



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for November 4, 2007  
Released on October 31, 2007**

**"Joseph's Dream"**

**Devotional Reading: Psalm 70.**

**Background Scripture: Genesis 37.**

**Printed Text: Genesis 37:5-11, 19-21, 23, 24a, 28.**

**Genesis 37:5-11, 19-21, 23, 24a, 28**

**5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.**

**6 And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed:**

**7 For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.**

**8 And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.**

**9 And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.**

**10 And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?**

**11 And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.**

.....

**19 And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.**

**20 Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams.**

**21 And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.**

.....

**23 And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colors that was on him;**

**24 And they took him, and cast him into a pit.**

.....

**28 Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.**

### **Lesson Aims**

**After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:**

1. Describe the early relationship of Joseph with his brothers and parents.
2. Explain why Joseph had to tell about his dreams.
3. Make a commitment to share the gospel in a situation where it may not be welcome, and be prepared for the potentially difficult result.

### **How to Say It**

DOTHAN. *Doe-thun* (*th* as in *thin*).

ISHMAELITES. *Ish-may-el-ites*.

MIDIANITES. *Mid-ee-un-ites*.

OBEISANCE. *oh-bee-sense*.

PADAN-ARAM. *Pay-dan-a-ram*.

POTIPHAR. *Pot-ih-far*.

SHECHEM. *Shee-kem* or *Shek-em*

### **Introduction**

The word "coincidence" is used to describe events that seem to be connected only by accident but at the same time are remarkable. For example, while visiting a city for the first time, a man runs into an old classmate he did not even know was living there. Since this was neither anticipated nor planned, it is said to be coincidental.

In the Bible, however, something more remarkable than coincidence is presented: it is called "providence." "Providence is the beneficent outworking of God's sovereignty whereby all events are directed and disposed to bring about those purposes of glory and good for which the universe was made" (Ferguson, ed., *New Dictionary of Theology, IVP*).

Simply put, providence is God working out His plan in the world. To do this, God uses people, events, nations, and even tragedies. But this does not mean God is the author of evil. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James. 1:13).

Even so, God can take sinful human choices and redeem them, for "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

### **Lesson Background**

Jacob eventually returned to Canaan from living in Padan-aram, where he had married and where most of his children were born (last week's lesson). The livelihood of the family was based on raising livestock. In this relatively dry region, it

was necessary to move the flocks and herds around to provide them with daily food. Sometimes the shepherds would have to go long distances to find that food.

Jacob was a very successful shepherd, and apparently he intended for Joseph, his favorite son, to follow in his footsteps. To that end, we see Joseph learning the family operation. The biblical record tells us that Joseph had eleven brothers and one sister. The nature and significance of Joseph's interaction with his brothers is a vital part of the Genesis account.

### **Dreamer Dreams (Genesis 37:5–9)**

As we enter into the story of Joseph, around the year 1900 BC, we find a boy at age 17 (Genesis 37:2). Immediately we are introduced to a love-hate triangle consisting of Joseph, his brothers, and their father, Jacob. Joseph's father loved him more than he loved his other sons. This created a burning resentment toward Joseph.

Three things aggravated the situation. First, Joseph had brought a bad report about his brothers to his father, Jacob (also known as Israel; Genesis 37:2). Second, Joseph received preferential treatment in terms of a special coat, a colorful one perhaps with long sleeves (37:3, 23). Third, Joseph had been having dreams of personal grandeur. That's where our story opens today.

### **Questions**

#### **Joseph Dreaming—Gen. 37:5-11**

##### **1. What was the first dream Joseph shared with his brothers (vs. 5-8)?**

In the first dream that Joseph shared with his brothers, they were all in the field binding sheaves of grain. When Joseph's sheaf stood up, the sheaves of his brothers all bowed before his sheaf. Of course, Joseph's brothers did not need great interpretative skills to discern the obvious meaning of their younger brother's dream.

Joseph was having visions of greatness before his brothers—or so it seemed to them. Their response was not one of rejoicing or resignation. They wanted to know whether he intended to reign over them. Did Joseph intend to rule them? Furious that he would suggest such a thing, Joseph's brothers hated him all the more because of his dreams and for what he said. It is bad enough to have to accept the fact that Joseph is their father's favorite. But the suggestion that they will bow down before him is too much. The stage is being set for terrible happenings.

We may note at this point that we have a prediction that will be fulfilled in the later years of Joseph. "Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.... And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them" (Genesis 42:6, 9; compare 43:26, 28; 44:14).

