

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 25 May 2026

Greetings.

I attach the second of four main 'Musings' which focus on 'The early life of Joseph', as detailed in Genesis 37-41.

Last week, the 'Musings' covered (i) the background and context of Joseph's life story and (ii) how his early experiences fit into the main Bible storyline.

This week, we consider the first few links in 'a chain of ten links which brought young Joseph from the home of a loving father in the land of Canaan to the very highest position open to him in the whole of the land of Egypt'.

As last week, here are three unconnected items to be going on with:

1. 'God demonstrates His love toward us, in that ... Christ died for us', Rom. 5. 8.

'It is the cross alone that ultimately proves the love of God to us—not the providential circumstances of our lives. We must not allow ourselves to be tricked into thinking that if things are going well with us, then we can be sure of God's love. For life can often seem dark and painful. Things do not always go well for us. Rather, we look to the sacrifice of the cross and the demonstration God gave there of His love. This is the proof I need. This is the truth I need to hear'.

(A. Begg and S. B. Ferguson, 'Name above all Names', pages 32-33.)

2. 'Those who are considered worthy to attain to ... the resurrection from among the dead ... cannot die anymore', Luke 20. 35-36.

'Resurrection will not simply mean resuscitation, like Jairus' daughter or Lazarus. It will not mean starting off again in exactly the same kind of world as at present. It will mean going through death and out the other side into a deathless world'.

(N. T. Wright, 'The Resurrection of the Son of God', page 422.)

3. 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ', 1 John 2. 1.

'The Lord intercedes for us without our even asking. We do not gain Him to intercede for us because of our repentance or prayers. He did not intercede for Peter when he repented, but before he sinned; He interceded for Peter because he needed it. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father". It does not say, If any man repent of his sin, but "If any man sin". ... It is the exercise of grace in His own heart towards us to restore our souls'.

(J. N. Darby 'The Word of God and the Priesthood of Christ', Collected Writings, Volume 7, page 284.)

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

THE EARLY LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 2: Genesis 37. 2-25

SCRIPTURE

Our first Bible reading¹ comes from Genesis chapter 37, verse 2 ...

These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old,² was feeding the flock with his brethren ...

Then from chapter 41, verse 46 ...

And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.

And, finally, from the Book of Acts chapter 7,³ from the second half of verse 8.

Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

INTRODUCTION

We concluded Part 1 by claiming that, apart from revelations which God made by way of dreams, 'there was a chain of at least ten links which brought the young man whom God chose to be His instrument from the home of a loving father in the land of Canaan to the very highest position open to him in the whole of the land of Egypt'.

I begin by surveying the territory which I plan to cover over the course of our remaining studies.

THE CHAIN OF TEN LINKS

Our Chain of Ten Links consists of ...

1. **The jealousy of Joseph's brothers.**⁴
2. **The anxiety of Joseph's father.**⁵
3. **The friendly inquiry of a certain man of Shechem.**⁶
4. **The timely intervention of Reuben and Judah.**⁷
5. **The journeying of certain Arabian traders.**⁸
6. **The domestic needs of Potiphar's household.**⁹
7. **The wickedness of Potiphar's wife.**¹⁰
8. **The injustice of Potiphar's decision.**¹¹
9. **The falling from favour of Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker.**¹²
10. **The memory of the chief butler.**¹³

So, first ...

1. The jealousy of Joseph's brothers.¹⁴

When addressing the Jewish Sanhedrin, Stephen says, 'The patriarchs, moved with envy (better, 'with jealousy'), sold Joseph into Egypt'.¹⁵ I say that '**jealousy**' is the 'better' translation, because the Greek word used by Stephen (as is true also of the Hebrew word found in Genesis 37¹⁶) signifies 'the desire to have for yourself what someone else has', whereas the Greek word for '**envy**' refers rather to 'the desire to deprive someone else of what he or she has'.¹⁷

The word 'jealousy' (in both Genesis 37 and Acts 7) is telling us that Joseph's brothers 'resented' him, wanting for themselves what he had—that they 'begrudged' him his special position and privileges.

The other key word used to describe the brothers' feelings for Joseph is that they 'hated' him (which we are told no less than three times).¹⁸

It seems to me that there were at least three contributing factors to their jealousy, resentment and hatred.

(i) Joseph's bad report concerning some of his brothers.

First, although the Bible doesn't actually attribute their bad feelings for Joseph to this, the 'evil (the 'bad') report',¹⁹ which he brought home to his father about the activities of Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher could not have helped!

