

“Behold, this dreamer...”

Some people, including Christians, enjoy fighting. I do not. I see fighting against error or for good, something I have to do. I definitely do not ‘enjoy’ it! Others think it is wonderful when they are meted out affliction and despair. I do not. It is true that Christians can suffer all kinds of problems because God has a particular plan in their lives, and suffering is part of it. I have known plenty of this in my own life – but do I ‘enjoy’ it? No I do not.

I can accept that suffering is in God’s plan. I will go along with it, because it is what must occur. But, I think it is odd for Christians to enjoy being harmed – it is perverse. As for enjoying adversity, well, I think it is rather bizarre. There is nothing in suffering to ‘enjoy’!

When opposing error or fighting against those who would defy God, I can be anxious, if not scared witless. There are times when I have even known misery in the 50 years or so I have been a ‘soldier of Christ’. Yes, I have known victories, and I know God is with me. But, that does not make suffering somehow nicer. Suffering is suffering and there is nothing nice about it.

A soldier of Christ will stand firm even when scared. He will fight on when everything is against him. His aim is to uphold the standard of God, not to make out to be some kind of hero, or ‘super-spiritual’. His own fate is irrelevant. What matters is the honour of God.

In this chapter we come to the famed account of Joseph being sold into slavery. It is not romantic, as many preachers make it out to be. Joseph was loathed by his brothers, who treated him badly. After tracking them in the desert Joseph came upon them with the flocks, to see if they were safe. In return, the brothers threw him into a pit. They would have left him there to die except for two things – the coming of nomadic caravan merchants and the destiny planned for him by God.

At the time, though, he did not know God had a plan for his life, or that later his life would make him one of the most powerful men in the Middle East. No, at the time he was scared! He was deliberately ‘set up’ by a scheming wife, destroying his good name and getting him cast into prison for a long time. Only a fool would relish that kind of experience! It was not until well after the event that Joseph saw any good coming out of his misfortunes.

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

What does this tell us? It tells us that no matter what the circumstances are, we must always look to God's providence. As Christians He will not allow us to suffer without reason.

Verses 1&2

1.

“And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.

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.”

The account now moves to Jacob/Israel, or, particularly, his son, Joseph. We are told that Jacob and his family were not part of the historical society of Canaan, but were 'strangers'.

We go to the time when Joseph was 17 years of age. (Note of interest: the word 'seventeen' is made up of 'ten' and 'seven'). Like his brothers, he tended flocks of sheep for his father. It is often assumed that Joseph was sold into slavery out of jealousy.

But, here we see that Joseph was in the habit of reporting everything his brothers did, to their father, Jacob... hardly an endearing trait in members of any family, and bound to engender anger if not hatred. We are not told what constituted 'evil' here, only that Joseph took their 'evil report' to Jacob. The word 'evil' suggests something bad or malignant, so the reports were not light or insignificant. We should remember that it was Jacob's eldest sons who slaughtered the males of the entire city of Jerusalem. And now, possibly because of their various mothers, they did not accept Joseph as a true brother.

So, it is not so much jealousy as anger that led to the actions against Joseph by his brothers. It is possible, of course, that the brothers were acting very badly, enough to cause immense concern in Joseph's mind and heart. It is true that those who act badly will also react badly

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

when found out. At any rate, Joseph did not make friends of his brothers! Added to this was favouritism. These strained intrafamilial relationships form the background to the account of Joseph's initial experiences.

Verses 3&4

1.

"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.

2.

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."

Sadly, Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other children. (Note: he had a number of daughters as well). It is true that Joseph came along when his mother was naturally beyond child-bearing age, but it is never right to put more emphasis on one child over others. It is bound to lead to jealousy and, in this case, hatred and murderous thoughts. Of course, it could be that Israel knew the hearts of all his children, and so loved what was pure in Joseph.

To show his favouritism, Jacob made Joseph a coat of many colours, which made matters even worse! In this text Jacob is also called Israel. He made Joseph a special coat. This was a *tntk*, or *kethoneth*, a long garment of linen, like a shirt. Even today we see these worn by Arabs. The garment was of 'many colours'... special.

This may, or may not, refer to actual colours, for the word '*pas*' can also simply mean the tunic extended right down to Joseph's feet. If this is the case, Joseph's 'coat of many colours' might simply be a long tunic of fine linen, with no 'colours' as such, apart from what was naturally in the weave. On the other hand, it is possible that the coat was dyed to make it special, or, that different natural linens of varying colours were sewn together to make a pattern. We cannot tell for certain.

