

# FAVORED SON, HATED BROTHER

## **GENESIS 37**

There is more space given about Joseph than any other character in the book of Genesis. This was a significant aspect to those for whom Moses was writing. God wants us to know about Joseph.

*Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan. (Genesis 37:1).*

Joseph is the eleventh of twelve children. He would have been only six years old when his family fled from their home in Haran. The family had come down to Shechem. His sister had been raped there and his brothers had gone in and had murdered everyone in the city. Because of this, the family had to move again and now they were near to Bethel.

He had seen three deaths in his extended family.

- His grandfather Isaac.
- His mother Rachael.
- A nurse named Deborah.

*These are the records of the generations of Jacob. (Genesis 37:2a).*

This short title serves to mark off this section as one of the main parts of the book of Genesis. On ten different occasions we have read that these are the records/generations of the heavens and the earth, of Adam, of Noah, of Shem, of Abraham, etc. It tells us that we have been learning the history of a single family.

## **A CAUSE FOR BROTHERLY FRICTION**

*<sup>2</sup> These are the records of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.*

*<sup>3</sup> Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. <sup>4</sup> And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms. (Genesis 37:2-4).*

Blended families can be difficult, even in the best of times. While jealousy and strife and not exclusive to blended families, these have more opportunities to arise when there are half-brothers and half-sisters who are vying for the attention of their parents.

There were actually two different events that took place within this family to fan the flames of friction and hatred.

1. Joseph's Bad Report: *Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father (37:2).*

We do not know the specifics, but Joseph evidently received the reputation of being a tattle tale. Such a reputation has negative implications in our culture. That is because we live in a day when people think you should never say bad about anything or anyone. We live in a live & let live world. But God does not teach such a thing. There are times when silence isn't golden; it is merely yellow.

2. Joseph's Varicolored Tunic: *Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic (37:3).*

Brother number eleven was being treated as though he were brother number one. This was evidence by this special gift. It is described here as *a varicolored tunic*. Translators have puzzled over this phrase. There are some who would render it as "a coat with sleeves." The same description is given to the clothing worn by the daughters of King David in 2 Samuel 13:18 where the sleeve actually seems to play a part in the story. It is interesting to note that in some cultures only the nobility and the high-born wear sleeves because they will not be doing the menial work that might cause one's sleeves to get dirty.

It seems evident that the coat was representative of Jacob's special love for Joseph. Some have thought that it was more than this; that it was a coat designed to indicate that Joseph was to become the leader of the tribe.

There are a number of contrasts and comparisons that we can see between Joseph and his father Jacob.

Jacob	Joseph
He was the younger son.	He was the youngest son.
His name means "heel-grabber"	His name means, "To add."
He was loved by his mother.	He was loved by his father.

He bought the birthright from his brother.	His father gave him the birthright over his older brothers.
He was hated by his older brother.	He was hated by his older brothers.
As a result of his brother's threats, he traveled to Haran.	As a result of his brothers' plot, he was sold and taken to Egypt.
In Haran, he worked for Laban.	In Egypt, he worked for Potiphar.
Jacob brought prosperity to Laban.	Joseph brought prosperity to Potiphar.
Laban deceived Jacob.	Potiphar was deceived by his wife.
When Jacob left Laban, he was a rich man.	Joseph left Potiphar's prison to become the ruler of all Egypt.
Jacob became fearful as he anticipated meeting his brother again.	His brothers became fearful when they met Joseph again.
Jacob was eventually reconciled with his brother.	Joseph was eventually reconciled with his brothers.

## JOSEPH'S DREAMS

*Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.*

*<sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had; <sup>7</sup> for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."*

*<sup>8</sup> Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.*

*<sup>9</sup> Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." <sup>10</sup> And he related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" <sup>11</sup> And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. (Genesis 37:5-11).*

Joseph has two sets of dreams. They are set in the world in which he lived; an agricultural economy and life out under the sky and the stars.

Setting	Action	Implication
In the field	Brothers' sheaves bow down to Joseph's sheaves	Brothers would bow down to Joseph
In the sky	Sun, moon and 11 stars bow down to Joseph	Jacob and his wives and sons would bow down before Joseph

It is noteworthy that the images of this second dream are essentially repeated in Revelation 12 where John sees *woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars*. It is a picture of Israel in that passage and it is a picture of Israel here.

