

The Brothers Plot to Get Rid of Joseph

Genesis 37:12-25

Genesis 37:12-25 - *"Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." So he said to him, "Here I am." ¹⁴ Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.*

¹⁵ Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?" ¹⁶ So he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks."¹⁷ And the man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.' So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

¹⁸ Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! ²⁰ Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"

²¹ But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." ²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

²³ So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. ²⁴ Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelite, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt."

Background Notes

Joseph's ten older brothers hated him because he was their father Jacob's favorite son. Jacob had even given Joseph a special tunic, which made it all the more obvious that Joseph was favored above his brothers. Furthermore, Joseph had dreams in which he was elevated above his brothers, and that they even bowed down to him in the dreams. When he shared those dreams with his family, his brothers hated him even more.

It is often argued that Joseph didn't use common sense when he shared his dreams with his brothers - that he should have kept them to himself. Joseph, however, was convinced that these dreams were from God - and, in fact, they all came true! So Joseph shared his dreams for that reason, not for lack of common sense. Joseph knew that the dreams were communications from God, and he believed it was right to share this information with his family. It was because of these dreams, and because of his favored status with Jacob, that his brothers hated Joseph.

The brothers went to feed Jacob's flocks in Shechem. Why Shechem? Back in Genesis 34, two of the brothers had plundered Shechem, and slaughtered all the men. That massacre may have been only a year or two earlier, and perhaps the brothers were curious to see what had taken place there since that time. Then they moved on from Shechem to Dothan, about seventy-five miles from their home.

Because Jacob had not heard from his sons for some time, he sent Joseph to see how they were doing. Jacob apparently didn't realize how much the brothers hated Joseph. The fact that Joseph didn't simply return home when he couldn't find his brothers at Shechem, but rather searched for them until he found them at Dothan, shows that Joseph really did care for his brothers. They hated him, but he didn't hate his brothers.

When the brothers saw Joseph coming they conspired to kill him, but the cooler head of Reuben, the eldest brother, prevailed to save Joseph's life. When Joseph arrived, the brothers tore off his special robe and threw him into an empty water cistern.

Doctrinal Points

1. The heart of man is incredibly wicked.

Jeremiah 17:9 says, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"* The Bible teaches that humans are capable of incredible wickedness, and that is evidenced in Joseph's brothers. Think of it! They were willing to kill their own younger brother because he was their father's favorite son, and they didn't like his dreams! *"And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelite, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt" (v25).* The brothers were probably eating food that Joseph had brought from home, and all the while they were plotting to get rid of him! How wicked could they be?

Listen to what the brothers said many years later, in their confession of guilt, *"We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us" (Genesis 42:21).* The brothers saw young Joseph's anguish, and they heard his pleading cries from the cistern - and yet they could sit down and eat a meal. The heart of man is desperately wicked!

All of this reminds us of the incredible wickedness of men that was directed against the Son of God when He was here on this earth. John 15:25 says, *"But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'"*

Remember the parable of the vineyard, in which the wicked workers killed the owner's son? *"A certain landowner planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him"* (Matthew 21:33-39).

This parable pictures the incredible wickedness of mankind's treatment of Jesus Christ. On the very day that the Jewish leaders cried out "Crucify him," they sat down to eat the Passover meal. And Matthew 27:36 says this of the Roman soldiers, during the crucifixion: *"sitting down, they kept watch over Him there."*

Do you see how the treatment of Jesus Christ is pictured in the brothers' wicked treatment of Joseph? The brothers planned to kill Joseph, and they sat down together and ate a meal while Joseph was suffering. The heart of man is incredibly wicked.

2. The heart of God is incredibly gracious.

Where do we see the truth that the heart of God is incredibly gracious? We see it in the fact that God didn't zap the older brothers, or have the earth open up and swallow them alive for their wickedness!

In fact, God had great plans for these brothers. He would deal with them and eventually bring them to confession and repentance. He would make them the heads of the tribes of Israel. Not only that, the line of the Messiah would come through **Judah** - not Joseph! And God still has great plans in the future for the tribes of Israel and for the nation of Israel. God is incredibly gracious!

Is it possible that you have never realized the truth that God is incredibly gracious? God is just as gracious toward you today as he was towards Joseph's brothers in that day. Don't think that God can't save you because you have gone too far in your sin! Confess your sins even now, and repent of your sin. Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ as your only means of salvation. Trust in Him as your personal Savior, and God will save you. The heart of God is incredibly gracious!

Practical Applications

1. Have you been betrayed by your own family?

Being betrayed by anyone is devastating, but being betrayed by your own family is especially tough. It can happen, though. It happened to Joseph, and it happened to our Lord. Not only was the Lord betrayed by one of His own disciples, but none of His own brothers or disciples came to His defense. It can happen to you, too.

Maybe you've been betrayed by members of your own family for something that you didn't do, or because of a misunderstanding. When one of my students at Emmaus Bible College became a Christian, she shared the gospel with her unbelieving father and mother. They hated to be told that they needed to be saved – and they actually told her to leave their home. She was disowned by her family!

Perhaps you feel betrayed by your own family, or by some of your fellow believers. You may have been rejected for doing something that you believed was right. Or maybe you did nothing, yet because of a misunderstanding your brothers and sisters in Christ turned their backs on you.

What should you do in a situation like this? Do what Joseph did! Joseph came to believe that God had allowed him to be betrayed by his own family for an ultimate good purpose. Listen to his words in Genesis 50:20, *“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”* Finally, when Joseph had been elevated to be the prime minister of Egypt, and his brothers came to Egypt and bowed down to him and confessed and repented, Joseph told them that God had worked through all the problems and tragedies in his life for good - to save the lives of many people

If you know and trust the Lord, you can say the same thing. Romans 8:28 says, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”* Even if your own family betrays you, God can use that event, that terrible experience - and He can work it together for good in your life and in the lives of others.

2. Watch out for the sin of jealousy!

The sin of jealousy caused the brothers to hate Joseph. They couldn't stand the fact that Joseph was favored over them. The sin of jealousy led them to rejection, hatred, and betrayal - and almost to murder. Watch out for the sin of jealousy!

Jealousy is such an insidious sin. It can catch you off guard, and before you realize it, you're trying to undermine and remove your rival, or even assassinate his or her character. And you'll find yourself justifying what you did in your heart by thinking, “He had it coming to him!” or “She needed to be humbled!” Watch out for the sin of jealousy!

I once knew a Christian woman who played the piano at her church. She was so jealous of anyone who was a better pianist than she was, that she would do whatever she could to cut her “rival” down! In fact, you only had to mention the name of the more talented pianists in her hearing, and even if your comment had nothing to do with music or pianos, invariably she would start with her negative comments. She constantly tried to undermine other pianists in some way – and, sadly, she didn't even realize what she was doing!

The sin of jealousy is insidious. It can happen to you, and it can happen to me. Watch out for the sin of jealousy!

