

Lesson 4 – 23 May 2010

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

Lesson Scope: [Genesis 37](#)

Lesson Focus

Genesis 37 introduces Joseph as a young man seventeen years old. The experiences of Jacob's family up to this time were all a part of his memories. Grandfather Laban's deceit and changeableness, the favoritism of his father toward Rachel, and the apprehensions and preparations prior to meeting Uncle Esau had all left their mark.

Death had already touched Joseph's life through the death of his mother, Rachel, and his grandfather, Isaac. The moral failure of his oldest brother, Reuben, and the traumatic encounter with the Shechemites revealed to him the results of ungodly behavior. But the most powerful influence was his father's love for God, his obedience to divine revelation, and the evident protection and blessing of God upon his father's efforts. Jacob's name change and the constant reminder of his halting walk testified of God's work in Jacob's life.

Jacob made no effort to hide his special love for Joseph. Giving him a coat of many colors and using him as a messenger added fuel to the growing hatred of Joseph's brothers.

"Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof arc coals of fire, which bath a most vehement flame." Those who harbor the sin of jealousy become vulnerable to main other temptations.

Lesson Aim: To study the sin of jealousy and to see where it can lead.

Theme Verse: [James 4:5](#).

Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

Lesson Text.

The Seeds of Jealousy

Genesis 37:2-4

These *are* the generations of Jacob. Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of *many* colours. ⁴And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

The Growth of Jealousy

Genesis 37:5-13

And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told *it* his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. ⁶And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: ⁷For, 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. ⁸And 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.

⁹And 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. ¹⁰And 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? ¹¹And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

¹²And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. ¹³And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed *the flock* in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here *am* I.

The Fruit of Jealousy

Genesis 37:23-34

And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, *his* coat of *many* colours that *was* on him; ²⁴And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit *was* empty, *there*

was no water in it. ²⁵And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry *it* down to Egypt. ²⁶And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit *is it* if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? ²⁷Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh. And his brethren were content. ²⁸Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty *pieces* of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

²⁹And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. ³⁰And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child *is* not; and I, whither shall I go? ³¹And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; ³²And they sent the coat of *many* colours, and they brought *it* to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it *be* thy son's coat or no. ³³And he knew it, and said, *It is* my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. ³⁴And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

Questions for Study

The Seeds of Jealousy

1. What factors contributed to the jealousy of Joseph's brothers?
2. How can we minimize the likelihood of jealousy developing among our children?

The Growth of Jealousy

3. What was God revealing to Joseph and his family by these dreams?
4. What are some things that feed the growth of jealousy?
5. How should a person respond who knows that others are jealous of his success or position?

The Fruit of Jealousy

6. What did the brothers hope to accomplish by selling Joseph and displaying false evidence?
7. What happens to the heart when jealousy is in control?

Analyzing the Passage

Joseph was the second youngest of Jacob's children. He was also the

oldest son of Rachel, Jacob's chosen wife. That this was a factor in the special relationship is also suggested by the fact that Jacob chose Joseph as the heir to receive the blessing of the firstborn after Reuben forfeited that right by immoral conduct. Joseph's interest and efforts to do right likely contributed to this special relationship.

The evil report (Gen.37:2) that Joseph gave to his father involved four brothers Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

The Bible records only two dreams of Joseph. Contrary to his brothers' insinuation, he does not appear to have been a dreamer. These dreams came directly from God and do not appear to have needed any special interpretation.

Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites (descendants of Ishmael) and Midianites (descendants of Keturah). These people were relatives.

Principles and Applications

The Seeds of Jealousy

1. Jealousy, originates in an evil heart (Gen.37:2-4). Knowing this fact helps us understand the remedy. Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders" (Matthew 15:19). Saul had no problem with David until David received more recognition than himself (1 Samuel 18:7-8). The stirrings of jealousy in the heart must be identified and rooted out.

2. Jealousy undermines dependability (Gen.37:2-4). A jealous person is very concerned about who gets the credit. Decisions will be based on a personal agenda. Jealousy is a destroyer, not a builder. Jealousy will always hinder team effort, whether it is found on a church committee or a job site.

3. Jealousy is fanned by perceived personal injustice (Gen.37:3-4). The seedbeds of mistrust and suspicion bring forth the fruits of hatred and jealousy. The Scriptures admonish us to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Romans 12:10). We can test our love for others by how we respond when they misunderstand or seem to slight us.

