

## **Sunday School Lesson September 6, 2020**

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed.

### **Sunday School Books for Fall Quarter are available in the Church office.**

Lesson for September 6, 2020, "Issues of Love"

Background Scripture from Genesis 37.

From the text section, The Human Situation. Jealousy, envy, and hate all continue to plague relationships. People continue to plot against one another. The strong take advantage of the weak. Some try to justify their actions by self-claimed authority, by their wealth, by their position in society, but such claims of superiority and exercise of privilege are not what God desires. The story of Joseph and his family illustrate what happens when people act out of jealousy or feelings of entitlements. Joseph was spared, but enslaved. This story continues to unfold through the end of Genesis, illustrating over and over again the imperfections of human community. Jealousy and hate still abound.

The entire book of Genesis is related to God's covenant with us. One of the high moments is Genesis 12 when God's covenant with Abram is established. Where does this story of Joseph and his family fit into this all-important theme? Remember that the high, sacred moment in Israelite history is the Exodus. Israel escapes their slavery in Egypt through the waters parted by God. The question arises as to how Israel ended up settled in Egypt, which is an important part in the story. The family of Israel had migrated into Canaan. This land was valued, for it was rich in water. One of the prophets actually refers to Canaan as the "way of the water." It had become a great trade route for other tribes, and was great for herdsman like Isaac and his family. The story of Joseph explains how and why they left Canaan, for Egypt.

The culture and customs of the near eastern people were different from those that developed in the west. The events in the narrative of Joseph predate the Mosaic Law. An understanding of certain laws had developed, such as the law of hospitality, penalties for stealing etc. Selling Joseph into slavery violated the culture and deeply wounded the laws of family.

Although the near eastern world lived so differently in relation to certain

rules and customs, the family of Israel experienced some of the same emotional turmoil and pain families experience today. This narrative reveals the author of Genesis was not creating stories of super men and women. This narrative has revenge, jealousy, arrogance, and greed. The positive and negative behaviors and attitudes present in the modern family were just as present in the family of Jacob. The two major destructive attitudes in this lesson are favoritism and jealousy.

Jacob was reared in a home of favoritism. His father loved Esau for his hunting skill and ability to provide food. Rebekah loved Jacob. The narrative doesn't tell us why she loved Jacob more than Esau, but the fact that she did is clearly stated. She devised with Jacob a scheme to steal the birthright that rightly, and by cultural law, belonged to Esau. This was one of the most important acts and transfers in the Old Testament world. The first-born son was to receive the full inheritance of the father. Rebekah and Jacob took advantage of Isaac's failing vision and stole the birthright. The giving of the birthright was given through the laying on of hands, and the words spoken by the father. Many ask why Isaac simply didn't take back the birthright back once he realized it was stolen. The reason Jacob was allowed to keep the birthright is related to the near eastern understanding of the power of "word." Words had creative power and once a vow or promise was spoken it was irrevocable. The world was created in the opening of Genesis through God's speaking. Isaac had spoken the birthright over Jacob and therefore could not rescind it.

Jacob was reared in a home of favoritism and greed. Children often learn to parent from their parents and can imitate the parenting and values they witness in the family. His family background might also explain Jacob's choice to ignore the animosity and jealousy possessing his own sons. He most often seems to have ignored what was very obvious.

The content of Genesis 37:2 reveals the author's major concern, "This is the account of Jacob" in this narrative in Genesis. The narrative begins by informing us of Joseph's age when the following recorded major events occurred. He was 17. We are introduced to the favoritism enacted by Jacob when Joseph was a young boy. When the tense encounter between Esau and Jacob finally reached a point of confrontation, Joseph and mother Rachel were placed in the rear of Jacob's entourage. Joseph's 10 other brothers were not offered this type of protection. The tone and pattern are set for the favoritism that is going to be displayed in the following years. We have no record of Jacob offering an explanation for his protection of Joseph and his mother. As we continue to read the narrative, we find Isaac with his head buried in the sand. He is watching and engaging in favoritism, and has to recognize the growing conflict in his other sons, but throughout the story he

says and does little.

The story then shifts gears a little from the favoritism of Jacob and tells us of Jacob's other children. He gave two of his wives to Leah and Rachel. Therefore, the two wives became the servants of Leah and Rachel. They were no longer wives, but were now designated concubines simply by Jacob's decree. When they gave birth, their children belonged to their biological mother's owner. Therefore, when Bilhah and Zilpah, the former wives, gave birth, their child did not belong to them, but instead to Leah and Rachel.

