

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 9 August 2009

No. T0585

Speaker: Mr. Glenn Baxter

Lessons on the Life of Joseph: Joseph in his own home

Today we begin a series of four talks entitled "Lessons on the life of Joseph." There are quite a number of Josephs in the Bible. The Joseph we will be talking about is the Joseph whose life is set out in the book of Genesis, the Joseph who is perhaps best known for receiving a coat of many colours from his father.

There usually are many ways in which the life of a Bible character can be divided. In these four talks, we are going to divide Joseph's life based on what we could call his four main residencies, first of all in his own home in the early part of his life, then as a slave in Potiphar's house in Egypt, thirdly in prison and finally in King Pharaoh's palace.

In each of the four talks we will be considering lessons on the way in which a follower of God should live and also ways in which Joseph can be viewed as a type, or picture, of Christ in the verses covered.

To help all of us, it is as well to give a bit of structure to this first talk on Joseph based around his own home. Accordingly, we'll divide the talk under six headings,

1. Joseph's origins;
2. Father, son and brothers;
3. The two dreams;
4. Sent to his brothers;
5. Sold as a slave;
6. The blood-stained coat.

Joseph's origins

Our first heading, then, is Joseph's origins. Let me read Genesis 30:22 to 24, reading from the Authorised Version of the Bible: "And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: and she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son."

Joseph's father was Jacob, also called Israel in the Bible. Jacob had two wives, both sisters. The older one, Leah, had borne him a number of sons. Now Rachel's prayers were answered and Joseph was her firstborn son, Jacob's eleventh son. Joseph's name means "He shall add" and Rachel's prayer was answered in that later God did add a second son, Benjamin, to her.

In looking at Bible types, we must always take care not to push all the details to try to unearth parallels. However, in noting some ways in which Joseph is a type of Christ I wonder if we start to see some pointers in these early verses. Both Joseph and Jesus were the firstborn sons of their respective mothers. If Joseph means "He shall add", the New Testament teaches us that in Christ many shall be made sons, effectively God adding to the new line established by Jesus in His death and resurrection.

Father, son and brothers

For the rest of our considerations today, we turn to Genesis 37. In looking at our second heading, father, son and brothers, let me read verses 2 to 4 of that chapter: "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. 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. 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."

We don't read anything about Joseph between his birth and this chapter, when he is 17 years old. Here is another example of a future servant of God being trained as a shepherd. I wasn't brought up on a farm but in my teenage years I spent many a happy holiday with kind Christian farming families in Northumberland. All of the farmers were shepherds and I saw for myself their dedication, patience and very hard work. What amazed me as much as anything

was their knowledge of the sheep. These shepherds were not so much looking after a flock of sheep, they were caring for a large number of individual sheep, each with its own tendencies. What a good training ground for learning to care for human sheep! Simon Peter was told by Jesus to shepherd and tend the sheep and lambs. Today, our churches need dedicated, hardworking, caring men and women who really do have a heartfelt love for their fellow believers, young and old, and who seek to guide and feed those believers in God's things, recognising the differing needs of individuals. Joseph had a grounding in caring for the sheep.

The verses which we have just read tell us that Joseph was the favourite son of his father, Jacob. Jacob himself had been brought up in a home divided by favouritism and jealousy. Jacob was the favourite son of his scheming mother, Rebekah, while his brother, Esau, was favoured by his father. Now Jacob is repeating the mistake and is dividing his own home in Canaan. He favoured one wife over the other and now shows favouritism for one out of his twelve sons. I am pleased that I have never had a home divided by favouritism. My wife and I have two grown up children whom we love equally strongly. Surely we don't need to stress the hurt which favouritism in our homes can generate. But let me extend this principle to our churches, which are our spiritual homes. How easy it is there to show partiality. The Bible would teach us to love all our fellow believers equally and failure to do this can result in the discord which we see in the home in which Joseph was brought up.

That must have been an unhappy home. Even when caring for the sheep, it would seem from verse 2 that some of Joseph's brothers caused him problems which Joseph reported back to his father. When Jacob exacerbated things by presenting Joseph with the coat of many colours, verse 4 tells us that his brothers actually hated him and could not speak in a friendly way to him. This was inevitable because the coat presented by his father would make Joseph stand out from his brothers.

What do we see of Joseph being a picture of Christ in these three verses? We don't need to have a detailed knowledge of the New Testament to know of the great love which God the Father has for His Son, Jesus. As Joseph's coat distinguished him from his brothers, so God the Father ensures that everybody realises that His Son, Jesus, is unique. For example, at the time of the transfiguration recorded in Matthew 17:1-9, when Peter equated Moses and Elijah with Jesus, God spoke from heaven and said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

Joseph's coat must have been an array of beautiful colours. No doubt Joseph would sometimes wear the coat and sometimes not. In His life in this world as recorded in the four Gospels, Jesus displayed a marvellous array of beauties and qualities. The difference is that Jesus didn't put those beauties and qualities on and off; those things were an integral part of Himself!

