

# Lesson 23: Joseph is attacked by his brothers

Genesis 37:12-36 (pg. 46-47, Gospel Story Bible)

## Teaching Points:

**Joseph's brothers plotted against him** — In their jealousy, Joseph's brothers plan to murder him. They have certainly heard how their own father stole the birthright of his older brother, Esau. Now it appears that the same thing is happening to them. The older brothers are going to bow down to the younger! They resent Joseph's dreams and the special treatment their father gives him. They despise that Joseph, in his manager's coat, is checking up on their work as if he were the oldest brother. In their sinful judging, the brothers sentence Joseph to death.

(Later, in Egypt, Joseph's strong abilities as a manager and leader became obvious. Clearly, Jacob saw something special in his son and was not simply "playing favorites.")

**Not all the brothers are equally guilty, but all are guilty** — Not all the brothers are equally guilty in the plot against Joseph. At the same time, none of the brothers tries as hard as he can to save him. Reuben suggests that they simply throw Joseph into a pit without killing him. Reuben's hope is to come back later and rescue Joseph. While Reuben is off somewhere else, Judah suggests that the brothers sell Joseph as a slave. Judah seems genuinely concerned for Joseph. But he also seems willing to share in the profit the brothers will make if they sell him.

As often happens, one sin leads to another. After selling off their brother, Joseph's brothers must lie to their father to conceal their wicked actions. Even Reuben and Judah were part of the lying. When the sons try to comfort their father in his mourning for Joseph, they undoubtedly tell additional lies. Sin just produces more sin.

## Where is the Gospel?

### How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

Read Matthew 27:17-23.

Joseph was treated unfairly by his brothers because of the brothers' resentment and jealousy. This is one of many Old Testament stories that look forward to the life of Jesus.

Joseph was betrayed, bound, and sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. But later God would use Joseph to save his brothers. Like Joseph, Jesus was unjustly turned over to Pilate out of envy, which is very similar to jealousy. And later, Jesus would make a way of salvation.

When we look at the life of Joseph, we see a picture of Jesus who was betrayed, bound, and crucified by his own people because they were jealous of him and resented him.

## Bible Truth:

God saved  
Joseph so that  
He might  
some day  
save us.

## A Little Bit More (grades 3-5) - Deceit

In a rebuke, Paul describes lying (deceit) this way: "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? (Acts 13:10).

John records Jesus speaking of unbelievers and the devil this way: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44 NIV).

Deceit started in the human race in the garden when Satan tempted Eve. Adam and Eve hid from God, and from that time, deception entered the human race and became one of our most frequent sins. Sin loves to grow in the darkness. In secret, lying allows us to believe we can hide our sin, but God is not fooled; he sees all things.

## Object Lessons:

### 1. One sin leads to another (Grades K-2)

#### Supplies:

- a brand new twenty dollar bill (or something similar)

Tell the children that you are going to tell them a secret and they must promise not to tell anyone. Show them the twenty-dollar bill. Let them pass it around, and when they are finished looking at it, ask them if they know what it is. They will say a twenty-dollar bill, but you tell them they are wrong.

Tell them it is a counterfeit twenty and that earlier this morning you met a world-famous forger who gave it to you. As objections rise, expand on the tale any way you would like to.

The point of the story is to help the class see that in order to not have sin exposed, you must continue sinning. Allow the story to get ridiculous and then tell them the truth. Then ask the class the following questions:

▪ **When you sin or deceive someone, what do you need to do to keep them from discovering your sin?**

(You need to continue lying or adding more sins to the ones you have already committed. If Reuben had threatened to tell his father what the others had done to Joseph, he may have been killed to cover up their sin.)

▪ **Can you think of a time when you had to lie to cover up your sin?**

(Be prepared to direct the children to their parents if any recent or serious sin is confessed.)

▪ **What does our repeated sin reveal about our need for the gospel and salvation?**

(We might want to believe we don't need God and that we can be righteous by obeying the law and that we are not really so bad. That is shown to be a false assumption when we sin and then sin again attempting to cover up the first sin.)

### 2. It's So Unfair (Grades 3-5)

#### Supplies:

- a larger gift item or privilege (ex. a couple of Oreo cookies)
- a smaller gift item or privilege (ex. a Lifesaver or sticker)
- a less desirable gift item (cotton balls, etc).

Note: You can substitute other items for the above. The important thing is that the items clearly have different values from each other; e.g., a cotton ball is not as good as a Lifesaver, and a Lifesaver is not as desirable as Oreo cookies.

The object of this exercise is to help the children identify with Joseph's brothers.

Recruit eleven volunteers to come to the front.

Give ten of the children one cotton ball and the last child, your favorite, the Lifesaver. Have them return to their seats and then ask the class what they thought about what you did. They are likely to talk about how you were not fair. Explain to them that the child who received the Lifesaver was your favorite. Draw out some of the children who received the cotton balls and ask them how they felt. Go on with this for some time until it is well established that you were not fair.

Then, take out the Oreo cookies and present it to your favorite child and explain that he is not permitted to share it with the class.

When you present the Oreo cookies, the class will really think you are being unfair. Help them to connect their feelings with that of Joseph's brothers. When we read the story of Joseph, it is easy to identify with Joseph, the victim, and not the sinful brothers. Joseph, however, is a picture of Christ who was unjustly betrayed by those closest to him. We are more like the sinful brothers who eventually, when the famine comes, will need to be saved.

Help the children see how quickly jealousy and even anger fill our hearts and how we need a Savior to deliver us from our sin. (Close this object lesson by encouraging your "favorite" to share Oreos with the class.)