

Joseph Hated

HN 6/06/04pm

Reading: Genesis 37, John 8:31f, Acts 2:14f

Study: Genesis 37:1-17

Psalms: 36:1-4, 1, 36:5-9, 36:10-12

This is the history of Jacob. We come to the last section of Genesis – the last genealogy or *toledoth*. Isaac was dead. Esau had moved away but Jacob stayed on in Canaan, the land that God promised to his grandfather Abraham and then to his father Isaac. Jacob was now the family head and the one bearing the promises. Jacob stayed on as a sojourner or stranger like his father. He was based at Hebron with flocks that his sons took to graze far and wide.

Although these 14 chapters, almost 25% of Genesis, focus upon Joseph, Jacob remains the family head until he dies in the second last chapter. Why they focus upon Joseph we will see shortly.

The story of Joseph is one of the most well known and greatly loved stories of the Bible. It is in one sense a very human story – a family tragedy. The life of Jacob or Israel was one of deceit and striving from the very beginning. *Few and evil have been the years of my life* he said as he reflected over the past 130 years of his life (47:9).

In another sense it is a very heavenly story for it traces the life of this young man Joseph, whom the Lord chose. And the Lord was with him and used him to save his people. Indeed not only his own people but all nations. *The famine was over all the face of the earth...so all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain because the famine was severe in all lands* (41:56). We have here a preliminary fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham – I will make your name great, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. They were blessed with food and saved from death through hunger. Only in the death and resurrection of Jesus are the promises finally fulfilled – salvation of the soul and the gift of eternal life.

In this chapter we see something of the evil which Jacob experienced in his life. He is left mourning the loss of his beloved son Joseph. Yet we see that much of his suffering was the consequence of his own actions. He played the favourite with his children and he failed to discipline them.

Israel loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age. Benjamin was even more a son of his old age. Jacob openly and blatantly displayed that favouritism by making a special coat, a richly ornamented coat for his favourite son. This coat of many colours was like a royal robe (II Samuel 13:18). The other brothers resented such favouritism as might be expected, and guess who copped the brunt of their anger – Joseph. *They hated Joseph and could not speak peaceably to him.*

It is so easy to fall into this trap of playing the favourite, of showing favouritism, but it is so destructive of relationships especially in a family. The Scriptures speaks of the sin of partiality or favouritism (James 2:9). Not only do the other children resent it but the favoured child also suffers. The favourite child tends to be spoilt and not disciplined properly.

Joseph was only 17 years old so we do not expect him to be full of wisdom. He was with his brothers looking after the flocks. But then *he brought a bad report of them to his father*. What was the nature of his report? Did his father want a report? Was he just telling tales on his brothers? We do not know the details, although it is hard to see that his father cared much about his other sons or would be shocked by anything they did – they had after all massacred all the males in Shechem and his eldest had committed incest. Joseph's brothers or half brothers regarded him as the spoiled pet of their fathers, and a story teller, and they hated him.

Then came the matter of the dreams. Joseph had a dream – two dreams in fact, the one reinforcing the other. Dreams seem to come in pairs in the life of Joseph. He will later be called upon to interpret two dreams of the Pharaoh. The first was very much of the earth. He saw a grain harvest with cut bundles of the crop standing in the field. The second was a picture of the sky in which the sun, moon and stars were all visible together. The pictures were not unnatural (no ladder reaching to heaven) but the fact that the sheaves and the stars were bowing down to Joseph was – and this was the message of the dreams.

There is no mention that these dreams were from the Lord. The Lord does not speak directly as he did in the dream Jacob had at Bethel. But clearly in the light of what transpires and the fact that his dreams do become reality, they must be understood as coming from the Lord. When the brothers went down to Egypt because of the famine they came before Joseph and *bowed down before him with their faces to the earth* (42:6).

Joseph was eager to share his dreams with his brothers. He believed they were true and had an important message. His brothers did not share his enthusiasm for such revelation. The obvious conclusion from the dreams, that his brothers would one day bow down to him, infuriated his brothers. *Shall you indeed reign over us* they sneered? *They hated him even more. They hated him more* after the first dream *and hated him even more* after the second. They envied him or were intensely jealous of him. They were not threatening at this stage to kill him but the signs were there.

Strangely even his father rebuked Joseph for telling his dreams. *Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?* Now his mother Rachel had died at this stage but for completeness she is pictured here in his dream. This is one of the few times when Jacob reprimands one of his sons and he does so to Joseph for merely sharing his dream. Was he trying to put on a face in front of his other sons?

Jacob kept the matter in his mind. He pondered these things going on his family, as well he might. Jacob had had dreams from the Lord himself so could not be totally dismissive of Joseph's dreams. 'He had learnt by now, as his sons had not, to allow for God's hand in affairs, and for his right of choice among men'.

A brother parading in a fancy royal type coat, a brother telling tales on them to their father, and finally one who told his dreams about how they would all one day bow down to him, was about as much as they could take. They must have been glad to get away from home as they went off to Shechem to graze the flocks.

But then Jacob called upon Joseph to go to these sons up in Shechem and find out how they are

getting on. He maybe took some supplies to them also. The danger signs are there, to all except Jacob and Joseph it seems. Shechem was some 80km to the north of Hebron. Joseph arrived but could not find them. A man found him wandering about and was able to help him. He said that they had gone further north to Dothan. Would Joseph continue on in search of them or would he return home? Another 40km further from home. He went on and found them at Dothan.

Before we go on in this amazing story (next time) let us reflect for a moment on how Joseph is a type of Christ – how he portrays Christ. The parallels are striking are they not? We might ask why this focus on Joseph when he is not the one who bears the promises. He is not the one in the line that leads to Jesus – at least not by genealogy. But by reason of his life he certainly points forward to Christ. 'In the person of Joseph a lively image of Christ is presented' wrote Calvin.

Think of how much jealousy and hatred Jesus faced during his short life on this earth – for doing no wrong! Even his own brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:4). But it was his fellow Jews, the religious leaders who came to hate him intensely. They hated him without reason. They hated him because his actions were good and their own evil. Jesus had to reveal to them that were not true children of Abraham but rather children of the devil because they were rejecting him. They were rejecting the truth. They took up stones to throw at him. They wanted to kill him at the earliest opportunity (John 8).

And his parents did not understand him either. They rebuked him when at the age of 12 he stayed behind in the temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:48). Yet his mother was one who kept all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19) – she pondered the revelations from heaven regarding Jesus, the Saviour.

Despite all the jealousy and all the hatred, despite all the misunderstanding and rejection even by those closest to him, Jesus pressed on. He did not turn back. He knew what lay ahead, even if Joseph did not, but with the same resolution he pressed on. He was seeking the lost. *For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.* He came to save his people from their sins.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon