**Abandoned?**

By Brad Olson

Imagine what it would be like to like to be betrayed in such an unthinkable way that in your pain and confusion, you wondered "Where is God?" or, "Has God forgotten about me?"... whether it was by a friend or family member, imagine being betrayed by the people who you are supposed trust, people who you would never think might do you harm, maybe it's a brother, maybe a parent, maybe a trusted uncle... perhaps they lied about the business deal, or stole something meaningful to you? Maybe they hurt you by telling your secrets? Or, worse yet, maybe they abused you in some way?

Now, imagine what it would be like to be the second youngest of a big clan of brothers- 11 brothers- you got teased- you were the one picked last for baseball- you got all the "hand-me-downs"- you never got to do the cool stuff they did- or the grown-up stuff, 'cause you were just a kid- "hey Joe, fetch me another bucket of water"... you got tired of hearing them boss you around- you often had to do the grunt work- and, though you seldom received it, you sought after your brother's approval and praise every day... when you were younger, you even wanted to be like your older brother "Levi"-  he was a leader with a heart, unlike the others... But now, they don't seem to care for you much- they pick on you- they tease you more- and the more they tease you, the more determined you become.

You are a guy who wants God's favor and you seek God with all your heart- though you are young, you know what you're good at and what you're not good at- you have a charismatic personality- people like you. It is clear that your Dad is proud of you... maybe more proud than he is of your brothers... you're beginning to see this...  One night, after being teased and slugged by your brothers, maybe more so than usual, you become angry and want to fight back- but you cannot- you're just a kid...and there are 10 of them- all older than you... "one day... one day...", you tell yourself as you fall asleep...

God seems to speak to you in ways that are special- he seems to be doing this more and more- when you dream, you just "know" what a dream means- you know what God is saying through a dream- even if the dream sounds like a crazy mixture of random events of your day and that late night movie you watched... the dreams make sense to you. One night, in your dreams, 11 stars bow to you and sheaves of wheat belonging to your brothers bow to you... you are clear about the meaning from God, and this dream satisfies your desire for revenge… one day, they'll be sorry they ever treated you poorly. So, you announce to your brother’s the next day at the breakfast table that God spoke to you in a dream again last night. The dream was clear and its meaning even more so… "One day, they will all bow to him! He will be the leader... He will tell them what to do... He will have the power... God says so." Your brothers chuckle and mock you. They do their best to disregard your pronouncement, but you could tell, *that* one got to them... they did not like it at all.

On a cloudy and cool afternoon, you hear your brother Levi calling to you.  As you walked around the barn, you notice they all were quieter, as if they had a secret they were keeping from you. But you were used to them excluding you from "adult talk", so you didn't think much about it. Not even in your wildest dreams did you see what was coming next. When you approached, your brothers seemed to slowly circle like a wolf pack trapping their prey. They didn't look at you the same way- they had a look in their eyes void of any brotherly teasing, some of them couldn't look at you at all- they looked more like determined animals- ready to take something, or someone by force. By the time you realize that YOU were the prey, you turn to run, but it was too late. You feel the blows to your head and stomach and try to fend them off the best you can... but there were 10 of them. The last thing you remember was Levi ripping off your favorite jacket you got from your Dad for your 16th birthday last year, then everything becomes numb and blurry... you lay there... unconscious.

You wake up in a cage, in a foreign land, chained to a post. You are unable to see out of one eye because of the swelling. There is dried blood on your torn up clothes. Your head hurts; your lip is still bleeding a little. You are cold, hungry, confused, and in shock.  You think to yourself, "I must be dreaming"...

In the story of Joseph, we think of the multi-colored coat, the rise to prominence, and the happy ending. But we forget that Joseph was the victim of a brutal, cruel and violent act- delivered by the family he trusted and loved. We don't think of him as a kid. But he was. He was just a kid when his brothers secretly attacked him and sold him into slavery. He was just a kid when he was faced with the likelihood of never seeing his home again. The likelihood of never seeing his friends, never sleeping in his bed, never eating his favorite home-cooked meal, never talking to his younger brother, never getting a hug from his mother, and never seeing his father again... ever. Joseph's story is one of violation, abuse, and utter abandonment... abandonment that went on for years. If anyone shouted "Why me!?" or wondered "Why has God forgotten about me?!", surely it was Joseph.

Thankfully, this story does have a happy ending, not just because of what happens to Joseph or his family, it has a happy ending because in the story, God makes clear just exactly what kind of God he is: A God with a plan. God ALWAYS has a plan. And, in his plan, God somehow factors human messiness into his best equations… using our worst predicaments and our selfish plans to accomplish his purposes.

So, has God abandoned you? I doubt it. I doubt it very much. It’s when I feel abandoned that God’s purposes to grow me and grow his kingdom are never more evident.

**"God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20)**