

AN OVERCOMING LIFE

Genesis 37:1-36

Introduction:

Well, here we are starting into another new year. It is hard to believe that it is a whole year since the last time I said that. As we begin another year it is always a good time to look back and look ahead. Looking back, we could probably all recount times of sadness and disappointment, as well as times of joy and delight. I trust that we could also relate seeing the hand of God on our lives over the past year.

Looking ahead, there are many questions. We do not know what this year will hold. At this time of the year, many people have set goals and made resolutions. Many of those resolutions have already been broken. Do you have any goals for this coming year?

I have never been big on setting goals. I sometimes say, somewhat in jest, that my goal is just to survive another year, or week, or day. While there is a certain element of truth to that, I believe we need to aim higher than just being survivors. I want to do more than survive, I want to thrive and live a life of victory and vitality.

What we need is an overcoming life, a life that is lived above the circumstances we face. Sometimes we hear someone say, "I'm doing pretty well under the circumstances." I hope that isn't good enough for you. We need to live above our circumstances. We need to be overcomers, conquerors.

One of the most profound paradoxes we find in the Scripture is in the book of James. In the very second verse of his epistle, he says, "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,*" (James 1:2). Surely he can't mean that. How can you rejoice when trials come into your life. That kind of approach to life seems self-defeating and it would be if he hadn't gone on to explain, "*...for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*" (James 1:3-4 ESV)

"...for you know..." – those three little words make all the difference. The knowledge that God does nothing capriciously or impulsively, but only with our ultimate good in view, allows us to face life and its trials with confidence and even joy.

One of the best examples of this kind of confidence that we have in the Scriptures is the Old Testament character Joseph. His life was filled with struggles, with dark, difficult experiences, yet he was able to come through it all better and stronger. He faced hatred and treachery from his own family, temptation and the lure of sin, disappointment and discouragement, the dangers of success, and many other things that could have destroyed him. Yet he maintained his faith in God and came through it all stronger and better for it. He didn't just survive; he was an overcomer.

I have been reading several accounts about the life of Joseph and his response to the trials that he went through:

- **"Joseph: 'God planned it for good'"** - a book by Theodore Epp published many years ago by Back to the Bible.
- **"Joseph: Overcoming Life's Challenges"** – a Discovery Series booklet published by Radio Bible Class
- Of course, the **Scripture account** of his life – Genesis 37-50

I believe there are a number of lessons we can learn from the life of Joseph. In the coming weeks I would like to look at some of these lessons, in the context of being an overcomer. Today we begin by looking at overcoming treachery and hatred.

A Family Feud

Have you ever felt betrayed by someone you thought you should be able to trust? A coworker sabotages a project you were working on in order to gain position for himself. A family member undermines your character or integrity to make himself look better. A friend turns against you and placed the blame at your feet when faced with criticism.

We can probably all relate to that kind of conflict—what we might call treachery or treason. We have had people in our lives who have violated family or workplace allegiance and left us hanging out to dry.

Joseph was a person who experienced this kind of treachery. In order to understand what happened to him we need to see some of his family background. In order to do that we need to go back to his father, Jacob. A quick summary of his background:

- Jacob's name – means cheater, conniver – descriptive of his nature
- Conflict between Jacob and Esau
- Jacob's flight to Haran
- Becomes manager of his uncle Laban's sheep ranch
- Marries the boss's daughter – ends up with two wives and two concubines – Rachel (Bilhah), Leah (Zilpah)
- Children begin to arrive
 - Leah – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah
 - Bilhah – Dan, Naphtali
 - Zilpah – Gad, Asher
 - Leah – Issachar, Zebulun
 - Rachel – Joseph, Benjamin
- Joseph was probably about 5-6 years old when they left Haran and returned to Canaan
- Jacob's night of wrestling with God, reunion with Esau
- Death of Rachel, giving birth to Benjamin
- Jacob's favoritism of Joseph – oldest son of the wife he loved

Joseph's older brothers were not a good influence on him. They were ungodly, deceptive, manipulative and angry men. Talk about a dysfunctional family. This was a classic example. It was a family built on conflict, competition and mistrust.

