

FEED MY SHEEP

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The Plot Against Joseph

The Story of Joseph, Part 3

We can imagine that the teenaged Joseph might have thought the fulfillment of his prophetic dreams wherein his brothers and parents bowed down to him was going to happen sooner rather than later. Little did he know the years of humbling he would have to undergo first. The humbling began with his brothers' attempt to murder him.

Genesis 37:12 And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.

After Rachel had died and Jacob had buried her near Bethlehem, he established his tents some miles south of there in the Hebron valley. That was home. But previously, when he had come back from serving Laban all those years, he had bought some real estate from the Hivite Canaanites near the village of Shechem. It says in...

Genesis 33:19 And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money.

The point is the geography. My estimate is that the property up at Shechem was approximately 45 to 50 miles north of the Hebron valley, and so it was no small journey from one place to the other. So the ten older brothers are up there at the Shechem property shepherding the flocks. Can you imagine the enormous number of sheep and goats and other cattle which Jacob must have possessed in order to keep ten grown sons busy, not to mention a large number of servants. Clearly, Jacob was a wealthy man.

13 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*.

This is perhaps a small thing, but nevertheless worth pointing out. Joseph was no dummy. He knew how his brothers felt about him. Yet when his father gives him this task, Joseph is quick to be obedient *and* with a good attitude about it. No whining and complaining: "Aw, dad, do I *have* to? You know how they hate me. They're mean to me and they just don't like being around me. Can't you send one of the servants?" On the contrary, Joseph appeared to be quick to answer: "Okay, dad, I will go."

14 And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

I could not help but be reminded of the similarities between Joseph and David. This is now the second of many we will see. The first was the coat of many colors appearing in both stories, and it appears only in these two stories. We also notice that while Joseph was not the youngest of the sons of Jacob, he was certainly near the end, the second youngest among 12. David, as we know, was the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse.

Secondly, in both cases, their fathers send them on missions to go check on their elder brothers. Recall how Goliath challenged the armies of Israel. None of the men of Israel had the courage to take on this giant descendant of the Nephilim in one-on-one combat—including David's three oldest brothers who were in the army.

1 Samuel 17:17 And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched *corn*, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren;

18 And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge. [i.e., bring me some assurance.]

Since both David and Joseph are types of overcomers, we will find many similarities as we proceed with our story. There is also a tie-in here with them both being types of Christ. Jesus is often referred to as our elder brother, and this is certainly true; but it can also be equally true that he is our younger brother in that he came to incarnate as Jesus 4000 years after Adam. He was in heaven with the father, and the father says to the son: “Son, how about going down to earth and looking in on the welfare of your brethren for me, will you?”

For each of them, this trip, this mission to look in on their brothers started the whole ball rolling. David ends up going into battle with Goliath, then into service to Saul and then persecuted by Saul. Jesus comes to earth to bring the bread of heaven as nourishment to his brethren. He is rejected by his brethren and ultimately put to death. Joseph now runs into a similar problem. He arrives at Shechem only to find that they are not where they are supposed to be.

Genesis 37:15 And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou?

16 And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks.

17 And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan.

Every word in Scripture is important, isn't it? Every word, every number and every name has layers of meaning. The brothers had been at Shechem. *Shechem* means “shoulder,” and it signifies carrying or “shouldering” a burden or task. The *shoulder* thus becomes a metaphor for labor. But there is a second meaning. There were two gemstones later placed on the shoulders of the ephod of the high priest and in the two stones were engraved the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. Aaron and later high priests had the responsibility and authority to intercede with God for the nation.

Still later, Isaiah, referring to the Messiah, tells us that “the government shall be upon His *shoulders*.” From this we discern that the shoulders are also a symbol of responsibility and authority. Jesus is the Head and if believers in Jesus are the body of Christ, then the shoulders have the authority and responsibility for government and rulership. Hence, the shoulders company must be symbolic of the overcomers. File

that away in your neurons for future reference.

So Joseph, who is predestined for rulership comes to the town called Shoulder, where his brothers are supposed to be feeding the sheep. But they are not there. They have left their position of rulership. Does this foreshadow the non-overcomer Christians who find the road to overcomership too hard to pursue?

The brothers have moved from Shechem to a place called Dothan. It's about 12 miles north of Shechem. *Dothan* means “two wells.” It is easier to feed the sheep at a place with two wells. The brothers can lounge around and laze around and watch the sheep, and never be far from the refrigerator, as it were.

In a way, it reminds me of many Christian ministers who take the lazy way out as they feed the sheep. Nowadays, it is all too tempting to simply deliver the sermons that come pre-packaged for them down from denominational headquarters. I have even noticed some trans-denominational “sharing” of sermons.