It is not explicitly stated, Jacob may have been grooming Joseph to head the family upon his passing. If so, he would violate the law of birthright for the second time. This might explain why Joseph felt he had the power and authority to report on the others to his father. He is only 17, but not a child. Certainly, he appears immature, but he would understand his actions and what they would mean to his brothers, especially when the report is a "bad report." He, like his father, doesn't seem to be that concerned with what their behaviors mean to the other brothers. These brothers would experience heartbreak, possibly feel unloved, and emotionally distant from their father. Before we think of Joseph as a heroic figure in the Old Testament story, remember he was first arrogant and seems to have little compassion for his own brothers. This will reveal the transforming power of God to fashion Joseph into a man who will forgive, provide and save this very family in Egypt.

We receive a pointedly, blatant statement of the behavior and feelings of Jacob toward his sons. It doesn't get plainer than he "loved Joseph more than any of his sons." This revelation also helps us understand the source of the emotional pain of Joseph's brothers, and the igniting of their anger that would take harsh, painful action in return. We are also offered a rationale for Jacob's favoritism for Joseph. The parallel to his own birth story is stunning. Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age, and therefore was certainly treated as a gift from God. Now, Joseph is born to Jacob in Jacob's old age and treated as precious gift.

The robe is an interesting part of the story. In our modern culture, we have many expressions to demonstrate wealth and status. In the Middle East clothing was a major expression of your importance. Even up to the time of the European kings we find they took great interest in their clothing, and often wore a particular form of clothing to meet or engage with dignitaries. The text reads that Jacob "made the robe." We do not know if Jacob himself made the robe, especially with his impaired vision. He was also wealthy enough, with enough servants to have it made. Giving the robe

to Joseph was a significant event with significant meaning. The Hebrew word for "robe" used here is used on only one other occasion in the Old Testament. The word is used to describe the garment King David's daughter wore. The robe would have been ornate and set Joseph apart in a manner that incensed his brothers. Joseph proudly wore it and it became a constant reminder to his brothers that he was the favored one. Their jealousy had now become hate. It was a constant reminder that their father loved Joseph far more than them. Jacob does nothing to alleviate their hurt or stop their growing animosity. Their hatred now controlled their tongues, for they could not utter one good word to Joseph. Joseph's every word would have been despised, and wearing his robe would prove to be an act of arrogance. They hated Joseph so deeply they inflicted a painful consequence which can hurt. They would use silence as their weapon of hate or refuse to utter one kind word to him. Silence may prove silent to the ear, but it speaks volumes and does so loud and clear. When we refuse to speak to another, we are informing them they mean little or nothing to us, and are not even worth a word. Jealousy recognizes no color, gender, status or age except for young children. Sadly, our culture will teach them jealousy soon enough.

The hatred of the brothers had now also become full-fledged jealousy. The brothers will find themselves not in the field near the sheep, but near a cistern into which they will throw their brother.

Joseph was blessed with a spiritual gift that could be used for the good of many. When we recognize that we might have a true spiritual gift, the emphasis is upon the gift and what it accomplishes for God. Joseph makes the dream about him. He seems just as concerned that his brothers know "he had the dream" as the message of the dream. The manner in which Joseph shared the dream must have had an arrogant tone, for instead of listening to the dream's meaning, their attention is upon Joseph and "they hate him all the more."

Even if the dream was true, Joseph gained nothing, and nothing redemptive occurred when he shared it with his brothers. Without doubt, Joseph told the dream in a manner in which it was obvious that he was the powerful one, and his brothers were subservient. His choice of words must have dripped with arrogance to create an even deeper hatred in his brothers.

Joseph felt he was doing best telling his dream to his brothers. But he without doubt possesses little tact and even less compassion. Telling his brothers they would one day bow before him was no way to resolve the hatred they possessed or heal the broken relationship. Jealousy and hate only intensified. Verse 9 reveals that either Joseph couldn't have cared less

about his brother's response, or just had trouble relating to the feelings of others.

Joseph, second dream differed little from the first in content. In scope it was grander, more threatening to his brothers, and now included his father and mother. The near eastern people often thought of the heavens as the abode of the gods. When the family of Israel prayed it is most probable they looked upward. The heavens also provided the signs of events to come upon earth. Psalm 19, provide an understanding of what the heavens meant to the near eastern people, surrounded by fantastic displays of God's craftsmanship. When Joseph claims his dream revealed that even the heavens would bow before him it was upsetting and threatening. This dream opens the door from the first real response of Jacob toward Joseph's claims and their implications.

Jacob well knew the law of birthright, for he had stolen it from Esau. The father, as the most powerful figure in the family, passed all he owned to his firstborn son. Now one of his sons is placing his father in a subservient position. Jacob is disturbed, asking if he and Joseph's mother are being asked to join the heavens in bowing to his young son. To bow was an act of worship, an act of subservience, and an act in which the one bowing recognizes the greater power of the one before whom he bows.

