

Lesson 2: Life of Joseph, God's Man--Sold (Genesis 37)

Introduction:

In the book of Genesis there are more chapters devoted to Joseph than to "Father Abraham," Isaac, or anyone else. Why, do you think?

Perhaps because Joseph is an example of well developed Godly character.

I believe God means it when He instructs us in Philippians 4:8,

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."

As Christians we have an unlimited number of interesting topics to study:

We could study the cults, or world religions, or current satanic activity.

Isn't it better, though, to study true doctrine in order to recognize to false.

We could have great fun studying the *Koran*, the *Book of Mormon*, the *Writings of Mohammed*, or other "holy books." But wouldn't it be more productive to study the Bible, the actual word of God Himself.

We could dwell on the sinfulness, cruelty, and depravity of man, but we can accomplish much more by developing righteousness, sensitivity, and discernment as instructed in Scripture.

I believe this biblical process includes keeping great, virtuous, righteous, and praiseworthy examples before us, like Joseph.

Review of Chapter 37:

Verse one tells us that Jacob moved his family down south of Bethlehem to Hebron, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem. This is where his Grandfather Abraham made his home and communed with God "face to face."

Immediately after this important move the emphasis of Genesis shifts from Jacob to Joseph.

Verse 3 reports that Joseph was seventeen and the youngest of the boys that were out tending their father's flocks. His older brothers obviously got into some kind of trouble and Joseph reported the trouble back to their dad.

STRIKE ONE (Everybody hates a snitch)

You would think Jacob would have learned something from his father's weakness. Remember Isaac favored Jacob's brother Esau and his mother had liked him best bringing disaster to their family.

He knew what it was like to have his dad favor another child over him and yet, as we see continuing in verses 3 and 4, he repeated that mistake.

He made a special coat for Joseph illustrating clearly that he loved him more than the other boys.

STRIKE TWO (Everybody hates a pet)

As we move on to verses 5 through 11 we experience Joseph's immaturity. He has a couple of dreams that seem to elevate him to a place above his brothers and even his parents. He doesn't seem

to realize the potential danger in sharing them with his already hostile brothers. Their sheaves bow to his sheaf, their stars bow along with the sun and the moon to his star. This is the last straw.

STRIKE THREE (Everybody hates a bragger)

THREE STRIKES, YOU'RE OUT, JOSEPH!

And it only goes down hill from there.

I. THE SETUP (Read 37:12-28)

A. The Chase

Jacob sent the older boys off to look for a place to graze the sheep. He had a lot of sheep. Genesis 30:43 says, ", , , *the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.*

1. They were a long way from home.

Joseph's brothers were in Shechem that is forty miles North of Jerusalem. That put them about sixty miles from home in Hebron. Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers.

Jacob had reason to worry about his sons. Why? Had they been in Shechem before? Yes!

2. They had a history in that area.

Genesis 34 tells us that years before Jacob had settled his family near Shechem and even bought a piece of land from Hamor, the local ruler. Hamor's favorite son wanted Jacob's daughter, Dinah and actually ended up raping her.

Even when he proclaimed his true love for Dinah and asked to marry her, Dinah's brothers were so angry they plotted revenge. They agreed to allow the marriage if all Hamor's men were circumcised.

That night while all the men were in pain Simeon and Levi, her blood brothers, attacked and killed every male in the city.

Then verses 27-29 tell us, "*Jacob's sons came upon the slain and looted the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that {was} in the houses.*"

The family had to flee and God led them to Bethel where they got rid of their idols and Jacob built an altar and dedicated himself and his family to God. It was a turning point in Jacob's life but the boys didn't seem to change much.

When Joseph got to Shechem his brothers were already gone looking for better pasture and he had to chase them to Dothan, another ten miles north.

B. The Confrontation

The instant Joseph's brothers saw that special coat they began to plan the death of a dream.

1. The Plan

Genesis 37:18-20, *When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. And they said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!"*

2. The Counter Plan

Rueben, Joseph's oldest brother, came to his aid as verses 21-22.