4. Jealousy is expressed by hateful speech (Gen.37:4). We abhor the thought of taking another person's life. The words of Scripture, however, equate hatred with murder (1 John 3:15). It is possible to cripple or destroy a person's emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being by hateful, cutting words.

The Growth of Jealousy

5. Jealousy clouds the ability to benefit from God's message. (Gen.37:7-9). The implications of Joseph's dreams were clear, even though none of the family could begin to imagine how God would work it all out. Years later, Joseph could tell his brothers, "God did send me before you to preserve life.... God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. (Gen. 45:5-7).

The Fruit of Jealousy

6. Jealousy seeks to remove its object (Gen.37:26-28). Joseph's brothers' hatred was strong enough to consider murder and a convincing cover-up as the solution to their problem with him. Gossip and slander in the brotherhood are also an effort to remove the influence of another. They are sinful, bringing condemnation.

7. Jealousy seeks to cover personal sin (Gen.37:31-32). Covers for sin come in many sizes and shapes. Some put on the cloak of silence, calling it wisdom. Some may put on the cloak of maliciousness, calling it conviction. Others put on the cloak of covetousness, calling it diligence. Joseph's brothers chose the cloak of circumstantial evidence which was convincing. But God was watching, as He always is. "He that covereth his sins, shall not prosper" (Proverbs 28:13)

8. Jealousy brings sorrow and bitterness to others (Gen.37:34). For approximately twenty years, the brothers kept this sin covered. One cannot imagine the guilt they experienced or the feigned innocence they needed to maintain as they endeavored to minister to their father's grievous sorrow. Time is too short and eternity too long to allow jealousy to mar and dominate our lives.

Important Teachings

1. Jealousy originates in an evil heart (Gen.37:2, 4).
2. Jealousy undermines dependability (Gen.37:2, 4).
3. Jealousy is fanned by perceived personal injustice (Gen.37:3, 4).
4. Jealousy is expressed by hateful speech (Gen.37:4).
5. Jealousy clouds the ability to benefit from God's message (Gen.37:7-9).
6. Jealousy seeks to remove its object (Gen.37:26-28).
7. Jealousy seeks to cover personal sin (Gen.37:31, 32).
8. Jealousy brings sorrow and bitterness to others (Gen.37:34).

Answers to Questions

1. What factors contributed to the jealousy of Joseph's brothers?

The brothers were not of good character. Joseph's honesty and integrity were like thorns in their conscience. No doubt Joseph's good response to his father made it easy for Jacob to show him special favor. The brothers were aware of Jacob's special love for Joseph's mother, Rachel. The friction and competition between Leah and Rachel likely passed on to the children. Jacob's giving Joseph a special coat of many colors or pieces set him apart as a prince or ruler.

2. How can we minimize the likelihood of jealousy developing among our children?

We must recognize and accept the strengths and weaknesses of each child. Assure each one that he is a special creation of God with gifts and talents that God can use. Encourage children to use these gifts and talents for the glory of God and the blessing of mankind. Refuse to show favoritism.

3. What was God revealing to Joseph and his family by these dreams? These dreams indicated that God had a special work for Joseph. Some day they would all bow before him as their superior.

4. What are some things that feed the growth of jealousy?

The seeds of jealousy will grow if we allow the devil to have control. He will fill the mind with suspicion and surmising that will blind us to the truth about others. Feeling either inferior or superior about our position, talents, or authority provide a fertile seedbed for jealousy.

5. How should a person respond who knows that others are jealous of his success or position?

Make sure the problem does not rest with you. Keep a humble attitude. Continue to faithfully fulfill God's will in your life. Heap coals of fire by returning good for evil.

6. What did the brothers hope to accomplish by selling Joseph and displaying false evidence?

They expected to forever remove Joseph's influence from the family. They used this means to make void God's revelation through Joseph's dreams. By selling Joseph, the brothers thought they would escape the guilt of murder while making some money besides.

7. What happens to the heart when jealousy is in control?

Those who harbor jealousy become vulnerable to many other temptations. The heart becomes hard, hateful, and cruel, capable of committing the worst of deeds.

Summarizing the Lesson

Jealousy is a grievous sin to which we are naturally disposed. Its reaping may last a lifetime. But it is not cause for despair. Now is the time to deal with Jealousy. Tomorrow may be too late. "For we ourselves also were ... hateful, and hating another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared ... according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:3-5).

Research Guide

Study the Scriptures listed under "envy" and "jealousy" in Nave's Topical Bible.