

Joseph's Guilt

Can you see anything that Joseph had done to earn such deep hatred from his brothers? Certainly some of his actions might have fanned the flames of their anger toward him, but Joseph had not sinned against his brothers.

Family Leadership

Notice which of Joseph's brothers tried to keep him alive. Reuben, as the oldest brother, moved to make sure that they didn't murder Joseph. Later, Judah suggested that they sell Joseph as a slave rather than leave him to die.

Scripture Link:

There are many parallels between Joseph and *Yeshua*. For example, both men were sold for the price of a slave. Here, Joseph's brothers received 20 shekels of silver for him. In **Matthew 26:14-15**, Judas Iscariot received 30 silver coins for turning over *Yeshua* to the Pharisees.

Jacob's Anguish

Try to put yourself in the position of one of the brother's who went to Jacob with the news of Joseph's death. Imagine the atmosphere that the news of Joseph's "death" created in the family. Now try to imagine keeping this secret for the rest of your life.

2. Joseph sold into slavery - 37:12-36

a) Jacob sends Joseph to his brothers who are pasturing the sheep. Where does he send Joseph and where does Joseph find his brothers? How does he find them?

b) As his brothers see him approaching, what do they do? Who suggested that they modify their plan and in what way?

c) What did they do to Joseph? Who suggested that he be sold? Why? How much money did they receive?

d) Who's actions are described in verses 29 & 30? What does this imply about his participation in this affair? Why might he have been opposed to his brothers' plans?

e) How did Jacob respond when his sons presented him with the evidence of Joseph's death? Do you think they expected such a strong response? Here, Jacob is the victim of yet another deception. How do you think the brothers felt keeping this secret for over twenty years?

3. Judah and Tamar - 38:1-30

a) At this time, Judah moved away from his family to “go into business” with Hirah. Judah marries. What was his wife’s ancestry? How many sons did they have?

b) Who was Tamar and how did the “Law of Levirate Marriage” apply to her? (See **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**) Why didn’t Judah give Tamar to his third son? What did he do instead?

c) When she heard that Judah was going to Timnah, what did Tamar do? What items of Judah’s did she acquire as a result? Did Judah try to get these items back? Why didn’t he try harder to get them?

d) When Judah found out that Tamar was pregnant, what was his response? After she presented him with the evidence of the father, how did he respond? What does this show about Judah’s heart attitude at the time?

e) Tamar had twin boys. Why is the identity of these sons important?

Childless Widows

Ancient middle-eastern culture was patriarchal and sons were expected to produce sons to carry on their branch of the family. If a married son should die without producing an heir, a brother was required to marry the dead brother’s widow for the purpose of providing an heir to carry on the family name of the dead brother. This also assured that the widow would remain in the family and not be abandoned to a life of poverty.

When Caught in Sin

Imagine Judah’s anger when he discovered that Tamar was pregnant. While he had not fulfilled his responsibility in allowing his son Shelah to take her for his wife, that was no excuse for her to “play the harlot.” So it must have been very embarrassing to learn that he was the father of Tamar’s child. Judah’s reaction however, showed a contrite and repentant heart, exactly the attitude that God would want in such a situation.

Scripture Link

Luke 3:33 and **1 Chronicles 2:3-15** help explain why it’s important to know the identity of Tamar’s twin sons.

Importance of Attitude

Through no fault of his own, Joseph seems to find himself in bad situations. Much can be learned from how he responds in these situations. First, he doesn't seem to dwell on his own misfortune but tries to make the best of the situation. Second, he doesn't seem to doubt that God is in control of his situation and he trusts God to see him through. We could probably benefit from keeping this same attitude when we face adversity.

Punishment Fitting the Crime

Given that slaves in Egypt were considered to be mere physical property, what do you think would typically happen to a slave who was accused of making sexual advances to his master's wife? Since Joseph was not immediately put to death, how do you think Potiphar felt about his wife's accusation?

4. Joseph and Potiphar's wife - 39:1-20

a) How did Joseph fare as Potiphar's slave? Who deserves the credit for this? What part, if any, did Joseph play?

"The Lord was with Joseph and . . . prospered everything he did."
Genesis 39:2-3

b) What was Joseph's response to the advances made by Potiphar's wife? Was this a frequent occurrence? What can we learn of Joseph's character from his actions?

c) The accusation of Potiphar's wife presents a much different picture of Joseph's character than Potiphar must have had. Do you think he believed his wife's story?

d) Potiphar could have sentenced Joseph to a wide array of different punishments. Why do you suppose he chose to put him in prison?

5. Joseph in prison - 39:21 - 40:23

a) How did Joseph fare in prison? Who deserves the credit for this? What part, if any, did Joseph play?

b) What were the occupations of the two men that Joseph attended while in prison? Describe the dreams that each man had. How did Joseph interpret these dreams?

c) How did Joseph's interpretations come true? How did the Pharaoh's cupbearer repay Joseph's kindness?

Being Forgotten

Lest we forget how unhappy Joseph was in his current situation, after he gave Pharaoh's cupbearer a favorable interpretation of his dream, he said to him, "...remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh.." (**Genesis 40:14**) Sadly, **Genesis 40:23** records that "The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him."

Digging deeper

The Power of Jealousy

Jealousy is a very common human emotion at the root of many sins. For example, consider Cain's murder of Abel recorded in **Genesis 4**. While jealousy is an emotion we all have to deal with in life, God expects us to respond to it without falling into sin. Can you think of other examples from scripture where someone either resisted falling into sin because of jealousy or succumbed to it?

1. Jealousy is a very strong emotion. Analyze the jealousy that Joseph's brothers harbored and note how it grew. Was their jealousy justified in any way? What actions fueled their jealousy? How do you handle jealousy when you experience it?

2. Joseph's world was turned upside down when he was sold into slavery. However, he prospered while in Egypt because "God was with him" (**Genesis 39:2**). Do you think Joseph's attitude had any bearing on his situation? In what way? What can you learn from this?

For further study, see
Haftarah : Amos 2:6-3:8
Brit Hadashah : Acts 7:9-16