*But Rueben heard {this} and **rescued him** out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." . . . "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him" — **that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.***

And so, they stripped off his fancy tunic, threw him into a dry pit, and sat down eat. He was terrified. How do we know that? In Genesis 42:21 it reports that His brothers said to one another, *"Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because **we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.**"*

How evil were they? They ignored his pleas and really believed he was going to die, but they felt they didn't technically "kill him" and so they could just eat as if nothing had happened. But the plot thickens when a caravan of camels bringing products from Gilead down to Egypt passed them.

*And Judah (perhaps he was the treasurer of the group) said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; for he is our brother, our {own} flesh." **And his brothers listened {to him.}** . . . so they pulled {him} up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty {shekels} of silver. **Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.** (vv 26- 29)*

Here's a chance to get rid of Joseph forever with no blood guiltiness and make a handsome profit as well.

This seems like it is a total disaster for Joseph but my mind is driven forward to Joseph's statement to these same brothers in Genesis 50:20. *"And as for you, **you meant evil against me, {but} God meant it for good** in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."*

II. THE COVERUP (Read 37:29-35)

Now all they have to do is deal with dad.

A. The Plot

1. Rueben reacts

Rueben didn't know what happened and *returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; **so he tore his garments.*** (v 29)

He obviously thought the worse, that they had killed Joseph after all. *"And he returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is not {there;} as for me, where am I to go?"* (v 30)

As the oldest he was responsible for his younger brothers and would have to tell their father. He has already betrayed his father's trust so this was going to be tough.

2. The Lie

Genesis 37:31-32 explains, *So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat, and dipped the tunic in the blood; and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please examine {it} to {see} whether it is your son's tunic or not."*

Genesis 37:33 records Jacob's reaction, *Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!"* It was a piece of cake. Their dad supplied the details so they didn't have to lie verbally, but it was still a lie.

B. The Pain

1. The Expected:

So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. (v 34)

2. The Unexpected

Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol (the place of the dead) in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him. In fact, Jacob was never quite the same again.

Before we are done however, Let me present some lessons we can glean from these events.

III. THE LESSON

A. Deceit Breeds Deceit

1. Jacob modeled an unrighteous life style to his kids.

He learned it from his father and as has been said often before, "Children will imitate their parents despite all attempts to teach them good manners."

I'm sure the history of this family was already legendary. Jacob stole the birthright and blessing from his brother Esau. Jacob and Laban stuck it to each other time and time again.

And now Jacob loved Joseph best of all his sons, was more concerned with his own reputation than their spiritual development, and was unaware of the boiling hatred he had fostered in his household.

2. We model righteous or unrighteous behavior to our kids.

The way we operate at work, the way we talk at home, the way we drive, the way we pay our taxes, the way we treat each member of our families, and the way we live speaks volumes and teaches behavior patterns to our children.

B. Disciple is Vital

How strong does God feel about discipline? He does it Himself.

Hebrews 12:8-11 *"But if you are **without discipline**, of which all have become partakers, then **you are illegitimate children and not sons**. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they*

disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He {disciplines us} for {our} good, that we may share His holiness.

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

1. Jacob did not correct, discipline, or punish his sons.

When his sons annihilated and sacked an entire city he didn't discipline them, in fact he was worried about his own life and reputation (34:30).

Perhaps he felt helpless because they were reacting to the rape of their sister. Or perhaps he, like David, recognized that they were just like him and so he couldn't bring himself to act.

2. We must disciple our children.

We must live righteously so that our discipline is effective. But, even when we fail, we must still correct for righteousness sake not for our own reputation.

C. Openness is Important

1. Jacob did not communicate with his sons.

If Joseph's brothers had been loved perhaps they could have let Jacob know how they felt about Joseph, and how his favoritism hurt and angered them. Perhaps things could have been different.

2. We need to communicate with our families.

In our culture it is hard for parents, especially fathers, to stay close to their children. By experience I know it is easier to ignore problems than deal with them, but passive fathers create insecure and anger children.

Favoritism is a common problem. We tend to favor children who are "good" or cooperative. We tend to get easier and more relaxed as we learn how to parent. But we are human and make many mistakes and we need to be transparent and allow our family to mirror back to us our faults. That is a hard, but valuable lesson.

This part of the story ends with this statement in Genesis 37:36, ***Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard.*** This is where we'll pick up the story next week.