



Lesson 11

“How Can I Do This Great Wickedness?”

Genesis 34; 37-39

Purpose: To help class members (1) learn how to make all experiences and circumstances work together for their good and (2) strengthen their commitment to obey the Lord’s standard of sexual morality.

“To our young people, the glorious youth of this generation, I say, be true. Hold to the faith. Stand firmly for what you know to be right.

You face tremendous temptation. It comes at you in the halls of popular entertainment, on the Internet, in the movies, on television, in cheap literature, and in other ways—subtle, titillating, and difficult to resist. Peer pressure may be almost overpowering. But, my dear young friends, you must not give in. You must be strong. You must take the long look ahead rather than succumbing to the present seductive temptation.

Uncouth-looking entertainers draw big crowds of our youth. They grow rich from high admission prices. Their songs, so many of them, are suggestive in nature.

Pornography is everywhere with its seductive invitation. You must turn away from it. It can enslave you. It can destroy you. Recognize it for what it is—tawdry and sleazy stuff created and distributed by those who grow rich at the expense of those who see it.” Gordon B. Hinckley, Nov. 2003 General Conference.

The Book of Genesis

See Supplement Lesson 6..

Commentary:

Genesis 34

The Hebrew word that is translated “took” in the phrase “he took her” can mean “to take away, sometimes with violence and force; to take possession, to capture, to seize upon” (Wilson, Old Testament Word Studies, s.v. “take,” p. 435). Commenting on the phrase that Shechem “spake kindly unto the damsel” (Genesis 34:3), one scholar said it means:

“Literally, he spake to the heart of the damsel—endeavoured to gain her affections, and to reconcile her to her disgrace. It appears sufficiently evident from this and the preceding verse that there had been no consent on the part of Dinah, that the whole was an act of violence, and that she was now detained by force in the house of Shechem. Here she was found when Simeon and Levi sacked the city, verse 26.” (Clarke, Bible Commentary, 1:207.)

The outrage of Simeon and Levi was justified, but to deceitfully set up a whole town for slaughter on the pretext of bringing them into the covenant was an evil and wicked thing. Jacob's blessings on these two sons just prior to his death (see Genesis 49:5–7) show that neither he nor the Lord condoned this act.

5 And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter: now his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they were come.

A violent temper is such a terrible, corrosive thing. And the tragedy is that it accomplishes no good; it only feeds evil with resentment and rebellion and pain. To any man or boy within the sound of my voice who has trouble controlling his tongue, may I suggest that you plead with the Lord for the strength to overcome your weakness, that you apologize to those you have offended, and that you marshal within yourselves the power to discipline your tongue.

...There is too much trouble in our homes. There is too much anger, that corrosive, terrible thing called anger. I make a plea with you, you men of the priesthood: Control your tongues. Walk out the door instead of shouting. Get control of yourselves. (Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1997], 25)

25 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.

*"But what the brothers did, after their father's peaceful negotiation with the people of Shechem, was to roar into the city, brandishing swords. They killed every man, 'and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive.' (Genesis 34:29.) This in no way restored Dinah's honor. The violence was self-serving and ego-raising." (Dawn Hall Anderson and Marie Cornwall, eds., *Women Steadfast in Christ: Talks Selected from the 1991 Women's Conference*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1992], 124)*

31 And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?

Israel's peace in Shalem was short-lived. An act of risk followed by an act of lust, an attempt at recompense, an agreement made in duplicity, and a violent assault by sons of Israel—all caused Israel "to stink among the inhabitants of the land," so Israel had to move on. Jacob's remonstrance with his guilty sons (who had reasoned they were justified in using violence to revenge the honor of their sister) may seem mild, but there were deep and lasting effects (Gen. 49:5-7).

Genesis 37

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.

