

JOSEPH

Genesis 37:1-11

Part 1

Intro: The story of Joseph in the OT is one of the greatest stories in all of the Bible. But when I make that statement, I must identify which of the Josephs who are mentioned in the Bible it is that I am referring to. Herbert Lockyer, in his book, *All the Men of the Bible*, mentioned twelve men in Scripture who had that name. But, by far, the one we think about primarily when we speak of Joseph is the eleventh son of Jacob, and the first son of Rachel. The other Joseph which may come to our minds is Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of our Lord.

Jacob's son, Joseph, is the first Joseph mentioned in the Bible (see the record of his birth in Gen. 30:24), and he is also the last Joseph mentioned in the Bible (see Rev. 7:8). The account of his life actually begins in the 37th chapter of Genesis, and with the exception of one chapter, the 38th, the story of his life and death occupies every chapter, with that one exception, on to the end of the book of Genesis, chapter 50. So he occupies a very unique position in Scripture even though he was not of the branch of his father's family which led on down to coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. That branch was through his half-brother, Judah.

But there is no other person in all of Scripture, whose life more beautifully pictures the life of our Savior, than does Joseph's life. We all should know that Joseph was not perfect, but the Spirit of God has seen fit to pass over the sins which he did have so that he might appear in Scripture as an amazing type of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am going to spend at least two Sundays on Joseph, and maybe three, because of the unique importance of his life. But I am going to keep to my original purpose in these studies, and that is to look at the lives of some of the men in the Bible, to learn what we can from ways in which they learned to walk with the Lord according to the ways of the Lord and for the glory of the Lord.

We learn from the record of Joseph's birth in Genesis 30, why he was named Joseph. Joseph was married to two wives, who were sisters. Their names were Leah and Rachel. Leah started having children immediately after her marriage to Joseph, but Rachel did not. She had to watch while

Leah and her handmaiden, Zilpah, and Rachel's handmaiden Bilhah, had babies, a total of nine of them. Finally, the Lord gave Rachel a baby boy which she named Joseph, because she was apparently led to believe that the Lord was going *to add* to her one son, another son – which He did, but Rachel died when that baby, named Benjamin, was born. So the name “Joseph” means that Rachel believed that the Lord had given her one son, and that He was going to give her another.

Genesis 37 sets before us the conditions which existed in Jacob's home, conditions for which Jacob was primarily to blame.

I. THE HOME IN WHICH JOSEPH GREW UP.

In the first place it was a home in which Joseph's father had more than one wife. And all during his married life Rachel had been his favorite wife, and the others were aware of how Jacob felt. Leah had done all that she could to win the love of her husband, but even though she was the first to have a child, a son, and went on to have three others, while Rachel had none, yet Jacob still preferred Rachel.

So, when finally Rachel had a child, and that was a son, it was to be expected that Jacob would prefer her son above all of his other sons. The older sons knew how their father felt, and that made them very unhappy. And his older sons hated Joseph.

Two things added to their hatred. One was that the brothers were involved in something that was wrong. We are not told what it was, but we are told that Joseph told Jacob what his brothers were doing, and that made them hate him even more. We don't know why Joseph felt compelled to tell his father, but it may have been that the brothers were stealing some of their father's flocks and/or herds. We don't know. But we do know that Joseph told on them. That made Joseph's relationship with his brothers even worse. Finally, Joseph made a coat of many colors for Joseph, but not for his other brothers, and this made a very bad situation even worse.

But there was still one more thing that caused Joseph's brothers hate him even more. He dreamed not just one dream, but two dreams. Now we have to understand about dreams in the day in which they lived. They had no written Word of God such as we have. Instead, as the book of Hebrews tells us, and the OT confirms in many places, God spoke to His

people in many different ways at different times. So God was speaking to Joseph in these dreams. Joseph realized what they meant. But I believe that Joseph did a very foolish thing to tell his brothers. Even Jacob rebuked Joseph about the dreams, but as he thought about the dreams, we are told that he “observed the saying.” This meant that he wondered if this could be a prophetic message of God’s will for his life, as ridiculous as it sounded even to him. But this made his brothers hate him all the more, and we are told in verse 11 that “his brothers envied him.”

This marked a new development in their hatred. Let me explain what I mean.

In the last verses of Romans 1 the Apostle Paul gave a list of sins as he proved that God was righteous in condemning the human race. Man did not want to know God, or to please Him, and so God gave them over to do the sinful things that were in their hearts – and to a great extent we are seeing the same things take place in our generation. But as you go down through that list of sins (given in verses 29 through 32 in Romans 1), we come to these words: “Full of envy, murder.” Unchecked envy and lead to murder.

Let me give you another example. In Matthew 27:18 when our Lord was on trial before Pilate, we are told that Pilate “knew that for envy they had delivered Him.” And so that asked that Barabbas be set free. And when Pilate asked what he should do with Jesus, they responded by saying, “Let Him be crucified” (Matt. 27:22).

