

Genesis 37

Speaking peaceably with your brother

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Philadelphia is a major city in the US and certainly in its home state of Pennsylvania. It's named for a city of hope, a city where people would act differently. They chose a Greek name to remind themselves of this reality. Germany and France and Italy and England had been at war; most of Europe was fighting over religion and over control of religion. So the early Dutch (actually Deutch, meaning German) settlers came to America and settled in the eastern hills of the Allegheny Mountains. They wanted to make a statement about what they wanted out of life and who they wanted to be. They named the major city Philadelphia, which is the Greek for "City of Brotherly Love."

Today as we discuss the relationship between Joseph and his older siblings in this dysfunctional family of Abraham, we will major on brotherly love and its obvious lack. We will talk about those things that make for peace between brothers and what makes for disharmony. Also in this chapter, deception, the hallmark of the Family Who Lies Together, continues as a robe once given as a specialty item is now found as evidence of a crime of cruel hatred. What really is sad is how far hatred will make brothers leave their Philadelphia and go to a City of Lies.

On we go to Genesis 37.

The story begins in verse one with a(nother) reference to the land of Canaan, the once and future home of the family of Abraham. The link is made clear for Jacob and Joseph tie the land into the beginning and then later into the end of the book (50.24=25). Jacob will be mentioned over 60 times until Genesis ends; Joseph over 160. Land is key, but so is the idea of the fertile crescent travelogue featuring the Jewish people, which helps them to remember their purpose. Remember what God told Abram (chap 12) that he would be a major name with great reputation in the world, and a mission to be a blessing to the nations around. This role of the Jewish people with the nations is one of those major themes not only in Genesis, but also throughout Torah and the whole of the Tenach. God wants us to show His love and care to all the world.

And that love and care should show in the family of the Jewish people, but unfortunately, it's far from visible in chapter 37.

See how the brothers hate and hate deeper and finally hate so deeply that they punish their brother and their own father with discomfort and pain.

Let's go back to verse ²2. Joseph brings back a bad report about the siblings. And because of that you might say they are justified in the hatred they manifest towards him. But is hatred ever really justified? OK, you say, Jacob bought his son the manicolored robe and demonstrated favoritism. This choosing and letting the brothers know was another cause to hate. And for that some may not fault them either. The coat was "the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore" (2 Sam 13:18).

The progression of hatred, with or without a cause, is rapid and full. They hate Joseph, then they hate him more fully, yet again and finally sell him to slavery. It all begins in verse 4. They could not speak to him on friendly terms. The Hebrew is clear: speak in peace. וְלֹא יִכְלֹוּ דְבָרָוּ לְשָׁלָם

Peace. It was missing in the household. And hatred begins when people don't speak peaceably with one another. Even this week, I've been with people who didn't speak kindly; the people who alleged their commitment to Jesus. And this inability to speak in peace with father or daughter, with brother or brother, is what the world is awaiting. When they see believers in peace, living out the Gospel they allege to believe, the world will take notice.

I say that to us at Beth Messiah and those who are reading or hearing this online. May "welcome" to strangers be a watchword of our lives. May kindness be the language we speak to one another, especially those who enter for the first time with us. How desperately each of us needs to know and hear those kind things only our brothers can say. May we have a Philadelphia in our midst!

Hatred continues in verses 5, 8 and 11. Maybe they were mad at him for dobbing them in for stealing or for being lazy. Maybe they were readying to do a Jacob on their dad. You know, making the stripes or the spots work to their advantage. Maybe they were misusing family trust. The Bible is unclear what their 'bad' work or life was. Perhaps they were investing time in the neighboring tribes and getting in trouble like their sister Dinah had a couple chapters ago. They were after all, 50 miles away from their family home and

when they were in one place near Shechem, they moved another 15 miles to Dothan. I think they were becoming like the world they were intended to influence. Whatever they were doing, it was bad and Joseph knew this. And he told.

