

## Joseph's Dreams Get Shattered

**Text:** Gen. 37:12-36

### Introduction:

1. This section opens up the first major chapter in Joseph's life. Up until this point at the age of 17, he has enjoyed the privileged status as Jacob's favorite son and the princely status of holding firstborn rank in the family over his brothers. But what was about to unfold looked more like a nightmare in contrast to his previous happy dreams. Joseph was about to have his life catapulted at the hands of his embittered brothers into a searing trial; a trial that appeared from the human standpoint to shatter any hope of the Divine Dreams coming true.
2. Concerning this section Alexander Maclaren writes, "We have left the serene and lofty atmosphere of communion and saintship far above us. This narrative takes us down into foul depths. It is a hideous story of vulgar hatred and cruelty."
3. In this lesson we study the betrayal of Joseph at the hands of his brothers as Joseph goes from the lofty heights of dreams and visions to the bottom of the pit and into slavery in Egypt. There will be lessons about practical things but most importantly, the truth of the Providence of God is seen. What is the Providence of God? One author defined it this way, "Providence is that work of God in which He preserves all His creatures, is active in all that happens in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end."
4. We will study this passage under **5 headings**.

### I. **THE CONTEXT OF JOSEPH'S BETRAYAL (VS. 12-17)**

The Bible paints the occasion and the scene for this momentous event. There are three points to the setting to consider. Take note of:

#### **A. The Family's Division (Vs. 1-11)**

We studied this in our last lesson but keep in mind the division within the family that is described in those verses.

1. There was favouritism in Joseph's home (Vs. 3-4)
2. There was friction in Joseph's home (Vs. 4, 8, 11)

There was hatred and jealousy towards Joseph from his brothers.

- a. Vs. 4 – "they **hated** him and could not speak peaceably unto him".
- b. Vs. 8 – "And they **hated** him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words."
- c. Vs. 11 – "And his brethren **envied** him".
- d. Hatred and envy make a deadly combination in the heart and the bitter fruit of it is about to be manifest.

#### **B. The Brothers Departure (Vs. 12)**

1. The purpose of their departure (Vs. 12a).
  - a. The revealed reason. The brothers went to feed the flocks in Shechem. They may have simply needed to find better pasture for their livestock.

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- b. The root reason. It is possible they departed on account of their animosity and hatred towards Joseph and the situation in the home.
- 2. The place of their arrival (Vs. 12b)
  - a. It is interesting to note that despite the events of Genesis 34, Jacob's brothers were more than comfortable returning to Shechem. You would think that if there had been a deep work of repentance in these boys, they would be reluctant to go back to the place where they committed such heinous crimes.
  - b. Joseph's brothers were pretty wicked men at this time in their lives and evidently had no reservations about going back to Shechem.
  - c. When you are truly repentant over a sinful defeat in your life, you won't be comfortable in Shechem. You will want to stay away from it!

### C. The Father's Directive (Vs. 13-17)

- 1. The sending of Joseph to his brethren (Vs. 13-14)
  - a. The readiness of Joseph to go (Vs. 13). Notice Joseph's "here am I" response. Joseph was a submissive and obedient son who was willing to serve. Would to God our response would be "here am I" when our Heavenly Father asks us to serve His eternal cause. Some have noted that Joseph seems to have "combined all the best qualities of his ancestors – the capacity of Abraham, the quietness of Isaac, the ability of Jacob, and the personal beauty of his mother's family."
  - b. The reason for Joseph to go (Vs. 14). Jacob was concerned to know:
    - i. The wellbeing of his sons.
    - ii. The wellbeing of the flocks.
- 2. The searching of Joseph for his brethren (Vs. 15-17)

Joseph departs from the valley ('vale' Vs. 14) where Jacob's family was encamped to go North to Shechem which was about 50 miles (80 km) away. Little did Jacob and Joseph realize that they when they said goodbye that day, that it would be over 22 years before they saw each other again.

