

A Rood Awakening!

Presents

Awakening in the Word

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS
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THE OVERVIEW

While we have already received the joyous news of Joseph's birth, this week's portion begins yet another transition from the story of the patriarch Jacob to that of his beloved son Joseph. The portion begins by describing the ever-mounting tension that exists between this favored son and his brothers. This brief introduction is followed by the further provocation of Joseph's two prophetic dreams. Jacob sends his favored son to Shechem to check on his brothers. It is here that the tension and resentment come to a climax with the brothers scheming to put an end to Joseph. The story then concludes with Joseph being cast into a pit, stolen by Midianites, sold to Ishmaelites, and finally sold into slavery in Egypt.

THE OUTLINE

- Genesis 37:1-4 The setting and the context
- Genesis 37:5-8 The first dream
- Genesis 37:9-11 The second dream
- Genesis 37:12-17 Israel sends Joseph to check on his brothers
- Genesis 37:18-20 The brothers' evil scheme
- Genesis 37:21-22 Reuben attempts to save Joseph
- Genesis 37:23-25 Cold-hearted brothers
- Genesis 37:26-27 Judah's plan to sell Joseph
- Genesis 37:28-30 Unforeseen events
- Genesis 37:31-32 The cover-up
- Genesis 37:33-35 Jacob's grief
- Genesis 37:36 Joseph is sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the great significance of this story?
2. Is the Sovereign One present in this story?
3. When does this story take place?
4. What change of status is given to Bilhah and Zilpah?
5. What is meant by "his father was a stranger"?
6. What is significant about the phrase "These are the generations of Jacob"?
7. What is the difference between Isaac and Jacob?
8. Why does Jacob love Joseph more?
9. What does the coat represent?
10. What is the coat?
11. Why do the brothers hate Joseph?
12. What picture of the Messiah is given?
13. What lessons may we learn for our own lives?
14. What is the significance of Dothan?

THE TEXT

Genesis 37:1-36 *And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. ²These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. ³Now 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. ⁴And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. ⁵And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. ⁶And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: ⁷for, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. ⁸And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? Or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. ⁹And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. ¹⁰And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? ¹¹And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying. ¹²And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. ¹³And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I. ¹⁴And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. ¹⁵And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? ¹⁶And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks. ¹⁷And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. ¹⁸And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. ¹⁹And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. ²⁰Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. ²¹And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. ²²And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again. ²³And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; ²⁴and they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.*

²⁵And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? ²⁷Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content. ²⁸Then 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. ²⁹And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. ³⁰And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? ³¹And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; ³²and 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. ³³And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. ³⁴And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. ³⁶And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.

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This week's Torah portion marks the beginning of the end of the patriarchal period. Once again we witness a major transition in the biblical narrative from the stories of the individual patriarchs to the story of the children of Israel. While the focus in many ways is still upon certain individuals, such as Jacob and Joseph in particular, it is clear that the focus is largely upon the dynamics between the various brothers who are the fathers of the twelve tribes. We should remember that these stories are being told to Moses by the Creator at Mount Sinai after the great deliverance out of Egypt. With this said, we may understand large sections of the book of Genesis as giving answers to three basic questions.

1. Genesis 1:1 - 11:32 The story of creation through the story of the tower of Babel answers the question: "Where did all the nations (including Israel) come from?"
2. Genesis 12:1 - 36:43 The calling of Abraham through the patriarchal narrative to the birth of Benjamin answers the question: "Where did the nation of Israel come from?"
3. Genesis 37:1 - Exodus 19:25 The story of the selling of Joseph into bondage up to Israel's encounter with the Sovereign One at Mount Sinai answers the question: "How did we get here?"

The story of Joseph and his brothers and their eventual migration to the land of Egypt will now occupy the rest of the book of Genesis.

Nahum M. Sarna has written a wonderfully succinct introduction to this lengthy biblical narrative.

The importance of the Joseph story lies in the fact that it initiates the chain of events that leads to the descent to Egypt; it is the prelude to the drama of oppression and redemption that constitutes the overriding motif of biblical theology. Joseph's experience is the culmination of a series of episodes set in motion by causes that were often temporal, petty, sordid, and mundane. A father's favoritism, tittle-tattle, sibling jealousies, egotistic boyish dreams—all these are elements of a family situation that culminates in explosive tragedy.