They have jealousy to their brother. He is the favored one and who likes that in any family? What a hard thing this must have been to Reuben, especially. He was the firstborn of Leah, the unfavored wife. Now he's the displaced firstborn. We've seen that before. Ishmael is similar; first son of the handmaid from Egypt, Hagar in the Abraham account. But Reuben will be a mensch at story's end. The other brothers decide to sell Joseph to the traveling nomads, the Midianites. They pull the brightly colored robe off him and rather than returning it as is, or selling it, they destroy it. Remember the times you found things that belonged to those you despised and you ruined them, pouring coca cola or hydrochloric acid on them? Kicking at things that disturb you on the golf course is similar, but this one is more personal. It was the object of the father's love that made the elder brothers very angry. Joseph who will eventually fulfill the dreams he saw, is despised by his brothers. Joseph whose birth announced yet a greater son to come, would be hated and lied about by his brothers. It all sounds so familiar.

Listen to the sounds of the announcement of the brothers in verse 37.

" הַיָּה בָּעַל הַחֲלֹמוֹת הַלְיָה בָּא " Baal hachalomot, meaning master of the dreams. Not just a one off dreamer; this is the one who can interpret them, He's a dream expert, and the one who thinks he's the boss because he sees them. The tongue is deep in the cheek on this one.

Hatred stirs up other sins. Anne Landers, the American Jewish advise columnist, wrote, "Hate is like acid. It can damage the vessel in which it is stored as well as destroy the object on which it is poured." (Sep, 1992) Henry Fosdick had said something similar 70 years before, "Hate kills both the person who you hate but also yourself as well. Hating people is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat." The book of Proverbs teaches us "Hatred stirs up dissension, but loves covers a multitude of sins" (10.12) John and Y'shua both taught against hating your brother in your heart (1 John 3.15, Matt. 5.21-26). Listen to this from Messiah,

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. "Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent."

So hatred stirs up envy and jealousy in the boys. And violence and murder is in their hearts. And lying. What a bad week it is for the righteousness meter to register anything on the family of Jacob. Yet in this

introduction of the 14 chapters focusing on the man Joseph, introduced as the 17 year old boy who will be Prime Minister, we see hope. And God's pleasure is manifest to the boy and to us who follow him. It's hard to see, but it was in the remembrance of all these things by Jacob (verse 11) and it was in the dreams themselves.

Dreams can give us hope. Edgar Allen Poe said "Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things that escape those who only dream by night." TE Lawrence said something similar although he used the term dangerous, of those day time dreamers. Not daydreamers or time wasters, but those who ponder what they want to do and how they can accomplish things, and give themselves to the dream's task. Lawrence said, "All men dream but not equally. Those who dream by night... awake to the day to find it was all vanity. But the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for the many act out their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible."

Compared with Y'shua

The similarities begin here between Y'shua and Joseph. They continue throughout the story of Joseph. He is my favorite Older Testament hero and Bible character. On the table up the back is a chart with some comparisons of Y'shua to Joseph. Now let me make this clear. I don't think the story is told to point to the Messiah. There are scores of messianic predictions in the Older Testament that are clear and point directly to the Lord Y'shua. But some stories have allegorical or symbolic one to one representation that almost cry to be noticed. This one story of one man Joseph seems to be one of those that does this.

Note the favored son of the father. Note his being given a sign of that favor. Note the brothers who should have loved him who despised him and sold him and considered him dead after a cruel bloodying. There will be many more, subtle as the parent who remembers these sayings until much later in the story (Mary in the Gospels Luke 2). Some will be much more clear. We'll see that Y'shua wants to draw all men to himself and that includes you and me to day. He wants us to love him, to dream with him about what can be, and to live peaceably with our families and our congregational neighbors. God make this a Philadelphia, make our homes a Philadelphia, make Sydney a City of Brotherly Love. Rule in my heart Y'shua, blessed Son of the Father.

Summary

Here are some things I see in our text in summary, and maybe you can add some to your own list as well:

- 1) Hate will ruin you long before it assaults the object of your hate
- 2) Speaking peaceably to your family is key in Kingdom understanding
- 3) No matter the pain in your seeing your family apparently destroyed, God wants you to treasure His plans in your heart

Dear friends...we have eternal life due to Y'shua to his love and care. ...

Actual tezt