

Genesis 37 • The Favored Son

Introduction

When we find significant time spent on an Old Testament figure, particularly one who is found to be in God's favor, we most often find someone who is pointing figuratively to the Messiah to come. This is particularly true for Joseph and David, whom Jewish authorities for centuries even before Christ's first coming understood to be two of the most significant pictures of the Messiah to come: "HaMashiach ben Josef" and "HaMashiach ben David"—"The Messiah the Son of Joseph" and "The Messiah the Son of David". They understood that Joseph pointed to the Messiah coming in the character of "The Suffering Servant" and David pointed to the Messiah coming in the character of "The Conquering King". What they failed to understand, and what unbelieving Jews still fail to grasp today, is that it pointed to one Messiah, two comings. The Messiah would first come in the character of "The Suffering Servant" as a sacrifice for sin the first time and return as "The Conquering King" to establish His millennial kingdom on earth. Everything written about Joseph teaches something about the Messiah.

¹Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan. ²These 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. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. ⁴His 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.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: What is unusual about this particular use of, "These are the records of the generations of Jacob"?

A: In other places in Scripture it is usually followed by a genealogy, such as that of Esau recorded in the previous chapter. In this case, it shows an extreme contrast between Jacob and Esau in that for Esau all that is recorded is a list of descendants, whereas the line through Jacob is much more important and really encompasses the stories in the rest of Genesis from chapters 37-50. We know who was born to Esau, but we are given the details of the lives of those born to Jacob.

Q: In v.2, what provides a hint that the seeds of division were already sown in Jacob's family?

A: There were the "brothers" of the sons of Leah and Rachel to which Joseph belonged, and then there were the "sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah", those born through handmaidens given to Jacob by Leah and Rachel who are differentiated from the rest. It would seem to indicate distinctions already existed which might give rise to issues and rivalries beyond what would be expected in a large family to begin with.

Q: What is the greater meaning of the "varicolored tunic"?

A: This was not merely a gift but appears to be Jacob's way of elevating Joseph's authority and standing over the rest of his brothers. Notice that this full-length robe is not mentioned until after he "brought back a bad report" about his brothers.

Q: What might be interesting about the brothers' reaction to Joseph?

A: They seemed to equate their father's love for Joseph as a lack of love for them. They appear to not take into consideration that their own behavior—the "bad report", warranted any accountability or change on their part for the situation.

Application: Joseph repaid his father's love with respect and integrity whereas Jacob's other sons were not living up to that love and were the subject of a bad report. Instead of addressing their own issues, they took it out on the one they thought made them look bad.

⁵Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. ⁶He said to them, “Please listen to this dream which I have had; ⁷for 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.”

⁸Then 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.

⁹Now 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.”

¹⁰He 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?” ¹¹His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

¹²Then his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock in Shechem. ¹³Israel 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.”

¹⁴Then 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.

[Read v.5-11]

Q: What is unusual about how these dreams were understood compared to how most other dreams recorded in Scripture come to be understood?

A: They needed no one to provide the correct interpretation. Those to whom Joseph told the dream immediately understood it to apply to them.

Point: Whereas many other dreams in Scripture require a prophet or third party to explain to whom and what they apply, Joseph’s family in this case were the interpreters, a kind of testimony that though they did not like the truth, in their hearts they still knew it was the truth.

Q: How is the first dream’s setting dramatically different from the second dream’s setting?

A: The first dream has an earthly setting—“sheaves in the field” (v.7) but the second dream has a heavenly setting—“the sun and the moon and eleven stars” (v.9)

Point: This suggests the dreams had both literal and spiritual applications, such as for the literal Joseph the son of Israel and for the future Son, the Messiah to come. It could also have meaning for Abraham’s earthly seed (Israel) and his heavenly seed (the Church).

Q: What was the difference in reactions to the dreams?

A: Although everyone knew the dreams were about them, Israel “kept the saying in mind” whereas Joseph’s “brothers were jealous of him”.

Q: How do Joseph’s brothers’ actions seem to mirror those in the previous verses?

A: Instead of seeking to address their own shortfalls, they instead take it out on someone else.

Q: How might this be a source of strength to come for Joseph?

A: In spite of how circumstances will seem to take him in the opposite direction of these dreams, in reality they are going to bring about the precise fulfillment of the dreams.

*Surely the Lord GOD does nothing
Unless He reveals His secret counsel
To His servants the prophets. (Amos 3:7)*

Application: These dreams reveal that Joseph is not just the favored son of his earthly father, but the favored son of his heavenly Father, in the same character of the Messiah to come.

[Read v.12-28]

Q: What is given as yet another early indication that something is wrong with Joseph’s brothers?