I suspect that Joseph had been sent to tend Jacob's flock with these particular brothers because they were nearer his own age than were most of his other brothers (the sons of Leah) and that the bad report which he conveyed to his father would have done nothing to endear him to them.

(ii) Joseph's distinctive tunic.

But, more importantly, there was Joseph's coat (or, 'tunic', a long shirt-like garment), described in the King James Version as 'of many colours' but which, more likely, was either a richly embroidered tunic or one which reached to his hands and his feet.²⁰

The only other passage in the Bible where the particular word occurs is in 2 Samuel 13, where we read of Tamar, (not the Tamar of chapter 38 here in Genesis but) the daughter of David,²¹ that 'she had on a richly embroidered garment (or, 'long garment with sleeves'), for the king's virgin daughters usually wore such apparel'.²² So, in David's day at least, it was an item of clothing worn by royal princesses. Clearly then this was no ordinary garment, and was meant to distinguish the wearer, whether male or female, from all others around.

As we noted in Part 1, the opening of 1 Chronicles 5 tells how Jacob stripped Reuben of his birthright and transferred it to Joseph's sons. The sin of Reuben which occasioned Jacob's action is recorded for us back in chapter 35.²³

It may well be that Jacob has already expressed his intentions to his sons, and that Joseph's tunic was the mark and symbol of Joseph's special place in Jacob's *plans*.²⁴ It certainly seems to have been the evidence and symbol of Joseph's special place in Jacob's *affections*, for we are twice told (once each side of the statement that Jacob made Joseph a distinctive tunic) that 'Israel loved Joseph more' than any of his other sons.²⁵ Indeed, when we read that 'his brothers saw that their father loved him more' than them, the 'him' is emphatic.²⁶

The reason for Jacob's special fondness for Joseph was, we are told, that Joseph was 'the son of his old age'—Jacob being over 90 years old when Rachel gave birth to Joseph.²⁷ And in that name, 'Rachel', undoubtedly lies the clue to the real and underlying cause of Jacob's special affection for Joseph. For Joseph was the firstborn son of Rachel²⁸—who was by far the greatest love of Jacob's life.

And Joseph had even inherited his mother's good looks, for the very same expression is used to describe both Rachel and Joseph: 'Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance'²⁹ and Joseph 'was beautiful of form and appearance'.³⁰

And now that Rachel is dead and buried, Jacob's love and affection transfers to her firstborn son. And so, just as we read in chapter 29 that Jacob 'loved Rachel more than Leah',³¹ so we now read in chapter 37 that he 'loved Joseph more than all his sons'³²—the same Hebrew expression being used in both passages.

Joseph's tunic was clearly meant by Jacob to distinguish Joseph from his half-brothers and, indeed, to mark him out as pre-eminent over them. Apart from anything else, a richly embroidered garment or a long garment with sleeves is totally unsuitable for manual work. Tunics worn for such activity were plain, had no sleeves and reached only to the knees. In one sense, the tunic which Jacob had made for Joseph,³³ said it all: Joseph was the apple of Jacob's eye.



But I can't help feeling that Jacob was less than wise in this, and that he, of all men, should have known better, for Jacob had been brought up in a dysfunctional family home, where his own father, Isaac, had made one of his sons, Esau, his obvious favourite.³⁴ Oh yes, Jacob knew very well how it felt to be loved less than his brother. And he had experienced at first-hand how his father's selective affection had bred hatred and threats of violence in the home.³⁵ And yet now, we see Jacob himself sowing the seeds of hatred and violence in his own family.

I said that there were at least three contributing factors to the brothers' jealousy, resentment and hatred. There was (i) Joseph's bad report of verse 2 and (ii) Joseph's distinctive tunic of verses 3 and 4. But matters really came to a head over (iii) Joseph's dreams of verses 5 to 11.

(iii) Joseph's dreams.

Scripture doesn't say explicitly that Joseph's pair of dreams came from God but, given that they received such accurate fulfilment later³⁶ and given the explicit God-given nature of the two other pairs of dreams in the story (the one pair of dreams granted to Pharaoh's officers in chapter 40,³⁷ and the other pair granted to Pharaoh himself in chapter 41³⁸), it is clear that they had just that—that Joseph's dreams actually did come from God.

And we now find that Joseph's brothers came to 'hate' him 'even more' on account of *God's* manifest favour towards him than they did on account of *his father's*, for we read, 'they hated him even more for his dreams'. It is lovely to note from later chapters that Joseph never bore any grudge against these men—men who begrudged him his special place both in his father's affection and in God's revealed purpose.

