

The Story of **JOSEPH'S BROTHERS:** **Overcoming A Guilty Conscience**



"Speaking among themselves, they said, 'Clearly we are being punished because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his anguish when he pleaded for his life, but we wouldn't listen. That's why we're in this trouble.'" Genesis 42:21 NLT

- ▶ Is there anything from your past that still causes you to have a guilty conscience?

Everyone is born with a conscience. It is a gift from God. The dictionary defines conscience as: "An inner feeling or voice viewed as acting as a guide to the rightness or wrongness of one's behavior." The Bible shows that God's law is written on the hearts of people and "...*their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.*" Romans 2:14-16 NLT

Greg Laurie writes: "There are a lot of people today who have a guilty conscience. That is what Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes stories, discovered. One day he decided to play a joke on 12 of his friends. He sent them all a message that said, 'Flee at once. All is discovered.' And within 24 hours, all 12 of his friends had left the country. I think that is having a guilty conscience. It was just a joke. Nothing was discovered. But these people felt so guilty about something that they got out as quickly as they could." Devotional, August 23, 2005.

In Genesis 37-50 we have the story of the 12 sons of Jacob, who was renamed Israel. The primary focus of these chapters is on Joseph, Israel's eleventh son.

Joseph is betrayed by his older ten brothers. They considered killing him, but ended up selling him into slavery. Joseph experienced many years of hardship but God eventually worked through circumstances to make him the second highest authority in Egypt. Eventually, Joseph's brothers come to him to buy food during a world-wide famine. They do not recognize Joseph. But as the story unfolds, Joseph's 10 brothers show that they had a deep sense of guilt for the way they treated their younger brother Joseph.

The story of Joseph's brothers teaches us about how to overcome a guilty conscience.

Central Lesson -
Only confession and forgiveness can clear a guilty conscience.

1. A guilty conscience hangs around for a **LONG** time (42:21).

"Speaking among themselves, they said, 'Clearly we are being punished because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his anguish when he pleaded for his life, but we wouldn't listen. That's why we're in this trouble.'"

2. A guilty conscience **CONFUSES** how we read our circumstances (42:25, 28).

"Speaking among themselves, they said, 'Clearly we are being punished because of what we did to Joseph long ago....'"

"²⁵ Joseph then ordered his servants to fill the men's sacks with grain, but he also gave secret instructions to return each brother's payment at the top of his sack. He also gave them supplies for their journey home."

²⁸ 'Look!' he exclaimed to his brothers. 'My money has been returned; it's here in my sack!' Then their hearts sank. Trembling, they said to each other, 'What has God done to us?'"

Joseph's brothers were confused about their circumstances. They didn't understand why they were facing difficulty. They thought God was paying them back for the way they treated Joseph. A guilty conscience can cloud our perspective of our problems and circumstances, too.

3. A guilty conscience is a **POSITIVE** sign that the conscience is still **ALIVE** - because it can die and be silent.

The Bible shows that it is possible for a person's conscience to die. **1 Timothy 4:2** *"These people are hypocrites and liars, and their consciences are dead."*

Again, Greg Laurie writes: "Guilt can be good—it can be God's warning system to alert us to a problem. When I am beginning to do something wrong, guilt kicks in. It says, 'Stop! Red alert! Don't go any further. This is a bad thing.' Guilt is there to remind us we are crossing the line, and we should not go any further. Do you have a guilty conscience? Maybe God is telling you something. Maybe you should pay attention to your conscience. Then you can be refreshed by the presence of the Lord."

4. A guilty conscience can only be cleared by **FORGIVENESS** (50:16-21).

"¹⁶ So they sent this message to Joseph: 'Before your father died, he instructed us ¹⁷ to say to you: "Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly." So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive our sin.' When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept. ¹⁸ Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. 'Look, we are your slaves!' they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph replied, 'Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. ²¹ No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.' So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them."

Hebrews 9:14 *"Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God..."*

Joseph's brothers eventually confessed their wrong behavior. Joseph forgave them and their relationship was restored.

The Central Lesson:

Only confession and forgiveness can clear a guilty conscience.

- ▶ Accept Christ as your Savior.
- ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ.
- ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday's study.
- ▶ Attend a small group.
- ▶ Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses.
- ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.