##### **2. What was the second dream Joseph shared with his brothers (vs. 9-11)?**

In the second dream Joseph revealed to his brothers, he saw the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing before him. For Joseph, the two dreams provide absolute verification that the message is true, since the two dreams concern the same subject. We may compare this with Pharaoh's two dreams in the same night; those dreams had different images but the same meaning (Genesis 41:25). On this occasion, Joseph also informed his father of the dream.

Although he was his father's favorite son, Joseph was not above being rebuked by Jacob. Again, the meaning of the dream was clear: Joseph's entire family would one day bow before him. But even for Jacob, it was inconceivable that he would actually bow before his son. After all, he was Joseph's father and patriarch of the clan.

All of these things led Joseph's brothers to hate and envy him even more than before. "But his father observed the saying" (Gen. 37:11), that is, "Jacob pondered the dreams. After all, Jacob had received messages from God in dreams; so perhaps it was the Lord speaking to Joseph" (Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Cook).

## **Joseph Sent**

Sometime after Joseph had revealed his dreams to his brothers, Jacob decided to send him to see about them while they were tending sheep near Shechem (v. 12). Without hesitation, Joseph agreed to do as his father had asked. From our perspective, it seems strange that Jacob would send his favorite son anywhere near his brothers. In all likelihood, though, neither Jacob nor Joseph realized the intensity of the hatred that his brothers felt toward him.

While some simply see Joseph as a tattler, others think that Joseph must have had good reason to inform his father of the actions of his brothers. The wholesale slaughter of the men of Shechem by two of Joseph's brothers gives us insight into what these men were capable of.

This event occurred when Jacob's daughter Dinah, was violated by the son of Hamor, from whom Jacob purchased land (Gen. 34:1-7). Because of this, "Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males" (v. 25). Thus Jacob was not on the best of terms with his neighbors. "And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land" (vs. 30).

## **Joseph Despised—Gen. 37:19-21, 23-24**

### **3. What was a time when you had to tell a truth that turned out to be very unpopular? How did you handle the situation?**

Most of us are familiar with the concept of "shooting the messenger." This is the idea that if a certain message is unpopular, then people may react by attacking the one who is bringing the message rather than coming to grips with the truth of the message itself. This can take the form of character assassination. When Jesus' enemies could not refute His truth, they said, "He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?" (John 10:20). The result may be physical confrontation, as in Acts 14:19.

Maintaining poise and coolness under fire is important. "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). This is not a skill learned overnight! Humility is always called for. An arrogant presentation of the truth will not be persuasive.

### **4. What was the plot that Joseph's brothers hatched against him (vs. 19, 20)?**

Arriving in Shechem, Joseph did not find his brothers there. Asking where they had gone, he learned that they had moved on to Dothan. Dothan was about fifteen miles north of Shechem and near one of the major north-south trade routes of the region.

As Joseph approached his brothers, they recognized him from afar by his coat of many colors—a reminder to them of his cherished position in their father's heart. Seizing this

opportune moment when Joseph was away from the protection of his father, "they conspired against him to slay him" (Gen. 37:18).

Because Joseph had revealed his dreams to his brothers, they now disparagingly referred to him as the "dreamer" (Gen. 37:19). Since Joseph's dreams indicated he would rule over his brothers, they intended to make sure that his dreams came to naught.

Before long, the details of the plot against Joseph were hatched. First, they would kill him. Then they would dispose of his body by throwing it into one of the many pits in the area. Finally, they concocted a story that would cover up their murderous plot and free them from suspicion in the young man's disappearance. The brothers not only had a malicious motive, means, and opportunity, but clearly they were also acting out of premeditation.

**5. Does it surprise you that Joseph's brothers conspired to kill him? Why, or why not? What does this situation teach us about dealing with human nature in a godly manner?**

There are obvious reasons why the brothers would be angered by their father's favoritism and Joseph's dreams. But for them to cook up a plan to murder a family member seems extreme!

This is a striking example of the lengths people will go to when frustrated. Compare this incident with other biblical murder plots: Haman's plot to kill Mordecai, David's plot to kill Uriah, the plot to kill Paul, and the plot to kill Jesus. The devil's intention is to kill and destroy (John 10:10). He will use jealousy, anger, lust, and ambition to accomplish his purpose. Anger is one of his favorite tools. Learning to control one's temper honors God—and may prevent a life from being taken (Proverbs 15:1, 18; Ephesians 4:31).

**6. Which brother tried to rescue Joseph from the plot? Why (v. 21)?**

Though all of his brothers apparently hated Joseph, his brother Reuben did not wish to go as far as the others. Interceding for the youth, Reuben said, "Let us not kill him." What his motive was, we are not told.