Although I know the dreams undoubtedly threw fuel on the raging fire of his brother's jealousy, I do not see Joseph's telling of his dreams as a matter of proud boasting on his part. I suspect that he related them to his brothers and his father in all innocence. Given what we learn of Joseph's character later, I find it difficult to believe that Joseph had particularly high thoughts of himself.

But, for whatever reason he told them, the report of his dreams to his brothers did more to inflame their hatred than had his report of their misdeeds to his father.³⁹

Joseph had two dreams. And, if I understand them correctly, the first dream, which concerned the sheaves, pointed to his destined supremacy over his brothers and the second dream, which concerned the heavenly bodies, pointed to his destined supremacy over the whole house of Israel⁴⁰—including even Jacob himself.

The fact that Joseph has two dreams with more or less the same meaning and interpretation is itself significant. Unless I am mistaken, the key to this lies in chapter 41. For, when Joseph comes to interpret Pharaoh's two dreams (which also both carried much the same meaning), he explained to Pharaoh that 'the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God'.⁴¹ I suspect that in Joseph's case also, repetition indicated certainty of fulfilment.

And is there also a hint, I wonder, of future events in the very imagery of the first dream, in which his brothers' sheaves 'gather around' Joseph's own sheaf, and bow down to it—a very suitable symbol of his brothers' later coming to Egypt for grain and bowing to him, when, so to speak, their sheaves were empty, and his sheaf was full?

But Joseph's recounting of his two dreams proves (if you will excuse the pun) the last straw for his brothers—and they 'were jealous of him'.⁴² 'Who', the proverb asks, 'can stand before jealousy?'⁴³ And many indeed are the ugly weeds which have grown on this particular stalk! It was, we remember:

(a) jealousy which motivated Korah to speak against Moses and Aaron;⁴⁴

(b) envy which motivated King Saul to hound and seek the life of young David;⁴⁵

(c) jealousy which motivated the presidents and princes of Persia to accuse Daniel to Darius;⁴⁶

(d) envy which motivated the chief priests and elders of our Lord's day to deliver the Saviour up to Pilate that He should be crucified.⁴⁷

And the apostle Paul is careful, I note, to include 'jealousy', along with 'envy', in his catalogue of 'the works of the flesh' in Galatians 5.⁴⁸ Well might we say, in the words which, in his play, 'Othello', William Shakespeare put into the mouth of Iago, 'O, beware ... of jealousy! It is the green-eyed monster'.⁴⁹

And yet, in His own wonderful and mysterious way, our God catches up Joseph's telling of his dreams into the fulfilment of His own gracious purpose ... for, in part at least, it is Joseph's telling of his dreams (together, of course, with his brothers' reaction to them) which leads to their ultimate fulfilment! But of this, Joseph, of course, knows nothing—then!

The animosity of his brothers toward Joseph had built up until the situation had become highly explosive.



It only needed a match.

It was only a matter of time and of opportunity.

And that time and that opportunity finally arrives when Jacob sends Joseph to Shechem—which brings us to the second link in the chain.

But, before we leave the first link, let us file away just how critically important the brothers' jealousy and hatred were. For, apart from these, Joseph would never have been sold into Egypt and, as we noted in Part 1, the later history of the world would have been radically different!

And so ...

2. The anxiety of Joseph's father.⁵⁰

Joseph's brothers (now all ten of them⁵¹ and not only four, as in verse 2) are feeding their father's flocks in Shechem.

In one way, (i) this is not surprising—but, in another, (ii) it most certainly is.

(i) It is not surprising, because we learn from chapter 33 that Jacob had bought the portion of the field at Shechem, where he had once pitched his tent.⁵² And, presumably, that parcel of ground still offered Jacob and his sons good pasture land for their flocks.

