



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## The Sun, Moon and Stars in Prophecy

We have commenced a study of the life of Joseph the patriarch. It is one of the most beloved of all Bible stories. This will be an extensive study and it may happen that we will interrupt it on any given month for whatever reason. We are early in the story—where young Joseph has just “tattled” on his older brothers—or did he? Given the track record of his brothers, it *was* indeed proper for Joseph to report to his father on any out-of-line activities.

But then young Joey goes and throws gasoline on the fire by *bragging* to his brothers about his dreams. Of course, since we recognize the over-riding sovereignty of God in every human action and reaction, we know that everything was part of God’s overall Plan. It was part of His Plan that young Joey evidently be a braggart.

There are some commentaries that paint a picture of Joseph as a person of virtually flawless character. It is true that, unlike David, Joseph seems to have had very few character flaws. If it is true that he was prideful and arrogant, it was a trait that was extinguished in him within a relatively short time.

We have mentioned the book of Jasher numerous times in our various studies, and I must say that this whole story of Joseph is one for which the book of Jasher fills in an amazing amount of detail and explanation. The Bible references the book of Jasher twice, evidently as source material, and because of that, I tend to give a certain degree of credibility to Jasher.

I am not saying that I put it on a par with the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. I do not and Jasher nowhere claims to be inerrant. But I have read it several times cover to cover, and I find very few places where it seems to contradict the Bible—and of course, the Bible seems to contradict itself in quite a few places. This allows atheists, agnostics and Christ-haters in general to have ammunition to supposedly debunk Christianity. But veteran Bible students know that what seem to be

apparent contradictions are really not so at all. In any event, the book of Jasher reads like a best-selling novel; highly engaging, full of emotion, drama, very compelling—a book you won’t want to put down. We carry the book of Jasher. (See Resources, pg. 4.)

I must caution you, however, that there is another book available from some Christian sources which also calls itself the book of Jasher. I have also read that version cover to cover. I used two issues of *Feed My Sheep* to expose it as an outright fraud. So don’t buy the wrong one. The genuine book of Jasher is the 1840 edition, not the one dated 1829. (Those issues were the October and November, 2000 issues. You can find and print them off our website for free. If you do not have web access, we will reprint and mail them to you, but please keep in mind our time and expense to do so.)

The reason I introduce the book of Jasher at this point is because of the question of whether or not Joseph was always of nearly flawless character. Not according to Jasher. It says this in Jasher, chapter 41, beginning in verse 6. It had just related how the ten brothers were so strong and victorious in slaughtering a bunch of Amorites. Then it says:

“6. And when Joseph saw the strength of his brethren, and their greatness, he praised them, but he ranked himself greater than them, and extolled himself above them; ...

7. And when Joseph saw that his father loved him more than his brethren, he continued to exalt himself above his brethren, and he brought unto his father evil reports concerning them.”

The reader will note that, as a matter of formatting, I am not boldfacing the Jasher quotations, as I do virtually all biblical quotations. This again, denotes my belief that the book of Jasher is **not** to be set on a

par with the Bible.

“9. And Joseph was seventeen years old, and he was still magnifying himself above his brethren, and thought of raising himself above them.

10. At that time he dreamed a dream...

And then it goes on virtually word for word with the passage in Genesis. So, IF the book of Jasher is reliable, Joseph may well have had some character deficiencies which landed him in trouble...and because God planned it all, his arrogance and pride not only landed him in big trouble, but it changed the course of world history.

Did the youthful and proud Joey know that? Heavens, no! The illusion that he was operating under his own free will was just as real in him as it is in all of us. He made choices, he made some bad choices from his perspective, but choices which God had planned from the beginning of the world would be the means by which the chosen people would be enslaved in Egypt.

But looking at just the human interaction level of the story, we can see that young Joe-Joe was either quite naïve, or his character was somewhat lacking yet at age 17. It is perfectly understandable that he may have been prideful of his status as daddy’s favorite and therefore somewhat arrogant as he related his dreams to his big brothers. I mean, what does he expect... when he tells them that their sheaves of grain bowed down to his sheaf? This only increases his brothers’ resentment of him. You can just hear them snarling at him:

“Why, that little twerp! He’d better watch his back. You never know when some wild animal will catch him and tear him to shreds, and I wouldn’t shed a tear if that happened.”

Some time later, Joey wakes up one morning and says: “Hey, guess what, guys? I had another *awesome* dream last night! Want to hear about it?”

“No!” they shout in unison.

“Oh, but it was so awesome, dudes; listen to this.” In fact, according to Jasher, he is telling both his brethren and his father at the same time. And so he goes on to tell them how the sun, the moon and the eleven stars all bowed down to him.