*There is some question as to what Joseph's coat actually was. The Hebrew word denotes "a long coat with sleeves ... i.e. an upper coat reaching to the wrists and ankles, such as noblemen and kings' daughters wore" (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 1:1:335; note also 2 Samuel 13:18, which says that the daughters of King David wore similar coats). The coat may have been of different colors, but its significance seems to have been far more than its brightness and beauty. One noted scholar suggested that it was "a tunic reaching to the palms of the hands and soles of the feet; the long tunic with sleeves worn by young men and maidens of the better class; in the case of Joseph, supposed by Bush ... to have been the badge of the birthright which has been forfeited by Reuben and transferred to Joseph" (Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*, s.v. "colour," p. 82).*

If indeed this coat signaled that Joseph held the birthright, which may have been in question among the brothers because there were four firstborn sons in Jacob's family, this fact would explain the intense hostility and jealousy the coat provoked among the other sons of Jacob. The following brothers could easily have thought that they should have had the birthright.

Reuben. He was the firstborn of all the sons. Although he had lost the right (see Reading 7-28), he may not have accepted that fact.

Simeon. Since he was the second son of Leah and next in line following Reuben, he could have assumed the birthright would come to him after Reuben lost his right to it.

Judah. He could have argued that not only Reuben had lost the right, but so had Simeon and Levi, through the massacre of the Shechemites (see Genesis 34). The disqualification of these sons would make him the rightful legal heir.

Dan. Because his mother, Bilhah, was considered Rachel's property, he could argue that he was Rachel's firstborn, not Joseph, and therefore should have received the birthright when Reuben lost it.

Gad. He was the firstborn son of Zilpah and therefore could easily have thought he should have taken the birthright after Reuben forfeited it.

Joseph's dreams (see Genesis 37:5–11), which clearly signified future leadership, only added to the resentment among the brothers.

4 And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

The explanation of Israel's favoring Joseph "because he was the son of his old age" may suggest Jacob was much older when Joseph was born than is accounted for in the records of his twenty-year sojourn in Haran.

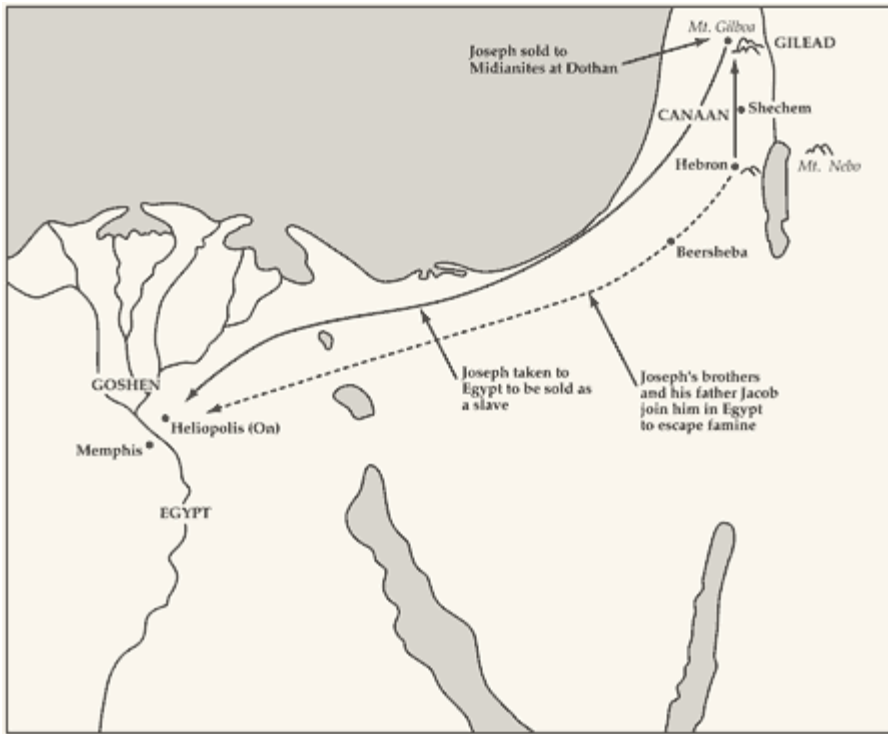
In any case, favor with his father put Joseph into disfavor with his brothers. His telling the prophetic dreams to his brothers, certainly the action of an immature seventeen-year-old, only increased the disfavor, for the meaning of the dreams was plain enough. Note that whereas his brothers "envied" Joseph, his father "observed" (Heb., lit., "watched, guarded") the concepts in the dreams (Gen. 37:11).

