

Introduction

This week I had the opportunity to share the gospel with a Catholic man. I love sharing with Catholics. There is an openness to the gospel. They believe in Jesus so there is a great first step. Most of them have never heard the rest of Romans 10:9-10, where we have to confess Jesus as Lord. Most of them have not heard 1 John 5:11-12 that tells us that we can know that we have eternal life. After sharing with the man, he began to tell me about lent. His wife had asked him what he was going to give up for lent, and he said that he might give up chocolates. His wife told him to consider giving up cussing. They have two macaws and even the birds have started cussing. So, I also got to share with him about how to deal with cussing. I shared with him what Jesus taught us in Matthew 15. He said that the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart and these defile the man. The key to stop the cussing is to renew his mind, so that the words of his mouth are not cuss words, but words of blessing and truth. He needed to fill his mind with truth. I taught him about reading, memorizing, meditating, and filling his mind with God's word.

(Matt 15:15-20) "Peter said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." {16} Jesus said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? {17} "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? {18} "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. {19} "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. {20} These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

In our text today, Joseph's brothers plan on murdering him. They end up selling him as a slave to some Midianites on their way to Egypt. They had hate and murder in their hearts, and their actions were a result of what was in their heart. In our message today, we will be looking at their motives and the things that led up to their actions. We will look at the opportunity they had to carry out their evil plans. We will also look at their cover-up, and the end results.

1. The Motives (Gen 37:1-11)
2. The Opportunity (Gen 37:12-17)
3. The Plans (Gen 37:18-30)
4. The Cover Up (Gen 37:31-35)
5. The Results (Gen 37:36)

1. **The Motives** (Gen 37:1-11)

(Gen 37:1-11) "Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan. {2} These are *the records* of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was *still* a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father. {3} Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. {4} His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and *so* they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms. {5} Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. {6} He said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had; {7} for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."

{8} Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. {9} Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." {10} He related *it* to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" {11} His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying *in mind*."

The motive is very clear; Joseph's brothers hated him and were jealous of him. There were several contributing factors to this great hatred and jealousy that they had for him. Let's take a look at these factors.

a. Bad Report (Gen 37:2)

The first factor was a bad report. When Joseph was seventeen and was pasturing the flock with his brothers, he brought back a bad report of them to his father. We do not know what the bad report was, only that he gave a bad report. The Hebrew word is *dibbah* (Strong's H1681), and it means to slander, defame, or give an evil report. The word is used nine times and about half the time it is translated as slander and the other half as a bad or evil report.

When we think of slander, we think of saying something that harms the reputation of another person. It carries a malicious intent to harm the reputation of another person. In our text today, we do not see any hint of a desire by Joseph to maliciously slander and harm the reputation of his brothers. I believe that this is why the translators used bad report instead of slander. As we study the life of Joseph over the next few weeks, we will see that he is a man of integrity. God's hand and favor are with him. I do not see him as a slanderer, or one who tries to maliciously hurt others. That does not fit his character profile. I believe he gave a bad report, and he may have given it in response to specific questions from his father.

Three of the times that *dibbah* is used is about the ten spies that brought back a bad report to Moses and the people of Israel. They did not slander anyone, but their report discouraged people from doing what God wanted them to do. They said that it was a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people were of great size. Furthermore, they said that they were like grasshoppers in their sight. So, in this sense, a bad report can be something that makes a situation look bad, not necessarily a person to look bad.

(Num 13:32-33) "So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of *great* size. {33} There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

I believe that Joseph told his father what his brothers had done or were doing, and it exposed the evil that they were involved in. Therefore it made them look bad in the sight of their father. It may have been something that Jacob asked Joseph about and he simply told his father. It may have been something that was wrong that Joseph felt that Jacob needed to know about.

