

Joseph's Dreams

Genesis 37:1-11

Genesis 37:1-11 - *"Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. ² This is the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. ⁵ Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. ⁶ So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: ⁷ There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. ⁹ Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." ¹⁰ So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" ¹¹ And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind."*

Background Notes

The story of Joseph begins in Genesis 37 and runs right to the end of the book of Genesis. There is more about the personal character of Joseph in the Bible than any other biblical person, except for our Lord Himself.

Joseph forms the great link between the patriarchs of Israel and the nation of Israel. Think of the gigantic gap that would be in the biblical record if we didn't have the story of Joseph. We'd have the patriarchs, and then suddenly, we'd come to a large number of Jewish people who were slaves in Egypt! What happened? Joseph is the link.

The birth of Joseph is recorded in Genesis 30. He was the first son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, and therefore Joseph was favored above all his brothers. Jacob gave Joseph a special coat or tunic (v3). From Sunday school days on, we've known this tunic as the "coat of many colors" - right? Well, the Hebrew words that are used here tell us that this garment wasn't special because of its colors, but because it had long sleeves and came down to the ankles. Everyone wore a tunic in those days, but the working man's tunic had short sleeves and was only knee-length. It was designed for work.

Joseph was given a tunic that was fit for royalty! Because of his favored position, his brothers were jealous of him. In fact, they hated Joseph.

Furthermore, Joseph had two dreams. In the dream about the sheaves of grain, his brothers' sheaves all bowed down to Joseph's sheaf. In the dream about the sun, moon, and stars, all of them bowed down to him – even the sun and moon, which represented his father and mother! Not surprisingly, Joseph's brothers hated him all the more because of these dreams. Joseph's father (and perhaps his brothers) may have realized that this double dream was indeed from God, but his brothers envied him even more. And Jacob kept these dreams in mind (v11).

Doctrinal Points

1. God's faithful servants should tell the truth, even though it may hurt others.

At the beginning of this story, Joseph was seventeen years old, and he was feeding the flocks with his brothers. He was with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. What the problem was, we don't know, but presumably Joseph's brothers were doing something dishonest (or worse) behind Jacob's back. It may sound like Joseph was a tattletale, but he wasn't "snitching" on his brothers. Joseph was responsible to report this wickedness, and he did the right thing.

Throughout the life story of Joseph, he was presented as a godly believer who was faithful to the Lord all the way through his life. As God's faithful servant, Joseph always told the truth - even though, as in this case, his brothers were hurt. We probably should put the word "hurt" in quotation marks, because in the long run, whatever "hurt" the brothers experienced was good for them. Maybe Joseph's true report resulted in Jacob disciplining his sons, which would have been good! In any event, Joseph did the right thing in telling the truth, and we should too. God's faithful servants should tell the truth, even though it may "hurt" others.

Have you ever had to tell the truth, even when it hurt someone else? It happens all the time. Recently I was asked to write a letter of reference for a fellow-believer who was applying for a job. I did the best job that I could for this person, but at the same time, I didn't compromise the truth. That would have been wrong. When you're asked, you can't say a person is outstanding in his ability to work with others if, in your experience with that person, you know he can't work with others! You must tell the truth!

Right now it's final exam week at Emmaus Bible College. I would love to give "A"s to all my students - but I can't! To be a faithful teacher, I must turn in a truthful report, even though some students may feel hurt. However, that hurt will be helpful and good if those students have been irresponsible in their studies, and the poor grade helps them turn their study habits around.

Many more illustrations of this truth could be given. God's faithful servants should tell the truth, even though it may hurt others.

2. God's faithful servants should tell the truth, even though they themselves may be hurt.

When Joseph told the truth about his brothers, and when he shared his dreams with his family, he experienced hurt. *"And his brothers said to him, 'Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."*

It could be argued that Joseph should not have shared his dreams. Maybe he should have kept them to himself - that would have been just common sense. Why share these dreams of greatness? He should have expected that his brothers, who already hated him, would hate him even more!

But remember, Joseph would have considered that these dreams were messages sent from God. In fact, his family probably recognized that this double dream was from God. They were angry because they didn't like the content! So as I see the situation, Joseph was not naïve and foolish to share his dreams. He felt before the Lord that he should share the truth, even though it might cause further hatred of his brothers. These dreams were a revelation from God, and it was important to share the truth.

This part of Joseph's life reminds us of the experience of our Lord Jesus when He was here on earth. In fact, there are many parallels between Joseph and the Lord Jesus, as we will see. As Joseph was hated by his own brothers, so our Lord was hated by his own people.

When the Lord came to his people, the nation of Israel, he was hated. Why? Because He told the truth! He denounced the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and legalistic Judaism. He told them the truth, that He had come from God and that He was their Messiah, their King. But like Joseph's brothers, they said, *"We will not have this man to reign over us."* (Luke 19:14). Joseph's dreams came true, and so will our Lord's predictions. As Joseph's brothers eventually bowed their knees before Joseph, so Israel will one day recognize Jesus Christ as their rightful King. Joseph told the truth, even though it resulted in his own hurt.

As God's faithful servants, we should do the same. As you share the truth of God's word with non-believers, you will experience the hatred of this world. The Lord Jesus said that the world will hate us because it hated Him. *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you"* (John 15:18).

As God's servants, have you shared the truth of God's Word with those unbelievers with whom God has brought you in contact? Have you shared the truth with your unbelieving neighbors, or your unbelieving fellow workers, or your unbelieving fellow students? Have you shared the truth of God's Word, even though you may get hurt and even be

hated? Well, don't be afraid. Be like Joseph! God's faithful servants should tell the truth, even though they themselves may get hurt.

Practical Application

Teenagers - you can do it, as Joseph did.

Joseph was a model of a godly man of faith all the way through his life. He established this pattern for his life when he was a teenager. He was only seventeen years old at this time, but he was tested in many areas while he was still a teen, and he passed the tests. Joseph was tested in the area of telling the truth even when it hurt, and he passed the test.

He was also tested in the area of prestige, or favor. When Jacob gave Joseph that special tunic, Joseph was tested in the area of pride and prestige. Now Jacob should not have played favorites among his children, and he shouldn't have shown his favoritism to Joseph in this obvious way. He must have known this would cause jealousy and friction in the family. But Jacob gave Joseph the special tunic, and Joseph was put into this testing place as a result.

How would Joseph handle this test? How would he handle the jealousy and hatred of his brothers who were not as favored by their father? Even though he was still a teen, Joseph passed the test. He didn't become proud because of his favored position, and he tried to have as normal a relationship with his brothers as possible. In chapter 39 we'll see that he was tested in the area of sex, and remained faithful to God. He passed that test, too.

Teens, you can pass the tests that come into your lives, just as Joseph did. If you have more brains, or better looks, or more athletic or musical talent than your fellow students, you will be tested in the area of prestige and pride. Others will be jealous of you, maybe even hate you because of your brains, or appearance, or talent, and so forth. Will you pass this test, or will you become proud? Will you deny friendship - or even try to take revenge on those who are jealous of you?

Recently Danny Wuerffel, the quarterback for the University of Florida, received college football's most prestigious award, the Heisman Trophy. Danny Wuerffel is an outstanding Christian. He had a great testimony for Jesus Christ throughout his high school and college years. Thus far, he has passed the test in the area of pride and prestige. How will he handle this next level?

Although I'm particularly addressing teens, this lesson certainly applies to all of us. How will you handle the tests that God allows in your life? You can pass the tests, just as Joseph did!