Joseph is sold Into slavery

Are you familiar with alternative history books? Alternative history is defined as “genre of speculative fiction consisting of stories in which one or more historical events occur differently. These stories usually contain "what if" scenarios at crucial points in history and present outcomes other than those in the historical record. The stories are conjectural but are sometimes based on fact.” This form of literature dates back to 27 BC with a book containing an account of Alexander the Great surviving to attack Europe as he had planned. Modern books often speculate about the South winning the Civil War or Germany winning World War II. I tend to think on a smaller scale wanting to see the bad guy getting what he deserves in the end. This week our study of Genesis chapter 37 continues as we read about 9 men who attack their younger brother with no apparent consequences for their actions. Jacob sent Joseph to check on his older brothers who had taken their flock of sheep to graze near Shechem. Given their history with Shechem, this would appear to be an ill advised location although some speculate that the brothers went there thinking that Jacob would be worried and send Joseph to make sure they were safe. The last recorded location of Jacob’s family prior to this incident was Hebron which was located about 100 miles south of Shechem. By the time Joseph caught up with them they had moved onto Dothan which was north of Shechem. They saw him coming referring to him as a dreamer then they attacked him and sold him into slavery. They actually intended to kill him but Rueben convinced them to throw him into a cistern hoping to rescue him later. While Rueben deserves some credit for saving Joseph’s life, he should have used his status as the eldest brother to prevent them from harming Joseph at all. It would have been hard for one man to stand up to the peer pressure of 9 others but strong leadership often requires us to stand firm even when we have no allies. As we discussed last week, Judah a/k/a/ Judas comes up with the idea to sell Joseph to a band of merchant Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver. To hide their crime, they dipped Joseph’s coat in blood from a goat they slaughtered and showed it to Jacob who assumed that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Last week I asked you to think about our actions vs. God’s plan. The specific question is whether our sinful behavior is part of God’s plan or if He intervenes to change the course of events in response to sin. God certainly knows far in advance every action we will take. God told Jerimiah that He knew him before he was in his mother’s womb (Jer. 1:5). God has a plan for each of us but our free will to make choices began in the Garden of Eden and can collide with God’s plan. God repeatedly told the Israelites the consequences for their choices (Lev. 26:9-17, Deut. 28:14-15, Mal. 2:2). Consider also the following “For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’” (Isaiah 46:9-10) Were the actions of Joseph’s brothers part of God’s plan from the beginning? Certainly, Joseph being sold into slavery set off a chain of events that ultimately led to his family surviving a famine in Egypt. Joseph himself believed it was God’s plan (see 45:5-8). Contrast that with the youthful Joseph who had bragged about his superiority over his brothers. Joseph had matured greatly during the 13 years of hardship he had endured as a slave and a prisoner. Could God have desired an alternate history, a different path to the survival of Jacob’s family that did not involve the sin of Joseph’s brothers? And what of us, are we where we are as a result of God’s plan or our actions? Should we be richer or poorer? Tevye laments his poverty in “Fiddler on the Roof” asking, “Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if I were a wealthy man?” While this is interesting to speculate about, it remains just that, speculation. After all, who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? (Rom. 11:34). One thing is certain, however and that is God’s plan from the beginning was to send His Son to die on the Cross for our sins. I have exercised my free will to accept Jesus as my personal Savior and I hope you have as well.

Below is a link to an interesting article which expands on the subject of God’s plan and free will:

https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/how-do-we-reconcile-gods-sovereignty-and-human-free-will.html