How did Jacob react? It says that his father *re-buked* him. However, we must not conclude that Jacob was scolding his favorite son as if in *contempt* of the dream. Because it says in verse 11 that Jacob “observed” it, meaning he *gave heed to* the meaning of the dream.

Jacob was well aware of the importance of dreams as being prophetic. He remembered how his grandfather Abraham had often told him the story of how God had spoken to him in a dream. And it was coming true in Jacob himself.

And of course, Jacob would forever vividly recall his own very potent dream of the “stairway to heaven” back at Beth-el so many years ago. So he was not rebuking Joey for the importance of the dream.

Perhaps the rebuke was only for the purpose of trying to prevent Joey from getting puffed about his own importance in the dream. In this way, Jacob might be trying to alleviate and mollify some of the envy of the brothers. But to no avail. Not surprisingly, his brothers grew all the more bitter towards him.

Their mother, Leah,—or at least the mother of six of them, had only died the year before at age 51, so these now grown men had experienced many years of imbibing their mother’s resentment, jealousy and bitterness towards Rachel.

They had many years of anti-Joseph programming to overcome. And they were failing miserably. Joseph apparently was, by his mouthy, braggadocious attitude, making it almost impossible for them *not* to be resentful and bitter.

Have you ever felt like that towards someone? Let me guess, for most of us, more often than not, that someone is a member of our own family, right? I was talking with a friend the other day who works in an office near our offices, and we were just chewing the fat for a few minutes and the conversation drifted towards someone who had wronged him.

I grinned and suggested that this was the way God teaches us about forgiveness, by putting all these horrible opportunities before us. Now this man is about mid-thirties, living with a woman, doesn’t go to church. I’m told he smokes dope, you get the picture—he is not what most people would consider your typical Christian.

And so there we are chatting about how he had been hurt badly and wrongfully treated by somebody, and he suddenly blurts out: “And you know what, James? You know what’s the really *funny* thing about it? Most of the time, it’s from somebody in your own family?”

No, that’s not funny; that’s not odd or unusual! That’s *normally* where most of our hurts and offenses come from. He went on: “You know, if it were some stranger that offended me; I could say: ‘Hey, no big deal.’ But man, when it’s your own family member, man, it’s really hard to forgive them.”

I said, “Yeah, tell me about it. Here I am, supposed to be a Christian, and a minister at that, and then one day back in the early 90s, I realized that I had hated my dad for close to 30 years.”

And I went on to give him the 30-second soundbite version of *My Personal Testimony on Forgiveness*, subtitled *Could You Forgive God?* (Free upon request in CD format. I do not ever intend to put them on the internet for free and so I ask everyone who obtains them to respect that.)

As the title implies, it is *my* story of learning forgiveness, but it is not really a how-to course in forgiveness. For that purpose, we have done a six-lecture series called *Achieving Jubilee Forgiveness*. We throw in the two CDs of *My Personal Testimony on Forgiveness*—all for \$24 ppd.

Back to Joseph's two dreams at age 17. By the way, in Bible numeric symbolism, 17 denotes victory, but for Joseph the victory could not come until he had run the race. Do you expect it should be any different for you and me?

It is also interesting to note that Joseph experienced two separate dreams which told essentially the same story but using different symbols. This is a foreshadowing of the two dreams by the Pharaoh which also told the same story with two sets of symbols. It seems to be the double witness principle at work here.

Furthermore, when we ponder the actual symbols in the two dreams, we find that the first—the sheaves of grain—points directly to Joseph's later concern for the grain of Egypt. In general symbolism, the heavenly bodies have always signified rulership. That is found among all nations of people and their symbolism. It is universally understood.

That is because, just as the sun, moon and stars are *above* the earth, so rulers are in high positions of authority *above* the people. Therefore, the second dream points to Joseph's ascension to a position of high rulership and authority.

The Bible makes use of that general and universal symbolism but gives it a very *specific* application. In verse 10, Jacob exclaims: "Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?"

Thereby, he identifies himself as the sun, Rachel as the moon, and the 11 stars as Joseph's brethren. Collectively, therefore, the sun, moon and stars symbolize the nation of Israel.

Thus, when we find these terms in prophecy, we have the key to their interpretation. And let me just use this opportunity to teach a couple of the basics of prophetic interpretation. There are perhaps a dozen places where these terms (the sun, moon and stars) occur as one in prophecy. We will just look at two of the more famous ones. For example, in Jesus' Olivet discourse, He says:

**Matthew 24:29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:**

Then we have John being given this vision in ...

**Revelation 8:12 And the fourth angel sound-**

**ed, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.**

I doubt very seriously that these are going to be fulfilled literally. After all, how can one-third of the literal sun be smitten? If some astronomical body were large enough to smite one-third of the sun, then I will tell you a little secret: it's lights-out time for planet earth. It's all over. All life would cease, period.