A: They are not in the place that their father expects them to be. He expects them to be in Shechem, but instead they are found in Dothan.

Q: How is their plot against Joseph similar to their reaction to Joseph’s dream?

A: In both cases it is rooted in jealousy, but it is also followed by personal recognition. They not only realized the dream referred to them

¹⁵A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, “What are you looking for?”

¹⁶He said, “I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock.”

¹⁷Then 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.

¹⁸When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

¹⁹They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer! ²⁰Now 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!”

²¹But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, “Let us not take his life.” ²²Reuben 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.

²³So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; ²⁴and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

²⁵Then 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. ²⁶Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? ²⁷Come 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. ²⁸Then 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.

specifically, but in the case of their death plot they fully realized they were committing a crime that would need a cover story. In both cases they are completely conscious of their actions.

Q: How do their actions against Joseph go directly to the source of their jealousy and envy of him?

1. They call him a “*dreamer*” (v.19), a way of ignoring both the authority given Joseph by his earthly father and that spiritually indicated by the dreams through his heavenly Father.
2. They strip Joseph of the tunic (v.23) so as to disparage his earthly authority.
3. They threw Joseph into the pit (v.24) so as to literally remove him from being over them.

Q: How does their final disposition of Joseph betray their core spiritual problem?

A: The final act of selling him for money completes the picture of their issues with power and wealth, first stripping him of authority and then selling him for a price. It seems to confirm what has been going on from the beginning that they not only have general issues with authority but themselves want to replace him in order to be in authority and power.

Application: *The favored son was betrayed into the hands of Gentiles.*

²⁹Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. ³⁰He returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?” ³¹So they took Joseph’s tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; ³²and 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.”

³³Then he examined it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!” ³⁴So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵Then 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.

³⁶Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh’s officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

[Read v.29-36]

Q: What might be particularly ironic about the deception perpetrated on Jacob?

A: Just like the deception Jacob perpetrated on his father (Gen. 27), the deception perpetrated on him by his sons was effected with a goat.

Point: We reap what we sow. There may be forgiveness for sin, but that does not automatically equate to the abolition of consequences for sin.

Q: How did conspirators fall short of getting what they really wanted?

A: This was not solely about position and power within the family, but Jacob’s love. They may have eliminated a rival for power within the family, but they never gained the love Jacob expressed for Joseph. Actually, Jacob would mourn for the next 22 years until they are reunited in the truth and the conspirators would not get what they wanted most.

Q: How did things look from Joseph’s point of view?

A: It most certainly looked like everything was working against him, (v.36) when in reality (because we know the end of the story) everything was working for him.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Application: The favored son was sent ahead to prepare the way for Israel’s preservation as a nation.

Overall Application

There are more than 35 events in Joseph’s life which mirror those of Jesus during His first coming, thus fulfilling His role as the “Suffering Servant” picture of HaMashiach ben Josef. In this passage alone we find:

Joseph	Jesus
The beloved son of his father. (Gen. 37:3)	The beloved Son of His Father. (Mt. 3:17)
Lived in “Hebron” which means “fellowship”. He dwelt with his father at the place of fellowship and was sent by his father to seek the welfare of his brothers. (Gen. 37:14)	Dwelt with His Father in the place of fellowship and sent by His Father to seek the welfare of His brothers. (Phil. 2:5-7; Jn. 3:16)
Testified to his father about the sins of his brothers and his brothers hated him. (Gen. 37:2)	Testified about the sins of His brothers and they hated Him. (Jn. 15:18-19)
Revealed to his brothers the exalted position he was to receive. They already hated him for testifying against their sins, now they absolutely despised him. (Gen. 37:5)	Revealed to His brothers the position of glory that He would receive and so His brothers hated Him. (Mt. 24:30; Lk. 20:19)
Foretold that one day he would rule. (Gen. 37:7)	Foretold that one day He would rule. (Mt. 26:64)
Rejected and condemned to die. (Gen. 37:18)	Rejected and condemned to die. (Lk. 19:14; 23:21)
Accused by his brothers of being a	They said that He had lost His

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dreamer. (Gen. 37:19)

Judah betrayed Joseph and sold him for twenty pieces of silver. (Gen. 37:26-28)

His brothers manufactured evidence to cover up his death. (Gen. 37:31-32)

Joseph's tunic was used to prove his death. (Gen. 37:33)

senses. (Mk. 3:21)

"Judas" (Greek for "Judah") betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. (Mt. 26:14-15)

The authorities manufactured false testimony to cover up Jesus' resurrection. (Mt. 28:11-15)

Jesus' tunic remained to prove His resurrection. (Jn. 20:6-7)

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