For example, a couple of years ago, I was in Florida visiting my kindred, and I went to a Baptist church with them. The sermon was of the typical 20-minute skim milk variety. As we were leaving, I commented to my brother that it was a fairly decent sermon, (as far as it went, but I did not voice that). It was a take-off on the popular TV show called *Extreme Makeover*. The sermon was, naturally, about how people need to find Jesus and get saved and thus get an extreme makeover, spiritually speaking.

When I came back to Asheville, I saw a billboard advertising the *Extreme Makeover* series of sermons at the local Baptist church. So it was clear that the sermon I had heard in Florida had come prewritten from Southern Baptist headquarters. A short while later, I was chatting with some friends in a northern state who are not Southern Baptists, and surprise—they were telling me about the *Extreme Makeover* series of sermons currently running at their church.

Golly, folks, I know it's tough to prepare good messages. But with it coming “pre-baked” from headquarters, I figure it might take a minister...(sarcasm) *at least* a half-hour to prepare a pre-baked message. ... Lazing around the double wells of Dothan. “Yep, life is good, feeding the sheep. [*lazily*] Plenty of liquid refreshment over there in the refrigerator, brother, just help yourself. I'd get up and get it for you myself, but I'm too busy here in my recliner watching the sheep-fleecing...er, um...I mean, the preaching on Christian television. Did you know that the rapture could happen at any minute?”

Of course, there is a *good* side to the two wells idea. The only other time the name Dothan shows up in Scripture is in 2 Kings 6:13. This is where the Syrians are seeking to capture the prophet Elisha. Elisha's hometown was Dothan. Elisha was Elijah's assistant and when Elijah went up in a whirlwind, Elisha re-

ceived his mantle and he also received a double portion of ministry. Ron Oja has pointed out that Elisha performed twice as many miracles as Elijah did.

So we have the idea with Elisha of a *double* portion at the place of *two* wells. When we think of Joseph, we know that at the end of the story, the dying Jacob blesses the 12 sons, but he gives the *double* portion blessing to Joseph. He adopts Joseph's *two* sons as his own, and later on, each of the two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, received separate land inheritances. Then, to really drive home the point, Joseph names his second son, Ephraim, which means, *doubly* fruitful or *double ash-heap*. Coming from Asheville, I take that personally.

Anyhow, Joseph seeks his brothers where they were supposed to be, shouldering rulership, and he soon finds them lounging at the place of two wells. Joseph seeks and finds his lost brethren. That also is a type of Christ because He came looking for the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

Joseph seeks his brethren. Later, in Egypt, his brethren *seek* him, at least according to the book of Jasher—which event we will expound upon in due course. But they don't find him at first because they were looking in the wrong places. We will find his brothers still did not give Joseph much credit character-wise even those many years later. Meanwhile, here at Dothan.

Genesis 37: 18 And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.

19 And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. [Hebrew: master of dreams]

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.

...we shall see what will become of his dreams. This indicates that the brothers did indeed believe that there was some significance to Joseph's dreams. But they were so consumed with envy and pride—that they, being older, should *ever* bow down to their baby brother, and a *half*-brother at that!—so consumed were they with pride, envy, jealousy and resentment, that it turned into outright hatred and then to its ultimate end: intent to murder. But not all of them are equally guilty of murder in their hearts.

21 And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.

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.

So Reuben's intent was to rescue Joseph. He showed some heart and compassion here, perhaps out of a motive of trying to get into his father's good graces again and to redeem himself in his father's eyes from the incestuous relationship scandal. Nevertheless, either Reuben did not have the courage or he did not have the persuasive power and the leadership ability to stop his brothers from doing Joseph any harm period, so he compromised by suggesting they throw him into a pit.

23 And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him;

The parallel with our Savior is fairly obvious. At his trial, Jesus was stripped of his garments. But more than that, Jesus voluntarily stripped Himself of His glory when he left the side of the Father in heaven and became naked in the fleshly womb of Mary.

24 And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.

At this point, it appears that all the other brothers except Reuben were content with the idea that Joseph would starve to death or be bitten by a snake or scorpion or be found and killed by a wild animal. But there was one other brother whose conscience was troubled, who really did not want to murder Joseph.

25 And they 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.

26 And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?

27 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.

28 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.

So Judah, of whose lineage came Jesus, is the instigator of betraying Joseph, the type of Christ, for

20 pieces of silver; whereas Judas (which is the Greek form of Judah), would later betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. The difference is that Judah does it to save Joseph *from* death, and Judas' act resulted *in* death.

