

More Than Just a Pipe Dream Genesis 37:1-11

According to Spinditty, there are at least 75 songs about dreams.

It was in 1942 that Irving Berlin released his song White Christmas made famous by Bing Crosby.

In his 1962 album, Andy Williams told us in song that we could Dream the Impossible Dream.

In 1973 Aerosmith told us with high pitched screeching the we could Dream On.

In 1975 Gary Wright gave us Dream Weaver.

In 1983 the Eurythmics said that sweet dreams are made of these so who am I to disagree.

In 1985 the Thompson Twins told us not to mess with doctor dream.

There has always been a debate about whether dreams have meaning.

Wikipedia suggests that “a dream is a succession of images, ideas, emotions, and sensations that usually occur involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep. The content and purposes of dreams are not fully understood, although they may have been a topic of scientific, philosophical and religious interest throughout recorded history. Dream interpretation is the attempt at drawing meaning from dreams and searching for an underlying message.”

The book Dream Moods A-Z Dream Dictionary postulates that “in analyzing your dreams, you can learn about your deep secrets and hidden feelings. Remember that no one is a better expert at interpreting your dreams than yourself.” They have compiled 5900 keywords and symbols with 20,000 different meanings to help you interpret your dream.

An article on dreaming in Psychology Today states that dreams are the stories the brain tells during the REM stage of sleep and note that people have multiple dreams throughout the night. Typically, they comprise elements from life – real people, real places, real events. The study of dreams as a field of psychology began with Sigmund Freud in 1899. He wanted to help people discover the meaning of dreams with the publication of his book The

Interpretation of Dreams. Over 100 years later most experts, according to Psychology Today, disagree with his conclusions. Some believe that dreams have no significance whatsoever. Still, inquiring minds want to know.

Our text this morning is about dreams. It’s found for us in **Genesis 37:1-11**. As my title suggests, what we find in these dreams is that they are more than just a pipe dream, more than just wishful thinking, more than just fantasy or a physical reaction to last night’s spicy chili. These dreams reveal something that will happen in the future, but something not yet understood. The problem we find in these verses is that these dreams were not taken too kindly. They further infuriated a deep-seated jealousy and anger that would be the fuel of hatred, hatred that God would use to bring about His will.

In **verses 1 and 2** we are introduced to the last toledoth or generation in the book of Genesis. It’s about Jacob. But even though it is the record of Jacob, the remaining chapters are predominantly about his son Joseph. This passage helps us see that he is more than just a son. God uses what happens to him to further His purpose for Israel.

In **verses 1-11** we notice three things about Joseph. First, we notice Joseph’s trust. Second, we notice Joseph’s ties. Third, we notice Joseph’s thoughts.

I. JOSEPH’S TRUST – vs. 1-2

By this time Esau has moved his family out of Canaan. God had promised Canaan first to Abraham and then to Isaac and then to Jacob. We read that Canaan is now Jacob’s home. We aren’t told how long the family has been in the land, but we are told that Joseph is now 17 years old. In our culture he would be knocking on adulthood.

Over the centuries, Joseph has been the focus of music and literature. Because of his character, many have looked to him for inspiration.

In 1742 using the biblical Joseph as his model hero, Henry Fielding wrote the story of Joseph Andrews.

In 1743 Handel produced the oratorio Joseph.

Over a 16 year period German novelist Thomas Mann wrote four novels based on the life of Joseph.

Many of you will remember the musical comedy featuring Donny Osmond playing the part of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat and the song “Any Dream Will Do.”

Although this is the record of Jacob, Joseph takes center stage. What is clearly evident through the remaining pages of Genesis is the sovereign hand of God in all that takes place. Take it from Scripture that no matter what is happening in the world today, be it the good, the bad or the ugly, God is in control whether people choose to believe it or not. That is clear from the life of Joseph as God choreographs all the events for His purpose.

Now the first thing we are told about the trust given to Joseph had to do with his work responsibility.

A. His Work Responsibility – v. 2a

The KJV reads that he was feeding his father’s flock with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, Jacob’s two concubine wives. They are Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. It has been suggested by some scholars that the sons of Leah are older and out of the house by now with their own families, although living close by. Joseph is 17 years old. Where the KJV notes that he was feeding his father’s flocks, the NIV states that he was tending his father’s flocks.

From just reading this we get the idea that these older half brothers were teaching Joseph the trade of shepherding. When we take a closer look at the two dreams we will come to understand that Joseph was being treated as firstborn son of Rachel rather than the firstborn son of Leah who was Reuben and also the oldest of all Jacob’s sons.