We have to be very careful about speaking ill of other people. We have to be very careful about not slandering others. We have to be careful about saying things that make someone else look bad. In Ephesians 4:29, we have a wonderful verse that helps us regulate what comes out of our mouths. Paul gives us four filters to use so that only pure things come from our lips. First, he says, let no unwholesome or rotten word come from our mouth. Is what we are thinking about saying wholesome, or is it unwholesome or rotten? Second, Paul said that we should only let words that are good for edification be spoken. Does what we want to say edify or build up others? If it does not build up others, we should not say it. Third, is what I want to say needed right now? Is this the proper time? Is this the need of the moment? If not, we should not say it. Finally, does what I want to say give grace to those who hear? One definition of grace is the ability and desire to do God's will. Does what I want to share create a desire in people to follow God and do His will? If not, we should not give the report.

(Eph 4:29) "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."

Sometimes we have to give some thought to how we are going to respond to things so that we do not give a bad report. I had a really bad work situation at the club that I managed in Florida. When people asked me how I liked working there, I did not want to give a bad report. I also did not want to say "Things are going great, and I love it here," which would have been something that was not true or genuine. I discussed the issue with my assistant manager and he gave some great advice. He said to tell people that you liked working with some of your staff, which was very true. When we give some thought about questions that we will be asked, we can usually find something positive to say. We have to learn to give gracious responses, rather than bad reports. Joseph gave a bad report and it caused his brothers to hate him. We need to learn to speak words of truth with kindness so that we have favor with God and men.

(Pr 3:3-4) "Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. {4} So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man."

b. **Favoritism** (Gen 37:3-4)

The second contributing factor to Jacob's brothers hating him was favoritism. In verses three and four, we see that Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, and the other sons knew that. His father made him a special varicolored tunic, and it was a constant reminder of the favoritism. It also says that Joseph was the son of his old age. Joseph had nothing to do with the favoritism. The hatred that his brothers had for him was not of his wrongdoing, but of their father's wrongdoing.

Parents, we have to be very careful of showing favoritism to any one of our children. We must be careful to make all of them feel loved and special. When Karen and I got married, I had no idea that we would have ten children. When we had our first child, I felt that I could never love another child as much as my first one. When our second one came along, I wanted the second one to know that we loved her just as much, so we named her Amy, which means beloved. (I thought our second child would be a middle child, not the second of ten.) We did not want to show favoritism.

James talks about favoritism. He said that when a rich man comes in and we give him a good seat and we give a bad seat to a poor man that comes to our assembly, we are showing favoritism. He says that this violates the royal law, which is to love our neighbor. We must not show favoritism in our homes, and we must not show favoritism in the house of God. It will rub people the wrong way, just as it did to Joseph's brothers.

c. **Lack of Discretion** (Gen 37:5-10)

The third contributing factor is a lack of discretion. It would seem that the dreams caused his brothers to hate him. I don't think it is the dreams that caused the problem. I think it is the fact that Joseph shared the dreams with his brothers that caused the problem. I think that God revealed to Joseph what was going to happen in the future. I believe he should have journaled those things and asked God for clarification. I believe in openness, but I also believe that you must temper it with discretion. In both dreams, God showed Joseph that his brothers and parents would bow down in homage to him. To share that with them has the appearance of arrogance. It could be arrogant, but I believe it was more a lack of maturity and discretion on Joseph's part.

We have to be careful about saying things to others that make us look superior or better than them. In Proverbs 27:2, Solomon wrote, "*Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.*" If Joseph had not shared a dream that praised himself, his brothers would have had one less reason to hate him. Humility endears people, but arrogant words estrange us from others.

d. **Jealousy** (Gen 37:11)

In verse eleven we read that "his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying *in mind.*" His brothers were jealous that his father treated him with favoritism. His brothers were jealous that he had been given a varicolored tunic. His brothers were jealous of these dreams that he was getting where they were going to bow down to him. But, there was something else that they were jealous about. Joseph had been given the firstborn blessing.

