

**STORY**

6/26/06

Joseph Sold into Slavery - Genesis 37

TEACHER PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, there are times in my life when I am timid and fearful. I feel at times that my life is out of control and that I am powerless to help myself. I pray that You would use these occasions to remind me that I am *never* in control of my life, You are. Teach me never to trust in my own power or wisdom, but always and only in You. When "bad things" happen to me, grant that I might always acknowledge Your wisdom and goodness and seek to recognize Your love in all that You allow to come into my life. Help me also now to present this vital truth to the students You have placed under my care. To this end bless my presentation of this lesson, in Jesus' name I ask. Amen.

VOCABULARY

Bilhah - Rachel's maidservant, Jacob's concubine, the mother of Dan and Naphtali

Zilpah - Leah's maidservant, Jacob's concubine, the mother of Gad and Asher

binding sheaves - tying the stalks of grain into bundles at harvest time

Shechem - a city at the foot of Mt. Gerizim north of Jerusalem where Jacob first bought land and resided after having worked for his Uncle Laban in Horan

Dothan - an ancient city about 15 miles north and west of Shechem, noted for its excellent grazing land. This was also later the site where Elisha was surrounded by the army of Aram and where the hills beyond were filled with fiery chariots and horses of God (2 Kings 6).

Ishmaelites - nomadic descendants of Abraham's son Ishmael by Sarah's maid, Hagar

Midianites - also at times translated Medanites. Midian and Medan were also sons of Abraham by his wife Keturah.

Shekel - monetary unit used in Israel. Twenty shekels equaled about 8 ounces, and later was set as the amount paid for a youth of Joseph's age who was dedicated to the Lord (Lev. 27:5).

Sackcloth - coarse, rough cloth worn as a symbol of mourning or repentance.

OUTER AIM

Joseph is envied by his brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt.

INNER AIM

God begins His plan to rescue the family of Israel and keep His promise to send the Savior through their ancestors.

BACKGROUND

Jacob showed obvious favoritism among both his wives and his children. Joseph was clearly his favorite, and Jacob's preferential treatment contributed to the sin of his sons. At this time Jacob was living in "the Valley of Hebron." He evidently moved there from Bethlehem after the death of his father Isaac. Jacob had extorted the birthright from his brother Esau and had thus inherited the land previously owned by his grandfather Abraham and father Isaac.

Verses 1-4

- Joseph at this time was 17 years old. It is hard to judge the character of the young man at this point in his life. He was obviously gifted and handsome, trustworthy and well loved by his parents. It is also true, however, that Jacob used the boy to keep tabs on his other sons. Some have condemned Joseph as a tattletale for "bringing a bad report" to his father about his brothers. Yet we have no way of knowing if Joseph was simply carrying out his father's command to observe and report back the truth. The fact that he would report back to Jacob obviously alienated Joseph from the rest of his brothers.
- The bad report Joseph brought to Jacob involved Dan, Naphtali, Asher, and Gad.
- The subject of the "coat of many colors" is widely misunderstood. It has long been thought that Joseph's brothers were simply envious that he had received a handsome coat from his father and that they had not. The brothers were not that petty. The term translated "coat of many colors" is more literally translated "long tunic that reached to the ankles and wrists." Such a garment was worn by royal children of nobler rank, which explains why it angered the brothers so much. By giving Joseph such a garment, Jacob was placing him over the brothers as their superior. This also served to exacerbate Joseph's later dreams of supremacy, as well as his "spying" and reporting back to Jacob.
- "*Hate*" is often best translated as "to love less." In this case, however, it seems clear that the brothers hated Joseph in the more modern understanding of the term, since they could not even "*speak peaceably to him.*"

Verse 5-11

- It is hard to determine if Joseph was simply immature and naive in telling his dreams to his brothers, or if he was exhibiting some cruelty by "rubbing it in" concerning his favored position. The youth was probably naive rather than cruel.
- Though all eleven of Joseph's brothers eventually *did* bow down to him, we have no record that his father and mother ever did so. It is certainly true, however, that Joseph was later honored by all for saving the family from starvation.