  - a. Joseph arrives at Shechem (Vs. 14b-17a). Joseph arrives in Shechem and can't find his brothers. Another man who was in the area finds Joseph wandering in the field and informs him that he heard his brothers say they were going on to Dothan. Dothan was approx. 15 miles (24 km) further north from Shechem. "The name 'Dothan' is believed to mean "two cisterns", and was presumably so named because of two storage wells there. One of these cisterns was dry at the time Joseph's brothers were there, and it was into this well that they later decided to place him." (Morris)
  - b. Joseph goes on to Dothan and sees his brothers in the distance. Little did he know what was in store for him and that he was going to find himself swept up in a chain of events that would eventually culminate in him being second ruler over the most powerful nation on earth at that time; the nation of Egypt.

## II. THE CONSPIRACY IN JOSEPH'S BETRAYAL (VS. 18-22)

Joseph's brothers see him coming afar off and immediately their hatred towards him is stirred up afresh. Now in the absence of their father, they feel emboldened to take matters into their own hands.

### A. The Plot to Murder Joseph (Vs. 18-20)

1. Their hostility towards Joseph (Vs. 18)
  - a. Their desire to kill Joseph was on account of their bitterness and envy. We are reminded of the danger of harbouring these poisonous attitudes in our hearts. Hatred and jealousy, if allowed to fester in the heart, can easily lead to murder or some other heinous crime. If you allow your heart to be overtaken with the poison of bitter envy, you have no idea of knowing where it might take you. Never say never! If you indulge these evil attitudes, you could end up in a place much darker than you imagined.
  - b. Hatred is the attitude of murder. 1 John 3:15 warns, "Whosoever **hateth his brother is a murderer**: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."
  - c. Note: Ultimately only God's saving grace can make bitter hearts sweet and hateful hearts holy. Come to the foot of a blood stained cross and let Christ cleanse away your sinful bitterness and jealousy.
2. Their mockery of Joseph (Vs. 19)
  - a. It is interesting to note that it was particularly the dreams God had given Joseph that were the focus of their attack against Joseph. No doubt these brothers were irritated by Joseph's purity of life and the fact he had heard from God.
  - b. They thought they could thwart what God had revealed to Joseph – "and we will see what will become of his dreams". (Vs. 20)
  - c. Remember, in this dispensation, mocking Joseph's dreams amounted to mocking the Word of God as that was the means sometimes God used to communicate His truth to His people.
  - d. Ungodly family members can still get incensed by the presence of the truth in the lives of saved relatives in our day. Remember, their opposition is ultimately to God and His Word in your life.
3. Their conspiracy concerning Joseph (Vs. 20)
  - a. They discussed how they could commit the murder (Vs. 20a). Their plan was to kill Joseph and then conceal the body by throwing it into a pit. Perhaps it was the very pit they threw Joseph into was the pit into which they originally planned to throw his dead body.
  - b. They discussed how they could cover up the murder. They also came up with the story they could tell Jacob and the rest of their family.

### B. The Proposal to Manhandle Joseph (Vs. 21-22)

Reuben, the eldest brother, stepped in and stopped the other brothers from carrying out their diabolical plan. We note two things about Reuben's proposal:

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- a. The compassion in the proposal. Reuben's objection to the plan to murder Joseph does say something for his character. As the eldest in the home, he seems to have had some tenderness towards Joseph. At the very least, he knew it was wrong to shed their brother's blood.
- b. The compromise of the proposal. Reuben's proposal did not represent a strong stand for what was right but a compromise. What he was proposing may not have been as bad as the original proposal but it was still wrong. There was an instability in Reuben ("unstable as water" Gen. 49:4) on account of his moral failure with his step mother Bilhah. Compromise in one's personal life leads to a lack of courage to make a strong stand for truth and right. Courage to stand for what is right is linked to a clear conscience. Remember, past sins should not stop you from standing for what is right in the present. If those sins are under the blood, then you can stand for what is right with a clear conscience. Reuben would go on to also support the lie to their father about what had happened to Joseph.