What is envy? It is not that I want what another person has; I just don’t want him to have it. Joseph’s brothers did not aspire to rise to Joseph’s place; they just wanted to bring him down to theirs. The scribes and Pharisees had no desire to be like the Lord; they just wanted to take away what He had and to show that He was just a human being like they were. Do you remember how they violently objected when He claimed to be the Son of God?

This is the reason that a lot of people hate our President. They don’t want to be like he is, but they want to bring him down to their level. They don’t know how to handle someone who is concerned about moral values, and who believes that things are either black or white, right or wrong. It produces a feeling of guilt and inferiority in them, and those who hate our President would like to get rid of us too, or make us just like they are.

Solomon wrote a long time ago,

A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones (Prove. 14:30).

We can thank God that envy does not always lead to murder, but somehow if it doesn't, it will make your bones rotten. That is, it will kill you. The alarming thing is that the Bible teaches that envy is in all of us! No political party is without it. Just think: the politics of envy. It is saying, "I don't want to be like you; I just don't want you to be the way you are."

When the Apostle Paul was defining love in 1 Corinthians 13, one thing he said about God's love is that "love envieth not." When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he said that envy can get into preachers and their preaching. We all have to stand guard against it. No one is immune to envy.

So don't be surprised when you read on in this chapter, and you find that Joseph's brothers were out on the range finding pasture for Jacob's flocks and herds, and Jacob told Joseph to go find his brothers, see how they were doing, and come back to report to him.

Joseph had a little trouble finding them, but eventually he caught up with them. He found them at a place called Dothan. Do you remember what they said when they saw Joseph coming. Let me read it for you. (Read Gen. 37:18-20.)

Do you see how envy in their hearts produced a desire to kill their brother, to cast his body into a pit, and then they would lie to their father, saying that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast, a bear or a lion presumably. But what was their objective, their real objective? You find it in the last line of verse 20: "And we shall see what will become of his dreams."

What were the Joseph's dreams? They were God's revelation to Joseph of God's will for His life. So these brothers were not only taking on Joseph, hoping to kill him, *but they were taking on God*. I hope that we all realize that when we take on God, we lose, and we lose big!

Let's all be clear on one thing: The reason that our President won a second term was because that is what was God's will for our country. We don't deserve a President like President Bush is, but God has extended grace to us. And that gives me hope for our country. Long ago a man by the name of Asaph said this, and it is just as true today as it was at least

3,000 years ago when it was first written. Listen to these words found in Psalm 75:6 and 7:

6 For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west,
nor from the south.

7 But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up
another.

What happened to Joseph? Did they kill him? Evidently not because with the exception of chapter 38, as I have explained, chapters 39 through 50 are all about Joseph?

But how did he survive? Well, if you understand Almighty God, you know that He is always prepared to see that His will is done. So he touched the heart of big brother Reuben who heard what his brothers wanted to do with Joseph, and he delivered Joseph out of their hands.

But the brothers still hoped that they would be able to kill Joseph. So they took his coat of many colors away from him, and cast him into an empty pit. And then they sat down to eat without giving Joseph anything to eat when all of a sudden, something happened that caused Judah to propose a solution to his other brothers. (Read verse 25 through verse 28.)

You see, the hand of God was in all of this. These merchants were on their way to Egypt which was to be the very place where the brothers would live to see Joseph's dreams become a reality.

But they had to give Jacob, their father, some explanation. So they took Joseph's coat which they had taken away from him, killed a goat, dipped the coat in the goat's blood, took it to their father, and let him draw his own conclusion. You see, even here we have a definition of envy. Those brothers did not want Joseph's coat; they just didn't want him to have it. That is envy. They thought that they were getting away with what they wanted to do, that Jacob would never learn what really happened, but they did not realize the agony of conscience they would experience under the hand of God for what they had done.

Concl: Was Joseph headed for an easy time? No, not at all! He was going to have thirteen very difficult years ahead of him. But ultimately God's will would prevail. The brothers despised God and the message He had conveyed to their younger brother about His future. They felt that it

was up to them to do what they could to get rid of their brother for whom they carried the greatest contempt in their hearts. They couldn't see God, but He was there. He knew what they were up to, and how they would do anything to get rid of Joseph. But what they did, although it meant great sorrow for their father, and great troubles for Joseph, thinking that they would be relieved, was what God used to get him into the very country where those same brothers would one day bow down before him, and do what they were determined they would never do. But God was going to show them that He could take an insignificant shepherd boy and set him on a throne in the greatest nation of that day.

As we get this first glimpse into the life of Joseph, we must turn away, not thinking about how helpless Joseph was, nor how despicably bad his brothers were, but how great and sufficient God was, and still is today. We are inclined to think that we are in charge, but we aren't! God is, and He is not going to let any man or any nation, and any group of nations over rule His will. So we need to need to read His Word, to learn all that we can about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, our triune God, so that we will be able to have both peace and confidence in knowing that we are in His hands, He is not in ours.

But let me say in closing something which most of you know. And that is that we can only know the true and living God if we will come to Him through His Son. What does this mean? It means that sin is what has separated us from God, and Jesus Christ died to take away our sins so that we might come to God. And it is only as we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins that we can know God, and trust Him, and rest in Him Who is working all things out according to His own will.