

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 27 (37:1 - 36): Some Summary Thoughts:

The Joseph narrative serves as a bridge between Jacob’s life and the book of Exodus. As such, it prepares us for future events that will transpire when the descendants of Israel find themselves in Egypt. Despite 12 sons and one daughter declared as the offspring of Jacob, the remainder of Genesis concentrates on the favorite son (Joseph) of the favorite wife (Rachel).

Chapter 37:

37:1: “Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.” The story of the promise is reaching a climax. The land is secured; descendants are plentiful (per the original promise in Gen 12:1-3).

37:2: Joseph is introduced as a young man of 17 who tends sheep with his brothers, but also apparently has a penchant for “tattling” on his brothers, i.e., taking actions designed to aggravate his siblings – some would even characterize Joseph at this point as a “spoiled brat.”

37:3-4: To further aggravate family dynamics, Joseph is depicted as being loved above his siblings by his father Jacob/Israel (vividly illustrated by the lavish coat given him by his father). The result is that he was hated by his brothers who could no longer speak a “kind” (peaceable, “*Shalom*”) word to him.

37:5-8: Joseph estranges himself even further from his brothers by relating his dream depicting his brothers bowing down before him – a picture clearly interpreted by his siblings as indicating Joseph’s superiority over them. The result: increased hatred by them toward him.

37:9-11: In a second dream, the picture becomes even more compelling as the sun, moon and *eleven* stars bow down to him. When he tells this to his father and brothers, it earns him a rebuke from his father and more jealousy from his brothers. In light of ancient thought that a key criterion to distinguish idle dreams from dreams with a larger significance was whether a dream came singly or in pairs and only dreams that occurred in pairs were considered to carry a larger significance (remember verse 41:32), it is easy to see why Joseph’s father was pondering, i.e., keeping the matter in mind.

37:12-17: In view of the family dynamics, it seems surprising that Jacob/Israel would dispatch Joseph to check on whether his brothers are “well” (peaceable, “*Shalom*”) while they are taking care of the flocks. The language showing the breakdown of “*peace*” is particularly striking when we move to the New Testament and read about Jesus Christ, “*For He Himself is our peace (“shalom”), who has made the two one (Jews & Gentiles) and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...*” (Eph 2:14).

37:18: When the brothers see him coming, there is no “*shalom, peace*” in their hearts or actions. They plot to kill him declaring, “*Then we’ll see what becomes of his dreams.*” That is the micro picture. The macro picture will be revealed many events later when the dreams do come true and Joseph puts his brothers actions into a powerful spiritual perspective: “*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today*” (51:20).

37:19-36: The brothers hatch a plan to get rid of Joseph, Reuben actually thinks he can pretend to go along with it and later save Joseph, but in the end Joseph is sold into slavery and he is taken to Egypt.

Though God is not actively present, this text is preparing us once again to learn that the Divine Presence is not confined to specific circumstances or location. Joseph is about to undertake a journey in which he will be far removed from the Land of Promise, but he still is embraced by the God of Promise. The Joseph so far in this story is devoted to self (actually generating conflict and dysfunction). The Joseph that he becomes through God’s design will be another lesson in God’s transformative Power.