(ii) What makes the brothers' presence at Shechem to be surprising is the incident recorded, not in chapter 33 but in chapter 34, for it was at Shechem (a) that Jacob's daughter Dinah had been assaulted and 'defiled' by the prince of the city⁵³ and (b) that Jacob's sons (Simeon and Levi specifically) had responded to that sordid affair by slaughtering all the males of the city.⁵⁴

Jacob's later commentary on the action of Simeon and Levi is recorded in chapter 49: 'Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place ... cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel!'⁵⁵

At the time, Jacob had been appalled at their violent actions, telling Simeon and Levi, 'You have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land ... and I, being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house'.⁵⁶

Scripture makes it clear that, at the time, God had specially preserved Jacob and his family when they left Shechem far behind them: 'they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob'.⁵⁷

But now, Joseph's brothers have ventured back to the scene of the massacre. I can well understand, therefore, their father's anxiety—his sense of apprehension over the welfare of

both his sons and his flocks.⁵⁸ His sons were well known (even, notorious) in the area and it was not beyond the realms of possibility that some angry relatives or friends of the slaughtered Shechemites might be looking for revenge.

I take it that Jacob would not have sent Joseph on such a potentially dangerous mission unless he saw this as absolutely essential. And I note that Joseph is not sent by his father to take food and other provisions to his brothers, as would be David to his brothers in the Valley of Elah about 900 years later.⁵⁹ Jacob clearly feels that he has no choice—he must know whether all is well with his sons.⁶⁰

I take it also that Jacob entertained no suspicion that Joseph's brothers nursed such bitter hatred for Joseph that they would consider killing him, which is why, of course, at the end of the chapter, when confronted with Joseph's blood-stained tunic, Jacob is ready to believe that Joseph had been attacked and killed by some wild beast⁶¹—not imagining for one moment that the hands of his other sons might have been running red with Joseph's blood.

Little did Jacob suspect that *Joseph had far more to fear from his own relatives than ever his other sons had to fear from the relatives of the dead men at Shechem!*

But I am less sure what Joseph thought.

It is difficult to believe that Joseph had failed to register the strength of his brothers' feelings. But, even if he had sensed this, he didn't allow it to hold him back from obeying his father's instruction. Quite possibly, he couldn't believe that his brothers would ever do more to him than to shout at him⁶²—or perhaps he simply trusted his dreams. I don't know. What matters to the history of Israel and to the world is that, to ease his father's mind, Joseph went.⁶³

How essential it was that, under God, Jacob's concern for his other sons and his flocks leads him to send Joseph to Shechem.

But that, in itself, raises an interesting point, because it means that, had it not been for the tragic events of chapter 34, including the cruelty of his sons Simeon and Levi, Jacob would have had no reason (i) to be anxious about his sons' welfare now and would, therefore, have had no reason (ii) to send Joseph to far-off Shechem ... and, if Joseph hadn't gone to Shechem, our chain of providence would have snapped ... and we haven't even reached the third link yet!

But it is time that we did. And so ...

3. The friendly inquiry of a certain man of Shechem.⁶⁴

Verse 14 closes by telling us that Jacob 'sent him (Joseph) out of the Vale of Hebron,⁶⁵ and he came to Shechem'. This involved the young man in travelling a distance of just over 50 miles as the crow flies—a good 60 miles if you don't happen to be a crow! Joseph, of course, wasn't a crow and the journey would have taken him at least two days.

In verse 15 we find him 'wandering in the field' at Shechem—rather fittingly, I suggest, given that Joseph is in quest of his father's flocks and that the word translated 'wandering' is translated 'astray' in the very familiar text, 'All we like sheep have gone astray'.⁶⁶

If the field in question is that which his father, Jacob, had purchased sometime before,⁶⁷ Joseph would have had every reason to expect to find his brothers there.

But he doesn't.

I guess that Joseph would never have thought that, over 500 years later, his own bones would be buried in that very field—having been brought there all the way from Egypt in a coffin by the children of Israel.⁶⁸

But, if his brothers are nowhere to be 'found', Joseph is! For it was there, in that field, we are told, that some unnamed individual 'found' him⁶⁹—'unnamed', I mean, by scripture, not by his parents!

And it just 'happens' that the man who comes across Joseph 'straying' in the field had himself just 'happened' to have seen Joseph's brothers there some time before and had just 'happened' to overhear them say they were moving on to Dothan.⁷⁰ I understand that, although the area to the east of Shechem offers excellent pasture land, the pasturage at

Dothan is even better.⁷¹ But, for whatever reason, Joseph's brothers had gone and it just so 'happens' that the unnamed individual who discovered Joseph was able to tell him where they had gone!

And, at this point, the whole story of Joseph (and the outworking of God's great purpose and plan) rests foursquare on an utterly casual and unscheduled meeting—'unscheduled' by man, I mean.

Just a 'chance' meeting! What an incredible 'coincidence'! I tell you, if you believe that, you will believe anything!