The story of Joseph and his brothers differs markedly from the preceding patriarchal narratives. By far the longest and most complete narrative in Genesis, it is set forth by a master storyteller who employs with consummate skill the novelistic techniques of character delineation, psychological manipulation, and dramatic suspense. Another unique feature is the outwardly "secular" mold in which the narrative is cast, the miraculous or supernatural element being conspicuously absent. There are no direct divine revelations or communications to Joseph. He builds no altars. He has no associations with cultic centers. God never openly and directly intervenes in his life. No wonder that Joseph is not included among the patriarchs (cf. Exod. 2:24) and that Jewish tradition restricts that category to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ber. 16b). Nevertheless, the secularity of the story is superficial, for the narrative is infused with a profound sense that God's guiding hand imparts meaning and direction to seemingly haphazard events.

When Joseph is lost he meets “a man” who knows exactly where his brothers are (37:15); the caravans of traders happen to be going to Egypt (37:25,28); YHWH is with Joseph in Potiphar’s house (39:2) and in prison (39:21ff.). It is significant that the name of God comes readily to Joseph’s lips at critical moments: when he is confronted by Potiphar’s wife (39:9); when he interprets dreams (40:8; 41:16 et seq.); and when he tests his brothers (42:18). The ultimate interpretation of events is given by Joseph himself at the dramatic conclusion of the narrative: “God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God.” (45:7, 8).¹

Once again, we should note that the Sovereign One is never directly mentioned in this portion, nor even overtly alluded to. Yet, as Sarna has pointed out, it is clear that the guiding hand of the Sovereign One is directing every event. From this we may glean several lessons. First, we should note that the story is told in such a way that we ourselves may relate to the events. Just as Joseph and his brothers could not see how they were being utilized by the Sovereign One, they were nonetheless a clear part of YHWH’S plans. Second, we may note how even the imperfections of Joseph and his brothers were used by the Sovereign One to fulfill His perfect will. While it is true that none of us is perfect, we may still be utilized by the Father if we will but remain available to Him, offering Him our whole being, as imperfect and broken as it may be. Clearly our finite, imperfect, and tarnished beings are the vehicle by which the Creator has chosen to accomplish His prophetic plans. We should, therefore, find great encouragement in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Finally, we should realize that even though we might fail to see YHWH present in the events of our lives, He is eternal and infinite; therefore, He is present everywhere, willing and working to accomplish all that His heart desires.

We may also ask why the name of the Sovereign One is omitted from this part of the narrative. I would suggest that it is to demonstrate the “godlessness” of the behavior of those involved in this story. Clearly one who is thinking about the Holy One, the Sovereign One, the Righteous One, the Father, would not be seeking to kill a brother. It should be obvious that YHWH is neither in the brothers’ hearts nor upon their lips when they conspire to destroy Joseph. I cannot help but think of the words of the Messiah Yeshua and his disciple John, who taught:

John 5:42-43 *But I know you, that ye have not the love of Elohim in you. ⁴³I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.*

John 8:39-40 *They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Yeshua saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. ⁴⁰But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of Elohim: this did not Abraham.*

1 John 2:9-11 *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. ¹⁰He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. ¹¹But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.*

1 John 4:20 *If a man say, I love Elohim, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love Elohim whom he hath not seen?*

Thus, we witness that although YHWH is not manifestly present because of the failure of those involved to keep His commandments, He is present in the events that transpire between Joseph and his brothers. This is an important lesson to learn. If we desire to see YHWH manifestly present in our world, then it is we who have been called to make this happen. It is we, by our faithful obedience to the Torah, who

¹ The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 254

manifest the presence of the Sovereign One in the world around us. If we fail in this calling, the Sovereign One, although still present, is veiled to our eyes.

Before we go any further in our study, I want to mention that there remains somewhat of a controversy surrounding the original chronology of this story. Traditionally, the story is said to have taken place after the rape of Dinah, the move from Shechem, the death of Rachel, the birth of Benjamin, and the offense of Reuben. Supporting this location for the story is the fact that Jacob sends Joseph from the “vale of Hebron” (37:14), which is well south of Shechem and Bethel. Thus, on their journey Jacob and his children must have already moved south of Bethel and even Bethlehem, where Benjamin was born and Rachel died (35:17-19). Also used to support this traditional chronology of our story is the fact that the brothers were grazing sheep in Shechem (37:13), which may have been the reason for Jacob’s concern for their well-being.

Genesis 34:30 *And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.*

Also used to support this traditional position is the promotion of Bilhah and Zilpah to the position of wives.

