

Genesis

Lesson 20 Into Egypt Genesis 37–38

Memorize the TRUTH!

But you, O Sovereign LORD, deal well
with me for your name's sake; out of
the goodness of your love, deliver me.
Psalm 109:21

Joseph the Dreamer — Genesis 37:1-11

Day 1

- Describe the relationship between Joseph and his brothers.
 - What were some of the factors that influenced this relationship?
 - How did Jacob/Israel's gift to Joseph affect the brothers' relationship?
- What did Joseph's dreams seem to foretell?
 - How did his father and brothers react when they heard about his dreams?
- What was really at the root of Joseph's brothers' feelings?

Learn the TRUTH!



Israel teeters on the brink of losing its identity as the people of God. God uses the slavery of Joseph, Jacob's beloved son, as a means to bring Israel into Egypt for their own preservation. This week, praise and thank God that He is sovereign and works out His perfect will in the circumstances of our lives.

Ten Against One — Genesis 37:12-27

Day 2

- Why did Joseph travel to Shechem?
 - How did Joseph's brothers react when they saw him coming?
- What did Reuben (the oldest brother) do to intervene?
- Why did Judah suggest that they sell Joseph into slavery?

Sold Into Slavery
Genesis 37:28-36

Day 3

7. According to Genesis 42:21, how did Joseph react as he sat in the cistern?
8. How did Jacob/Israel's sons deceive him regarding Joseph's disappearance?
9. a. Do you think the sons anticipated how deeply their father would mourn? Why or why not?

b. What was happening to Joseph as his father mourned?
10. What surprises you in this incident? What disturbs you? What encourages you?

Judah and Tamar
Genesis 38:1-30

Day 4

11. What happened to Judah's oldest son? Why?
12. a. According to Deuteronomy 25:5-6, what responsibility would fall to the second son?

b. Why did Onan avoid his responsibility?

c. What were the results of his refusal?
13. How did Judah avoid fulfilling his responsibility to Tamar?
14. a. What did Tamar do to reclaim her status in Judah's family?

b. How did Judah react when he found out?

The Sovereignty of God
Genesis 37-38

Day 5

15. What does "sovereignty" mean?
16. How do you see the sovereignty of God at work even in the schemes of Joseph's brothers?
17. How is God's sovereignty also woven into the events of Genesis 38? Matthew 1:1-16
18. What have you learned from this lesson that encourages you to trust God in difficult circumstances?

Live the TRUTH!

Jacob believed in life after death and that he would see his son again. A sense of loss is appropriate, but to allow the death of a loved one to destroy the rest of your life is not a good witness to the difference faith makes. Have you suffered a loss? God will restore your joy! We can say, "Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you" (Psalm 116:7). After a period of grieving, seek once again to serve the Lord with gladness.

Commentary Genesis Lesson 20

Jacob, like Abraham and Isaac before him, is a man of faith in many respects, but at times he shows a conspicuous lack of wisdom. Although he suffered from his own father favoring Esau, it seems he learned little from the experience. He chooses not only to prefer Joseph among his sons, but to openly show his partiality. Joseph enjoys the spotlight, but, in his youth, lacks the insight required to be humble. He aggravates the tension among the siblings when he is sent to shepherd the flocks alongside several of his brothers. In some unspecified way these brothers violate their father's instructions, and Joseph brings a negative report to Jacob. Resentment reaches its apex when the patriarch makes a richly ornamented robe for Joseph — tangible evidence of his preferred place.

As the story unfolds, Genesis will show that Jacob's confidence is well placed. Joseph is an unusually fine person, and one with great gifts. Sensitivity is evidently not one of them at this point. Joseph inflames a bad situation when he tells his family of a dream indicating that his brothers would one day be his servants. He has no control over the dream, but he should have chosen to keep it to himself. A second dream suggests that even Jacob and Leah will be among his subjects one day.

Jacob sends the teenaged Joseph to check on his brothers, who are at Dothan. Because Joseph is wearing his colorful coat, his brothers spot him when he is still far away. While he is coming, they plot his murder. They hate him deeply and forget none of his sins, nicknaming him "the dreamer" (37:19). They do not blink at the prospect of lying to their father about Joseph, because Jacob forms part of their problem as well. They display contempt for both father and brother.