I have learned from Dr. Stephen Jones about the *two* works of Christ, and I have thus done some teaching on it myself. Briefly, Jesus came the first time to perform a *death work*. He came the first time from the line of Judah, the royal line, to claim his *throne rights*. He comes the second time as Joseph to claim the *birthright*. It is not a death work, but a *live work*.

This can be demonstrated in the laws found in Leviticus as well. Remember the two birds in the law of cleansing leprosy. The first bird is killed. The second is dipped in the blood of the first and then let free into the open field. (Leviticus 14.)

We can relate this to Judas and Judah again. Jesus is the first bird. He had to be slain. Joseph was not slain though, was he? Joseph also represents the overcomer company who are metaphorically dipped in the blood of Jesus through faith and baptism, but they perform the live work of ruling the world in righteousness with Jesus as head. Remember, Joseph's garment gets dipped in blood—we'll get to that later.

Next, notice that verse 25 states that a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh. This is the first mention in the Bible of what we today call *essential oils*. The word spicery is certainly not referring to the leaves and powder spices we find in the grocery stores today, but rather to the oils and resins which gave them their fragrance, their potency and healing properties.

In this case, the word myrrh is not the oil of myrrh, but actually refers to the oil called Cistus from the rock rose. However, the myrrh oil was used as a fixative and so it could have been part of the mixture.

That the spicery and balm and myrrh were in fact *essential oils* is made clear in the marvelous book we have available called *Healing Oils of the Bible*. It is a well-written book, thoroughly researched by Dr. David Stewart, who is not only an expert in essential oils, but he is a retired minister and a former university science professor.

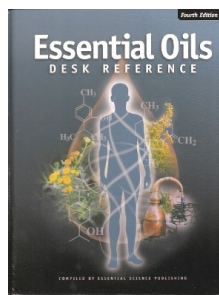
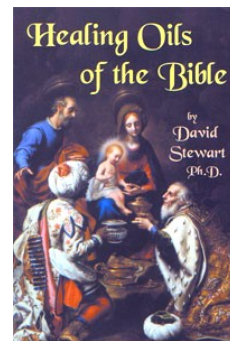
As you know, praying for healing, according to James 5, was accompanied in the New Testament by the laying on of hands and *anointing with oil*. I now believe that these were *essential oils*. They have phenomenal healing properties...healing for body, soul and spirit. This book is a fascinating introduction to a subject all Christians should be aware of and use.

Resources

Healing Oils of the Bible, Dr. David Stewart, 326 pgs., \$20

Essential Oils Desk Reference, Essential Publishing, 558 pgs., hardback, large format, \$50

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



The narrative in verses 26-28 seem a bit confusing about who bought Joseph. Were they Midianites or were they Ishmaelites. If you recall, Ishmael was the son of Abraham by way of Hagar, whereas the Midianites were descended through Abra-

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ham also, but by way of Keturah, Abraham's wife after Sarah died. As we said at the outset, the Bible is a wonderfully compact book, condensing stories down to the essentials.

The extended version of the story in the book of Jasher gives a very reasonable solution to this apparent contradiction. In fact, both the Ishmaelites and the Midianites are involved. I won't take the time to go into that here.

Reuben was obviously not present when the rest of the brothers decided to sell Joseph. Later,...

29 And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he rent his clothes.

30 And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child *is* not; and I, whither shall I go?

They proceed to tell Reuben what they had done. It doesn't matter now what Reuben had intended to do, he is now part of the conspiracy to cover up the wicked deed.

31 And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood;

32 And they sent the coat of *many* colours, and they brought *it* to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it *be* thy son's coat or no.

Here once again, I want to give you an example of the marvelous way in which the Bible condenses a story. The book of Jasher spends about 108 verses on this incident that the Bible condenses into about 15 verses. In verse 32, notice it says they sent the coat and they brought the coat. Well, which was it?

In fact, it was both. They sent it on ahead in the hand of their brother Naphtali, who was the track star of the family, and then the rest came along behind with the flocks and with dust on their heads in mourning. The duplicitous hypocrites!

33 And he knew it, and said, *It is* my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.

34 And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

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.

What another cup of bitterness is now handed to Jacob! Only seven years previously, Jacob had lost Joseph's mother, his beloved Rachel. Just one year ago, he had lost Leah. And now, he is utterly convinced that Joseph is dead.

Imagine! His favorite son, the one whom he had been grooming to take charge of the family business, his trusted son, now gone, also. In a senseless accident, of all things, mauled by a wild animal. Old Jake is so distraught that no one in the family can console him. The brothers, meanwhile, have to continue faking their grief lest their crime be exposed.