Genesis 37:2 *These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.*

It is often argued that Bilhah and Zilpah remain concubines until the deaths of Leah and Rachel, and only then are they promoted to the position of wives. While this may be true, there is nothing to prevent Jacob from elevating these women before the death of his wives, thus creating equality among the children. We are told of Rachel’s death, but no mention is made of the death of Leah. We only know that she is buried with Jacob at Machpelah.

Genesis 49:31 *There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.*

It may well be that Reuben’s offense was due to the fact that Jacob had already elevated Bilhah and Zilpah to the status of wives prior to the deaths of Rachel and Leah, and he feared that Jacob would choose Bilhah over his mother upon the death of Rachel.

Also used to support the traditional position is Reuben’s desire to save Joseph from the brothers’ conspiracy, which is often understood to be predicated upon his fear that people would see this heinous act as retaliation for Joseph replacing him as the firstborn, as indicated by the bestowal of the special coat. While it is greatly possible that this is the proper location for this story in the chronology of the narrative, it leaves us with a number of questions which could best be answered if the story had taken place earlier in the narrative.

Even with all of this support for the traditional location for our portion, I am going to suggest for your consideration the possibility that this story rightfully belongs sometime after the rape of Dinah and before the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel.

It is possible that the brothers were indeed seasonally grazing the sheep in Shechem. After the massacre they may have felt arrogantly safe there. We may remember that the Sovereign One put fear in the hearts of the neighboring people.

Genesis 35:5 *And they journeyed: and the terror of Elohim was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.*

The first indication that this story may not be in its correct location is the reason given for Jacob's love for Joseph.

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.*

Our portion begins with the announcement that Joseph is at this time seventeen years of age.

Genesis 37:2 *These are the generations of Jacob. **Joseph, being seventeen years old**, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.*

If the traditional chronology of this story is correct, then it is Benjamin who should rightfully be declared the son of Jacob's old age. We may understand that while the firstborn son often inherited the double portion to care for the whole family, it was the youngest son who often became the one to care directly for his parents in their old age. The title "the son of his old age" may well be a declaration that Joseph is the one to care for Jacob and Rachel in their old age. With the birth of Benjamin, however, this responsibility would move down to the youngest son. The failure to mention Benjamin raises question as to whether he was born when Joseph was sold into slavery. If we look ahead to the meeting of Joseph and Benjamin in Egypt, we see that Joseph, unrecognized by his brothers, inquires about their family and accuses them of being spies. They reveal that they are ten of twelve sons of one man.

Genesis 42:13 *And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.*

Joseph then demands that they bring their "youngest" brother to him to prove the truth of their tale. When Joseph sees Benjamin, it is as though he has never seen him before. It is also peculiar that he is described as being "his mother's son" as opposed to the son of his father Jacob. This may indicate that Benjamin resembles his mother.

Genesis 43:29 *And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, Elohim be gracious unto thee, my son.*

Also supporting the notion that the story took place before the death of Rachel is Jacob's rebuke of Joseph for boasting of his dreams.

Genesis 37:10 *And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall **I and thy mother** and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?*

At seventeen it is unlikely that "thy mother" is referring to Bilhah, who would have taken over the task of raising Joseph and especially the infant Benjamin after Rachel's death. By referring to Joseph's mother, Jacob seems to indicate that at the time of the dreams, at least, Rachel is still alive. That Rachel is still alive when Joseph is sent down to Egypt likewise explains Jacob recounting for Joseph the events surrounding his mother's death when they meet again in Egypt.

Genesis 48:7 *And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem.*

Had Joseph been present when these events occurred, there would have been no need for Jacob to explain to Joseph where and why his mother died and why she was not buried in Machpelah.

In further support of the story being positioned somewhere after the rape of Dinah and before the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel is the message that Joseph brings back to Jacob. The Torah tells us that Joseph is tending the flock with some of his brothers.

Genesis 37:2 *These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.*

We should note that there seems to be a division in the family between the sons of Leah and those of Rachel and the bondservants. We may remember that Jacob himself divided his family this way when encountering the potential threat of Esau.

Genesis 32:7-8 *Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands;⁸ and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.*

Genesis 32:10 *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.*

Genesis 33:1-2 *And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. ²And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost.*

We may remember that Leah bore six sons and one daughter to Jacob, more children than all the other wives combined, each of whom bore two sons. It seems from our story that there may be a bit of class warfare going on between the sons of the wives and those of the concubines. Since Rachel may have given birth only to Joseph at this time, it seems fit that the sons of Leah count him among the sons of the concubines. We may also remember that Joseph would be the youngest of the sons. The six sons of Leah may feel a bit of superiority because of their number, even though they are the sons of the least-favored wife.