28 Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

The price received for Joseph, twenty pieces of silver, is the same price specified later in the Mosaic law for a slave between the ages of five and twenty (see Leviticus 27:5). Typically, the price for a slave was thirty pieces of silver (see Exodus 21:32).

32 And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no.

Mormon recorded in the Book of Mormon that when Jacob saw that a remnant of the "coat of many colours" (v. 32) had been preserved, he prophesied that so also would a remnant of Joseph's seed be preserved (see Alma 46:24).



36 And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.

The Hebrew phrase which is translated as “captain of the guards” literally means “chief of the butchers or slaughterers.” From this meaning some scholars have thought that he was the chief cook or steward in the house of the pharaoh, but other scholars believe that butcher or slaughterer is used in the sense of executioner, and thus Potiphar was the “commanding officer of the royal body-guard, who executed the capital sentences ordered by the king” (Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary, 1:1:338). Either way, Potiphar was an important man, but the latter position especially would give him great power and status in Egypt.

Genesis 38

The sordid account of Judah and Tamar contains some genealogical facts pertinent to an important family line, that of King David (Ruth 4:18-22; Luke 3:33). Perhaps it can assure readers that they can excel in spite of problems in their ancestry; Jesus of Nazareth was born of that genealogical line.

There is also some satisfaction to one's sense of justice in that a self-righteous man, who was willing to have his daughter-in-law punished for adultery, had to face up to his own sins.

With typical honesty, the Old Testament includes the sordid tale of Judah's incestuous relationship with his daughter-in-law. There seem to be several reasons for its inclusion here. First, once again are illustrated the effects of the covenant people forgetting the importance of marrying in the covenant. Unlike his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather (Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham), Judah was not concerned about intermarriage with the Canaanites. The negative results of this marriage out of the covenant are clearly shown here. Second, the story shows the lineage of Judah from which the Messiah would eventually come (see Matthew 1:3; Luke 3:33). An additional lesson here shows that ancestry is not the determiner of one's righteousness. Finally, the truth that failure to honor one's commitments often leads to greater trouble is clearly shown. Had Judah faithfully kept his promise to Tamar, the seduction would never have taken place. Likewise, had Judah been faithful to the laws of morality, he never would have sinned with Tamar.

8 And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.

The ancient Israelites had a very peculiar law among them, and yet it was a very proper law, namely, that if a man died, his brother was to take his wife and raise up seed to him. That would be a curious kind idea among the world, where they did not believe anything of that kind; singular kind of a doctrine; but it was a thing that was practiced among the Israelites, and it is a thing we ought to be practicing among us. That is, if a man has a brother dead who has left a widow, let the woman left in that kind of a position be just as well off as a woman who has a husband... If a man should die and leave a wife and she should be childless, why not her be taken care of as well as anybody else? Would not that be just? Would not that be proper? Would not that be right? Yes. But says the man, "I do not know about that. I would rather raise up seed for myself." Perhaps you might do both... We do believe, you know, more or less in this principle. (John Taylor, Journal of Discourses, 26:71-72, Nov. 30, 1884)

11 Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

Ancient customs of the Middle East provided that a brother of a deceased man should marry his widow. Under Moses this custom became law (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10). The purpose of such a marriage was to produce a male heir for the dead man and thus perpetuate his name and memory. It was regarded as a great calamity to die without a son, for then the man's lineage did not continue and also the man's property reverted to someone else's family (through daughters, if he had any, or through other relatives). It may be that Onan, who by virtue of the death of his older brother would have been next in line for the inheritance of Judah, refused to raise up seed through Tamar because the inheritance would have stayed with the elder son's family. He went through the outward show of taking Tamar to wife but refused to let her have children. Thus when Judah failed to keep his promise to send the youngest son to her, Tamar resorted to deception in order to bear children.