### III. THE CRUELTY OF JOSEPH'S BETRAYAL (VS. 23-30)

Joseph arrives on the scene and the brothers carry out their cruel plan. Imagine what it must have been like for Joseph as he arrives in simplicity of heart to carry out his father's task with no idea of what his brothers were about to do. Can you see the pained, shocked expression on his face and feel all the emotions surging through his heart and body as his brothers seize him with hateful hands. Look at what transpired:

#### A. Joseph was Stripped of his Coat (Vs. 23)

This action represented:

1. The humiliation of Joseph. To be stripped of one's outer clothing would have been deeply humiliating and shameful to Joseph as an upright young man.
2. The rejection of Joseph. Joseph's coat was not just a symbol of the fact he was the beloved of his father. It represented his rank as the one holding the position of firstborn in the family. These brothers were making it clear by their actions that they rejected his position of authority in the home.

#### B. Joseph was Slung into the Pit (Vs. 24-25a)

Joseph has gone from the exalted position as the beloved one of his father to the pit; from the heights of dreams of future glory to the place of shame and potential death. Joseph's brothers further revealed the hatred of their hearts in their actions towards Joseph while he was in the pit. We get further insight into this from the comments of Joseph's brothers in their first trip to Egypt during the time of famine. Genesis 42:21-22 "And they said one to another, **We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us**, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required."

They hardened their hearts and ignored:

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1. Joseph's heartbroken anguish – “we saw the **anguish** of his soul”. The word ‘anguish’ is also translated ‘distress’ (Gen. 35:3; 42:21). John Gill describes Joseph's anguish in a most touching way, “when in the utmost agony, with trembling limbs, and quivering lips, and floods of tears, as they stripped him of his coat, he most earnestly and importunately requested of them they would not put him into the pit, and leave him there; and in the same manner entreated them they would not put him into the hands of strangers, but restore him alive to his father; but they turned a deaf ear to all his cries and entreaties, and hardened themselves against him.”
2. Joseph's heartfelt pleadings – “when he **besought** us”. The word ‘besought’ means to beseech, beg, intreat earnestly.
3. Note: It is a sobering reminder and warning of the kind of hatred and hostility that can exist in a family between siblings. Hatred directed at you from any individual is hard enough to bear but when it comes from a close family member, your own flesh and blood, it is all the more grievous.

### C. Joseph was Sold into Slavery (Vs. 25-30)

Imagine the glimmer of hope Joseph must have had when his brothers let down the rope to pull him out of the pit. Perhaps they had finally heard his tearful pleadings and would show him some pity? Imagine his heartbreak when having been drawn up out of the pit, they dragged him over to the Ishmaelite caravan and handed him over in exchange for 20 pieces of silver. What a hurtful and bitter experience! What a miracle that Joseph was given grace by God not to become the most bitter individual on earth at that time!

1. The people to whom he was sold (Vs. 25)
  - a. Joseph was sold to an Ishmaelite caravan on its way to trade in Egypt. The Ishmaelites were descendants of Ishmael and therefore distant relatives of Joseph and his brothers. Never underestimate what ungodly relatives can do to you!
  - b. The Egyptian practice of embalming meant there was a lucrative trade for spices, balm and myrrh that were used in the embalming process.
2. The proposal for him to be sold (Vs. 26-27)
  - a. It was Judah who suggested Joseph be sold. To Judah this was a win-win solution. They avoid the guilt of shedding Joseph's blood and at the same time make some money. “The original scheme to **slay** Joseph was changed to **sell** Joseph. Money looked more attractive than murder.” (Butler)
  - b. His brothers were ‘content’ (satisfied) with the proposal. It appears there were ongoing discussions about what to do with Joseph as they ate their meal and up until then, murder was still on the table as a possibility.
3. The price for which he was sold (Vs. 28). Joseph is sold for the price of a common slave at that time – 20 pieces of silver. For the ten brothers, this would allow for 2 pieces of silver each. What dirty money!
4. The pain after he was sold (Vs. 29-30).

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- a. For some reason, Reuben was absent when his brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders. He returns to the pit with the plan of retrieving Joseph to return him to his father. He was too late! Imagine if he had arrived a little earlier? How often significant things in history are determined within a very short time window. What a reminder of the Sovereignty of God. Joseph's brothers thought they sold him into Egypt but in reality, God was sending Joseph into Egypt for a much higher purpose.
- b. Reuben found out that compromise, while appearing to be the easier option, never bears good fruit. How much better it would have been if he had just stood squarely and firmly on the right side of the issue against his hot-headed brothers.