If this story takes place after the rape of Dinah, then we already know that the sons of Leah, the brothers of Dinah, have lost respect for their father, as is evident from their unanswered rebuke.

Genesis 34:31 *And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?*

Our portion tells us that Joseph returns from being with his brothers and reports to Jacob what he has heard. For years Joseph has been tagged as a tale-bearer, speaking evil of his brothers. The Tanach has much to say against this evil practice.

Leviticus 19:16 *Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am YHWH.*

Proverbs 11:13 *A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.*

Proverbs 18:8 *The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*

Proverbs 20:19 *He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.*

Proverbs 26:20 *Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.*

Proverbs 26:22 *The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*

But the text is clear. It is not Joseph who is guilty of the evil report. The text very clearly states that it is his brothers who are speaking evil.

Genesis 37:2 *These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father **their evil report**.*

It is not Joseph who is speaking evil but his brothers. I would suggest that the brothers were speaking treason against their father, discussing his failure to respond to the rape of Dinah. If this is correct, it confirms the fact that Reuben may well have been trying to take over the family when he slept with Bilhah, as was discussed in the previous week's portion.

Regardless of when this story takes place, it does take place, revealing the tumultuous beginnings of the children of Israel. It is interesting that the story begins with the statement, "These are the generations of Jacob" and then tells a tale of favoritism, jealousy, division, resentment, betrayal, and deceit. There is another anomaly in the opening verses of this portion that is worthy of our attention. The opening verse states that Jacob is dwelling in the land wherein his father was a stranger.

Genesis 37:1 *And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.*

The Hebrew word translated as "stranger" is *magowr* (*mem, gimmel, vav, resh*), which means "sojourner." A more accurate translation of this verse would be:

Genesis 37:1 *And Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.*

Implied in this word is the idea that Isaac was somewhat of a transient or a resident alien without possession in the land, while of Jacob it is said that he "dwelt" or *yashav* (*yud, shin, vet*) in the land of Canaan, implying a sense of permanency. There is a bit of irony in this statement, given the fact that Isaac was born in the land of Canaan, lived there his entire life, and died and was buried there, while Jacob was born there, left for Haran, returned again, and then went down to Egypt, where he died. Nonetheless, it is clearly Jacob and his descendants who will, in time, make this land their own. We may note that with the exception of Benjamin, the sons of Jacob were all born outside the land of Canaan, would come to the land of Canaan, and, like their father, go down to Egypt, where they would die. With the exception of Joseph, whose bones were returned to the land of Canaan and buried in Shechem, we may assume that the rest of the brothers were all buried in Egypt. Even to this very day, Israel's permanency in the land of promise is precarious at best. Division among the brothers and tribes often seems to precede Israel's leaving the promised land. Even now in the land of Israel there is division between the House of Israel and the House of Judah, as well as between those who call themselves "Orthodox Jews" and those who do not adhere to the oral Torah, who are identified as "secular Israelis." Can it be that this bickering and jealousy between brothers will again lead to an expulsion from the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

Another issue that we should address before we go any further in this story of Joseph and his brothers is the matter of the "coat of many colors." It is often the case that our understanding of Scripture is more influenced by tradition than by the Scriptures themselves. Those of us coming from a Christian tradition grew up envisioning three wise men coming to visit the infant Yeshua while he lay in a manger, yet the Scriptures themselves reveal nothing of the number of wise men and clearly teach that they visited him in

his home. The fact that Herod ordered the death of every child up to two years of age makes it possible that this visit from the sages took place two years after Yeshua's birth.

Matthew 2:1 *Now when Yeshua was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came **wise men from the east to Jerusalem.***

Matthew 2:11 *And when they were **come into the house**, they saw the **young child** with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*

Matthew 2:16 *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, **from two years old and under**, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.*

In many regards this same influence is at work in the story of Joseph.

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.*

The Torah tells us that Israel loves Joseph more than all his children because he is the son of his old age. It is interesting to note here that it is Israel (the spiritual man) and not Jacob (the earthly man) who loves Joseph more. The expression of this love is manifest in the giving of a peculiar garment. Here we may question whether this may have been a family tradition. We may recall that during the time when Jacob deceived his father Isaac he was wearing a special garment of Esau's. We may wonder whether it was Isaac who gave his beloved son this special garment as a sign of his affection.