Moses picks up the story when Joseph was 17 years of age. Look at Genesis 37. Verses 2-4 reinforce the division and conflict that existed within this family – Joseph spying on his brothers and the special treatment of Joseph by Jacob led to an intense hatred of Joseph by his brothers.

Igniting the Fuse of Anger

Beginning in v. 5 we see events in Joseph's life that only served to intensify the anger and hatred Joseph's brothers felt toward him. Joseph's dreams became a real point of contention between him and his

brothers. It is questionable whether he was wise in sharing those dreams with them, but when he did it was like throwing gasoline on an already smoldering fire—like putting a match to a fuse. It was only a matter of time until an explosion occurred.

Briefly describe the two dreams... Read vv. 10-11.

And so, the anger and hatred intensifies. Let me pause for a moment here to ask a question. When we face situations of betrayal, hatred or treacherous opposition, are there ever times when we add to the intensity of the situation through insensitive or unwise statements or actions. Sometimes, I believe we bring things on ourselves by our unwise words or actions.

The Treachery of Family Hatred

Well, it wasn't long before things did blow up for Joseph. *Go through the passage briefly.*

- Note the comparison to v. 2 – he brought a bad report.
- Now Jacob sends him out to check on his brothers and bring back a report.
- When they see him coming, they see this as their opportunity to rid themselves of him for good.
- Reuben's conscience – his attempt to save Joseph from death

vv. 25-28 – the decision to sell Joseph to a caravan of Midianite traders (Ishmaelites) on their way to Egypt. He was sold for twenty shekels of silver, an average price for a slave in Egypt. No doubt these traders believed they could make a bit of profit on a strong healthy young man like Joseph.

vv. 29-35 – the deception of Jacob – left believing that his favorite son, Joseph, had been killed by wild animals.

The Power of an Overcoming Life

v. 36 – meanwhile, Joseph ends up in Egypt, purchased by Potiphar, who was a very high-ranking officer in Pharaoh's court. He is identified as the captain of the guard. That is significant as we will see later as we continue to go through his life.

But what I want to do here is to look at the power of an overcoming life. There is no question that Joseph was on the receiving end of some very treacherous behavior on the part of his brothers. Their treasonous actions toward Joseph could very easily have led to discouragement and disappointment in his life. When we are faced with treachery and betrayal it is easy to use it as an excuse for wrong behavior and retaliation.

Yet, when we next see Joseph, we read a very interesting statement. Chapter 38 is a parenthesis, which describes another incident in Jacob's family. But the narrative returns to Joseph in chapter 39. *Read vv. 1-2 – "...the Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man."*

There is no indication that Joseph ever turned against either his family or his God. If God was with Joseph, then certainly Joseph must have been with God. Somehow, in the midst of all this treachery, Joseph maintained his trust in God, knowing that God must have some reason for allowing this to happen.

Conclusion

So how do we respond when we are betrayed... when a friend abandons us... when a co-worker undermines our work in order to advance his own cause with the boss... when a family member turns against us because we stand for what is right? What do we do when it seems like life pulls the rug out from under us, because of the treachery of those we should be able to trust?

It is so easy to become angry or bitter. But we can learn so much from the life of Joseph. Bill Crowder says of Joseph,

"...even though he was enslaved he was right where God wanted him. He was right where he had to be so that he could learn the lessons God wanted to teach him—lessons that would one day make him a great leader and enable him to overcome the treachery and betrayal of his own brothers. Psalm 76:10 says, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise You." Ever faithful, God would take the evil of men in Joseph's life and use it for his good and for His glory."

As we seek to live victorious overcoming lives in 2016, let us remember that overcoming treachery means realizing that God can use even the betrayal of friends or family to bring about his purposes.