



SESSION 9

Dreamer

Jealousy opens the door for acts of hatred.

GENESIS 37:5-8,18-28

People want to be treated at least fairly. In truth, we would prefer to be treated better than what we deserve. At the same time, we are often troubled when we see people being treated better than us and better than what we think they deserve. That is when jealousy comes knocking at the door of our hearts. Jealousy is dangerous because it corrupts one's heart and usually leads to more tragic sin. The story of Joseph and his brothers attests to this truth.

Why is jealousy so dangerous and corrupting?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

GENESIS 37:2-36

The last literary section of Genesis begins in chapter 37. It focuses on the sons of Jacob who would become the heads of the tribes of Israel. Special focus is on one son: Joseph. Genesis 37:2-36 introduces Joseph's life and lays the foundation for the events that will eventually lead to Jacob and his family relocating to Egypt. These verses may be divided into three sections. Verses 2-11 describe what caused estrangement between Joseph and his brothers. First, their little brother gave their father a "bad report" concerning them when they were out tending the sheep (v. 2). Second, Jacob "loved Joseph more than any other of his sons," and he

exacerbated the situation between his sons when he gave Joseph a special robe. Joseph's brother's "hated him" for this (vv. 3-4). Third, Joseph's revealing to his brothers his dreams indicating that they would bow down before Joseph made them jealous, and "they hated him even more" (vv. 5-11).

Joseph's brothers had left home to pasture Jacob's flocks at Shechem, and Jacob sent Joseph to see how they were doing and bring back word to him. Shechem was the same place where Dinah was raped and her brothers killed all of the men there and plundered everything else (34:1-31). Mention of Shechem serves as a reminder of the type of violence of which these men were capable. However, they had moved on to Dothan, where Joseph found them.

When the brothers saw Joseph approaching, they first thought to murder him and throw his corpse into a pit. Reuben talked them out of murder, hoping to rescue Joseph later. Yet while Reuben was away, Ishmaelite traders heading to Egypt passed by. Judah suggested they sell Joseph to them, and they did (37:12-28). The final episode in chapter 37 describes how the brothers killed a goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. They sent the robe to their father to deceive him into believing Joseph had been killed by an animal. Jacob mourned Joseph's death, unaware that his favored son was becoming a slave in Egypt (37:29-36).

As you read Genesis 37:5-8,18-28, consider what the passage reveals about the dangers of jealousy.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A DREAM (GEN. 37:5-8)

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.

VERSE 5

Verses 2-36 establish the reasons Joseph's brothers hated him. Joseph was a troublemaker for them (v. 2), and their father loved Joseph more than he loved them (vv. 3-4). As Joseph wore the special robe Jacob made for his favorite son, Jacob's other sons were constantly reminded their father loved them less than he loved Joseph. One would think Jacob had learned from the mistake of his own parents. Isaac had favored Esau, but Rebekah had favored Jacob (Gen. 25:28).

When Joseph *had a dream* and revealed it to his brothers, *they hated him even more*. The text offers no explanation of what motivated Joseph to share his dreams with his brothers. But it does reveal that God spoke to Joseph through dreams. Dreams and Joseph's ability to interpret them become a major aspect of the Joseph story. There is no indication Joseph sought to taunt his brothers with the dreams he shared with them. It simply states *he told it to his brothers*. Although he would comprehend the meaning of these dreams in the future, how could Joseph have known the exactness of their fulfillment at that time? Nevertheless, as the story continues, it would become apparent to Joseph and his family that God gave these dreams to him, and that they were prophetic.

VERSES 6-7

In his dream, Joseph saw him and his brothers *binding sheaves in the field*. This was a common practice among farmers. It involved cutting the stalks of ripe grain and tying them together in bundles with all of the heads of the grain at one end. Suddenly and amazingly, Joseph's *sheaf arose*. Joseph told his brothers that their sheaves *gathered around* Joseph's sheaf and *bowed down* to it.

Grain will play a significant role later on in the Joseph story. This dream anticipates the brothers' future trek to Egypt to get grain because of a widespread famine that would reach from Egypt to at least as far as Canaan (42:5). It was then that they bowed themselves down before Joseph, unaware it was him (42:6; 43:26,28).

VERSE 8

Though Joseph offered no interpretation of the dream, his brothers understood its message. Joseph was declaring that his brothers would become his subordinates. Therefore, their indignant questions in response were filled with sarcasm and hatred. As emphatically as they could express their outrage, they rhetorically asked: *Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?* What's more, they understood the seriousness of a dream. For Joseph to claim he dreamed what he did was the same as declaring God revealed this to him, and this made them hate him even more.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of sharing our aspirations with others?

A PLOT (GEN. 37:18-22)

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.

VERSES 18-20

Joseph's brothers had left their home to pasture Jacob's flocks. Sometime after that, Jacob sent Joseph to go see about their welfare and return with a report. But when Joseph's brothers saw him coming from afar, they conspired against him. It is likely they recognized Joseph from a great distance by the robe he wore that Jacob had made especially for him.

They said to one another is an idiomatic way of describing how the entire group of men were saying the same thing. What they said was dripping with ridicule, literally: "Oh, look, the master of dreams! Here comes that man!" "That man" indicates they already had this discussion. Verses 5 and 8 communicate how Joseph's brothers loathed him for the dreams he shared with them. It is curious that they literally called Joseph "the master of dreams," given that Joseph's dreams showed him to be their master. The irony is that Joseph would one day be their master and they would repeatedly call themselves his servants (42:6,10-13).

