

Joseph's Brothers Sell Him Into Slavery

Genesis 37:12-36

All of the events described in last week's story—Joseph's bad report to his father about his brothers, Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph, and the dreams Joseph described in which his family bowed down to him—set the stage for the events described in this week's passage.

Reuben, the oldest brother, was the first to show concern for Joseph's life. As the oldest brother and leader of the family, Reuben was in some ways responsible for his brother's safety. He would likely be the one to bring the deceitful report of his brother's demise to their aging father. His plan to put Joseph in a cistern (probably a dry well) in the desert and rescue him later may have been suspected by some of the other brothers. Scripture doesn't say that the brothers enthusiastically supported his plan; they just did what the eldest brother suggested, as younger brothers would be expected to do.

The brothers appeared to have little remorse for what they'd done to Joseph. They simply sat down to eat—the fresh food that Joseph had probably just brought to them—while Joseph sat in the dry cistern, contemplating a long, painful death from thirst.

Genesis 37:29 indicates that when the traders came along, Reuben was not present. Possibly it was his turn to check on distant flocks; in any case, he didn't witness his brothers' next act. Judah suddenly suggested that they spare Joseph's life. We don't know if this suggestion was prompted by pangs of guilt, the appeal of money, or a desire to punish Joseph even more severely by making a slave of him. Whatever the

motive, the decision was made, and Joseph was gone before Reuben returned. When he found that Joseph was gone, he was grief-stricken, anguishing over what to do next, and, no doubt, what to tell his father.

When the brothers returned to their father, they were careful not to lie. They simply showed Jacob the bloody coat and asked if it was Joseph's. Perhaps they felt their deceit would be less evil if they allowed Jacob to assume that Joseph had been ripped apart by an animal.

Whatever their motives, both Reuben and Judah tried to save Joseph's life, and God used their efforts to bring about his plan. What the other brothers intended for evil, God ultimately used for enormous good by using Joseph to save Jacob's family and much of the region from starvation.

Devotion for Leaders

The One Thing: When we do what's right, we grow closer to Jesus and encourage faith and growth in other people.

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: As adult Christians, we struggle daily to do what's right. Reread the story of Reuben and Judah, and consider the difficult dynamics in this story. Have you ever fought to do the right thing while others simply chose the wrong path? Write down your story this week, and share it with the children in your children's church. Your story may encourage someone else to do what is right.

Teaching This Bible Story to Children

You might be surprised to see that this week's session teaches children about Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery. Rest assured that for this age level we have chosen to focus on how our actions reflect our worship of God. Check out the session—we think you'll find God has a lot to teach children through this important Scripture!