Indeed, I don't think you will find the word 'coincidence' in God's dictionary. Talk about large doors swinging on very small hinges! 'Chance' meeting indeed!

But, speaking of 'chance', here surely was Joseph's 'chance' to return to his father at Hebron, if his heart were not in his mission. He has already travelled some sixty miles (and it has all been hills, through what we know as 'the hill country of Judea') and for him now to go to Dothan would mean at least a further fifteen miles (and again it would be all be hills— this time through what became known as 'the hill country of Ephraim' ... and you can guess from whom the area later got that name—from one of the sons of Joseph!).

But no, Joseph has no intention of turning back and going home until he has completed his allotted task. And we will discover this conscientious trait time after time in Joseph's life— whether in Potiphar's house, or in the King's prison or in Pharaoh's palace. Clearly, Joseph had come straight out of the Ecclesiastes 9 mould: 'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might'.⁷²

And so, to Dothan.

Interestingly, we find another Bible character at Dothan over ten centuries later⁷³; namely, the prophet Elisha.⁷⁴ And, as with Joseph, Elisha finds his life endangered⁷⁵ because he also had received direct revelations from God.⁷⁶ But Elisha had the advantage of horses and chariots of fire to surround him and protect him from his would-be assailants,⁷⁷ apart from which, in response to Elisha's prayer, God intervenes to inflict 'blindness' on those who presume to come against His prophet.⁷⁸

Joseph, of course, enjoys no such luxuries. And yet Joseph is as safe at Dothan as would be Elisha, for Joseph also is in God's hands and, as we shall discover, God can use a Reuben and a Judah to deliver Joseph from death with the same ease that He could have used His fiery angelic host and blindness!

And so, to Dothan, where we witness ...

4. The timely intervention of Reuben and Judah.⁷⁹

Before we consider the role played in the story by these two sons of Jacob, we need to fill in the gap between the time when Joseph set out for Dothan in verse 17, and the time when we first meet Reuben in verse 21.

No doubt, the brothers greeted the sight of Joseph's approach with a smile, albeit a grim smile. It is not that they were in any way pleased at the prospect of having his company, thank you—but because Joseph's coming to them so far away from their home and their father presented them with a golden opportunity to be rid of him—rid of his fancy tunic—rid of his insufferable dreams—and that for ever!

'Behold, this dreamer comes', they say sarcastically⁸⁰—literally translated, 'Behold, this master ('this possessor') of dreams comes'.⁸¹ Clearly, Joseph's brothers hadn't forgotten his dreams and, there and then, they resolve to put this 'master of dreams' to death.

'Come now therefore, and let us kill him', they say among themselves—words which find an echo in those which our Lord put into the mouths of the husbandmen in His parable of the vineyard in Mark 12, who 'said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him'.⁸²

And so, Joseph's brothers plan, first, to put Joseph to death and then to put out the story that some wild beast had killed and devoured him. That explanation for Joseph's death would, in itself, have been plausible enough, for we gather from Jacob's blessing of his sons in chapter 49 that he was familiar, at least, with lions and wolves.⁸³

'We shall see what will become of his dreams', they said.⁸⁴ And, in one sense at least, those very words 'what will become of his dreams' resound through the following few chapters!

Yet, Joseph's brothers would never have guessed that the very plans they were at that moment formulating among themselves would ultimately lead to the fulfilment of those very dreams.⁸⁵ But they have yet to learn (as many have since) that you cannot fight against God⁸⁶—and win!

Yes, the very plans the brothers were at that moment devising between them would ultimately lead to the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams. But for that to happen, everything now rested—humanly speaking—on the contribution about to be made by Reuben and Judah.

And so, the next few verses focus our attention on Joseph's two brothers.

(i) Reuben.

Reuben never forgot his unsuccessful attempt this day to rescue Joseph from his brothers' clutches and to restore him unharmed to his father. When speaking later to his other brothers, he refers back to this very moment—although then claiming that he had said rather more than he had actually said ... namely, claiming that (i) he told his brothers to do nothing at all to Joseph and that (ii) they had simply refused to listen to him.⁸⁷

But, even allowing for some exaggeration (or, to be generous, faulty memory) on Reuben's part, he certainly did attempt to save—and indeed, played a key part in saving—Joseph from being murdered by his other brothers.⁸⁸

And though Reuben was the oldest of the brothers and knew that his father would, therefore, likely hold him responsible for anything which happened to his (Jacob's) favourite son, it is in many ways very commendable that Reuben chooses to intervene as he does. As we noted earlier, Reuben's firstborn rights were to be transferred to Joseph⁸⁹ and he would, therefore, have had more reason than any to have resented his young brother.