Last week we saw that Reuben defiled his father's bed. I read Genesis 49:3-4 to you, which was where Jacob gave his final words and blessings to his sons before he died. He said,

"Reuben, you are my firstborn; my might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch."

Jacob took away his preeminence as the firstborn. Who did Jacob give it to? He gave it to Joseph. We read in 1 Chronicles 5:1-2,

"Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright. Though Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came the leader, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph.)"

When Jacob took away the birthright from Reuben, he gave it to Joseph. Joseph was the firstborn of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. This undoubtedly brought jealousy and ill feelings towards Joseph.

2. **The Opportunity** (Gen 37:12-17)

(Gen 37:12-17) “Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem. {13} Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing *the flock* in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "I will go." {14} Then he said to him, "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. {15} A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?" {16} He said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing *the flock*." {17} Then the man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard *them* say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.”

The first thing that I want to point out in the passage is Joseph’s heart to obey and please his father. Israel sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were pasturing the flock in Shechem. His immediate response to his father is, “I will go.” Shechem was the place that Dinah was violated, and they had killed off all the males. Apparently, people moved there and repopulated the city. Joseph went to Shechem and a man found him wandering in the field, and he asked Joseph who he was looking for. The man told him that he had heard that they went to Dothan, so Joseph goes on to Dothan to find his brothers. Dothan is a little north of Shechem, and 100 kilometers or 62 miles north of Hebron where they live. Joseph’s brothers hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms. Hate is an evil passion and it causes people to do things that they should not do. Jacob’s brothers hated him, and all they needed was an opportunity. Well, the opportunity they were looking for was getting ready to present itself to them.

3. **The Plans** (Gen 37:18-30)

(Gen 37:18-30) “When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. {19} They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! {20} "Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!" {21} But Reuben heard *this* and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." {22} Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. {23} So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; {24} and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it. {25} Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt. {26} Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? {27} "Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. {28} Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt. {29} Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. {30} He returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?””

Joseph's brothers hated him and they saw that this was their opportunity to kill him. There were three plans that they devised. When they saw him, they plotted to put him to death. They were going to kill him and throw his body into one of the pits. These pits were empty or dry wells. They also plotted their cover-up story. They were going to tell their father that a wild beast had devoured him.

When Reuben heard this plot, he begged them not to kill him, but to simply throw him into the pit. Reuben planned on rescuing him and restoring him to his father. Even though Reuben had lost his birthright and had every reason to go along with their first plan, he knew their plan was evil and he tried to spare Joseph's life. So, when Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped him of his varicolored tunic and threw him into the pit. Then, they sat down to eat a meal together.

Then, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites approaching them, and they came up with Plan # 3. The caravan was on its way to Egypt carrying aromatic gum and balm and myrrh. Judah said, what profit is there to kill him and cover up his blood. Judah saw a way for them to get rid of their brother and make a profit from it at the same time. So, they pulled him out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver.

When Reuben arrived and looked in the pit, he did not see Joseph, so he tore his garments. The tearing of garments was a sign of repentance and contrition. He was remorseful for whatever had been done to Joseph. Reuben may have done some wrong things, but he was truly acting like a first-born. He felt responsible for the well-being of his younger brothers. When he returned to his brothers he said, "the boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?" Reuben did not want to return home to see his father grieve over the loss of Joseph. He knew that his father loved Joseph and would be very upset over his death. He hated the thought of having to tell his father the bad news.

4. **The Cover Up** (Gen 37:31-35)

(Gen 37:31-35) "So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; {32} and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son's tunic or not." {33} Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" {34} So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. {35} Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him."

Their original plan was to tell their father that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast. They carried through with this plan. They slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood and brought it to their father. Then, they asked Jacob to examine it to see if it was Joseph's tunic or not. They let Jacob come to the conclusion that a wild beast had devoured him.

