

OLD TESTAMENT GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

Green Mountain 1st Ward, Lakewood, Colorado

21 March 2010

Page 1

Lesson 11: "How Can I Do This Great Wickedness?", Genesis 34, 37–39

Introduction

Think of some of the movies, TV shows, books, or magazines that are currently popular. What are the standards of morality presented by those media offerings? How do those standards differ from the Lord's standard as taught in the scriptures and by Church leaders?

The moral behavior of society often differs from the moral standards that the

Lord has established. While the standards of society can change, the Lord's standards are constant.

This lesson discusses the experiences of one man who followed the Lord's standard of morality and other men who did not. The lesson also discusses the consequences of following or not following the Lord's standard.



Joseph Resists Potiphar's Wife

Lesson Highlights

- Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers.
- Joseph refuses to "sin against God."
- Shechem, Reuben, and Judah commit serious moral sins.

Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers. (Genesis 37)



Joseph Sold By His Brethren
Gustave Doré

Jacob married Leah and Rachel, daughters of his mother's brother Laban, and also married their handmaids, Zilpah and Bilhah. Jacob's wives bore him twelve sons, who became the beginnings of the twelve tribes of Israel (the Lord changed Jacob's name to

Israel; see Genesis 32:28). Jacob's eleventh son was Joseph; as the eldest son of Jacob and Rachel, Joseph received the birthright when Reuben, eldest son of Jacob and Leah, lost it through unrighteousness (1 Chronicles 5:1–2).

Genesis 37:3–8 reveals that Joseph's brothers were jealous of him because he was his father's favorite and because he shared a dream he had that indicated that he would rule over his brethren.

Genesis 37:13–14. When Joseph was asked by Jacob to check on the welfare of his brothers and their flocks in Shechem, 45 miles away, he replied without hesitation that he would do so.

Genesis 37:15–17. His brothers had moved their flocks to Dothan, another 12 miles further, but Joseph journeyed on without complaint. From this account, we learn that Joseph was obedient and persistent in doing his father's will.

Genesis 37:18–20 tells us that his brothers conspired to slay Joseph as he approached them. But, upon further discussion, they were persuaded by Reuben not to take Joseph's life. Instead, they sold him to passing Midianites as a slave.

Genesis 37:28, 31–34 reveal what they did to deceive their father about Joseph's disappearance.

A study of this lesson will help us (1) learn how to make all experiences and circumstances work together for our good and (2) strengthen our commitment to obey the Lord's standard of sexual morality.

Next Week

#12: "Fruitful in the Land of My Affliction",
Genesis 40–45

Joseph refuses to “sin against God.” (Genesis 39)

Genesis 39:1-4 records how Joseph was blessed by the Lord after being sold as a slave.

Genesis 39:5-6 teaches that as Joseph remained faithful to the Lord, he was blessed with a great ability to serve his master, Potiphar, a wealthy officer of Pharaoh. Potiphar’s wealth increased as a result of the Lord blessing him through Joseph’s stewardship.

Genesis 39:11-12. When tempted by Potiphar’s wife to commit sexual sin, Joseph fled rather than comply with her worldly wishes. As we should know from this example, we too should immediately flee from the presence of temptation rather than succumb to it. Of course, if he had wanted to give in to the advances of Potiphar’s wife, Joseph could have invented and used numerous excuses. The practice of making excuses to justify sexual sins is commonplace

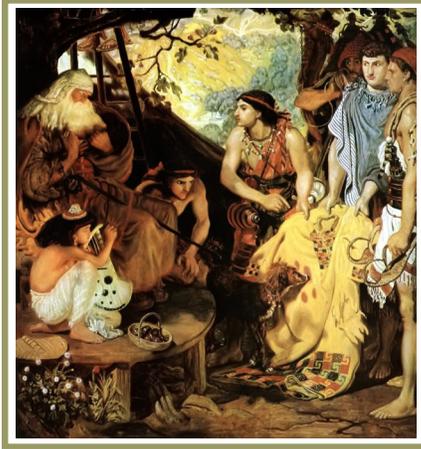
today. We see it constantly in the “entertainment” media. But the Lord gives no merit to any excuses or worldly justifications for indulging in sexual immorality.

Genesis 39:12-20. The lies and false accusations of Potiphar’s wicked wife resulted in Potiphar’s imprisonment of Joseph because he thought Joseph had tried to assault his wife. So, he went from being the trusted overseer of the estate to a lowly prisoner as a result of his virtue. In today’s world, the virtuous are sometimes ridiculed and excluded from social activities, but often they are respected for their wholesome values and righteous behavior. Of course, the greatest pressure to engage in immorality is on our youth—and unfortunately, too many of them fail when put to the test.

Genesis 39:21-23 emphasizes that while Joseph was

imprisoned, the Lord was with him. This assures us that Joseph continued in righteousness instead of blaming God for his problems since he was only following the Lord’s commandments. Because of his faith and sincere desire to follow the Lord no matter what the cost, Joseph’s bad circumstances were turned into good ones.

Elder Hartman Rector Jr. explained: “[The] ability to turn everything into something good appears to be a godly characteristic. Our Heavenly Father always seems able to do this. Everything, no matter how dire, becomes a victory to the Lord. Joseph, although a slave and wholly undeserving of this fate, nevertheless remained faithful to the Lord and continued to live the commandments and made something very good of his degrading circumstances. People like this cannot be defeated.” (Ensign, Jan. 1973, 130)



The Coat of Many Colours
Ford Madox Brown, 1866

Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- What have you learned from Joseph about turning bad experiences and circumstances into good ones?
- What is your reaction when members of your family offend you or receive better treatment?
- What can we learn about how to deal with temptation from the example of Joseph?

Shechem, Reuben, and Judah commit serious moral sins.

- **Genesis 34:1–12; 35:22; and Genesis 38:1–30**

While Joseph was valiant in the face of temptation, not all of his family and acquaintances were so valiant. Shechem (with Dinah), Reuben (with Bilhah), and Judah (with Tamar) failed the test of sexual temptations.

Genesis 34:3 describes Shechem’s feelings for Dinah, but if he had truly loved her, he would not have defiled her. Often people use the excuse “We are in love” to justify immoral activity, but people who truly love each other will not cause each other guilt and suffering to gratify physical passions and desires. Behavior that

makes it hard to pray, makes people unworthy to enter the temple, or breaks up families is not motivated by love.

Genesis 49:3-4 compliments Reuben’s good attributes, but Jacob’s blessing condemns Reuben for his moral sins. He was judged to be “unstable as water”. Just as his sins cost him dearly, the spiritual and temporal consequences of sexual sin today are serious in the sight of the Lord. The Lord places great importance on being morally clean.

Compare the price that Joseph paid to be virtuous with

the price that Reuben paid to be immoral. What did Reuben lose because of his immorality? (See 1 Chronicles 5:1–2.)

Church leaders have consistently taught that obedience to God’s commandments is true freedom. Consider how we see this in the life of Joseph. Reflect on how disobedience resulted in less freedom for Shechem, Reuben, and Judah. Choosing to keep the commandments makes us more free than choosing to break them. (See John 8:31–36.)

Conclusion

With the Lord’s help, all of our experiences and circumstances can work together for our good. It is important that we remain morally

clean in thought and action. We are encouraged to evaluate the movies, magazines, and other media we view and read, using only

those that reflect the Lord’s standard of sexual morality. We must be as committed as Joseph was to obeying the law of chastity.