother and wore goat skins for that lie. Now he's being lied to by his own children also using a goat. Meanwhile, Joseph was sold to a military official in Egypt and that story will pick up in Chapter 39.

Well Chapter 37 included an attempt to kill one's own brother, selling one's brother into slavery, then a big lie to their father. All of this will come back to haunt them. Despite all of that we'll read later they will apologize, and God will forgive them! His plan for the redemption of the nation continues despite the sins they and we commit. Chapter 38 is no better: I'll try to keep it brief: The story switches from a focus on Joseph to his brother Judah. It was Judah in Chapter 37 who came up with the idea for them to sell Joseph and make a profit. Why does the story switch to Judah? Because it's through him that the Messiah will come, so we get this ragged tale:

He marries a Canaanite woman (Mistake 1). He then has three sons with her. He arranges for a woman to marry son #1. The text said that son was wicked! God killed him with no further comment. If a son dies with no children, son #2 is to raise a boy in the name of the oldest. Son number 2 failed to get her pregnant, and God killed him too! Remember God wants to bring the Messiah in through this line, so it is a reminder to not mess with God! Judah then tells his daughter-in-law to go back to her father 'til #3 is old enough to marry. Then Judah's wife died. By now, the youngest should have married that girl but I suspect Judah thought two of my sons died, so she's bad luck. Anyway, the daughter-in-law disguises herself as a prostitute and has sex with Judah. She got pregnant from that. Three months later Judah is aware of it and wants her killed for the act. She then confronts her father-in-law with evidence that he's the one who got her pregnant, so that ends that killing. To quote my running joke at this point, and you thought your family was messed up! Anyway, she gave birth to twins. The first baby got his hand out, but the second one emerged first. As the pattern through this family the "younger shall serve the older" so the second one became part of the line of the Messiah.

By the way in Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 1, Verse 3) this episode is mentioned as part of the Messianic line from the first Jewish person Abraham leading to Jesus. So why mention that? For the same reason David's affair with Bathsheba is in the same line. The point is God works with imperfect people as for His will to be done! Does that mean I can sin all I want as God's will, will be done? To quote a pastor friend of mine, "I'm free to drink all the alcohol and do all the drugs I desire. The question's how much do I desire?" The point for you and me, is whether we're a good witness for Jesus or not, His will, still will get done. We are called to be a good witness for Him. Not to "earn" our way into heaven, but just to be a good witness for Him! In spite of the horrible sins we've all committed Jesus will still rule over the world one day from the nation of Israel. Just as Joseph was a type of Jesus as a ruler, and the line of Jesus was full of bad sins, so God still works with us to accomplish His will!

On the same page as this study is a more detailed study I wrote many years back. You are welcome to email me if you want or join my list to the get the latest lesson. Thanks for reading. John