While the dream obviously comes from the Lord, we are tempted to wonder at Joseph's lack of wisdom in sharing the contents of the dream with his brothers. On the other hand, this was a revelation from God and, as such, it was meant to be shared. There is a lesson here. It is that there is often a difference between what the world views as wisdom versus what the Lord commands. It is for this reason that Proverbs 3:5 tells you to *trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding*.

There is a continuing refrain that we ought to have noticed throughout this chapter. It has now been repeated on three different occasions. It is the refrain of hatred.

- *They hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms (37:4).*
- *They hated him even more (37:5).*
- *So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words (37:8).*

What was the cause of this hatred? It was caused by jealousy. They recognized that there was an element of truth in Joseph's dreams. They saw their father's favoritism toward him and they wanted that same sort of love and acceptance for themselves.

Jealousy is a terrible thing. James 5:16 says that *where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing*. This was certainly evident in the case of the brothers of Joseph. They were filled with jealousy and it would eventually turn to a desire for murder. Jealousy says, "I want to have what you have, no matter what it costs you." Love says, "I want you to have whatever is best for you, no matter what it costs me."

The first case of jealousy in the Bible is seen in the instance of Cain and Abel. It was a case of acceptance and rejection from God. God accepted Abel's offering while rejecting

Cain's offering. The result? Cain became jealous. It was not long before that jealousy turned to murder. The same was about to happen with the brothers of Joseph.

## JOSEPH'S COMMISSION

*Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem. <sup>13</sup> And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "I will go." <sup>14</sup> Then he said to him, "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.*

*<sup>15</sup> And a man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?" <sup>16</sup> And he said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock." <sup>17</sup> Then the man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. (Genesis 37:12-17).*

Joseph had already delivered a bad report concerning his brothers. This had been an initial cause of discord among them. Now Jacob inadvertently throws fuel on the fire of their animosity by sending Joseph on an errand to report further on their actions.

1. Shechem: *So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem (37:14).*

The family was now based in Hebron. That is in the southern region of Canaan and up in the highlands. To the south is the desert of the Sinai. To the east is the wilderness of the Dead Sea.

The brothers had gone out in search of good grazing land and they had gone to Shechem. There was a wide, fertile valley at Shechem.

This was a time in history where the cities of the land were small and weak. The power lay in the hands of the nomads. Jacob was such a nomad. His two sons had already wrecked havoc in Shechem.

There is a joke that asks, "Where does a 10-ton gorilla sit?" The answer: "Anywhere he wants." Jacob's sons were like that. They were able to roam the land freely.

2. Dothan: *So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan (37:17).*

Dothan is located even further north from Shechem and on the southern edge of the Valley of Jezreel. There is an ancient town located here near several large cisterns that are normally used to catch rain water.

## A MURDEROUS PLOT

*18 When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. 19 And they said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! 20 Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!" (Genesis 37:18-20).*

The hatred of Joseph's brothers has now turned murderous in its intent. As they see Joseph from a distance, it is likely that they first recognized the coat and were reminded of their father's favoritism.

That they had not sought to murder him earlier had only been due to the restraint of being under the watchful eye of their father. There is a lesson here. It is that your real spiritual life is what you manifest when no one else is looking.

The brothers form a plan for making certain that the dreams of Joseph are never fulfilled. In doing so, they are not only setting themselves up against their brothers, but also are acting in rebellion to the revealed plans and purposes of the Lord.

Of course, we know the rest of the story. It is that God was taking their sinful actions and He was going to do something wonderful with them. What they meant for evil, He would take and He would bring their salvation.

## REUBEN'S COUNTERPLOT

*21 But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life."*

*22 Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"-- that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. (Genesis 37:21-22).*

Reuben was the oldest of the brothers. As such, he should have been their leader. He also seems to have had some scruples about the murderous plot. But he is unwilling to confront the actions of his brothers. He could not trust his influence over them and he

might have been afraid that they would turn against him so that he also might be murdered.

Joseph may have realized the intention of his oldest brother, for years later, he would imprison Simeon, the second from the oldest.