Sadly, we must also take note that, just as Joseph was hated by his brothers, so Jesus was hated by His own people. Let me support this by two quotations from John's Gospel. In 1:11 it says that: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." In 15:25 it is recorded that: "They hated me without a cause." Look at the scenes surrounding the cross of Jesus to note the extent of the hatred of the Jews against Him.

The two dreams

We move on now to our third heading, the two dreams, covering Genesis 37:5-11. In the first dream, Joseph saw a harvest scene. All the brothers were binding sheaves of corn and the brothers' sheaves all bowed down to Joseph's sheaf. Rather unwisely, Joseph told this dream in all its detail to his brothers. Not surprisingly, his brothers strongly rejected the suggestion that they would ever bow down to Joseph and verse 8 tells us that they hated Joseph even more because of his dreams and what he had said.

Joseph then dreamed a second dream. This time the setting is in the sky and the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to Joseph. He relayed this dream to his brothers and then to his father and brothers. Jacob rebuked Joseph and questioned whether Jacob, Rachel and Joseph's brothers would ever have cause to bow down to Joseph. The result was that Joseph's brothers envied him, although Jacob pondered over what had been said.

At this stage, no member of Jacob's family could have envisaged making homage to the second youngest member of the family. However, God can see the end from the beginning and we shall see in the last talk in this series that all members of his family did indeed bow the knee to Joseph.

These dreams of Joseph were not ordinary dreams. There are a number of further dreams to come in the story of Joseph and God was speaking in those dreams to foretell events. There was never any doubt that those events would take place, but God would choose His timing and Joseph and others would have to wait on that timing. We don't ever read of Joseph showing impatience or urging God to move things on; he waited for God's timing, which is always perfect.

We are privileged today to have God's Word, the Bible, available to us at all times. In it, God tells us of events to take place in the future. It is not for us to know when these events will occur, but occur they certainly will, in God's timing. For example, the New Testament teaches that Jesus is coming back to take all Christians alive at that time out of this world to be with Himself and to join with all Christians who previously have died. This is sometimes referred to as the Rapture. When the Rapture will occur, we don't know because the Bible explicitly says that only God knows the timing. The Rapture will certainly take place because the Bible says so and it is not for us to question God's timing, even though Christians long to see Jesus.

On a practical level, sometimes God makes it clear to an individual Christian that certain things will occur affecting that Christian's life, just as Joseph's dreams envisaged future events affecting him. Again, the timing of such events is in God's hands and it is necessary to await that timing with patience, never questioning.

In this section, we can see another parallel with what happened to Jesus. Verse 11 of our chapter tells us that Joseph's brothers were envious of him. When Pilate, the Roman governor, was judging Jesus ahead of the crucifixion, it says in Matthew 27:18: "For [Pilate] knew that for envy [the Jews] had delivered [Jesus]".

Sent to his brothers

Now to our fourth heading, sent to his brothers, covering verses 12 to 24. Let me start by reading verses 12 and 13: "And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. 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."

First of all, notice Joseph's obedience to his father. Naturally speaking, Joseph may have had reservations about this particular instruction from Jacob. But Joseph displays no disagreement or hesitation. Immediately he makes himself fully available for the task. Today, God is looking for believers to serve Him, not necessarily in dramatic tasks, perhaps just in what seem fairly ordinary things such as was the case in this job required of Joseph. Do I obey God's voice fully and readily, when called? This task required of Joseph led to a long and difficult series of events but eventually great blessing resulted. God expects us to be obedient to His instructions and that lays the basis for God to bless in the way and at the time He chooses.

Of course, the supreme example of perfect obedience to God was found in Jesus. Using Joseph's words in verse 13, Jesus said: "Here am I" when God looked for someone to do the work of salvation. Taking further words from Hebrews 10:9, Jesus said: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." The perfect obedience of Jesus in going to Calvary to die for sin enabled God to come out in great blessing to mankind.

Returning to Genesis 37:12 to 24, as Joseph journeyed a man found him wandering in a field and asked him what he was seeking. Joseph replied: "I seek my brethren" – verse 16. Again, I feel that we can apply this to the Lord Jesus who came from heaven seeking those who would become His own, those who were bought by Him at the cost of His blood shed on the cross. Prophetically, Psalm 22:22 looks forward to this when it says: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren."

