

Explore the Bible: April 28

Dreamer • Genesis 37:5-8,18-28

By Laura Lee Leathers



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In today's lesson, Joseph, Jacob's son by Rachel, will encounter those emotions from his brothers in a tangible way.

As Genesis 37 opens, we learn Joseph is now 17 and tending the sheep with his brothers. Then we have this tidbit of information: Joseph has brought an evil report regarding his brother's concubines.

The next tidbit, "Israel loved Joseph more than the other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age." And finally, Jacob "made a robe of many colors for him." The birth of jealousy was planted in the lives of Joseph's brothers. So much so that "they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him" (37:4).

A Dream (Genesis 37:5-8) – When an individual states they have had a dream, it can mean several things. A dream can mean an aspiration, like wanting to be a famous baseball player.

Regarding dreams found in the Bible, scholars tell us there are three types: "1) A simple message dream did not need to be interpreted. 2) A simple symbolic dream used symbols, but they were clear enough that no interpreter was needed. 3) A complex symbolic dream required an interpreter. Although dreams sometimes served as a channel of the Lord's revelation, they were neither foolproof nor infallible" (Lifeway).

Throughout the book of Genesis, we see dreams "were vehicles of divine revelation (20:3; 28:12-15; 31:10-13; 40:5-8)." Joseph was excited to share his dream with his brothers. Were they rolling their eyes as they listened to how the sheaves would bow down to Joseph's sheaf?

One thing is sure: it added to their hatred as they thought about the possibility of him ruling over them.

A Plot (Gen. 37:18-22) – Joseph has another dream in verses 9 through 11. The "sun, moon, and 11 stars" were bowing down to him this time. Once again, he tells his brother and father, who rebukes him for such thinking. The brother's jealousy grows, but Jacob "kept the matter in mind."

The following six verses describe Israel's work assignment for Joseph and his trip to Shechem. He was to find out how they were doing and bring a word to Israel. Instead of finding them at Shechem, he learned they were at Dothan.

Seeing him coming, someone came up with the idea that now was their opportunity to kill him. Joseph was walking into a trap, and apparently, he had no idea how much they detested him. The moment they saw him, their anger and hatred were rekindled.

Notice the name calling, "that dream expert." It means, "Here comes the Lord [Baal] of Dreams" (Lifeway). Did the two brothers, who were already murderers, suggest the idea? We know the other brothers were complicit in the act (34:25-29). After the murder, they were going to throw him into "one of the pits."

Pits were cisterns (man-made) or wells (natural water sources). They would fabricate a story of how a vicious animal ate him. Note their comment at the end of verse 20, "Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!" One day, they would see.

Reuben takes a stand to protect his youngest brother. His suggestion was to put him in the pit, but "don't shed blood." He had a plan to rescue him later. He was the only brother who demonstrated compassion.

A Pit (Gen.37:23-28) – The favorite child was stripped of his long-sleeved robe. Imagine his horror as his brothers throw him into the pit, usually filled with water. But we learn it was "empty, without water."

Then, the brothers eat a meal – how calloused – while Joseph is without food and water.

While eating, "a caravan of Ishmaelites" appeared on the scene. Judah appeals to his brothers and suggests selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites. The brothers agree.

Joseph is sold for twenty pieces of silver, the going price for a slave. Rejected and betrayed by his brothers, he was taken to Egypt. And “the LORD was with Joseph” (39:2).

As you study this week’s lesson, think about the times you have had to deal with “the green-eyed monster.” Do you agree with Dr. Gary Chapman: “Jealousy eats away at relationships like acid. It’s corrosive and destructive. It destroys trust and intimacy.” Why is it important to confront jealousy and destroy its ability to gain a stronghold?

“A tranquil heart is life to the body, but jealousy is rottenness to the bones.” (Prov. 14:30)

Leathers is a member of First Church, Lexington.