### D. Joseph Symbolised the Saviour

So often as you study the life of Joseph you will see a picture of the Lord Jesus. There are too many parallels to be a coincidence. Christ can be found in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27) and this incident in the life of Joseph is no exception.

1. Joseph was the beloved son of his father; Christ is the only Begotten, Beloved, Eternal Son of God the Father.
2. Joseph was commissioned of his father to go and seek the welfare of his wayward, sinful brothers; Christ was sent by the Father into this wicked world to save undeserving sinners. Luke 19:10 **"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."**
3. Joseph was rejected of his brethren and in like manner, Christ "came unto his own, and his own received him not." Christ was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief..." (Is. 53:3)
4. Joseph was stripped of his princely robe by wicked hands and Christ was stripped of his seamless robe and scourged. Then he was stripped at the hands of wicked Roman soldiers bearing shame and humiliation. Matthew 27:28 "And they **stripped him**, and put on him a scarlet robe."
5. Joseph was sold into slavery for 20 pieces of silver at the suggestion of Judah; Christ was betrayed by his disciple Judah (Judas is the N.T. equivalent to the Hebrew name Judah) for 30 pieces of silver. Both were betrayed by Judah and both were sold for the price of a common slave!
6. Joseph suffered anguish at the hands of his wicked brothers; Jesus Christ went through all the agonies of the crucifixion as he suffered for the sins of the world.
  - a. Consider his agony in the garden as he stood under the shadow of the cross and was faced with the reality of "being made sin for us who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21) Luke 22:44 "And being in an **agony** he prayed more earnestly: and his **sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.**"
  - b. Consider the agony of His physical sufferings (bruised, beaten and nailed to the cross). Isaiah 53:5 "But he was wounded for our transgressions, *he* was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

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- c. Consider his anguish of soul as he cried “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

### 7. Joseph so beautifully pictures Jesus Christ!

## IV. THE COVERUP OF JOSEPH’S BETRAYAL (VS. 31-35)

### A. The Deceitfulness of their Plan (Vs. 31-32)

1. Instead of being willing to tell their father the plain, cold facts about what they had done, they concoct a further plan to cover up what they had done. Deception runs thick in this family!
2. They slay a baby goat (kid) and dip Joseph’s coat of many colours in the blood and bring it to their father and say “This have we found: know now whether it by thy son’s coat or no.”
3. Confessing our sin is God’s way, not covering up our sin. Prov. 28:13 “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy.”
4. Note: Bullies are actually cowards. They are happy to mistreat someone who is vulnerable but don’t have the courage to face what they have done honestly. Their brutal activities thrive in an environment of secrecy.

### B. The Heartlessness of their Plan (Vs. 33-35)

1. Not only had their bitterness and envy made their hearts cold and hard towards their brother Joseph, it had also made their hearts hard towards their own father. How our hearts can be “**hardened** through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13).
2. Think about it. Those brothers watched their elderly father cry his eyes out for day after day and yet they would not tell him the truth of what they had done. What staggering cruelty we are capable of against even the ones closest to us when our hearts are hardened by bitterness. Jacob was so overcome with grief, he thought it was going to put him in the grave.

## V. THE CONTROL OVER JOSEPH’S TRIAL (VS. 36)

The story of Joseph from start to finish is the story of the Providential workings of God. Genesis 50:20 is like the Romans 8:28 statement for Joseph’s life – “But as for you, **ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good**, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.” The bigger picture was that God was sending Joseph to Egypt in order to preserve the seed of Abraham. Psalm 105:16-19 “Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. **He sent a man before them, even Joseph**, *who* was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him.” God’s Providential ruling is seen in this event in at least two ways:

### A. The Protection of Joseph from Murder

1. If the brothers had their first wish, they would have killed Joseph. But God moved through Reuben to spare his life.
2. Judah’s suggestion of selling Joseph into slavery, though an evil one, put to rest any further thought of killing Joseph. They assumed, based on the typical treatment of slaves in that day, that they would never hear from Joseph again and that he would

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probably perish in Egypt at the hands of cruel slave masters. Little did they know how God's hand would work as they watched Joseph being tugged along by the Ishmaelite traders as they lead him off into the distance towards Egypt.