Genesis 25:28 *And **Isaac loved Esau**, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.*

Genesis 27:15 *And Rebekah took **goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau**, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son.*

While many draw a connection between this special garment and the right of the firstborn being given to Joseph instead of Reuben, this idea is largely due to the traditional location of the text after Reuben's defilement of Bilhah, although it is not supported by the text. The text plainly tells us that Israel loves Joseph because he is the son of his old age. We may also add that Joseph is the son of his beloved wife. Nothing is mentioned about Joseph being elevated to the status of firstborn until the book of 1 Chronicles.

1 Chronicles 5:1 *Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright.*

While Joseph does indeed inherit the double portion in the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh, it is not until well after our current story when Jacob journeys down to Egypt. Therefore, I believe that this special garment is nothing more than a sign of status as Israel's most beloved son.

We also cannot say with certainty what this coat looked like. The Hebrew words used to describe this garment are *ketonet (khaf, tav, nun, tav) pasim (pey, samech, yud, mem)*. A *ketonet* is a long, linen shirt-like undergarment. The word *pasim* comes from the root word *pas*, which means "the palm of the hand" or "the sole of the foot." Most scholars agree that what is being described is a linen shirt-like undergarment or tunic with sleeves reaching down to the hands and the hem reaching the feet. Such a garment is described as being the proper attire for the virgin daughters of the king.

2 Samuel 13:18-19 *And she had a **ketonet pasim** upon her: for with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins apparelled. Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her. ¹⁹And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her **ketonet pasim** that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying.*

It is interesting to note that in both places in the Scripture where this phrase is used, the coat represents a position of privilege. It is also interesting to note that both instances involve a story of betrayal by brothers or a brother. In the first instance it is the betrayal of Joseph by his brothers, and in the second instance it is the rape of Tamar by her stepbrother. Also in both instances the *ketonet pasim* is destroyed by tearing it, accompanied by grief and tears.

Clearly this garment signifies the father's love. Again, there is nothing connecting this garment to the right of the firstborn. The Torah tells us quite clearly that this whole story is about the father's love. While we often hear it said that the brothers are angry with Joseph for being a tattletale, this is clearly not the case. Again, the text makes it very clear that the brothers are jealous of their father's love for Joseph.

Genesis 37:4 *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.*

Genesis 37:11 *And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.*

Here we should begin to see a very clear allusion to Messiah Yeshua, who was loved of his Father but rejected and despised by his brethren.

John 1:11 *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

John 7:7 *The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.*

John 15:18-19 *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

John 15:24-25 *If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.*

John 8:42 *Yeshua said unto them, If Elohim were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from Elohim; neither came I of myself, but He sent me.*

John 10:17 *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.*

John 15:9 *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*

As the disciples of Yeshua, we are clearly the recipients of the Father's love and favor. It is by this love and favor that we are to provoke our unbelieving brethren to jealousy.

Deuteronomy 32:21 *They have moved Me to jealousy with that which is not Elohim; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.*

Romans 10:19 *But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.*

Romans 11:11 *I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? Elohim forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.*

We would be wise, however, to take heed of the warning contained in these passages. We should take careful note that this blessed status, won for us by Yeshua, will indeed be noticed by our unbelieving brethren. But as long as our brethren are under a spirit of blindness and unbelief, this Fatherly favor will be met with jealousy and anger. The more we are identified with Messiah Yeshua, the more we will be forced to endure the same rejection, hatred, anger, resentment, and violence that Joseph and Yeshua endured. While we may indeed rejoice in the love and unmerited favor bestowed upon us by the Father through Yeshua the Messiah, we must realize that this blessing may indeed be turned into a curse by those who are filled with envy, jealousy, and anger. We must learn to tread cautiously when dealing with those bound by unbelief and blindness.

The Torah reports that Joseph's brothers' hatred for him is a progressive hatred. At first, they hate him and cannot even speak to him peaceably, but in the end, their hatred consumes them and provokes them to kill their brother.

