

Joseph's Dreams

Our Old Testament reading for the day (according to the Bible Companion planner) introduces us to the dreams of Joseph, a man who experienced great trials and hardship, as he waited for the promise of God to be realized. It has often been pointed out that in Joseph, we have a type, or pattern which points forwards to our Lord Jesus Christ. In the events that befell him, and the dreams that were revealed to him, we see many principles that foreshadow the life and works of our Redeemer. Our exhortation for today will consider the dreams and the circumstances of Joseph, particularly in relation to our Master, as we prepare our minds for the partaking of the emblems before us.

The first point that comes out from the inspired record is Jacob's love for his son Joseph, and his brother's hatred for him. So we read: "When his brethren saw that *their father loved him* more than all his brethren, *they hated him*, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (Gen. 37:4).

Three times in five verses (vs. 4, 5, and 8), we are told that his brothers "hated" him. In these things, we have a foreshadowing of our Master. In relation to his Father, we are told in Colossians chapter one that he was: "the Son of his love" (Col. 1:13 margin). Being His only begotten Son in whom He was well pleased, Christ had a unique position of love before his Father. But his brethren – the greater extended family of Jacob – hated him, and sought his destruction, just like Joseph's brethren sought to remove him.

The First Epistle of John describes those who hate their brother thus: "... he that *hateth his brother* is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 Jno. 2:11).

Joseph's brothers then, were dwellers in darkness. In these things, we have a striking warning for ourselves. We are told elsewhere "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door" (Jas. 5:9). Holding a grudge against our brother can originate in many ways, many of which are minor things in themselves. A thoughtless word spoken out of place, an ill conceived action that causes offence. We all labour under the bondage of sin and death, and we ought to focus on building each other up in the Master. There is no place before Christ for grudges; consider how he dealt with those who rose up against him, inflicting upon him the most painful death possible: "then said Jesus, Father, Forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Before him, each thing that might cause offence fades into insignificance before what he endured – and what he forgave. We must exercise love that covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8), and recognize that we need forgiveness for our own indiscretions, as well as those who sin against us. In Joseph's brothers, we have an example of hatred towards Joseph – but the story does not end there, for in due time, they repented, and recognized his God-Given position over them. We look to them, therefore, in hope, and realization that our own sins can be blotted out by the one who is Greater than Joseph, even as we forgive those who trespass against us (Mat. 6:12).

THE DREAMS

Turning to the dreams that Joseph had, the details are very well known to us. The first dream was to do with the rising up of Joseph's sheaf of wheat, and his brother's sheaves bowing before it: "behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright: and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf" (Gen. 37:7). His brethren quickly grasped the significance of the dream: "Shalt thou indeed reign over us, or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words" (Gen. 37:8).

Both dreams were to do with Joseph's immediate family subjecting themselves before him. But just as Joseph himself was a Type of the Lord Jesus Christ, even so his dreams have a wider fulfilment to do with his greater family, and those who become Israelites through faith. So it is, as we shall see, the dreams of Joseph point forwards to things that will take place at the resurrection, and elevation of Christ.

The language is very specific: Joseph's sheaf "arose, and also stood upright". We have a lifting up of the sheaf referred to again in the Law that came through Moses, to do with the offering up of the firstfruits of the land. When Israel were come into the Land, it was commanded of them: "ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your

harvest unto the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Lev. 23:11).

In order for the firstfruits to be accepted, they had to be lifted up, and waved before Yahweh. This is alluded to by the Apostle, in speaking of the resurrection: “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept ... as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits: afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

As the first sheaf of wheat in Joseph’s dream “arose”, even so Christ was the first to rise up from the dead. But not he only, afterwards those that belong to him at his coming. Then, they will be subservient to Christ in the resurrection, and bow before him.

Notice the response of Joseph’s brothers to his dream: “his brethren said to him, shalt thou indeed reign over us? Or Shalt thou even have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words” (Gen. 37:8).

“Shalt thou indeed reign over us?” This is the pattern repeated in those who rejected our Lord Jesus Christ. In his parable of the Nobleman who went to a far country to receive a kingdom, and then return to take up his dominion, the interpretation is clear. Jesus himself was to depart into heaven, but shall return to take up his dominion. But this is the response: “his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying we will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). And of those, it is said: “those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me”. So it will be that those who refuse to accept Christ will be excluded from his kingdom and dominion to come.

THE SECOND DREAM

The second dream was different, in that it spoke of how Joseph’s mother and father would also subject themselves before him, as well as his brothers:

“Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and behold, the sun and the moon, and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth” (Gen. 37:9-10).