Verses 12-17

- Though Jacob and his family had moved (fled) from Shechem after the shameful incident with Dinah, Jacob evidently maintained ownership of the land he had purchased there and used it to pasture his extensive flocks and herds. He may also have purchased land around Dothan, about 15 miles to the northwest, since he also pastured his flocks and herds there.
- Jacob, placing great trust in Joseph, sends him out again to check up on his brothers and the flocks and to report back. Jacob thus causes great stress in the relationship between Joseph and his older brothers. He also takes something of a risk in sending a 17-year-old boy out alone to make the dangerous 45-mile trip to Shechem.
- Joseph is not quite up to the task, for he is found wandering in a field near Shechem and must get help from a stranger. A more experienced man would probably have known to search in Dothan when he did not find the brothers in Shechem.

Verses 18-28

- The hatred of most of the brothers toward Joseph is very great, even to the point of plotting to murder him. It is hard to imagine what family life among Jacob's sons must have been like for the brothers to hate Joseph that much. Perhaps all of the years of favoritism, the ranking in order of affection enroute to meet Esau, etc., were all coming to a head there in the remote fields around Dothan.
- Reuben, both now and later, displays some strength of character and tries to rescue Joseph from his brothers. He was apparently not present when the others sold Joseph into slavery. In fact we have no record that Reuben was ever told exactly what the others had done to Joseph.
- It was Judah's idea to sell Joseph. He was obviously loath to kill his own brother, but despised him

enough to sell him into slavery. We know from their words later (Genesis 42:21) that Joseph, "in great anguish of soul," pleaded with his brothers for his life—to no avail. The hatred and resentment of the brothers ran deep, but so did their guilt after selling him.

Verses 29-36

- Perhaps the greatest cruelty of all was when the brothers allowed their father to believe (for many years) that his beloved Joseph was dead. Jacob mourned for Joseph for several reasons. Not only was he his favorite, Jacob also very likely felt blame and guilt for sending his young son to his death.
- The fact that Jacob refused to be comforted was an indication not only of his love for Joseph, but also of a weakness of faith on his part. It is not right for even a parent to choose to refuse the comfort of knowing that a dearly loved child is safe and at peace with the Lord. Such a prolonged rejection of comfort can easily become a rebellious rejection of the will and wisdom of God.

STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Jesus, whenever something unfortunate happens to me in this life, help me to think about Joseph and all of the difficult things that happened to him. Remind me that just as You never abandoned Joseph, so You will always be with me. Help me to remember that You will allow in my life only that which You will also work out somehow for my spiritual good. Let me to never stop trusting in You alone. In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.

PRESENTATION

This account is short enough to read in its entirety during the class. Certain parts lend themselves well to acting out (such as when the brothers sold Joseph into slavery and he pleaded for his life).

APPLICATIONS

1. Playing favorites seldom does any good. Those that are preferred can become arrogant and haughty; those who are loved less can develop serious emotional problems and learn to resent those that are loved more. Help the children to apply this truth to their own friends and family. (How would your dad feel if you told him you loved your mom much more than him?)
2. Discuss the difference between a tattletale and a conscientious friend. It is not always wrong to "tell on" someone when it is done out of loving concern. Matthew 18 also applies to children. A tattletale, on the other hand, enjoys seeing others get into trouble. Motive is key. Discuss what a child should do or say when a friend says, "I'll tell you something if you promise not to tell." (In general, encourage your students to never accept such conditions. Love might dictate that they do tell.)
3. Show the students that although the dreams Joseph told his brothers were true and real, he showed tactlessness by sharing them. Lead the students to think about others before they speak— to consider how their words might unintentionally hurt someone else.
4. It is never good to let anger turn to hatred nor to allow that hatred to fester in our hearts. Discuss with your students various ways to deal with their anger. (Prayer, talking to the person who has wronged you, getting help from parents or your pastor, etc.)
5. Most importantly, lead your students to recognize that God allowed hardship to come into Joseph's life because He had a master plan in mind. Joseph could not at first see that plan. We often cannot see God's plan. The only solution is to trust God at all times and to constantly remind ourselves that God knows what is best.

PASSAGES

Lower

Luke 6:27 - *But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.*

Colossians 3:9 - *Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.*

Psalms 27:14 - *Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart.*

Middle any of the above and...

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Psalms 27:14 - *Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart.*

Upper any of the above and...

Matthew 5:44 - *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*

Isaiah 40:31 - *But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

Romans 6:22, 23 - *But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

HYMN CHOICES

"Jesus, I My Cross have Taken" (TLH #423:1-2)

"I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus" (TLH #428:1-3)

"My God, My Father, Make Me Strong" (TLH #424:1-4)