24 And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

It is important to note Judah's twisted sense of values. He had no qualms about sending Tamar home with unfulfilled promises nor of picking up a harlot along the road. But when he heard that Tamar was pregnant he was so incensed that he ordered her put to death.

Genesis 39

1 And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.

2 And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

3 And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

They took their seventeen-year-old brother and sold him as a slave to a caravan going into Egypt, a strange land, where they spoke a strange tongue and had strange customs. But the Lord was with this remarkable young man, and he seemed never to be discouraged. Though a stranger, a slave, his countenance must have radiated a special spirit. When offered for sale, he was purchased by a captain of the king's guard. It was only a short time before Joseph had so distinguished himself to the captain that he made him ruler over his house. In authority he was the first servant; and he was made overseer over all the captain had, and the captain put his complete trust, his properties, his income, into the hands of Joseph. (L. Tom Perry, "Trust in the Lord," Ensign, May 1978, 51-52)

7 And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.

For some unknown reason there is constantly appearing the false rationalization that at one time in the long-ago, virtue was easy and that now it is difficult. I would like to remind you that there has never been a time since the creation when the same forces were not at

work which are at work today. The proposal made by Potiphar's wife to Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 39:7) is not essentially different from that faced by many a young man and woman in our day.

The influences today may be more apparent and more seductive, but they are no more compelling. You cannot be shielded entirely from these influences. They are all about us. Our culture is saturated with them. But the same kind of self-discipline exercised by Joseph will yield the same beneficial result. Notwithstanding the so-called "new morality," notwithstanding the much-discussed changes in our moral standard, there is no adequate substitute for virtue. The old standard is challenged on every campus in America as it is in Europe. But God has not abrogated his commandments.

The violation of these commandments in this, as in any other age, brings only regret, sorrow, loss of self-respect, and in many cases tragedy. Rationalization and equivocation will not erase the cankering scar that blights the self-respect of a young man who takes that virtue which he can never replace. Self-justification will never mend the heart of a young woman who has drifted into moral tragedy. (Gordon B. Hinckley, Conference Report, October 1964, pp. 116-119)

8 But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;

9 There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

10 And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

The case of Potiphar's wife is an example of the creeping tentacles of sin (Gen. 39:7-20). Even though this scheming woman did not succeed in defiling Joseph, her sin was most grievous. The intent was there and the desire and the lust and the coveting. She had "already committed adultery with him in her heart and mind . . ." as she "cast her eyes upon Joseph day by day" (Gen. 39:7,10). This woman's transgression did not begin when she ripped the clothes from the body of this fleeing stalwart. Her perfidy had been born and nurtured in her mind and heart in the "day by day" of wanting him, teasing him, desiring him, lusting for him, and coveting him. Her sin was a progressive thing. So, for all the numerous people, who, like this seductive woman, carry in their hearts and minds designs or desires or covetings, deep sin lieth already at their doors. (Gordon B. Hinckley, Conference Report, October 1962, pp. 55-60)

21 But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

22 And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.

23 The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.

The spiritual greatness of Joseph is a remarkable thing. How many people have become bitter over some real or imagined slight, or blamed the Lord for some personal tragedy? In the very midst of being faithful and holding true to that which is right, Joseph was falsely accused and thrown into prison. How easy it would have been for him to give up, to say, "What's the use of trying to serve God? All He does is punish me." But there was not a trace of bitterness, no blaming the Lord. Joseph just continued being righteous and faithful. Unselfishly he offered to interpret the dreams of his two fellow prisoners, telling them that the knowledge came from God (see Genesis 40:8). He still trusted in the Lord, although he must have felt doomed to spend his life in prison. If any person had cause for discouragement and bitterness, it was Joseph, but he never faltered in his faith. Truly, Joseph is a model to be emulated.

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