

May 17th, 2020
Joseph Sold into Slavery
Genesis 37

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

May 10 28–2 Chron1	May 14 2 Chron13-17
May 11 2 Chron 2-5	May 15 2 Chron18-20
May 12 2 Chron6-8	May 16 2 Chron21-24
May 13 2 Chron9-12	May 17 2 Chron25-27

Lesson Introduction: *Our lesson this week begins the story of Joseph. Joseph’s saga is told over several chapters at the end of the book of Genesis. It is an incredible story of how God providentially works through Joseph to preserve His people and continue to fulfil the promise that He had made Abraham so many years before. As this story of Joseph begins, we will see how truly dysfunctional this family was. We will consider the sins of partiality, pride, and jealousy, and see how they led to Joseph’s brother’s betrayal of him. Throughout these next several weeks it will become plain that man’s evil schemes can never frustrate the plans of God, but instead, they are used by God to accomplish His purposes.*

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS:

- Sin begets sin (V. 1-11, 18-35)
- The Lord works all things according to the counsel of His will (V. 12-17, 36)

Read Genesis 37

1 *Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.*

2 *These are the generations of Jacob.*

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

5 *Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. 6 He said to them,*

“Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” 8 His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

9 *Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” 10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?” 11 And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.*

12 *Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “Here I am.” 14 So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.” So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15 And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” 16 “I am seeking my brothers,” he said. “Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” 17 And the man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.*

18 *They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19 They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.” 21 But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” 22 And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. 24 And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.*

25 Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. 28 Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

29 When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes 30 and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?" 31 Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. 32 And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." 33 And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." 34 Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him. 36 Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Discussion Section 1: Family Issues (V. 1-11)

-Why did Joseph's brothers hate him?

-How did Jacob sin in his relationship with his sons? When have we seen similar actions from parents in the book of Genesis?

-Do we see Joseph sin in this passage?

Note: *If there is one thing that is clear in this passage, it is that Jacob is hated by his brothers. They could not stand Him. After all, he was his father's favorite, he was given special gifts, and he was always talking about these dreams that he had, which only made matters worse. We will discuss the hatred Joseph's brothers had for him and what it led to in greater detail in our next section, but for now, it is important to understand what led to the hatred to begin with. To understand that fully,*

we must turn to Jacob's mishandling of his relationship with his sons.

Jacob knew what it was to be in a family where certain kids were favored. His mom liked him the best, while his dad favored his big brother, Esau. He also knew the kind of turmoil this could cause, as he played an active role in deceiving his father with his mother's help, which led to strife between he and Esau (Ch. 27). Jacob's overt favoritism toward Joseph is at least partially to blame for the mess that would ensue. The Scriptures are clear that we are to show no partiality because God has shown no partiality in choosing us to be a part of His family (James 2:1-13). Jacob clearly favored Joseph because "he was the son of his old age", and came from his favorite wife, Rachel (V. 3). As believers, and recipients of God's grace, may we never fall into the same sin, but see Jacob's sinful behavior in this passage as a warning. The sin of partiality in the home can cause all sorts of turmoil. As Christian parents, may we show love to our children in the same ways God has shown love to us, showing no partiality, but showering our love freely on the children that God has blessed us with. If you do not have children, the same principle can be applied to relationships you have with friends or coworkers, and certainly it can be applied to your relationships with brothers and sisters in the church. When we fail to show no partiality, we not only sin, but we set others up to sin by causing them to become either prideful or jealous and resentful. This was the case with Jacob's family.

We are never told explicitly if any of Joseph's behavior in this passage was sinful. What we do know is that some of his behavior was at the very least off putting to his brothers. The main thing we see that was so repulsive to the brothers was Joseph's telling of the dreams. While those dreams were most certainly meant to foreshadow the events that were to come, and thus were from God, we do not know for sure whether it was right for Joseph to tell his brothers, or the manner in which he shared these dreams with them. We do know that their reaction, along with their father, was one of outrage (V. 5-10).