## THE CALLOUSNESS OF JEALOUS BROTHERS

*So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; <sup>24</sup> and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it. <sup>25</sup> Then they sat down to eat a meal. (Genesis 27:23-25a).*

Canaan is a land that is at the mercy of the weather. When the rains do not come, the land dries up and withers. It was for this reason that there were deep cisterns to be found throughout the land. These were deep pits that were designed to capture rainwater and store it for times of drought. It was into one of these that the brothers threw Joseph.

There is a great callousness that takes place here. The brothers take Joseph, strip off from him the hated tunic and throw him into a dry cistern. Then they sit down to eat a meal amidst what must have been the mournful cries of their younger brother. There is no compassion, no pity and no remorse.

## SOLD INTO SLAVERY

*Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt.*

*<sup>26</sup> And Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? <sup>27</sup> Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him.*

*<sup>28</sup> Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt. (Genesis 27:25-28).*

In verse 25 we read that this was a caravan of Ishmaelites. In verse 28 we read of Midianite traders. The Midianites and the Ishmaelites were related -- they were both descended from other sons of Abraham. As such, they were distant cousins to the sons of

Jacob.

They were on their way from Gilead to Egypt. They were following one of the passes through the land of Palestine, taking the route up the Valley of Jezreel to meet up with the Way of the Philistines.

## REUBEN'S REMORSE

*Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. <sup>30</sup> And he returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?" (Genesis 37:29-30).*

Reuben returns to find that Joseph has been sold and his plan for Joseph's release has been thwarted. Yet we shall see that Reuben decides to go along with the lie of his younger brothers. His problem is that of a lack of leadership.

## LYING LIPS AND A DECEITFUL ROBE

*So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat, and dipped the tunic in the blood; <sup>32</sup> and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son's tunic or not."*

*<sup>33</sup> Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" <sup>34</sup> So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. <sup>35</sup> Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him.*

*<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard. (Genesis 37:31-36).*

There is a striking parallel here between the actions of Jacob's sons in deceiving their father and in Jacob's own actions some 30 years earlier when he deceived his own father.

<b>Jacob Deceived Isaac</b>	<b>Jacob's Sons deceive Jacob</b>
Jacob had deliberately deceived Isaac into giving him the blessing	Jacob's sons deliberately deceive him into thinking Joseph is dead

An article of clothing in used in the deception: Jacob wraps his arms and his head in wool to simulate the hairy arms and back of Esau	An article of clothing in used in the deception: The brothers dip Joseph's tunic in blood to simulate Joseph's torn body
Jacob had deceived his father with the skin of a dead goat.	Jacob's sons deceive him with the blood of a dead goat.

There is a lesson here. It is that the sins of the parents are often repeated by the children. No doubt, they had heard the story of how their father had deceived his father. While I doubt that they consciously were following in their father's footsteps, there is nevertheless a repeating of the old sin.

Finally, we see those who brought about Jacob's grief and misery playing the part of his comforters. This is a fitting finale to their hypocrisy.

## LESSONS FROM THE NARRATIVE

1. Life is not always nice. God's has not promised us easy living that is free from hardships. He has promised us that He will work all things for good to those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).
2. This story illustrates the providence of God in action. God had a plan. It was both a short term as well as a long range plan. He still does. His plan extends through today and to the future. That means you can look back at hard times in the past and you can often see the hand of God. It also means when you face hard times in the future, you can know God's hand is there, even when you cannot see it.
3. The story of Joseph reminds us of the story of our own spiritual brother: Jesus Christ.

<b>Joseph</b>	<b>Jesus</b>
He was beloved by his father.	<i>"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased"</i> (Matthew 3:17).
He was hated by his brothers.	<i>He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him</i> (John 1:11)
He was sent to find his brothers.	He was sent to save mankind.

His brothers plotted to murder him.	His fellow Jews and even his own disciple plotted to betray and to murder Him.
He was sold for twenty shekels of silver.	He was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver.
The blood of a goat served as the sign of his death.	His own shed blood is the sign of His death.

The difference between these two is that Jesus gave His life willingly. He is the Son who volunteered to give His own life as a ransom for others. He did so that we might be freed from the slavery of sin.

As you first read through this chapter, you probably found yourself identifying with Joseph. But in reality, we are more closely identified with the hateful brothers. Understanding this should drive us to the cross and to the place of repentance as we recognize the unmerited grace of God and the undeserved love of God that was extended to us.