The brothers spring into action when Joseph arrives, stripping him of the hated robe, the symbol of their father's favoritism. They deposit him in a cistern and callously sit down to enjoy a meal. Joseph pleads for his life (see 42:21), but his cries fall on dull ears and stony souls. Their lunch is interrupted by a caravan from Gilead heading for the coast road and Egypt. Their approach suggests a course of action: Why not sell Joseph instead of killing him? Their hands will be "clean" and their pockets lined as well. They use a perverse and hypocritical line of reasoning: "After all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood" (37:27). For 20 shekels of silver, Joseph becomes an unwillingly member of the caravan.

The brothers dip Joseph's infamous robe in goat's blood to simulate the attack of a predator. They take it to Jacob, saying, "Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe" (37:32). Jacob, ready to believe the worst, is sure an animal has killed Joseph. If the brothers were hoping their relationship with their father would improve in Joseph's absence, they are disappointed. Jacob is so consumed with grief that he can scarcely live at all. Meanwhile, Joseph is sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guard of Egypt's Pharaoh.

**Check
It Out:**

Clearly God had chosen Joseph. As a teenager, his dreams revealed that He was God's choice from among the sons of Jacob to lead his family, the budding nation of Israel. Being dumped in a pit and then sold as a slave and carted off to Egypt certainly didn't feel to Joseph as if God were orchestrating the events of his life. But as the story unfolds we will see with certainty God's sovereign hand. God has also chosen us who believe (Ephesians 1:11-14). He may even place us in the pit for a time, like Joseph. Just as Joseph's dreams foretold his glorious future, so God's Word reveals ours!

Chapter 38 provides a glimpse of the infant nation of Israel, which is about to undergo a great upheaval: they will soon find themselves living in Egypt where they will eventually be enslaved. What leads to this drastic change? Israel is losing its identity as a distinct people. Judah marries a Canaanite woman, demonstrating a lack of spiritual depth. Their three sons — Er, Onan, and Shelah — live evil lives. Judah arranges a marriage for Er with a woman named Tamar. Because of his wickedness, God takes Er's life before he can father any children. In order to provide a line of succession, the brother-in-law of a childless widow was expected to marry her to produce children. Their children were legally the offspring of the dead man and would inherit his property. Refusal to carry out this obligation was considered shameful. Yet that is precisely what Onan does. God regards his actions as particularly wicked and takes his life as a result. Tamar is once again a childless widow. Judah asks her to return to her father's home until Shelah, his third son, is of marriageable age. Judah has no intention of allowing the union; he fears Tamar may be bad luck to her husbands. Tamar honors Judah's request, but as years pass and Shelah is fully grown, she concludes that Judah has deceived her.

After a time Judah becomes a widower himself. Following a period of mourning, he goes to join his employees who are shearing the sheep in Timnah. When Tamar hears of this, she poses as a prostitute along the road and entices Judah to be a customer. She plans to become pregnant with Judah's child. She plays her role fully and asks for a pledge to guarantee payment. Judah obliges, offering his staff and seal. However, when Judah sends the promised goat as payment, the "shrine prostitute" cannot be found. When Tamar is discovered to be pregnant, Judah determines to have her burned to death. She is on the way to her execution when she confronts Judah with the evidence of his own fornication. He reverses his order and announces that Tamar has proven to be more righteous than he. Jacob's story ends the same way it began, with twins struggling in the womb—this time in Tamar's womb. And again the younger, Perez, is the destined leader and ancestor of Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:3). This series of divine reversals proves again that God himself is the engineer of Israel's history.



The 10th commandment says, "You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17). Coveting may start with a normal, reasonable desire for something that another person possesses, but it becomes obsessive when you would sin to get it. You may say, "I would never do that. I may be a little jealous ..." Or, "It is unfair that he got [fill in the blank] that I expected and deserved!" Jesus said "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matthew 5:21-22). Coveting something that God has given to another person, but not you, can lead from anger to murderous rage, from deep longing to ugly sin. Even if you never "act out," but the feeling is there, Jesus has said it is wrong. Paul wrote to Timothy, "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). Are you content with what God has given you?



Are you feeling like you're in a pit like Joseph? How do these verses encourage you?

Hebrews 10:23

Romans 15:13