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

The effect of this gift to Joseph had the effect of infuriating his brothers even more, and they were hardly able to talk with him at all. No doubt they spoke to him when they had to, especially in front of their father. But, otherwise, he was probably shunned or treated gruffly.

Verses 5-8

1.

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

2.

And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed:

3.

For, 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.

4.

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.”

We cannot be sure if dreams were a constant feature in the early life of Joseph, but at about age 17 he had a dream. Whether it was wise or not, or determined by God for a purpose, he told his brothers of the dream. Added to their already unfavourable frames of mind, his relating of the dream added fuel to their hatred: ‘And they hated him yet the more’.

‘Dream’ or *chalowm* could have two possible meanings – it was either ordinary or it had prophetic significance. The latter, as we now know, was the case. In the dream all the brothers were binding wheat into sheaves. The word ‘binding’, *kwt* or *tavek*, is one of motion, but it also has its root in the meaning to ‘sever’. They were, then, tying together wheat stalks into bundles, but there appears also to be a deeper meaning – that of being separated from Joseph.

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

The bundle tied by Joseph was firm and stood upright in the field. All the bundles made by the brothers turned toward the bundle tied by Joseph, and they bowed toward it, making 'obeisance'. This (*shachah*) is an act of bowing lowly before a superior. It is obvious from the brothers' response what this meant – they would become inferior to Joseph and bow to his superiority. This did not go down very well! Yet, it came true many years later.

We can imagine the sarcasm in their voices when they asked 'What? *You* are going to rule over us and be our superior?' Though they did not accept his dream, they nevertheless hated him even more for having the impudence to even relate its contents to them. We are told they hated his 'dreams': the word

chalowm

can be either singular or incorporating the plural. Therefore, we cannot tell at this stage if Joseph had had previous dreams, or if the text refers to this dream as well as later ones. Either way, they hated him for his dream/s and how he interpreted them!

Verses 9-11

1.

"And 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.

2.

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?

3.

And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying."

We are not told when it occurred, but Joseph had another dream. Once again he related it to his brothers and also to his father. In this dream appeared the sun, moon and eleven stars – the number of brothers he had!

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

It seems that the stars were the brothers, the sun was Israel and the moon was Joseph's mother. This time these heavenly objects bowed to him as a person. A very explicit reference to his own superiority, which did not escape the notice of the brothers. Possibly to keep the peace, Israel rebuked or reprimanded Joseph for saying such a thing even though he had received a similar prophecy himself many years before.

'Are we all to bow down before you, Joseph?' demanded Israel. The brothers 'envied' Joseph. That is, they were jealous. Does this mean they knew, deep-down, that Joseph was telling them the truth of the future? Or, were they just jealous because he again had the limelight? Though he had reproved Joseph, Israel secretly held what was said in his heart. Thus, it seems Israel knew there might be something in what Joseph said.

Verses 12-17

1.

"And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.

2.

And 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.

3.

And 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.

4.

And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou?

5.

And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks.

6.

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

And 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.”

A short while later, the brothers went to Shechem to feed the flocks. Joseph was, for some reason, still at home. Israel called for Joseph and said ‘I think your brothers are tending flocks in Shechem. I will send you to them.’

Israel wanted Joseph to go and check everything was alright. Joseph readily went, which suggests that possibly he was unaware of the depth of his brothers’ hatred toward him. He set off down the valley of Hebron and followed it to Shechem.

On the way he met a man who asked him where he was going. Joseph told him, and he advised that the flocks and brothers had moved on. ‘They said they were going to Dothan’ he added. With this in mind, Joseph carried on to Dothan (‘two wells’, northern Canaan, just north of Samaria; where Elisha would later come from).

Verses 18-22

1.

“And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.

2.

And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.

3.

Come 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.

4.

And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

5.

And 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.”

Even when they saw Joseph far away, the brothers plotted to kill him. Their hatred could no longer be contained, and they saw an opportunity to get rid of him once and for all, out of their father’s sight.

‘Look,’ they said amongst themselves, ‘the dreamer is coming! Let’s kill him and throw him into a deep pit. We’ll tell everyone he was killed by a wild beast. Then we’ll see how accurate his dreams were!’ The ‘pit’ would have been a dry deep hole, or a well of water.