Whatever your translation, whether tending or feeding or some other similar word, the word is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to one who rules. **Victor Hamilton writes in his commentary that the “syntax of the Hebrew allows for the translation ‘Joseph was shepherding his brothers.’**

What Joseph is doing in his teen life is exactly what he will be doing in his adult life – caring and providing for those who are dependent on him.”

The passage is then telling us that Joseph wasn’t just learning the family trade, but that he was actually ruling over his brothers here in Canaan, not just later on in Egypt. In **II Samuel 5:2**, the word clearly means to rule **“you will shepherd (rule) my people Israel.”** That’s the passage where all 12 tribes of Israel come to David in Hebron and ask him to be their king. That’s the idea suggested here that even though he was just a teen of 17 years of age, Joseph had the responsibility of being over his brothers as they tended the flocks. This helps us understand the reason behind much of their jealousy that led to their hatred of Joseph.

So the first thing we notice in this passage is his work responsibility. It’s a huge trust given to such a young man.

The second thing we see is his watchful reporting.

B. His Watchful Reporting – v. 2b

“He (Joseph) brought their father a bad report about them.” The KJV says it was an “evil report”.

There are some who suggest that Joseph was nothing more than a tattletale. We know them by other names: blabbermouth, snitch, rat, fink, canary, weasel, turncoat, traitor, betrayer, whistle-blower. You know the kind of person I’m talking about. They’re the ones in grade school who tell on you to the teacher.

They’re the ones in the shop or office who want the boss’s approval so they rat you out.

They’re the sibling who says “I’m telling Mom”. We know the type, the one who is always trying to get someone else in trouble. Maybe you were one back in the day. Maybe you were like the brothers on the other end of the stick who had someone rat you out for something you did.

We find them all over.

And you know what? When someone does something wrong, no one likes a tattletale.

Now, while some believe Joseph is just a big

blabber-mouth, others believe that the wording suggests he embellished the truth about what his brothers were doing just to get them in trouble. Still others, indicate that Jacob knew the character of these sons, and sent Joseph to spy on them and to report back what was going on. It doesn't take long for word to travel about the goings on of others, especially when behavior is disreputable. Another group of scholars contend that Joseph wasn't sent to be a spy on them, but instead when asked a direct question about the behavior of his brothers, he told the truth, which wasn't favorable at all.

I remember an event in 9th grade quite well. We had just finished a track meet and were on the way home when we stopped at a convenience store for something to eat. While the coach was still in the store a couple seniors in the back of the bus lit up a cigar. When they saw coach coming they tossed it out the window. Of course the odor was not something they could hide. I was sitting in the front of the bus when he climbed up the steps to get in. Smelling the odor from the smoke he asked me if someone was smoking marijuana. Now I could truthfully tell him no, because as a 110 lb. freshman weakling, I didn't want to give a bad report about a senior, so I kept my mouth shut.

On another occasion though, as a sophomore sitting in study hall, another senior decided to fling his chewing tobacco all over me. When asked about it, I did tell who it was.

When it comes to Joseph giving a bad report, the truth is, we don't really know the reason behind it.

Was he just a bratty teen-ager?

Was he a spy?

Was he truthful when questioned?

The closest word that is used in the Old Testament is found in **Numbers 13:32** and **14:36-37** when the 10 spies gave a bad report to the Israelites about the people living in the Promised Land.

What we know is what we read – Joseph gave a bad report about them. But here's something to keep in mind. It comes from the pen of Warren Wiersbe. "The presence of Joseph in the home didn't create

problems so much as reveal them."

He's saying that the milk was already sour. There were already problems. Joseph just brought them to light. He was trusted with work responsibility and watchful reporting. We aren't told what they did only that whatever it was resulted in a bad report.

From these opening verses, Joseph gives us some important things to keep in mind. The first is to take your work responsibility seriously. We are told in Scripture that whatever we do, do it with all our might and do it as if we are doing it for the Lord. The second lesson we learn is that when asked a question about someone else, and it's a question by someone who is in authority over you and others, answer with integrity and honesty. Be truthful. Don't sugarcoat it and don't embellish it. As Joe Friday would say on Dragnet "just the facts Ma'am, just the facts."

Then in **verses 3-4** we notice Joseph's ties.

II. JOSEPH'S TIES – vs. 3-4

By that I am referring to his family relationship.

A. His Family Relationship – v.3a

Joseph was the favorite. Our text says Jacob loved him more than any of his other sons. It's not exactly clear what it means that Joseph was born to Israel in his old age. That would technically be Benjamin. It's my belief that by this time Rachel has died.

I'd like to think that all the while growing up, Joseph was right by Jacob's side or at his heels everywhere he went.