Without speculating too much about Joseph's actions, this passage should serve as a good reminder to us of the way we share truth with people. As we have seen recently in 1 Peter 3:15, we are called to "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." We should be quick to share the truth with those around us, but we must never do so

from a place of pride or arrogance. Perhaps there are certain things that the Lord has revealed to us that we believe our brothers and sisters should know. May we take into account that the way we share such truth matters. We do not want to be a stumbling block to those we share truth with, thus we should do so humbly, with meekness and respect. Although we cannot ultimately control the way people will respond to truth, we can control our delivery, and we should strive to always be gracious in our interactions with others, lest we present ourselves arrogantly and leave a stench in the nostrils of our brothers and sisters.

Discussion Section 2: The Fruits of Sin (V. 18-35)

-What leads to the plot to kill Joseph?

-How have you seen sin lead to more sin in your life?

-What is the significance of Jacob being deceived by his sons?

Note: Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias has said, **“Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”** We see that statement play itself out in Genesis 37. What started as jealousy and envy in the hearts of Joseph’s brothers, transformed into murderous hatred and deception. No one simply decides to murder their brother on a whim or comes to place where they are ready to sell someone into slavery without any buildup. This passage shows us clearly that the fruit of sin is more sin.

Romans 1:18-32 paints a clear picture for us of the way sin can so easily take over our lives. There we see how the more we revel in our sin, the more seared our consciences become. When we make a practice of sinning, our hearts become hardened, and before long, what started as something we might consider small turns into outright rebellion against our Creator. In our passage this week, we see how jealousy becomes hatred, hatred leads to anger, and anger leads to a murderous plot.

How might sin be at work in your life? Could it be that you are holding onto some resentment or jealousy that is only leading you to a place of hard heartedness? Have you become calloused about the lust of the flesh that you continually give into? Has the hateful way you speak to your spouse become so common that you do not even

recognize it as sinful anymore? May this story serve as a wakeup call to each of us and drive us to do battle with the flesh daily by the power of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:15-26**). We should pray earnestly that we will never come to a place where we are content with gratifying the flesh and depend completely on the Lord to overcome our sinful desires by the power of His Spirit.

Discussion Section 3: The Providence of God (V. 12-17, 36)

-How do we see the hand of God at work in this passage?

Note: The acts committed against Joseph by his brothers were sinful. We know from the Scriptures that we can never attribute our sinful behavior to God, for **James 1:13-15** tells us, **“13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”** The sinful deeds of Joseph’s brothers were born out of their own fleshly desires and were acts that were disobedient to God’s commands. Yet one of the truths that we have seen time and time again throughout the book of Genesis, and will see on full display here in the story of Joseph, is the truth that God works all things according to the counsel of His will (**Ephesians 1:11**). Even in our passage this week, filled with wickedness and treachery as it is, we can see the providential hand of God at work.

There is an interesting note in **verses 15-17** where we see Joseph asking a man where his brothers had gone. He had expected to find them in Shechem, but when he arrived, they were nowhere to be found. Joseph meets a man who tells him that he had heard his brothers talking, and that they had decided to go to Dothan. This may seem like a throwaway part of the story. Why on earth do we need to hear about this man giving directions to Joseph? It is vital that we realize that there is not a word in Scripture that is not intentional. This trip to Dothan was part of God’s plan.

From John MacArthur’s commentary on Genesis:

“The assignment to Shechem brought Joseph providentially to Dothan, a site more convenient for contact with merchants using the main trade route on

their way to Egypt... When Joseph arrived (in Shechem), he learned that his brothers had gone to Dothan, so he went and found them. His brothers threw him into a pit and later sold him to some Ishmaelite spice traders on the way from Gilead to Egypt. The traders took Joseph to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard."

What we see is that if Joseph's brothers had not decided to move on to Dothan (for whatever reason, we are not told), they would not have been on the trade route. Most likely they would have simply killed Joseph, but God had other plans. He would place them in Dothan and use their sinful actions to fulfill His purposes. In selling their brother to these traders, Joseph's brothers unknowingly were setting up their brother to become their savior.

"What they meant for evil, God meant for good"

(Genesis 50:20). We will see this theme continued next week. May we praise God that we are completely in His hands, that His will cannot be thwarted, and that He brings salvation out of the most dismal of circumstances (Acts 4:27-28).