I spoke earlier of Reuben's noble attempt to restore Joseph unharmed to his father as being 'unsuccessful'. And so, of course, it was. But then, if Reuben meant well, God meant better. And yet, God's 'better' for Joseph—and for countless others through him—now called for a crucial proposal to be made by Judah.

But before we get to that, Joseph has arrived! And I note that his brothers' very first action was to strip him of his tunic⁹⁰—of the tunic which they so deeply resented.

Joseph was now at his brothers' mercy and would not shortly be going home to his father who had given the distinctive tunic to him and so would have no further need of it!

I enjoy noting that, when, many years later, the tables were turned⁹¹ and Joseph had his brothers at his mercy, such was his forgiving spirit that, when sending them home safely to their father, he gave 'to each man', we are told, 'changes of clothing'.⁹²

Joseph's brothers' next action is to throw him into a pit (into a water cistern, that is), which at the time was empty.⁹³ In all likelihood, the cistern was shaped something like a bottle with a narrow mouth, so that anybody imprisoned in it would be unable to escape without assistance.⁹⁴

I gather from something which the brothers later let out in chapter 42 that, at this time at Dothan, Joseph had pleaded with them for mercy but that they had been totally unresponsive and had refused to listen: 'They said to one another, We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish ('the trouble', 'the distress') of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear'.⁹⁵ That recollection was over twenty years later—and Joseph's cries still haunted them.

We don't actually read of Joseph's shedding any tears when he was stripped and flung into the cistern but I would find it hard to believe that he didn't. And, if Joseph did, then that would make at least nine times in all that he shed tears, for, between chapter 42 and chapter 50, we read of his 'weeping' on no less than eight occasions⁹⁶—and mostly over these very men.

Yet his brothers certainly shed no tears over him here in chapter 37. Far from it! For their third and final action before Judah mounts the stage to say his all-important lines is that ‘they sat down to eat bread’.

Apparently, the appetites of the brothers were unaffected by Joseph’s pitiable cries, calmly sitting down to enjoy their meal.

It is hard to credit just how callous and cruel these men had become. And remember, please, that they started on their downward path when they allowed the green-eyed monster in!

Their heartlessness is so monstrous and grotesque that it later became proverbial in Israel: ‘Woe to you’, the prophet Amos wrote, well over a millennium later (when denouncing those who indulged and gratified themselves but who were unmindful of the plight of those around) ‘who drink wine by the bowlful, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph’—‘are not grieved for the injury (‘the breaking in pieces’) of Joseph’.⁹⁷ Yes, that’s a fitting way to describe Joseph’s ordeal. Thank you, Amos.

And so it is that Joseph’s brothers feasted while Joseph hungered and thirsted.⁹⁸ But I can tell you that it is just as well for them that Joseph wasn’t left to die of hunger in that cistern ... or they would all likely have died of hunger some twenty years later⁹⁹ ... and a whole lot more people with them!

And so ... enter Judah.

TO BE CONTINUED

But, as far as you and I are concerned, Judah will have to keep his contribution until next week, God willing.

Notes

¹ The King James Version.

² Jacob looked after Joseph for 17 years, Gen. 37. 2, and, later, Joseph reciprocated and looked after Jacob for 17 years, Gen. 47. 28.

³ Acts 7. 8b-10.

⁴ Gen. 37. 1-11.

⁵ Gen. 37. 12-14.

⁶ Gen. 37. 15-17

⁷ Gen. 37. 18-24; 26-27.

⁸ Gen. 37. 25, 28.

⁹ Gen. 37. 36; 39. 1-6.

¹⁰ Gen. 39. 7-18.

¹¹ Gen. 39. 19-23.

¹² Gen. 40. 1-4.

¹³ Gen. 40. 20-23; 41. 9-13.

¹⁴ Gen. 37. 1-11.

¹⁵ Acts 7. 9.

¹⁶ Gen. 37. 11.

¹⁷ For the meaning of the Greek word, see W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, under 'Envy, envying' and R. C. Trench's *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pages 82-86 (Number xxvi).

For the meaning of the Hebrew word see H. G. L. Peels, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Volume 3, pages 937-940 (Number 7861).

¹⁸ Gen. 37. 4, 5, 8.