Joseph continues his journey and his brothers recognise him from a distance. Far from being pleased to see him, his brothers plot to kill him. Reuben, the oldest brother, persuades them not to kill Joseph directly but to put him into a pit, having stripped him of the coat of many colours. Later on in 42:21, we learn that Joseph pleaded from the pit for them to release him, but they ignored his pleas.

There are remarkable parallels here with what happened to Jesus. Near the end of Matthew 21, Jesus tells a parable about a man who planted a vineyard and rented it out, with the man reserving the right to receive some of the fruit. At the time the fruit was ready, the man sent his servants to collect his share but those who rented the vineyard killed the servants. This happened a second time. The man then sent his son, thinking that they would respect him. In verse 38 of that chapter it records the men as saying: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him..." That parable depicted God initially sending various prophets and finally His Son, Jesus, whom men killed at the cross. How similar to what happened to Joseph.

As mentioned, Joseph's cries for help were ignored. In Psalm 69:20, looking forward to Jesus at the cross, it says: "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."

Sold as a slave

Now to the fifth section of this talk, entitled sold as a slave and covering Genesis 37:25-28. Let me read these verses: "And [Joseph's brothers] 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. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? 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. 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.”

I wonder what Joseph thought at this stage. How did being sold as a slave fit with the dreams where his family bowed down to him? Whatever his thoughts, we don't read of Joseph ever questioning God's plan, either here or in the difficult circumstances which occurred later. There is a lesson here for all Christians that, whatever the severity of the short term problems may be, God's ultimate plan for us will not be thwarted and will come to pass. In all Joseph's difficulties, God remained close to him.

Once again in this section we see some remarkable similarities to the experiences of the Lord Jesus. In a general sense, we can see Joseph's path descending from his favoured position in his father's house to the pit and then to being sold as a slave and going into Egypt. We will see further downward steps in chapters 39 and 40, before Joseph is exalted in chapter 41. If you have time, read Philippians 2:6-8 where the downward steps of Christ Jesus are recorded, from His position with His Father in heaven right down to the death of the cross. Philippians 2:9-11 then record the exaltation of Jesus.

In this fifth section of Genesis 37, we see that Judah, one of Joseph's brothers, suggested making money out of getting rid of Joseph, who was then sold to the passing merchantmen for 20 pieces of silver. We immediately think of Judas Iscariot, one of the 12 disciples and therefore close to Jesus, as Judah was close to Joseph. Judas betrayed Jesus and sold Him for 30 pieces of silver, making money out of getting rid of Jesus. Even in that terrible betrayal, the accuracy of Scripture is touching to note, because the Bible says "...that in all things [Christ] might have the pre-eminence" - Colossians 1:18. Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver but Jesus for 30!

The blood-stained coat

So, Joseph is brought into Egypt by the merchantmen and our second talk on Joseph will pick up the details of what happened to him in Egypt. However, Genesis 37 is not quite finished. We have our final section of today's talk in verses 29 to 35 which I am calling the blood-stained coat.

Joseph's brothers faced a dilemma. As far as they were concerned, they had got rid of Joseph, although years later they would see that this was not the case. However, they did not want to admit to their father that they both instigated and implemented the plan for the disappearance of their father's favourite son. Accordingly, they killed a young goat, dipped Joseph's coat of many colours in the goat's blood and brought the blood-stained coat to Jacob with the lie that they had found the coat.

Jacob was distraught when presented with this lie. Naturally he assumed that a wild beast had killed Joseph. Jacob tore his clothes, mourned many days and refused to be comforted.

Often, sin is like a treadmill. To try to cover up the first sin, further sins are committed. How often telling lies is a part of that sinful process. God's Word is quite clear, including the ninth of the Ten Commandments, that to lie is a sin, and all sins are against God. The Bible never talks about white lies or little lies. We never read of Joseph telling a lie, even when others lied about him. Jesus was the embodiment of truth, the opposite to our enemy, Satan, who is described as the father of lies – see John 8:44. As Christians, we should be known as those, like Jesus, who always speak the absolute truth, even if in the short term it proves costly.

Another matter to note from this final section is that when sin takes place, its effects often extend beyond those committing the sin to cause problems to others. Joseph's brothers sinned and the result was that their father was broken hearted with sorrow. Verse 35 of our chapter contains Jacob's words: "For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him." Sin is a dreadful thing and causes misery and distress. We only need to read any daily newspaper to see that.

Joseph is one of those Bible characters like Joshua, Caleb and Daniel where very little of criticism is noted in the Bible. I trust that we can learn from Joseph's way of life as a follower of God. I trust also that we can gain an even greater appreciation of Christ by seeing the parallels contained in the Old Testament but shown in much greater wonder when Jesus is revealed in the New Testament.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.