Genesis 37:4 *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.*

Genesis 37:5 *And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and **they hated him yet the more.***

Genesis 37:8 *And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? Or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? **And they hated him yet the more** for his dreams, and for his words.*

Here we should likewise take care to see what anger, envy, jealousy, and hatred can do if we allow them to fester and grow unabated within us. We must be quick to put an end to all such thoughts before they have time to bear poisonous fruit in our lives. We should recall the words of the Messiah, his beloved disciple John, and the apostle Shaul:

Matthew 5:44 *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*

Matthew 24:12-13 *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.
¹³But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

John 13:34 *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

Ephesians 4:26 *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*

Ephesians 4:31-32 *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: ³²and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as Elohim for Messiah's sake hath forgiven you.*

1 John 3:15 *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*

1 John 4:7-8 *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of Elohim; and every one that loveth is born of Elohim, and knoweth Elohim. ⁸He that loveth not knoweth not Elohim; for Elohim is love.*

If we are to truly fulfill our calling to provoke our brothers to jealousy and envy, then we must likewise be able to maintain our love for our brethren even through their hatred, anger, rejection, and even violence. Like Joseph, who at the end of the story continues to embrace his brothers, and Messiah, who forgives his brethren even from the cross, we too must develop a tenacious love for our brethren. We must learn to take our offenses to the cross so that our love may indeed endure and not wax cold in the end.

There is another lesson that we may learn from Joseph's mistakes. Joseph's brothers are already envious of him due to the favor and love shown to him by his father. But when YHWH reveals the future to Joseph through two powerful dreams, instead of keeping them to himself or seeking understanding from the Sovereign One in prayer, Joseph runs to his brothers and shares the dreams with them. Clearly Joseph lacks wisdom. Instead of sharing in Joseph's excitement about the nature of the dreams, the brothers simply see this as Joseph flaunting his status over them. Again, we must use great care when YHWH reveals truth to us. If the Creator has blessed us with revelation, we must seek the wisdom to know when, if, and with whom we are to share this knowledge. We should not assume that this revelation is for everyone or even for the present moment. We may recall that even Daniel and John were shown things that they were not to reveal.

***Daniel 12:4** But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*

***Revelation 10:4** And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.*

We must seek wisdom, knowledge, and understanding concerning when and if we are to share such dreams and revelations with others, especially among those living in a spirit of unbelief. We do not wish our blessings to become the fuel that ignites an ever-growing fire of hatred toward us. Therefore, we should learn carefully from our brother Joseph and wait upon our Father for release.

We should recognize the spiritual nature of the events taking place in our portion by the fact that it is Israel and not Jacob who speaks to Joseph and commands him. So, it is Israel who sends Joseph into the conspiring arms of his brothers. While Joseph is on his way to Shechem where the brothers are supposed to be grazing the sheep, they have gone on to Dothan. The name Dothan means "two wells." I cannot help but see a connection between wells and the Torah. We have often seen the connection between the Torah and images of water. In many ways this story does seem to indicate that the sons of Jacob have gone to a place of two wells. Is it possible that we are to understand this as a shadow picture of the sons of Jacob moving toward the idea of two Torahs, the written Torah and the oral Torah? It is also interesting to me that one of the wells is empty! Clearly the written Torah is a life-giving fountain, while the oral Torah remains empty and lifeless. It is also interesting that the revenge they schemed for their brother Joseph was to force him into the empty well. Again, I cannot help but see the current struggle in the Hebrew Roots/Messianic Movement as many of the brethren seek to force Joseph (the House of Israel) to adopt the confines of the empty well of oral Torah!

It is Reuben the firstborn who is the first to soften and seek a way to prevent the death of Joseph. Judah and his brothers agree that it would be better to profit from him than to kill him. So the brothers plan to sell their brother Joseph into bondage to the Ishmaelites. Before they can do this and before Reuben can rescue his brother, men from Midian come and kidnap Joseph and sell him to the Ishmaelites, who then sell him to Potiphar in Egypt.

The brothers concoct a tale to tell their father so that they will be free of any suspicion in the matter of Joseph's disappearance. Here we should not miss the subtle act of justice that takes place. Jacob, who once deceived his father with the coat of his brother Esau,² is now deceived by his sons who bring the

² Genesis 27:1-29

coat of their brother. Because of Jacob's behavior Isaac was bereaved of his son's company for twenty years.³ Now, because of his sons' behavior, Jacob will be bereaved of his son Joseph's companionship as well. One cannot help but recall the principle of sowing.

***Galatians 6:7** Be not deceived; Elohim is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

The sons of Jacob reap what they have sown. While the source of the envy and anger may be gone, now they reap the sorrow and grief of a father who will not be consoled or comforted. Again, we see that nothing good can come of unbridled anger and envy. It would be wise for us to learn to let it go quickly that we not plant seeds of inconsolable grief in our own lives.

³ Genesis 31:38

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