¹⁹ 'Joseph's "bad report" implies that the brothers were participating in serious wicked behaviour', Thomas Constable, *Expository Notes*, comment on Gen. 37. 2-4).

The expression, 'evil report' occurs in Num. 13. 32; 14. 36-37 KJV.

²⁰ (i) 'An upper coat reaching to the wrists and ankles, such as noblemen and kings' daughters wore', C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, page 335.

(ii) 'It is literally "a tunic of palms", i.e. reaching to the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, differing from an ordinary tunic by having sleeves, and by reaching to the feet', H. E. Ryle, *Genesis: The Cambridge Bible*, page 351. (iii) 'A distinctive tunic, possibly richly embroidered or with long sleeves', R. L. Alden, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Volume 2, page 743 (Number 4189).

²¹ 1 Chron. 3. 8. That David had more than one daughter is clearly implied, 2 Sam. 13. 18-19.

²² 2 Sam. 13. 18-19. 'Virgins of old time wore such loose coats tied at the hands, and let down to the ankles', Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book VII, Chapter VIII, Section 1.

²³ Gen. 35. 22.

²⁴ ‘The presentation of the special garment may have been an act of investiture, analogous to the special apparel that Aaron and his descendants don in connection with their ordination to the priesthood (Exod. 28. 40-41) or to the mantle that Elijah threw over Elisha when he designated him his successor (I Kings 19. 19). If these analogies hold, then the presentation of the ornamental tunic to Joseph was more than a doting father’s innocent (if catastrophically insensitive) demonstration of affection; it was, instead, Jacob’s designation of his primary beneficiary. If this be the case, then it is readily understandable why Joseph’s brothers “hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him” (Gen. 37. 4). With that one act of investiture, Jacob’s biological eleventh son became his legal first-born, leapfrogging over Leah’s first-born son as well as over those of the two slaves, Bilhah and Zilpah’, Jon Levenson, *‘The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son’*, pages 57-58.

²⁵ Gen. 37. 3, 4.

²⁶ Gen. 37. 4.

²⁷ Jacob was 130 years old when he appeared before Pharaoh, Gen. 47. 9. At that time, there had been two years of famine, Gen. 45. 6. That is, because of the intervening seven years of plenty, it was some nine years since Joseph had first appeared before Pharaoh, at which time Joseph was 30 years of age, Gen. 41. 46. In summary, Joseph would have been about 39 years old when Jacob was 130—a difference of 91 years.

²⁸ Gen. 30. 22-24.

²⁹ Gen. 29. 17 (literal translation).

³⁰ Gen. 39. 6 (literal translation).

³¹ Gen. 29. 30.

³² Gen. 37. 3 *literally*.

³³ Gen. 37. 3.

³⁴ Gen. 25. 27-28; 27. 1-4.

³⁵ Gen. 27. 41.

³⁶ Gen. 42. 6-9.

³⁷ Gen. 40. 5.

³⁸ Gen. 41. 1-5.

³⁹ Gen. 37. 2.

⁴⁰ Compare ‘the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me’, Gen. 37. 9, with ‘a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars’, Rev. 12. 1.

⁴¹ Gen. 41. 32.

⁴² Gen 37. 11. Jacob didn’t dismiss the dream. He simply put it on the back burner and let it simmer.

⁴³ Prov. 27. 4.

⁴⁴ Psa. 106. 16

⁴⁵ 1 Sam. 18. 8-9.

⁴⁶ Dan 6. 1-4.

⁴⁷ Matt. 27. 18.

⁴⁸ Gal. 5. 20-21. ‘Jealousy’ and ‘envy’ are distinguished also in ‘*The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*’, 3. 2.

⁴⁹ ‘Othello’, Act 3, Scene 3.