There are two poignant ironies here which bear examination. The first is concerning Reuben. Here is a man who is the eldest of the family and by right ought to have the privilege of the birthright. But for many years now, he has known that daddy favors Joey.

Then Reuben sleeps with Bilhah and thus forever solidifies his status as a second-class son. He has been totally displaced by Joseph. Yet, Reuben can find the decency within himself to rescue Joseph from certain death at the hands of his brothers.

Thus, he saves the very man whose rank in the family should have been his. So we can credit Reuben with having some redeeming virtues.

The other irony is summed up in our saying: What goes around, comes around. Or as the Bible says, you will reap what you sow. Jacob had many years ago with the connivance and guidance of his mother, Rebecca, worked a deception on his father Isaac. So that Isaac was prevented from bestowing the birthright blessing upon his favorite son, Esau.

Now Jacob's own sons deceive him into thinking Joseph is dead and, at least for many years, Jacob is prevented from thinking he will bestow the birthright blessing upon his favorite son Joseph. How the wheel turns!

You see, when Rebekah and Jacob decided to pull a fast one on blind, old Isaac; they knew that God had promised the birthright to Jacob. But their faith was weak and so they *thought* that they had to help God out, to make sure He wouldn't forget what He had promised. In the end, they went about obtaining the birthright for Jacob in an illegitimate way and it has caused centuries of conflict in the world, which as we know, continues to this day.

From the sovereignty of God perspective, of course, this was exactly the Plan that God had predestinated, but that still did not make it okay for Jacob to commit fraud any more than Abel's death being predestinated made it okay for Cain to kill him.

And this reminds me of some of those today who are anxious to see God's kingdom of righteousness come to full fruition on the earth. We are all anxious to see that, of course, But there are some who are in the mindset of old Jacob, thinking that it isn't going to happen unless they take matters into their own hands and bring it about.

Do you know what I am talking about? I have discussed this before in depth in a message I called *Patriots and Politics*. Now, you know what I am talking about. The way of the overcomer is to have faith in God that He will bring about the promises of His covenants.

As the curtain falls on act one of this drama of Family Values in Ancient Israel, we can all find portions of the story which relate to our own situation. Years ago, when Jacob had wrestled with the angel, he had been awarded a new name, Israel.

I believe that it was at that point that he had the rank of overcomer given to him. But it was *only by imputation*, not in actuality yet.

Because it was at that time—during the wrestling match—that Jacob came to realize that behind his enemy Esau was Yahweh Himself, who uses Esau to train Jacob-Israel in obedience, in forgiveness and in unconditional love.

But as I said, this did not mean that Jacob-Israel was actually and literally transformed into an immortal overcomer at that time. He still had years more of training to undergo.

So it is with all of us as overcomer candidates. We come to a point in our spiritual growth where we realize that all those bad guys out there—including all those modern sons of Esau—that our Father Yahweh put them here for our training.

And so we come to realize that to hate them is like hating the whipping rod which a loving parent uses wisely on his wayward children.

With that realization we are enabled to change our focus. While we are still aware of the evil machinations of those people, those vessels of wrath... we are aware of the wickedness of the Trilateralists in high places, for example. But while we have that understanding, we no longer waste our valuable time and energy on the negatives. [*slowly, for emphasis*] We quit focusing on how nasty the whipping rod is.

Instead, we turn our focus to developing the positive character traits which Christ intends for all his followers: the fruits of the spirit; the greatest of which is love, which encompasses all the others—obedience to His laws and forgiveness towards all. As with Jacob-Israel and as with Joseph, we too have more years of training to undergo.

Chapter 37 closes with the Midianites selling Joseph as a slave to Potiphar. Potiphar is Pharaoh's captain of the guard, who answered directly to him. So I would liken him to the attorney general in the United States. The captain of the guard also had charge of all the prisons and all executions in Egypt.

36 And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, *and* captain of the guard.

Now I want to leave you to ponder this thought as I close.

Joseph is a type, not only of Christ, but of the Overcomers, the Shoulders Company. Joseph is sold into bondage to Egypt. Egypt is a symbol of bondage and slavery and it is also a type of the world, the world system.

Corporately speaking, and I think Pastor Sheldon Emry brought this ought many years ago, that God has sold us, his Christian Israel, into bondage to Mystery Babylon, the present world system. An important issue for all of us to ponder is: How then shall we act? How should we behave while in captivity to Mystery Babylon? I think you can see where this is going. We shall look to the example of Joseph the overcomer. Thank you for your kind attention. Amen

END

