

Joseph Told His Dreams to his Family

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the nation of Edom was made up of the descendants of Esau. The life and ministry of Joseph is the primary focus of this chapter and the rest of the book of Genesis. As a result, we will learn many lessons about the way the Lord works in our lives by the way the Lord worked in and through the life of Joseph.

Genesis 37:1-4 says, “Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. 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. 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. 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.” Jacob and his family had returned to the land of Canaan and settled there. As a result, we shift from the family of Esau back to the family of Jacob.

Other than his birth, the details of the life of Joseph, that are given in the book of Genesis, begin with events that happened when he was seventeen years old. We see that he was helping to feed the flock of his father. He was helping the sons of two of the wives of Jacob, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, as they fed the flock of Jacob. We see that Jacob brought a bad report about those brothers. The word translated “bad or evil” is used six hundred and sixty-three times in the Old Testament. It is translated “evil” four hundred and forty-six times, “wickedness” fifty-nine times, and the rest of the uses are several different words that have a very similar meaning. We do not know what Joseph said about his brothers, but we do know that he felt that what they were doing was evil.

One of the other things these verses say is that Israel loved Joseph more than any of the other children in the family. This was due to the fact that he was the son of his old age. Jacob made it very obvious that Joseph was his favorite son by making him a tunic of many colors. The word translated “tunic” was like a long undershirt and was usually made of linen. However, this created a major problem in the family. The brothers could all see that Joseph was the favorite of their father and they were filled with hatred toward him. The word translated “hatred” is a word that expresses a strong emotional reaction that causes one to oppose, despise, or want to have no contact with that person. It is the opposite of love and so the brothers could not speak peaceably to him. This meant that he often felt the anger of his brothers by their evil words and actions toward him. Every time they saw this shirt of many colors, it stirred up that anger.

Genesis 37:5-8 goes on to say, “Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, ‘Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: 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.’ 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.” Here, we see that Joseph told his brothers about a dream that he had experienced. Instead of causing the brothers to like him, this dream only stirred up more anger and hatred toward him.

In the dream, Joseph and his brothers were working together out in the field. He said that in his dream, they were all binding sheaves in the field. To “bind sheaves” means *to cut off a handful of stocks of grain and tie them together*. These bundles would then be taken to the threshing floor, untied, and spread around on the threshing floor. The oxen would then walk over and over these stocks causing the heads of grain to break loose from the stocks. Then, the stocks would be removed from the threshing floor and used for straw on which the cattle could lie at night in a corral, stable or barn. That left the heads of grain and tiny pieces of straw on the threshing floor called chaff. Ruth 3:2 says, “Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, *is he* not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.” The threshing floor was usually on the top of a hill. When the wind blew in the evening, the heads of grain (barley in this verse) and the chaff were thrown into the air and the wind would blow the pieces of chaff away and the grain would land back on the threshing floor. At the end of the evening, the people would gather the heads of grain and put them in containers and they would be taken to the barns for storage for the winter.

In his dream, Joseph said that his sheaf of grain stood up in the field. Then, the sheaves of his brothers all stood around his sheaf and bowed down to it. As we saw earlier, that dream caused even greater anger among the brothers. They said to him, “Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?” The word “reign” means *to be a king, queen, or some other kind of ruler*. The word “dominion” means *to rule over*. They demanded of him whether he thought he would become a ruler and then rule them. More than twenty years later, Genesis 44:14 says, “So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, and he *was* still there; and they fell before him on the ground.” Then, Judah spoke to Joseph for all of his brothers, in Genesis 44:16, which says, “Then Judah said, ‘What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord’s slaves, both we and *he* also with whom the cup was found.’” Here, we see that this statement did become a true statement, even though they did not recognize their brother.

However, that day the brothers had a very different reaction. We read earlier, “So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.” In this statement, we see that their hatred increased for two reasons. First, the brothers hated the dream that Joseph had dreamed. Second, they hated the interpretation of the dream. However, that was not the

end of his dreams. Genesis 37:9-11 says, “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.’ 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?’ And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind*.” Here, we see that his next dream also included his parents.

In this dream, Joseph said that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars all bowed down to him. This time, Joseph told his father, as well as his brothers, about his dream. Jacob immediately rebuked Joseph. The word translated “rebuked” means *to rebuke or reprove*. Jacob made it clear that he thought Joseph was boasting by telling his dream. In his rebuke, Jacob asked Joseph two questions. The first question was, “What *is* this dream that you have dreamed?” The second was an even stronger rebuke when Jacob told Joseph, “Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” Jacob wanted to know if he would bow down to Joseph. By telling this dream to his father and brothers, it caused two different reactions.

We see that the brothers of Joseph envied him. The word translated “envied” in this verse means *to be jealous or to envy*. This is a very strong emotion. This word is used of God, in passages like Exodus 20:3-5, where we read, “‘You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me.’” Here, we see that God will judge sin when people worship false gods. The word is translated “zeal” in Psalm 69:9, where it talks about the zeal that God has for the house of Israel. That verse says, “Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up. And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.” This word is used in Genesis 30:1, where we read, “Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or else I die!’” This word is also used in some contexts regarding adultery, which also speaks of very strong emotions.

In contrast, although Jacob rebuked Joseph, he kept the matter in mind. The word translated “kept the matter” is usually translated “keep” or “observe”. The basic idea of the word means to exercise great care over something. In Proverbs 19:8, we read, “He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who keeps understanding will find good.” In this verse, we see that a person who exercises great care to gain wisdom so that he can keep understanding will find good. Here, the word is translated “keep”. Then, in Deuteronomy 11:32, we see that Moses told the people of Israel, “‘And you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.’” Here, the word is translated “observe”. Jacob kept thinking about what Joseph had said and wondered what would happen in his life that might put Joseph in a position of leadership

where his family would bow down to him.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that God actually revealed to Jacob what was going to happen to Joseph in the future. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.