This dream then, was to do with the heavenly orbs being subject to Joseph. Genesis chapter 1 tells us of the purpose of the Sun, Moon and Stars: “God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also” (Gen. 1:16).

The Sun was to “rule” the day in providing light for man upon earth. Ultimately, God himself is the Sun (See Psa. 84:11: “Yahweh Elohim is a sun and shield”), but our Master is also depicted in this way, being the Sun of Righteousness who Malachi predicts shall arise with healing in his beams (Mal. 4:2). And nations are elsewhere said to have a sun, moon and stars in what we call the political heavens (Isa. 13:10, Ezek. 32:7, Joel 2:10, 3:15; Mat. 24:29).

The principle in the use of these figures is that God is in heaven, and we upon earth. He rules over us, and so the heavens speak of the place of rulership, and the earth those who are ruled. Hence, nations generally are said to have a sun, moon and stars, and the extended family of Israel more particularly, being subject to Messiah when he comes. In the future, the resurrected brothers of Messiah are likened to stars: “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake ... and they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan. 12:2-3).

Abraham was told that his seed would be as the stars for multitude (Gen. 15:5), a picture of the resurrected saints ruling in the kingdom to come. So it is, that the future inheritance is described as “the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12).

Joseph’s brothers, however, were not fixed stars giving light in the absence of the Sun. Jude gives a fitting description of the false brethren in the ecclesia: “ ... wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of

darkness for ever” (Jude 13). Joseph’s eleven brothers were in darkness, hating him, and rejecting the visions God had revealed.

It is interesting to note some other details in Jude in this context: “likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignitaries” (Jude 8). So we think of Joseph’s brothers rejecting the dominion depicted in the dreams, and speaking evil of Joseph himself. They called Joseph a “dreamer” (Gen. 37:19), but in fact it was they who had defiling dreams, of being rid of the One that God had appointed over them. And ultimately, their dreams never came to pass.

JOSEPH IN EGYPT

Returning to Genesis 37, we find that Joseph was sold as a slave, at the instigation of Judah. The brethren together determined to kill him, but Judah, being greedy of gain, did not see a personal profit in doing this. Far better to sell him, and have profit in ridding themselves of “this dreamer” and his aspirations:

“Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him ...” (Gen. 37:26-27).

In these things, we have a pattern to be later repeated in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ. The name “Judah” is the same as “Judas”, and it is significant that Judas betrayed his Master, by effectively selling him to the enemy. His overriding characteristic was the pursuit of personal gain. He was the keeper of the bag, and stole the money that was given for the poor (Jno. 12:6). For the love of money, he betrayed his Master. Judas’s hand was not personally against Christ to put him to death, but through his instrumentality, he was killed by the Romans (Compare David in the case of Uriah the Hittite).

Joseph then, was sold into bondage, and became a slave to Potiphar, the captain of the guard to Pharaoh. In this position, we see that he was “well favoured,” and that his was a “goodly person” before his Master (Gen. 39:6). He was second only to his Master, being placed over all that he had. Potiphar’s wife, however, had eyes for him, and sought to persuade him to lie carnally with her. He refused, and said: “... how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

Notice here, Joseph’s concern was that he would sin, not only against his Master, but “against God”, who had brought him into that position. Potiphar’s wife, however, became insistent, verse 10 telling us that “day by day” she sought to wear him down, and grant her request. As time went on, there came about a situation whereby she and he were alone in the house, and she sought to take advantage of the situation: “she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out” (Gen. 39:12). So it was, that Joseph refused to fornicate with his Master’s wife. Interestingly, there is an allusion to this in the inspired writings of the Apostle Paul:

“Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication ...” (1 Cor. 6:15-18).

Joseph refused to fornicate with his masters wife, as with an harlot. He literally fled fornication, as he ran to bring himself out of the situation. But interestingly, the Apostle continues to give the reason why we ought not be joined to the ecclesiastical harlot, in terms that remind us of Joseph: “Ye are not your own ... ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20).

Here is the point. Like Joseph, we are bought with a price. We are not our own, and neither was he. We must remain resolute in refusing to defile ourselves through a forbidden union with the world of iniquity, and the wiles of the harlot-system of spiritual Egypt, which can only bring us to destruction. Though sin will pressure us “day by day” we must not give in: flee fornication is our maxim, as we seek to remain pure and chaste to our Master. With Joseph refusing to lie with her, Potiphar’s wife orchestrated a situation whereby it appeared that Joseph had raped her, when no one else was about. The consequence of this was that he was cast into prison (39:20), where he was to remain for some time. But even in this dire situation, it is written that “Yahweh was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy” (Gen. 39:40).

