

June 18, 2017 - Gen. 37:1-36 - Joseph Dreams & Sold by his Brothers
Torah Readings: Genesis 37:1-36 - Joseph Dreams & Sold by his Brothers
Psalm 30
Haftorah - (1) Isaiah 32:18 – 33:6 + 15

Joseph a type of Christ

The story of Joseph reveals him as a type of Christ, who was also first humbled and then exalted.

Genesis 37:1 - "And Jacob dwelled in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan."

The Targum of Jonathan paraphrases the words, "and Jacob dwelt quietly"; or peaceably, in tranquillity and safety. Troubles with Laban and Esau lay behind him.

This is the conclusion of the "Generations of Esau" from the previous chapter. Esau's settlement in Seir and subsequent birth of children and grandchildren are reported without details.

But Jacob's "dwelling quietly" in the land was to prove only an aspiration that was not realized. Events intervened.

Esau again chooses short-term gain

One Midrash reports a deal between Esau and Jacob, in which Esau again chooses short term, instant gratification instead of the long-term promises of God:

"Esau said to Jacob : Divide all that my father has left into two portions, and I will choose (first), because I am the elder." Jacob said : This wicked man has not satisfied his eye with wealth, as it is said, "Neither are his eyes satisfied with riches" (Eccles. 4:8). What did Jacob do ? He divided all that his father had left as the one part, and the other part was to be the land of Israel and the Cave of Machpelah. What did Esau do? He went to Ishmael in the wilderness in order to consult him, as it is said, "And Esau went unto Ishmael" (Gen. 28:9). Ishmael said to Esau: 'The Amorite and the Canaanite are in the land, and Jacob trusts (in God) that he will inherit the land, therefore take all that thy father has left, and Jacob will have nothing!'

"And Esau took all that his father had left, and he gave to Jacob the land of Israel, and the Cave of Machpelah, and they wrote a perpetual deed between them. Jacob said to Esau : Go from the land of my possession, from the land of Canaan. Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all that he had, [as it is said, "And Esau took his wives . . . and all his possessions which he had gathered in the land of Canaan], and went into a land "away from his brother Jacob " (Gen. 36:6). And as a reward because he removed all his belongings on account of Jacob his brother, He gave him one hundred provinces from Seir unto Magdiel." - (*Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, 38)

The promise of the land to Abraham included a promise of suffering: “Strangers shall your seed be in a land not theirs,” and will serve 400 years. Rashi and other Sages maintain the 400 years began with the birth of Isaac, and the “land not theirs” included the years spent in Canaan before Jacob went down to Egypt.

Suffering, alienation and tribulation followed Jacob and his family, and would precede final fulfillment of the blessing - as it does with all believers:

1 Peter 4:12-13 - “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

In contrast, the world system seems to roll along with no problems. Esau easily established a place, and then Edom spawned eight kings before Israel ever had one.

The new scroll continues Jacob’s story with “The generations of Jacob” in verse 2.

Genesis 37:2 - “These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought to his father their evil report.”

The Hebrew reads: “And he was lad (na’ar - “youth”) with the sons of Bilhah, &c.” The probable meaning of this is, that as the youngest son it was his duty to wait upon his brothers, just as David had to look after the sheep, while his brothers went to the festival; and was also sent to the camp to attend to them (**1 Samuel 16:11; 1 Samuel 17:17-18**).

Was Joseph acting as a faithful steward or a gossiping tattletale when he reported his brothers’ misdeeds? What exactly he reported is not explained.

Perhaps their quarrels among themselves, their contempt of Joseph himself, their neglect of their flocks. Some of the Jewish writers they performed abominable acts of uncleanness (Bereshit Rabba, sect. 84. fol. 73. 1.), others say it was the eating of the member of a creature alive, particularly the flesh of the tails of lambs while still living (Targum Jon. in loc. Pirke Eliezer, c. 38.).

Genesis 37:3 - “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 colors.”

“because he was the son of his old age” - Targum Onkelos renders it, "because he was a wise son to him.”

Joseph is described as a clever, precocious prodigy, with amazing insights, but with the narcissism of youth, and unaware of the inner worlds of others. With an almost

Asperger's Syndrome-type cluelessness of (or disregard for) social interactions. This combined with his being his father's favorite, estranges him from his brothers, and starts a cascade of events. (*The Beginning of Desire*, p. 253)

(Na'ar - "youth" has the same numerical value as "fool") By the time he is in prison in Egypt, his perception of others deepens and matures.

Genesis 37:5-10 - Joseph's dreams

The Talmud says that dreams "follow their interpretation." i.e., the way they are interpreted determines how they are fulfilled.

Both the Brothers and Jacob interpret the dreams as meaning Joseph will rule over them. So, "thus they were fulfilled."

Genesis 37:11 - "And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying."

The brothers may have believed Joseph was plotting to get his father to curse them, so he could take the entire inheritance. But his father "waited for the "events to materialize."

The Coat of Many Colors

Joseph's coat reflects the rainbow and the Tabernacle and points to Christ

The four colors of the robes that Jesus wore in the New Testament were blue: Exo 28:31,32 & John 19:23; purple: John 19:2; scarlet: Mat 27:28; white "fine twined linen" Mark 9:3. The four same colors appear in five stripes or bands on the fabric gate, door, veil, and the ceiling of the Tabernacle of Moses. The colors also reflect the same meaning as the rainbow after the flood - a vehicle and expression of mercy and grace extended to mankind.

