

# Joseph's Journey to Slavery

Genesis 37:1-36

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## Bible Memory Verse

Ephesians 4:32 NIV

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

## Bible Story

Jacob was third in line from the original promise of God. The first was Abraham who the Lord told would have descendants as many as the sand on the seashore and as the stars in the heavens. Isaac was the second. The promise was passed on to him because he was the promised son of God to his father. Jacob is next. Of course the promise was passed on to him as well. During Jacob's life, the Lord changed his name to Israel. Jacob had twelve sons, which would become the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph was one of those sons.

Joseph was almost the youngest boy in the family. You can imagine how the older brothers treated their much beloved brother. When Joseph was seventeen he told on his brothers to his father. It didn't help that his dad, Israel, "loved Joseph more than any of his other sons..." (Genesis 37:3). He even made a very special, very expensive, multi-colored robe for Joseph.

*"When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him" (Genesis 37:4).*

One night Joseph had a dream in which his sheave of grain in a field rose up and the other sheaves bowed down to his. Of course Joseph's brothers interpreted this dream to mean that they would eventually one day bow down to their brother.

*"And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he said" (Genesis 37:8).*

Joseph had another dream where the sun and the moon and eleven stars were all bowing down to him.

*"When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, 'What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?' His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind" (Genesis 37:10-11).*

Obviously Joseph's apparent bragging could only be tolerated so much.

One day Joseph's father sent him to go check on his brothers while they were grazing the flocks. The young dreamer wandered around looking for his brothers and soon found them near Dothan.

*"But when they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. 'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. 'Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams'" (Genesis 37:18-20).*

From the sounds of it, Joseph's brothers were really upset with him!

The oldest brother, Reuben, tried to intercede for his younger brother and suggested to just throw him in the cistern and not actually kill him. So they did. His brothers grabbed Joseph, stripped him of his special robe, and threw him into the cistern. While they were eating lunch (without Reuben's presence mind you), Joseph's brothers saw a caravan of Ishmaelites caring supplies on their way to Egypt. Then they got a grand idea:

*"What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood" (Genesis 37:26-27).*

They all thought this was a splendid idea. So they sold their brother Joseph into slavery for twenty shekels of silver to the traveling Ishmaelites. Meanwhile, Reuben returned and found Joseph not in the cistern! He was distraught! What was he going to tell his father?! So they came up with another brilliant plan:

*"...they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, 'We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe.' He recognized it and said, 'It's my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.' Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days" (Genesis 37:31-34).*

To Jacob, Joseph was dead.

*"Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard" (Genesis 37:36).*

Joseph's life journey, to this point, led him to slavery. What was going on? Was this God's plan? What possible good could come of this most unfortunate circumstance?

We shall see...

## Life Application

This is a lesson in loving and tolerating family members. I don't know about you, but there is something about how your family can get under your skin like no one else! Joseph's brothers went as far as to almost kill him and then sell him off into slavery because of their festered hatred toward their younger brother. Should things have gotten that far? Of course not.

God asks us to love our neighbors, and no one lives more close to you than those in the next room (or the same room!). Tolerating and loving our family isn't easy. In fact, it is often the most difficult thing to do. And maybe we all have to go through the season of our lives where we fight and bicker and whine and complain about our siblings and family in order to love them.

But maybe, with God's help, we can bypass the normal course of events and actually love and care and build up our family first rather than frustrate and kick and scream. I also wonder if God designed the "family" to be a training ground for how to love. Perhaps, by practicing loving our family members we become more and more like Jesus...

## Review Questions

1. Which of Jacob's (Israel) sons was not very well liked by his older brothers? Joseph.
2. Why did Joseph's brothers not like him? Their father, Jacob, favored him over the others. He told on his brothers to his father. Joseph had dreams about him being "superior" to the others. Bragger. Jacob sent Joseph to "check" up on his brothers.
3. What did Joseph's brothers want to do him one day? They wanted to kill him.
4. Which brother tried to "rescue" and "intercede" for Joseph (tried to prevent the other brothers from killing him)? Reuben.
5. What did the brothers end up doing to Joseph? They stripped him of his robe. They threw him into a cistern (a watering hole). They sold him as a slave to the Ishmaelites.
6. How did the brothers explain Joseph's disappearance to their father, Jacob (Israel)? They took the special robe and dipped it in animal blood and told Jacob that a wild animal had killed and eaten Joseph.
7. Who did the Ishmaelites sell Joseph to? An Egyptian named Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials and the captain of his guard.

## Coloring Sheet

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