Whilst he was in the prison, Joseph was not alone. Pharaoh's chief of the butlers, and chief of the bakers were with him, and they had two dreams, one each. Not knowing what the dreams meant, they told Joseph "we have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it." (Gen. 40:8). Joseph's response demonstrates humility before his God. "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me them, I pray you." Like Daniel before the wise men of Babylon, Joseph recognized that "there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets" (Dan. 2:23, 28) and that of his own self he could do nothing. So the dreams were related to him, and he accordingly gave the interpretation, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The first dream was the Butler's, and signified how that in three days he would be restored to his office and be taken out of prison. Though the Baker also desired a good answer, the second dream was very different, in that it spoke of how in three days, he was to be executed. Recognizing that the Butler would be blessed, Joseph asked him to "think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house" (Gen. 40:14).

In the event, however, we read that "yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him" (verse 23). So it was that Joseph's hopes of leaving the prison seemed to be dashed – humanly speaking – and he was left there in bondage. Interestingly, we find that Jesus was not alone in his condemnation. Being crucified with him, there were two others. And like in Joseph's experience, one was saved, and the other died without hope. But whereas the butler forgot Joseph, Jesus will not forget the one who turned to him in hope and faith.

JOSEPH IN PRISON

Psalms 105 gives us some insight into the experiences of Joseph in prison: "... He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: until the time that his word came: the word of Yahweh tried him" (Psa. 105:17-19). Reading the narrative in Genesis, when we find that Joseph was given authority over the other slaves and prisoners, we tend to forget, perhaps, the difficulties he was faced with. Taken from his family, sold as a common slave into a foreign land whose language he did not understand, he was "laid in iron." This Psalm hints at some of his suffering: his feet hurt him, being held in fetters. Yet, in all this, we find that "Yahweh was with him."

Psalms 105 tells us "the word of Yahweh tried him". How was this so? He had been given great and precious promises, and in these he trusted, even though every indication was, that he would spend the rest of his days in the darkness of an Egyptian prison. They tried him greatly. How could they be brought to pass? Like Abraham before him, against hope, he believed in hope, looking to the time when his dreams would be come reality. So Psalm 105 continues: "The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free" (verse 20). In a moment, he was taken, and lifted up above the people.

There are a number of passages that seem to allude to Joseph's experiences: "Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king. Who will not more be admonished. For out of prison, he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor" (Eccl. 4:13-14). So we think of Joseph brought out of prison to reign, taking the place of those who were born in the kingdom. "he raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill. That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people" (Psa. 113:7-8). How appropriate these words are to Joseph's experiences! He knew how to be poor, and how to abound, he was in the depths of despair in the darkness of the prison house, but was lifted up in glory. But notice the words here: God "raiseth up the poor out of the dust". This is the language of resurrection! The saints from all ages shall emerge, and be raised out of the dust, as we saw from Daniel 12 earlier – such is the hope that we share.

Joseph was elevated in authority, second only to Pharaoh, even as Jesus was raised up second only to God Himself. Of Joseph it is written that: "they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 41:43). Even so, it is written of Messiah, that: "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11).

Whereas in our day, the name "Jesus Christ" is used as a term of abuse, contempt, and derision, in the Kingdom age it will be honored. At the mention of it, folk will submit themselves, and bow before Him, out of respect for what it means

RETURNING TO THE DREAMS

We have shown in our brief consideration of the dreams given to Joseph, that whilst they have a clear application to the way in which his brethren would ultimately bow before him, they take us through to his wider family in the day of resurrection. We saw the reference in 1 Corinthians 15, to Christ, as the first fruit sheaf, elevated above his brethren; but it is significant to note that later in this chapter, the Resurrected body is likened to wheat, and the sun, moon and stars. So we read:

“that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that will be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain. But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. ... there are celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead ...” (1 Cor. 15:37-42).

This is the ultimate fulfilment of Joseph’s dreams: the resurrection of the dead, with all things being subject to Christ, the son of Yahweh’s Love. Again, Psalm 148 provides us with a description of the orbs in the political heavens being subject to Christ: “Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all you stars of light. Praise him ye heavens of heavens ...” (Psa. 148:2-3). These are the days that we so earnestly long for. Like Joseph, we may pass through affliction and difficulty – but we have the same confidence that Yahweh will be with us. The Word of God tried him – as it does us. There are times that we wonder how His Purpose will be realized, and how we can be lifted out of the difficulties of our own situations according to His Word. But the days are surely near when we shall join Joseph’s repentant brethren in giving praise to Yahweh, bending the knee before His Son, and being part of that great host that shall be given life: Christ as the firstfruits, then we as his brethren at his appearing.

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