The plural exhortation of *let us kill him* demonstrates how they gave into a mob mentality and had worked themselves up into a frenzy, willing to do together what none of them would have been willing to do on his own. After murdering their brother, they would throw him into a pit. The brothers also came up with a story to cover up the murder. They would say Joseph was killed and eaten by a *fierce animal*. This murder and cover up would ensure that Joseph's dreams would never come to pass. Their final statement, *we will see what will become of his dreams*, may be more than mockery. At some level, they may have believed there could be some truth to Joseph's dreams (v. 11).

How does jealousy add fuel to a mob mentality?

VERSES 21-22

When the oldest of the brothers, **Reuben**, heard the plan, he tried to save Joseph's life by convincing them that they should not take his life and be guilty of his murder. *Reuben* suggested they just throw Joseph into a pit. His plan was to return later to **rescue** Joseph and to return the young man to his father. Reuben's relationship with his father had already been strained when he slept with Jacob's concubine (35:22). Perhaps this would help him get back into his father's good graces. At first glance, what Reuben did may sound noble. However, if he had wanted to do the right thing, he would have stood up against his brothers and spoke up for Joseph, but he didn't. Years later Joseph learned of Reuben's intervention to save his life, and what he heard moved him to tears (42:21-24).

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Family*

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption. (See Proverbs 11:29; 1 Timothy 5:8.)

A PIT (GEN. 37:23-28)

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.

VERSE 23

The special **robe** that Jacob made for Joseph (and which Joseph apparently wore all of the time) gave Joseph special status. Consequently, it became a continual reminder to Joseph's brothers that Jacob favored and loved Joseph more than he loved them. The **robe** represented everything Joseph's brothers despised about him.

DID YOU KNOW?

Joseph's robe has traditionally been described as a "coat of many colors" (KJV). The Hebrew text in verse 23 can be interpreted to mean either a robe of extremities (a long robe reaching to the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet) or a robe of diversities (diverse colors). Because the precise meaning of the Hebrew is unclear, some Bible translations describe this special robe as a multi-colored robe and others describe it as a long-sleeved robe.

It should also be noted that the seeds of their hatred for Joseph were probably planted by their mothers, given the jealousy their mothers had toward Rachel, Joseph's mother and the only one of Jacob's wives Jacob truly loved. Their hatred for Joseph had years to simmer, and now they had the opportunity to give vent to it by stripping him of this symbol of his special status. The Hebrew word translated **stripped** communicates this was a violent act.

VERSE 24

After stripping Joseph of his robe, they tossed him **into a pit**. Given that the verse mentions the pit was dry, it most likely was a cistern. Cisterns were either natural pits or deep holes people dug out for the purpose of catching and holding rainwater. Water was arguably the most important natural resource in the entire ancient Near East; thus it is not surprising that a multitude of cisterns have been discovered from that time period. The location where this happened was probably a regular "rest stop" for pastoralists looking for places to water their flocks. Since this particular one was without water, it may indicate this assault on Joseph happened during the dry season (May to September) or during a time of drought.

VERSE 25

Note the callousness of these men. After violently stripping Joseph of his robe and throwing him into the pit with no food or water, they *sat down to eat*. As Joseph cried out to them in his distress to release him, his brothers were impervious to his pleas. In Genesis, the phrase *looking up* signals something significant was about to happen (see 13:10; 18:2; 22:4). In this instance, the brothers saw *a caravan of Ishmaelites*, descendants of Abraham's son Ishmael, on its way to Egypt for trade.

Why might a person grow calloused in his or her treatment of others?

VERSES 26-28

In those days, there was substantive slave trade in that region. So it fits that Judah recommended selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites. He explained that it was just good logic to sell Joseph instead of murdering him. Judah had enough sense to realize that no good would come from murdering their brother, their *own flesh*. This may come across as noble, but there was nothing noble about discussing whether they should murder their brother or engage in human trafficking by selling him into slavery. Judah reasoned that they would profit more by selling Joseph. If they killed him, their only profit would be that they would be rid of him. As nice as that sounded to them, it would make more sense to sell Joseph into slavery, be rid of him, and pocket some silver as well.

The brothers *lifted him out of the pit* and sold him to *the Ishmaelites*, who *took Joseph to Egypt*. The brothers must have believed they were finally rid of Joseph as they watched the Ishmaelites, also called *Midianite traders*, take him away into slavery.

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary or concordance to understand a key word.

Read the article on jealousy in a Bible dictionary. Use a concordance to find biblical references to jealousy. List biblical examples of jealousy. (Joseph's brothers [Gen. 37]; Saul's jealousy of David [1 Sam. 18]; the prodigal son's older brother [Luke 15:11-31]) What do the examples teach about jealousy? What does God mean when He describes Himself as "a jealous God" (Ex. 20:5; 34:14)?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers should be wise in what they share and with whom.
- Believers must guard against following peers bent on hurting others.
- Believers must beware of callousness in their own lives.

Discuss ways have you seen jealousy damage relationships in the church. How can we guard against becoming jealous of others?

Examine your life for callousness toward others. What are some ways you can guard against callousness? What would the opposite of callousness look like in your relationships?

Memorize Proverbs 27:4.

PRAYER NEEDS