When Jacob went to the sheep pens, there was little Joe.

When Jacob went to trade wool, there was Joseph. When Jacob went out to get the mail, Joseph was in tow right behind his father.

Jacob doted over his favorite son.

But how many of you know and would agree that jealousy is closely on the heels of favoritism. Favoritism is the fuel of sibling friction. The problem is that Jacob understood what favoritism was like and what it could do in a family. His

brother was the favorite of his Dad, while he was the favorite of his mother. Favoritism resulted in his stealing the blessing from his brother that sent him on an extended stay with his Uncle Laban. Yet, here he is acting in the same way showing favoritism toward one son over all the rest, loving one son more than all the others.

Where there is favoritism there is sure to be a lack of family harmony in the home. It's quite evident in Jacob's story. Two of his wives, who were sisters, were rivals. The addition of two concubines making four wives only served to increase the family tension. When your home has one father, 12 sons by four different mothers, you have the making of many problems.

Why did his brothers hate him? I'll give you two answers: he had integrity, meaning he tried to live by a high standard of conduct and second, he was their father's favorite. The love Jacob had for Joseph is evident in what he was given. It was a coat, but it wasn't just any old coat, it was a coat of many colors. We notice through **verse 4** that it was a favorite robe.

B. His Favorite Robe – vs. 3b-4

When Jacob went shopping for the other brothers, they all got suits from that French designer Jacque Penney. Joseph on the other hand had tailored suits by Armani.

This wasn't just any old robe. This was a special robe made of many colors. But it wasn't just a special robe given by a father to a son he loved. This robe had significance. We read about something similar in **II Samuel 13:18**. It was a robe worn by Tamar, the daughter of King David. **“She was wearing a richly ornamented robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore.”**

The kind of robe given to and worn by Joseph was the kind of robe that was worn by tribal chieftains. It was the robe of a ruler. Most likely the coat was given to Joseph as an indication that it was Jacob's intent to make him the firstborn heir over the other

brothers, even though he wasn't born first. Let's consider several reasons why Joseph was deserving and not the other brothers.

Reuben, the firstborn son of Leah, Jacob's first wife, forfeited his right to the inheritance when he slept with his father's wife, Bilhah. A couple weeks ago when we talked about this, we noted that taking a father's wife meant you were assuming the right of authority over the family, that you were now the head of the family. Reuben forfeited the inheritance.

The next two sons of Leah to whom the inheritance could have been given also forfeited their right when they deceived the men of Shechem into getting circumcised after Shechem raped Dinah. Three days later they went on a murderous rampage for molesting their sister.

Joseph on the other hand, was the first-born son of Rachel. For all intents and purposes, Rachel was to have been his first wife had it not been for the deceptive actions of her father Laban. Warren Wiersbe notes that Rachel was not only Jacob's true love but essentially **“in God's sight, Rachel was his first wife and therefore Joseph as firstborn, was heir.”**

It was clear to the brothers what the intent was and that fueled their hatred for Joseph.

In his first epistle, John tells us that a person who hates someone else, is walking in darkness and not in the light (**I John 2:9, 11**). He further states that a person who says they love God and yet hates his brother is a liar (**I John 4:10**) and anyone who hates his brother is a murderer (**3:15**). Jesus indicated that a person who is angry with his brother is subject to judgment (**Matthew 5:22**). In fact, He continues by noting that anger or hatred is a heart sin and that in God's sight it's the same as committing murder.

Hatred is like a poison someone drinks that destroys the person from within. It produces bitterness that eats away at the heart and mind. That's why we read in **Hebrews 12:15** not to let any root of bitterness spring up in us, in our hearts and so defile many. Hatred destroys your relationships and it

destroys your testimony.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines hatred as “a feeling of strong antagonism and dislike, generally malevolent and prompting to injury.”

If somehow you believe that hatred is just a feeling and doesn't hurt anyone then you need to think again.

Joseph's brothers hated him because of his integrity.

Proverbs 29:10 “The bloodthirsty hate the upright.”

Joseph's brothers ridiculed him for being the favorite.

Proverbs 9:8 “Do not reprove a mocker or he will hate you.”

Joseph's brothers caused all kinds of trouble.

Proverbs 10:12 “Hatred stirs up dissension.”

Hatred in the Old Testament is condemned and was to be judged, especially when it involved injuring someone else.

James 3:16 says that where envy and strife are, there is confusion and every evil work. We will see that played out next week.

Among the different sins listed in **Colossians 3:5-9** that the Christian is to put out of his life are “**anger, rage, malice and slander**”.