Reuben suggested that they only cast Joseph into a pit. He was hoping he could rescue him later and return him to his father. Of course, he did not reveal this to his brothers.

Of course, Joseph was going to be neither rescued nor murdered. In the providential plan of God, he would end up in Egypt and thus pave the way for the preservation of the whole family. Ultimately, this would lead to the establishment of the nation of Israel and the coming of the Messiah.

**7. When Joseph arrived in his brothers' presence, what was the first thing they did? Why (vs. 23, 24)?**

The very first thing that Joseph's brothers did when he arrived was strip him of his coat of many colors. This garment was apparently a source of great irritation for the brothers. It symbolized both their father's special affection for Joseph. The next stage of their revenge is throwing Joseph into a *pit*, meaning a dry cistern. It is impossible for him to climb out of it without assistance from outside.

## **8. What did the brothers end up doing with Joseph? What was the rationale behind this (v. 28)?**

As they sat down to enjoy a meal together, the brothers noticed the approach of an Ishmaelite caravan heading toward Egypt.

It was Judah who spoke up and said, "What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?" (Gen. 37:26). Was Judah having second thoughts about their murderous plan, or was he merely attempting to profit from the situation?

Selling Joseph into slavery would not only rid him from their father's house but also make it possible for them to make a little money. Judah also pointed out that Joseph was their own flesh and blood, admitting that perhaps the decision to kill him was somewhat rash.

Since both Ishmaelites and Midianites are mentioned in this passage, there is some confusion concerning who actually bought Joseph. "Ishmaelites were descendants of Abraham by Hagar (16:15) and the Midianites (37:28) descended from Abraham by his concubine Keturah (25:2). The term Ishmaelites became a general designation for desert tribes, so that Midianite traders were also known as Ishmaelites" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

So Joseph was sold into slavery and taken away to Egypt. For some reason, however, Reuben had not been present when the transaction occurred. Hoping to rescue Joseph, he returned to the pit only to find it empty (Gen. 37:29).

## **9. What happened to Joseph after he was sold?**

To cover up their deed, the brothers dipped Joseph's coat in the blood of a goat and then presented it to their father. They let him draw his own conclusions concerning what had happened. "It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces" (Gen. 37:33). This brought on a long period of mourning.

In the meantime, Joseph was taken to Egypt, put on the auction block, and sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard (Gen. 39:1). Though things were bad, they could have been worse. Joseph's presence in the home of Potiphar brought success to his master. Recognizing his value, Potiphar promoted Joseph to the position of chief steward.

Things were looking up for Joseph-until his master's wife attempted to seduce him. After refusing her advances, Joseph was falsely accused and thrown into prison. Once again, it seemed that things were not going well for Joseph. This too, however, was about to turn around, for human decisions cannot thwart the purposes of God.

## **Conclusion**

The brothers in their haste to dispose of Joseph had no idea of the chain of events that they had set in motion.

God in His foreknowledge was aware of what was to come. God had already promised through Abraham that his family would sojourn in Egypt for 400 years (Genesis 15:13). That sojourn would result in a group of people large enough to be a nation.

Joseph was being sent ahead as a kind of "point man" for his family to this end. At the place where today's lesson ends it is almost certain that he could see only the slavery that lay ahead. The brothers later remembered Joseph's state of mind at this point in time: "We saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear" (Genesis 42:21).

Because we can look back on the entire story, it is easy for us to see the hand of God at work in all of this. But what about Joseph when he first began to have dreams of great significance? Did he see the hand of God working in his life?

Perhaps Joseph understood that his dreams pointed to his being a leader. Of much greater importance was the fact that Joseph determined to maintain his personal

integrity regardless of what happened. His brothers thought him to be positioning himself to take over the family. The life of Joseph demonstrated that he primarily sought to work with integrity no matter what position of life he was in. God, the unseen mover in this story, had chosen the right man for the job!

It can be very difficult to see God's hand during our trials today. Yet God remains as the unseen mover in our lives and indeed in all of history. This fact leads us to today's prayer.

### **Prayer**

Our Father in Heaven, we ask that You help us to use the story of Joseph to inspire us to be patient as we await the outcome of events we experience. In our waiting, we pray that we would conduct ourselves with all holiness, even during—especially during!—the toughest times. In the name of Christ, amen.

### **Thought to Remember**

God is still the unseen mover.

### **Anticipating Next Week's Lesson**

In our lesson next week we see how God preserved and elevated the young but faithful Joseph in a foreign land. Study Genesis 41:25–45.

### **Lesson Summarized By**

Willie Ferrell

Jesus Is All Ministries

[www.jesusisall.com](http://www.jesusisall.com)