

## GENESIS 37:19 -36

### 10+1=12; DO THE MATH! (10 boys + Reuben + God)

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I personally don't watch much of what they call reality TV. In my opinion there isn't much about it that's real. Instead, I like to watch forensic shows and programs where you go along with the cops to solve the murder, not the fake ones, but the real mysteries. The ones with real cops and maybe a few re-enactments.

I enjoy the shows where they profile the killers. I like trying to solve the "whodunnit." When I watch a movie I want to watch one that makes me think. I like to watch what is referred to as a thriller. I want to figure the movie out before it ends. I don't watch for the gore. I don't watch a movie for the special effects either. I want to think and I want to learn.

Watching these shows, you often hear of what the detectives refer to as a "break" in the case. That is, they get a tip of some kind, or they say they got lucky. Sometimes you will hear them say that they "just happened to run into someone or something that broke the case." Many times there will be someone that "just happened along and witnessed something." There are often coincidences that help the investigation.

**"So what has all that got to do with the Bible?"** you ask.

Well, the point is that you can get many of the same plots you see today on TV in the Bible. Granted, it's not as graphic as some of the stuff on TV, but nevertheless the plot and story are still there. These "stories" as many call them, read just like some of the crime novels you can get in Books a Million. The plots are the same, the motives are the same and the breaks in the case are the same. Someone just happens by or by coincidence someone sees something.

The word coincidence is an interesting one.

- coincidence - The state or fact of coinciding
- coincide - to occupy the same position simultaneously; to happen at the same time or the same period

Now let me ask you a question. Have you ever been involved in anything where a coincidence was apparent? Can you think of a situation where someone just happened along at the right time to help you? Maybe they happened along at the right time and prevented you from doing something you shouldn't have been doing in the first place. Perhaps you ran out of gas or had a flat and someone just happened to come by and help.

What are the chances that they just happened along? Do you understand that their paths had to have crossed yours at the precise time? Have you considered that they had to be the right person for the job? It is sad, but not everybody can change a tire. Not everyone is willing to stop and help. There are some folks passing by that you don't want to stop and help.

But when someone does, and they are the right person for the job in that circumstance, how did that happen?

I, being something of a mystic in the sense that I believe in the supernatural, believe that God is the person orchestrating all these things. I believe God helps the cops and the folks with a flat tire.

We will see that today as we go back into Genesis 37.

If you recall, last week we read about Joseph's dreams and how his brothers hated him for his status and arrogance. Because of the dreams he revealed to them, and what was most likely years of having to put up with daddy's favorite, they hatched a plan to kill him and leave his body in a dry well. Then someone just happened by.

**Gen 37:19** *Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming!"*

**Gen 37:20** *Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"*

**Gen 37:21** *But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him."*

**Gen 37:22** *And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.*

**Gen 37:23** *So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him.*

**Gen 37:24** *Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.*

So we see the plot hatched to kill Joseph. Then, Reuben the firstborn stands up and suggests that they don't kill him violently but that they just throw him into the well and let him die slowly.

We see that Reuben planned to come back later and free Joseph, but that didn't work. Apparently Reuben left for a time because he was unaware that his brothers had sold Joseph to the Midianites.

Now, Reuben spoke up and in effect bought Joseph some time. God knew Reuben's heart, that he was weak at taking action even when he had the authority to do something about the situation, so He acted.

Last week we talked about this. We have to move and have more than words when we have the authority to do something. When we have the opportunity to help someone we need to help them. We can't just be tinkling cymbals and sounding brass. We have to be more than talk. We can all remember the guy in school that talked a good game but never delivered. Talk is cheap!

In this however we see God's grace. As I said before, God knew Reuben and his faults. Therefore He used Reuben to "buy some time." Then what happened?

**Gen 37:25** *And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt.*

**Gen 37:26** *So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?"*

**Gen 37:27** *Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh." And his brothers listened.*

**Gen 37:28** *Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.*

After they had thrown Joseph into the well and while Reuben, the conscientious objector was gone, Judah looked up and had an epiphany. He saw some Ishmaelite traders on the trade route and decided that if they were going to get rid of their brother they might as well make some money doing it, so he got the idea to sell Joseph.

What if those guys had never happened by? Look at this "coincidence!" God knew Reuben was weak. He knew Reuben would leave. So some traders just **happened by**.

But those guys were out of sight before Judah could convince his brothers to go along with the plan. What would they do now? If no one else came by Joseph might die in the well. However, someone else did come by, the Midianite traders and Joseph was sold to them for 20 shekels of silver. So we see that God sent one group of traders along to

plant the seed and another group was sent along later to bring the plot to fruition.

But that was a large trade route, traders passed through there all the time. It must have been a coincidence. By definition it was. Two groups occupied the same rough location at the same time. The right group was there at the right time.

What happened after that?

*Gen 37:29 Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes.*

*Gen 37:30 And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?"*

Reuben apparently doubled back and intended to save his brother. Well, you may ask, I thought you said he was weak?

He was weak. He didn't take action when he could have. Instead of being forceful and stopping things when he could have he tried to do things stealthily. However he wasn't wired that way and God knew it.

But he did come back and attempt to deliver his brother. If that is the case then why did God need the Ishmaelites and the Midianites?

Have you ever heard the expression, "**Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him to fish and you feed him for a life time?**"

God is working on a different time table than we often are. We tend to see things in the microcosm of our little lives. God is working on a much larger scale. He is thinking ahead, so to speak.

If Joseph is delivered from the well by Reuben then there are events in the future that could be devastating to the family. But, by allowing him

to be sold to slave traders, God is positioning him to aid the entire family and unknowingly help to build a nation.

However, the boys still have to justify their brother's disappearance.

**Gen 37:31** *So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood.*

**Gen 37:32** *Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, "We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?"*

**Gen 37:33** *And he recognized it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces."*

**Gen 37:34** *Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days.*

**Gen 37:35** *And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him.*

We see here that the boys are so willing to carry out the plot that they don't care that they broke their father's heart.

**Greed, selfishness, hate and covetousness are powerful motivators.** They are the main motives behind the modern TV shows we were talking about earlier. Remember, all things are common among men and there is nothing new under the Sun.

So they allow their father to weep and mourn for his son for weeks.

Then we are given another clue.

**Gen 37:36** *Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.*

Joseph was sold to Potiphar, captain of the guard in Egypt. Why does the Bible tell us that? It's like the TV shows, wanting to leave us hanging so we tune in next week to see where the plot goes!

It is important, as Christians that we stop viewing our circumstances in a microcosm. We are to see sin the same way God sees it, and I believe we have to start seeing our lives as God sees them. We can't see our lives as being a microcosm; that is our own little world that is detached from everyone else's. We are tied in to everyone else around us directly and indirectly we are tied to everyone else in the world.

We get thrown into a well and start whining. We get pulled out and sold to Midianites so we whine and ask, "**Why me?**"

**Do we stop to think that God is in control?** Do we stop to see the circumstances and coincidences as God's hand moving to place us where He wants us in order that we accomplish something greater than what we want in our own little world?

Folks that is what happened here. If you read ahead you will see that God just pulled off something that still affects us today in many ways!

**God is constantly taking advantage, if you will, of our inability to act.** He is taking advantage of our greed, and selfishness, working in us and through us in order to accomplish His will. What is sad is that He has to work in spite of us instead of with us.

Last week I asked you to think about what you would do if you were thrown into a well. This week I want you to think about the coincidences in your life and how you got where you are.

I want you to see how God moved in your life to bring you to where you are now and I want you to see that he is moving in your life at present to do His will now.

**Is He working through you or in spite of you?**