Also, each section of the Tabernacle is described in terms of a human body (Christ's). Joseph and his coat mirror this revelation.

Joseph "tried" in a rabbinical court

Genesis 37:20 - "Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

Again, in one strain of commentary, the Sages hope to whitewash the behavior of the Patriarchs.

According to a Midrash, the brothers convened a rabbinical court and formally tried Joseph. This "rabbinical court" convicted Joseph of wanting to harm his brothers, and thus Joseph was regarded as having the status of "actively harming others," one whom

Jews are obligated to stop, even by killing him.

Thus they convict him and pronounce a “legal death sentence.” It’s eerily similar to the trial of Jesus.

Genesis 37:22 - “And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.”

Though not confronting his brothers directly, Reuben was trying to modify the outcome and come back and release Joseph later.

Because of this one shred of decency, the “cities of refuge” later were located in Reuben’s territory.

Thrown into a pit

Interpreting the words, “the pit was empty, there was no water in it,” in **Genesis 37:24**, a midrash taught that there was indeed no water in it, but snakes and serpents were in it.

Joseph's life was in peril and God protected him from the creatures.

Luke 10:19 - “See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you.”

Rabbi Aha interpreted the words “the pit was empty” to teach that *Jacob’s* pit was emptied — Jacob’s children were emptied of their compassion. The midrash interpreted the words “there was no water in it” to teach that there was no recognition of Torah in it, as Torah is likened to water, as **Isaiah 55:1** says, “everyone that thirsts, come for water.”

God’s Subtle Plot-line

Although God’s sovereignty assures his will be done, it is not mechanical - he molds his ‘plot line’ to adhere to his main characters’ personalities and their uniqueness and maintain the feeling of free will and autonomy.

“Jacob, our father, should have gone down to Egypt in chains and iron collar, but God said, ‘He is my first-born son - shall I bring him down in shame? ... I shall draw his son down before him, and he will go down after him, unawares, that he will bring God’s presence down with him to Egypt.’” - (Genesis Rabbah, 86:1)

Joseph as Sacrifice

“The Ishmaelites usually transported foul smelling items such as pitch and tar, but this particular caravan happened to be transporting spices and incense to Egypt. Despite

the indignation of being repeatedly sold as a slave, Joseph was finally heading down to Egypt ... surrounded by sweet fragrance.” - acc. to a Midrash (<http://www.aish.com/tp/b/lp/48960406.html>)

The “spicery and balm and myrrh” show a foreshadowing of Jesus’ burial.

John 19:38-40 - “He [Joseph of Arimathea] came therefore and took away the body. And there came also Nicodemus, who at the first had come to him [Jesus] by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred [Roman] pounds. So they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the burial custom of the Jews is.”

Early on the first day of the week (resurrection morning) certain women came to the tomb with the intention to “anoint” the Lord’s body with “spices” (Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:1).

They ‘killed a kid of the goats’

Genesis 37:31 - “And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood”

A kid of the goats was killed as a substitute for Joseph, recalling the Akedah and the ram substituted for Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19).

“It was Issachar's advice to tear Joseph's coat of many colors, and dip it in the blood of a little kid of the goats, to make Jacob believe that his son had been torn by a wild beast. The reason he suggested a kid was because its blood looks like human blood. In expiation of this act of deception, it was ordained that a kid be used as an atonement sacrifice when the Tabernacle was dedicated.” - (Legends of the Jews, vol. 2)

Maimonides (RamBam) agrees:

The goat’s blood, he says, “will be accounted to you, as though you had shed his (Joseph’s) blood.”

“Our Sages ...explained the fact that goats were always the sin-offerings of the congregation [on Yom Kippur], as an allusion to the sin of the whole congregation of Israel: for in the account of the selling of the pious Joseph we read, "And they killed a kid of the goats" (Gen. 37:31). Do not consider this as a weak argument; for it is the object of all these ceremonies to impress on the mind of every sinner and transgressor the necessity of continually remembering and mentioning his sins. Thus the Psalmist says, "And my sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51:3).” (*Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:46)

A late Yemenite Jewish manuscript focuses on this goat:

The goat had no horns and it said to the brothers, “You are killing two lives.” ... When they came to slaughter it, it cried out in a voice that reached the heavens, so that the angels came down to see, “Joseph lives and I die! Who will tell Jacob?” One of the

winds went and told Jacob what the goat said. But in the end, "His heart went numb, for he did not believe them." So he goat cried out, "Earth, do not cover up my blood!" And till now, the goat's blood is damp on the earth, until Messiah comes, as it is written, "I will smelt them as one smelts silver" (Zechariah 13:9) - the silver for which they sold Jospheh, as it is said, "They sold Joseph for 20 pieces of silver."

Genesis 37:35 - "And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him."

Traditionally, Jewish mourning is to be only for a limited period of time. But for Jacob, with one son missing, he could no longer fulfill his mission to found a nation of 12 tribes. So he was inconsolable.

Rashi, commenting on Genesis 37:35, says Jacob cries out, "I shall go down mourning to Sheol: This is Gehinnom - the inferno - for this sign was given by God, that if none of my sons died in my lifetime, I was assured that I would not see Gehinnom."

Only when Jospheh is restored to him does Jacob come alive again: "the spirit of their father revived" (Genesis 45:27).