- ⁵⁰ Gen. 37. 12-14.
- ⁵¹ Gen. 37. 12.
- ⁵² Gen. 33. 19.
- ⁵³ Gen. 34. 2.
- ⁵⁴ Gen. 34. 25.
- ⁵⁵ Gen. 49. 5-7.
- ⁵⁶ Gen. 34. 30.
- ⁵⁷ Gen. 35. 5.
- ⁵⁸ Gen. 37. 14.
- ⁵⁹ 1 Sam. 17. 17-18.
- ⁶⁰ Gen. 37. 13-14.
- ⁶¹ Gen. 37. 31-33.
- ⁶² Gen. 37. 4, 8.
- ⁶³ 'And Joseph went', Gen. 37. 17.
- ⁶⁴ Gen. 37. 15-17.
- ⁶⁵ Cf. Gen. 35. 27.
- ⁶⁶ Isa. 53. 6.
- ⁶⁷ Gen. 33. 18-19.
- ⁶⁸ Josh. 24. 32.
- ⁶⁹ Gen. 37. 15.
- ⁷⁰ Gen. 37. 17.
- ⁷¹ 'Where the pasturage is even finer than it is about Shechem', S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis: Westminster Commentaries*, page 323.
- ⁷² Eccles. 9. 10.
- ⁷³ Over 1,000 years later. Joseph was taken to Egypt around 1898 BC; Jehoram of Israel reigned from 853-841 BC. (Based on Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, charts following page 416.) [Jehoram was 'the king of Israel', 2 Kings 6. 8.]
- ⁷⁴ 2 Kings 6. 13.
- ⁷⁵ 2 Kings 6. 14.
- ⁷⁶ 2 Kings 6. 9-12.
- ⁷⁷ 2 Kings 6. 16-17; cf. 2 Kings 2. 11.
- ⁷⁸ 'He smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha', 2 Kings 6. 18. The word rendered 'blindness', which is plural in form, occurs only here and in Gen. 19. 11.
The word:
(i) 'denotes not so much blindness as a dazing effect, accompanied by mental bewilderment and confusion', C. J. Ball, *2 Kings: Ellicott's Bible Commentary*, page 124;
(ii) signifies 'not an absence of sight but some sort of visionary befuddlement or visual confusion', Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury*, page 114.
Compare the association of 'blindness' with 'confusion of mind' in 'the Lord will strike you with madness and blindness (a different Hebrew word) and confusion of mind, and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness', Deut. 28. 28-29.

⁷⁹ Gen. 37. 18-24, 26-27.

⁸⁰ Gen. 37. 19.

⁸¹ 'Master of' is a Hebrew idiom for ownership and possession; for example, (i) 'archers', Gen. 49. 23, is literally, 'masters/owners of arrows'; (ii) 'hairy', 2 Kings 1. 8, is literally, 'master/owner of hair'; and (iii) 'wrathful man', Prov. 29. 22, is literally, 'master/owner of wrath'.

⁸² Mark 12. 7. The words ('come, let us kill him'—'δευτε αποκτεινωμεν αυτον') are identical to those in the Greek Old Testament of Gen. 37. 20.

⁸³ Gen. 49. 9, 27. Compare also, Judg. 14. 5; 1 Sam. 17. 15; 1 Kings 13. 24 and 2 Kings 2. 24.

⁸⁴ Gen 37. 20.

⁸⁵ The dreams speak of Joseph's brothers 'bowing' before him; see the fulfilment in Gen. 42. 6; 43. 26, 28 (the same Hebrew word, ותשתחויו) and 44. 14; 50. 18 ('fall before').

⁸⁶ Compare, 'lest you be found even to be fighting against God', Acts 5. 39.

⁸⁷ Gen. 42. 22.

⁸⁸ 'Let us not kill him ... shed no blood, but cast him into this pit', Gen. 37. 21-22. Reuben's argument was that this would avoid 'blood-guiltiness' on their part; note his later words, 'his blood is required', Gen. 42. 22.

⁸⁹ 1 Chron. 5. 1.

⁹⁰ Gen. 37. 23.

⁹¹ For the background to the saying 'to turn the tables', see <https://mentalfloss.com/article/53009/where-does-phrase-%E2%80%9Cturn-tables%E2%80%9D-come>.

⁹² Gen. 45. 22.

⁹³ Gen. 37. 24. Compare the treatment meted out to the prophet Jeremiah by the officials of Zedekiah, 'they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern ... And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud', Jer. 38. 6. Sadly for Joseph at the time, there was no Ebed-melech immediately to hand, Jer. 38. 7-13.

⁹⁴ The cistern was probably shaped like an upside-down old-style light bulb.



⁹⁵ Gen. 42. 21.

⁹⁶ Gen. 42. 24; 43. 30; 45. 2, 14, 15; 46. 29; 50. 1, 17.

⁹⁷ Amos 6. 6.

⁹⁸ 'There was no water in' the pit, Gen. 37. 24. 'The absence of water called for comment because these pits were cisterns', D. Kidner, 'Genesis: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries', page 182.

⁹⁹ 'There will arise seven years of famine, and ... the famine will consume the land ... it will be very severe', Gen. 41. 30-31.