Ephesians 4:31 “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander.”

“**They hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.**” Every time they saw him, their blood would boil. All because their father loved and favored Joseph more than them and because he had given Dad a bad report about them. His responsibility, his reporting, his relationship and his robe were a bone of contention with his brothers. It was the reason for their hatred. But, as Paul Harvey would say, there is the rest of the story. It wasn't just in who he was, but also in what he said that stoked the fires of hatred. We find it in **verses 5-11**.

In these verses we read about Joseph's thoughts.

III. JOSEPH'S THOUGHTS – vs. 5-11

I have dreams all the time and dollars to donuts, as a friend of mine used to say, you do as well. If you have ever been in college you have undoubtedly had a dream where you are late for a class, but you can't remember which one. Or there are the ones where you are running and running but unable to get away.

I've had dreams where I needed to get to church to preach a sermon and no matter how hard I tried, something always interfered and I never made it.

I'm not one who believes that dreams have significance. However, in the case of the two dreams that are in the text, they have meaning. They are prophetic. They are not just the whimsical or fanciful thoughts of an idealist, someone wanting to flaunt his position. But that's not how his brothers perceived them because **verse 5** says that they hated him all the more.

In Joseph's first dream, they were all out in the field cutting down the standing grain. Imagine a field from centuries ago. They would cut a bunch of grain, tie them together, and then stand them up on end. In his dream the standing grain cut by his brothers all bowed down to the standing grain he had cut down.

They responded with a sarcastic tone asking if he expected them to bow down to him. Grain is symbolic of the earth's resources and refers to bounty and wealth. We'll see this come true in a few chapters as Joseph is put in charge of gathering resources from crops to dole out over the years of famine. Again, notice in **verse 8** that they hated him all the more because of what he said. I really do wonder if they will remember these dreams later on.

Joseph had a second dream. In this dream the sun, moon, and 11 stars all bowed down before his star. These symbolize power and authority and again we will see that come true. In **verse 11** we are told that his brothers had an additional emotion they felt toward their brother. This time they envied him.

Speaking on the subject of envy, a 14th century preachers manual says that it is “the most precious daughter of the devil because it follows his footsteps by hindering good and promoting evil.”

Writing to his friend Titus, Paul said that they had once been disobedient by living in malice and envy and hating one another (**Titus 3:3**).

Peter admonishes the believer to get rid of all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander (**I Peter 2:1**).

Proverbs 14:30 “Envy rots the bones.”

Envy can literally eat you up emotionally, physically, and spiritually. It leads to resentment, which leads to bitterness, which leads to anger, which leads to hatred.

British humorist Max Beerbohm once said “People who insist on telling their dreams are among the terrors of the breakfast table.”

They don’t like to hear your dreams, especially when it elevates the dreamer and puts the listener at some disadvantage. Even Jacob didn’t like it at first and rebuked Joseph for the dream wondering why he thought his family would bow down to him, but then we read that his father thought about it more.

But it would be the very fulfillment of these dreams that Joseph would become the salvation of a nation and a family that would become a nation.

God will use their envy and hate to bring about the fulfillment of His will, His plan, His purpose. Kent Hughes writes “Human sin and divine revelation combined to produce a hatred and rejection that ultimately created a way of salvation.”

We will continue to see through the remainder of Genesis that where sin abounds, grace super abounds. Always remember as we will see in the life of Joseph that when we submit to God out of love for Him, He brings about good in our pain.

Let me conclude with some thoughts about overcoming envy and hatred from Scripture.

I Corinthians 13:4 “Love does not envy.”

Psalms 97:10 “Let those who love the Lord hate evil.”

Leviticus 19:17 “Do not hate a fellow Israelite with your heart.”

James 1:19-20 “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

If we want to be right with God, we need to get rid of hatred and envy.

If we want to get rid of envy and hatred we need to practice the new command given by Jesus in **John 13:34-35** to love others just as He loved us. He says it demonstrates to the world that we are His disciples, His followers and a compelling reason for them to consider becoming a follower of Jesus, too.

Tertullian was a Roman official sent to investigate Christians and his only conclusion of them was “see how they love one another.”

If we desire to overcome hate and envy from taking root in our hearts, then we must first learn to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and in loving Him more, we will grow to love others as well and dispel any lingering hate and envy.

This is more than just a pipe dream. Joseph is given a glimpse of their future, a future his brothers can’t see or understand so in the present they resent, they envy, they hate. God will use it for His purpose. The world already is filled with enough hate and envy. Let’s be different. We are called to a higher standard by getting rid of hatred and envy by loving God with everything we have, which in turn helps us to love others.