Of course, we know that in John's visions many things occur on the earth after this passage, so we conclude that it is *not* some literal, astronomical event—like Planet X or Nibiru or a comet or an asteroid or some such thing that's going to crash into the sun and smite one-third of it, Hollywood disaster movies notwithstanding.

Since we now understand that the sun, moon and stars refer to the whole house of Israel, we can then interpret this verse as meaning that the spiritual light of the Israel people will be darkened for a period of time. (Do you think we are there yet?)

As we know, prophecy can be interpreted literally or symbolically; sometimes it is both. That is the *how* of prophetic interpretation. Then there is the *when* of prophetic interpretation. *When* will it be fulfilled? This refers to timing. And when we speak about the time dimension there are three possibilities: past, present and future.

Thus, there are three schools of prophetic interpretation when it comes to the timing. There is the preterist school (sometimes spelled *praeterist*). Generally speaking, they believe that almost all prophecy has already been long ago fulfilled. For example, we just quoted Matthew 24:29 from Jesus' Olivet prophecy. Preterists believe that this and virtually all of Jesus' Olivet prophecies were fulfilled by 70 A. D. or certainly by 132 A.D. That is the past tense.

Of course, everybody knows about the futurist school of interpretation. This is the one that gets all the ink and all the airwaves. The televangelists are constantly telling us that THE antichrist and the great tribulation are just around the corner, and that you need to send them money so they can help the Jews rebuild the third temple and all that.

According to them almost all the book of Revelation is off in the future, but not too far off. Moreover, the Christian bookstores are full of books about the soon-coming Antichrist (with a capital "A") and the mark of the beast and the seven-year tribulation and the rapture and all that.

Then there is the *Left Behind* series of books and movies which has helped popularize this futurist viewpoint even more. But let us not forget, friends; those

*Left Behind* books are *fiction*. As an antidote to that futurist nonsense, we carry several works on the subject (see Resources).

As a one-time fundamentalist, I was taught the futurist viewpoint. I cut my prophecy teeth on Scofield's notes in his study Bible and Dwight Pentecost's textbook, *Things To Come*. I still have Hal Lindsey's books in my library, so this week I pulled out *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the best-seller in 1970, and I had to laugh as I saw the title of the first chapter... "Future Tense."

I have many problems with both the preterist and the futurist interpretations. The third alternative, the present tense viewpoint is called the historicist school. All prophecy is not past, done and over with. It is not all future. It has been in the process of being fulfilled ever since John wrote it in the first century. It is really a present progressive tense.

When the Reformation broke out, Luther, Calvin and the others recognized that the papacy and the Roman Catholic church was and had been fulfilling prophecies all through the centuries.

This was not good news for the pope and his church hierarchy because they were being exposed as the antichrist, the beast and the false prophet, the man of sin, and so forth. It fit perfectly.

The Catholic leaders got very upset and fearful that their whole game was up. They would lose their power, their place and their wealth if this understanding of the prophecies of Revelation got too widespread.

It seemed certain that they could not stop the distribution of the Bible to the common people in their own languages, since Gutenberg had just invented the printing press. So instead they set about on a strategy to point the people in another direction when it came to *interpreting* the prophecies.

Using the just-founded Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, they very cleverly came up with both the preterist and futurist interpretations. They applied the prophecies to deflect attention away from the present papacy at the Reformation time, so that Christians could read Revelation and believe that Nero was Antichrist. It was all past tense. Or, conversely, the Antichrist was this great one-world dictator who would arise way off in the future. Looking at the state of the Protestant churches today, I would say the Jesuits were very successful, would you not agree?

There are many books available on the historicist interpretation. We list two below (Jennings and Rand). I am not going to go into any more detail on prophecy here, except to say that history clearly records that there were periods when the light of the gospel from the Israel nations (Christendom in Europe) was dimmed. The sun, moon and stars did not give forth their light. The stars fell from heaven. True Isra-

el nations lost their position as rulers of righteousness in God's embryonic kingdom of heaven upon the earth. Arguably, it is true again in our era.

#### Resources

*The Book of Jasher*, 256 pgs., \$13

*I Want to Be Left Behind*, Ron Poch, 130 pp., \$10

*The Rapture of the Saints*, Duncan McDougall, 51 pp. \$4

*The Rapture Plot*, Dave MacPherson, 300 pp., \$15

*The Rapture in Light of Tabernacles*, Stephen Jones, 40 pp., \$4

*The Book of Revelation from an Israelite and Historicist Interpretation*, Charles Jennings, 224 pp., \$12

*Study in Revelation*, Howard Rand, 284 pp. hrbk, \$18

**Please add \$4 shipping for the first book, \$0.50 shipping for each additional item.**

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