But, one of the brothers, Reuben, persuaded them not to kill him. ‘Look, don’t kill him. Put him into the pit in the desert instead.’ He had a plan to go back later to release Joseph, so that he could return back home. God’s hand was in this, for it is unlikely that ten brothers could be persuaded by just one, when their hearts were brimming over with such intense fury.

Verses 23&24

1.

“And 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;

2.

And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.”

So, the plan was agreed upon before Joseph reached the flock. The brothers grabbed him and took his coat, throwing him into a dry pit. Their hatred had been vented.

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

Verses 25-28

1.

“And 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.

2.

And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?

3.

Come, 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.

4.

Then 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.”

With satisfaction they then sat down to eat a meal! As they sat they saw a caravan approaching. It was owned by Ishmaelites, doing business. The camels carried “spicery, balm and myrrh” for sale in Egypt.

Possibly, the spice was gum; the ‘balm’ was balsam a salve used as medicine; myrrh was an aromatic gum extruded from the rock rose. It was known in the west as laudanum and was used widely as a painkiller or sedative. The three items were a vital part of Egypt’s economy. The caravan travelled from Gilead, through the Beth-Shean valley to Dothan, to join the main road to Egypt. This is an accurate historical note, as was Joseph’s route to find his brothers; the road from Hebron to Dothan via Shechem was the ancient north-south road west of the Jordan; it carried on over the central hill country along the whole length of the Canaanite water route. Though called Ishmaelites, the caravaners were also named Midianites. They were thus travelling merchants, descended from Ishmael, of the tribe of Midian.

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

To make things even worse, the hatred of the brothers quickly turned to greed; Judah suggested they should not just get rid of Joseph, but should also gain, by selling him to the Ishmaelites. That way they would not be guilty of killing him, but they would still get rid of him!

When the Ishmaelites came nearer. Joseph was pulled out of the pit and sold for 20 pieces of silver... silver pieces, silver money, or silver ornaments. The sale complete, the Ishmaelites continued on their journey to Egypt.

Verses 29-31

1.

“And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes.

2.

And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?

3.

And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood;”

All this time Reuben must have been with the flocks, and did not know what had happened, so when he went to the pit to release Joseph, he was shocked to find him not there. In misery he ripped his clothing and ran to his brothers: ‘He is gone! What will I do?’ Resourcefully, the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph’s coat in the blood. The deception had begun.

Verses 32-35

1.

“And 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.

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

2.

And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.

3.

And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

4.

And 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.”

The brothers travelled back home and presented the coat to their father, asking him if he recognised it to be Joseph's. He confirmed it was and lamented “an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.”

Israel tore his clothing off in despair and put sacking on his hips instead, the symbol of mourning. He spent many days mourning, unable to be consoled. His family tried to comfort him – including the scheming sons, but Israel said he would die mourning, such was his grief. And he wept. Joseph had previously reported the sins of his brothers to Israel. We can see from this account just how low they sank into sin, deceiving their father and allowing him to be grief-stricken to great depth, pretending to mourn with him and maybe even convincing themselves their evil was alright because they did not actually kill Joseph.

Verse 36

1.

“And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.”

Genesis 37

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 15 May 2015 14:51

Sometime after the brothers returned home, the Midianite merchants reached Egypt and put up Joseph for sale at a local slave-market. An officer of Pharaoh's, Potiphar, a captain of the guard, bought him. Potiphar (Egyptian: 'belonging to the sun') was a chief executioner and one of the Pharaoh's guard. The word 'officer', *cariyc*, can mean either an official or an eunuch. As he was married the meaning has to 'an official'. Joseph was now to embark upon a new life, starting with sorrow and ending in joy, after time in the highest ranks in the land, thanks to God.

This shift in emphasis, from Jacob/Israel to Joseph is important, because Joseph is the link between a free small tribe (Jacob's) and the emerging nation of Hebrews. He bridges two eras, the latter arising from enslaved tribes born to the peoples of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel, in the country of Egypt. Joseph was the one used by God to bring Jacob's family to Egypt, the family that grew in numbers quickly to become a people feared by a Pharaoh who lived about three hundred years after Joseph died. He was, then, the catalyst for a radical change in circumstances brought about by God for His own purposes. The slavery of the Hebrews was essential for their freedom and subsequent travelling to Canaan to take the land for their own, thus bringing to fruition God's promises to the patriarchs.

© January 2006

---oOo---

{loadposition btm_address}