Jacob actually confronts Joseph, whom he has allowed to emotionally and culturally treat his brothers as servants instead of family. Jacob also had dreams. But his dreams gave him directions concerning the direction his family should take. Joseph's dreams were about himself and the powerful position he would receive.

The text reveals they may have been starting to take Joseph's dreams seriously. Joseph was now more than an arrogant aggravating brother, he was a threat. Then the narrative states that their hatred transformed into jealousy. The lesson says the brothers became jealous, and their jealousy was an even stronger emotion and response than their seething hatred. Hatred is a feeling, a feeling that affects how we relate to the one hated. Jealousy on the other hand, is mostly concerned with vision. They begin to envision what Joseph may have that they do not and grow jealous. Watching their father dote over Joseph for years filled their eyes with visions and memories that made them jealous of what Joseph had and they did not.

Jealousy makes us stand in places we would never otherwise stand, as the Pharisees did at the grain field with Jesus. The jealousy of the brothers will lead them to a cistern. Their jealousy envisions the removal of Joseph from their lives, as if this would rid them of their hatred and Jacob's blatant

favoritism.

Jacob did not forget Joseph's second dream and kept it "in mind." Jacob realized the implications of Joseph's dreams and began to watch Joseph for signs that his dreams might indeed come to pass.

In Genesis 37:23-24, Jacob sent Joseph to his brothers to deliver information. The brothers were herding near a major trade route. Many have wondered why so many nations wanted to own Israel. The land served as a bridge, allowing tribes and merchants to travel from Asia Minor to Egypt. The land also provided water, a valuable commodity in the Middle East. His brothers worked near one of the routes and Midianite trade merchants traveled through. The brothers recognized the approach of the merchants as an opportunity to enact the hatred and jealousy that consumed them for years.

The purchasing of slaves and servants was a common practice. The brothers had stripped Joseph of the robe. They ripped away the symbol of their father's favoritism. Joseph had worn it as a badge of his father's selective love. Their proud brother wearing his regal robe was now stripped down as a slave, imprisoned in a cistern. He had been stripped of all that made him feel favored and now would feel what his brothers, his family servants, and others felt. They later slaughtered a goat and smeared the blood on the robe to convince Jacob his favorite son had been killed by a wild animal. The brothers had not only sold their brother into slavery, they had made their father a slave to his grief.

Joseph was sold to the Midianites for twenty shekels of silver, the normal price for purchasing a common slave. The Midianites took their new purchase down into Egypt and his family did not see him for years. This is the beginning of Israel's presence in Egypt from where they will escape in God's provision of the Exodus.

From the text section, Stepping into the World. Some individuals will be more likable than others. But this reality can be acknowledged without generation the favoritism shown by Jacob. Loving all doesn't require liking all. The temptation to disregard the talents of someone who is not a favorite or to ignore the opinions or ideas of others who are less likeable to be resisted. Perhaps most importantly, violence and injustices must always be resisted. Even when someone is in the wrong, harassment or murder is never a proper response. Silencing a troublemaker may be tempting, but working out difficulties, changing harmful institutions, and practicing forgiveness are all better approaches. Justice is God's desire, and we are always to work toward that end.

Whether more than 1,000 years ago or today, families can be thrown in disarray through parents who choose to parent disconnected from the members of their family. Parents should be aware of what is occurring in their children's lives. Demonstrating love toward each as equally as possible creates an atmosphere in which familial love and self-confidence can grow in the children. The narrative never reveals to us the effect of the disconnected family on the mother. Mothers certainly hurt and experienced grief, as did Jacob. Thankfully, most families inflicted with jealousy and hatred do not participate in violence. It is an act of emotional violence to disregard a hurting family member, to allow a child to feel unwanted and unworthy, or to simply neglect them. A family infected with the sins of hatred, jealousy and pride affects and hurts everyone in the family. Families can engage in long-lasting bitterness and division. Some may experience depression and some even physical illness from the stress in which they live. When a family is overcome with jealousy and hate it is a serious matter needing prayer and counsel. Jacob's behavior should teach us that brokenness in a family should never be ignored.

There is a positive power present in the story. God uses the sinfulness of this family for his future glorious purposes. God never gives up on us, and we are never useless to God. God's loving redemption is always available, and his sovereign purposes will be fulfilled. No situation is hopeless. Paul wrote, "We are saved by hope." (Romans 8:24). A family can be saved through the hope of God's redemption as much as the individual.

**Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.**

Next week's lesson September 13, 2020, "God Rewards Obedience"

Background Scripture from Genesis chapter 41:14-57.

*Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Lessons from Bible in Life, South Georgia Advocate Sunday School Lesson, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.*