Jacob then came to the conclusion that a wild beast had torn him to pieces and devoured him. Jacob tore his clothes and mourned for his son for many days. Joseph's brothers and sisters tried to comfort their father, but he refused to be comforted. He said that he will surely go down to Sheol mourning for my son, and Jacob wept for him. Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead. In the New Testament, the parallel word is hades. It is incorrectly translated as hell, when it is really the place of the dead, not the eternal place of judgment. Jacob was saying that

he would mourn until the day he died. Jacob truly loved Joseph and this was a devastating loss to him.

Even though the brothers did not lie about what happened to Joseph, they lied with their actions. They deceived their father, and led him to believe that a wild beast had torn him to pieces and devoured him. When his father came to that conclusion and said it, they could have easily told the truth. The fact is that they wanted their father to believe that, and they had purposely deceived their father, and removed any suspicion of their involvement or wrong-doing.

5. **Results** (Gen 37:36)

(Gen 37:36) “Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard.”

We leave the scene at Jacob’s house and our text returns to Joseph. The Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh’s officer, the captain of the bodyguard. In Genesis 39, we will pick up where we leave off today, with Joseph being in Potiphar’s house. But, I want to talk about another plan.

In Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abraham. God said to Abram in his sleep that his descendants would be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they would be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. God told him that they would come out of that land with many possessions. Then, in the fourth generation, they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete. God knew that Abraham’s descendants would go to Egypt and then return after four hundred years. God is omniscient. He is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega. He knows the past, the present, and the future. He is also Omnipotent, all powerful, and Sovereign. God could have stopped and intervened in the evil plans that Joseph’s brothers carried out, but God allowed it. God had other plans. God had plans to use Joseph to save his family in the coming drought. God had plans to bring Israel and the whole family to Egypt. God had plans to multiply them, to bless them, and then to bring them out of Egypt with many possessions. God gave a prophetic word to Abraham about all of this a long time in advance. Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born. Isaac just died at the age of 180, so this prophecy was given nearly 300 years before it begins to unfold.

(Gen 15:12-16) “Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror *and* great darkness fell upon him. {13} *God* said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. {14} But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. {15} As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. {16} Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

There are a number of things going on and I cannot always explain them. First, God is omniscient and knew all this was going to centuries in advance, before Jacob or any of his sons were even born. Second, God is sovereign. He is over all things, and can do whatever he pleases. God had a plan for the nation of Israel and for each of the individuals. Third, God is our Lord, Shepherd, and Keeper. He cares for us and works things out for our good. Paul wrote in Romans 8:28 that “*God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who*

are called according to His purpose.” God was going to cause what happened to Joseph to turn out for good.

After Jacob dies, Joseph’s brothers were concerned that he would turn against them. *“But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.’”* (Gen 50:19-20) Joseph understood that God had used what his brothers did for evil for good in his life. Joseph understood that God works all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

Conclusion and Applications

This morning we have seen that the results of hate. Joseph’s brothers hated him and were jealous of him. Therefore, they plotted to put him to death. Our desire is to walk in love, not hate. Our desire is to give good reports, and to be careful about the things that proceed from our mouths. Our desire is to have favor with God and with others.

We have also seen that God is bigger than our problems. He knew all of this would happen hundreds of years before it happened. God is Sovereign and has the ability to do anything He wants. God had a plan and He was going to turn this evil that was done today into something good for His people.

Some things may have happened to you that were not pleasant. People may have done or said things to you that were not nice. God wants you to know that He is aware of those things. He knew them in advance. He also wants you to know that He can take these things and turn them into good for you and for those around you. That is what He did for Joseph, and that is what He will do for you. My encouragement to you this morning is to place your trust in God. That is what Jesus did. Look what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:23. *“And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously.”* The religious rulers and soldiers did evil things to Jesus, but He did not revile in return, but kept entrusting Himself to the Father. This morning, give those hard things to God. Entrust yourself to Him. Be assured that God will take those things and work them out for good in your life.

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