3. Don't get the idea that Joseph's brothers were trying to be a part of helping fulfill God's purposes in Joseph's life. As far as they were concerned, this marked the end of Joseph's dreams. It was all over. They meant it for evil! They were doing all they could to try and thwart God's plan for Joseph's life. But God would overrule their plans and even use their evil actions as threads to weave the tapestry of Joseph's life. God can make even the wrath of man to praise him (Ps. 76:10).

### B. The Placement of Joseph in Egypt (Vs. 36)

1. God's sovereign hand ensured that out of all the people Joseph could have been sold to, he was sold to Potiphar, a high ranking official of Pharaoh. This was to prove Providential as the story unfolds from here.
2. "It is a miserable story of ignoble jealousy and cruel hate; and yet, over all this foaming torrent, God's steadfast bow of peace shines. These crimes and this "affliction of Joseph" were the direct path to the fulfilment of His purposes." (Alexander Maclaren)
3. "The grace of God is seen in this chapter in the way in which sin is defeated and the Divine purposes accomplished... Sin is never necessary, though it may be used and overruled by God. It is absolutely impossible to bring good "out of" evil; for there never has been any good in evil... But good can be brought about in spite of evil, **and so it came to pass that the very steps Joseph's brethren took to defeat God's purposes were used to fulfill those dreams.**" (Griffith Thomas)

**Conclusion:** Are you struggling to accept a trial God has allowed in your life? Will you submit to God's purposes and let his grace make you better rather than bitter?

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch lady whose family risked their lives during the Second World War to provide a hiding place in their home for persecuted Jews. Someone betrayed them and as a result her watch maker father was sent to a concentration camp where he died ten days later. Corrie and her beloved sister Betsie were incarcerated at Ravensbruck concentration camp. They were starved, covered with fleas and made to suffer. ***Betsie did not survive the horror of the camp but Corrie gaunt, filthy, and weak was released in October 1944.*** She later found out that an order had been given at the end of that very week to kill all women her age and older. An error in prison paperwork was the what God used to release her. Corrie vowed if the Lord allowed her to live, she would tell as many people as possible about the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. She also promised to go wherever the Lord led. Although she was fifty-nine years of age when released she travelled all over the world for the next thirty years speaking in more than sixty countries, captivating audiences with her inspiring faith and love for the Lord. She went to be with the Lord in 1983 on her ninety first birthday.

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Before she died in the concentration camp In Ravensbruck, her sister Betsie said to Corrie, **“Corrie your whole life has been a training for the work you are doing here in prison and for the work you will do afterward.”** Corrie used to say, **“God has plans, not problems for our lives.”** In the course of her talks, she often showed the reverse side of an embroidered bookmark. It looked like a meaningless mass of tangled threads. Corrie would turn it over and there written plainly were the words, **“God is love.”** She then quoted these words,

***My life is but a weaving, between my God and me,  
I cannot choose the colours He weaveth steadily.***

***Oft' times He weaveth sorrow and I in foolish pride,  
Forget He sees the upper and I the underside.***

***Not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly  
Will God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why.***

***The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skilful hand,  
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.***

***He knows, He loves, He cares, nothing this truth can dim,  
He gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him.***

Corrie Ten Boom in a recorded video interview for the film “The Hiding Place” as a woman in her eighties said this, “Some questions remain but they are not to be feared. **Our Heavenly Father holds all things in His hand, even our questions.** As for myself in the years since Ravensbruck (the German concentration camp), the Lord has sent me to some 60 countries and I have told to anyone who would listen, **“No pit is so deep that He is not deeper still.** With Jesus, even in our darkest moments the best remains and the very best is yet to be. I promised my sister I would tell it and I tell you.”

In so many ways, Joseph's coat of many colours symbolised the life God had in store for him. It would be a multifaceted, multicoloured life filled with many experiences: trials, tears and triumphs; pain, sadness and joy would all be woven into the fabric of his story but over it all God was weaving a life that would be a beautiful and powerful testament to His grace and power.