

## WHEN JEALOUSY RULES

In our study of Old Testament characters and events we see the unfolding and revealing of the nature of God as He deals with each of the characters we encounter. As we examined Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we saw evidence of the triune nature of God. In Abraham, we learned more about God, the Father. In Isaac, we see some of the provision and character of the Son, and then in Jacob, we saw how the Holy Spirit interacts in our lives to bring about the transformation that God would have us make from relying on our natural strength to relying on His spiritual strength.

We continue with the characters that were significant in the developing of the Hebrew nation we will next look at Joseph. We pick up the story of Joseph when he was just a teenager. Jacob was old enough to be Joseph's grandfather and Joseph wound up being quite pampered. The older brothers rather resented the fact that Joseph received favored treatment. This resentment and jealousy turned out to be the tool that God used to set a plan into motion that would save this family from starvation and allow them to grow into a mighty nation.

**GENESIS 37:3** Jacob's attitude toward Joseph is understandable. He was the oldest son of Rachael. Rachael would have been his only wife had he not been tricked by Laban. Jacob did not hide his feelings for the boy and even went so far as to dress him differently from the others. The coat of many colors was symbolic of authority and privilege. It was sort of like dressing one child up in a three-piece suit while all the rest of the kids had to wear overalls. Of course, being a naive teenager, Joseph probably wore it all the time. He likely would strut around and show off because that the way teens (and even adults) act in their immaturity.

**GENESIS 37:4** Usually, if a parent shows partiality toward one child, the other children do not address their conflict to the parent, where it belongs, but at the one child. It is so difficult to hide feelings that we have toward one another. In the case of Joseph's brothers the resentment worked its way out in their tone of voice and what they said to the youngster. It was likely that every time that he came around or said anything that the older boys would verbally abuse him and criticize him. He probably would wonder, "What eating them?" Joseph did not feel the same way about them, and he could not understand the world of grown ups. So many kids today encounter the same kind of criticism from parents, teachers, other children. Usually, they learn to adjust their behavior to escape the abuse or they will retreat into isolationism. Apparently, Joseph had a little dream world that he retreated to in order to feel better about himself. He (more than likely) felt inferior to his older brothers. They were bigger, stronger, knew more about things and they tried to make him feel inferior. Joseph's dreams helped to compensate for this negative influence in his life. In his dreams, he was no longer inferior, in fact, he was superior. The sheaf of grain dream was one such example. The other one was the sun, moon and 11 stars bowing down to him. As it turned out, these were not just idle dreams but predictions of the future. Joseph was open in sharing about his dreams and this raised much more jealousy in his brothers. The missing ingredient in the brothers was love. The missing element in Joseph, maturity.

Jacob's family made their living raising sheep. The older sons had driven the flocks a long way to find adequate pasture. They had been gone a long time and Jacob was

concerned. So concerned was he that he sent Joseph to see if they were OK. Jacob was concerned about all his children. It was the small favors and obvious partiality that made the older boys so resentful that they hated Joseph.

**GENESIS 37:17-22** It is my guess that whoever first brought up the subject of killing Joseph was probably half joking. You have heard people make comment such as that and not really be serious. The rest of the group picked it up and a plot developed as to how they might get away with it. Reuben overheard all this scheming and, being fearful that they might be getting too serious, suggest that they just put him in a nearby cistern. Reuben was the eldest and felt more responsibility than the rest. He did not want to oppose the others lest they turn on him. His intent was to rescue Joseph and give the others a way out of their decision once they had a chance to think about it. If they killed Joseph, then they would have difficulty undoing it.

**GENESIS 37:23-24** This action they took had the potential of helping them work out some of their frustrations and would get the attention of Joseph. He needed to learn to be a little less open in sharing all his dreams. It is OK to share your dreams with those that really love you – otherwise, your dreams of success will only serve to cause resentment and envy in others.

**GENESIS 37:25-28** All of a sudden Reuben had lost control of the situation. We don't know if the suggestion that they sell Joseph was seriously made; however, the crowd or mob effect took control and all of a sudden the group had made a decision that no one of them would have made on his own. This shows one of the basic dangers of democratic rule. Unless, those that make up the crowd are acting out of love, then rule is by reason of power rather than reason of what is right. In this case, power was in control because of they were in the majority. The other thing for us to learn is that because Reuben did not take his opportunity to stand up for right openly (he was not willing to sacrifice the relationship with his brothers for what was right), then he lost control of the situation and became guilty by association even though, in this heart, he was not a party to the matter. When we fail to take a stand when the group of which we are a part makes the wrong decision, then we are guilty by association.

Let us not forget that God is in control and the events that happen that day in Dothan and all those events that lead up to those events were things that God could use to bring about GOOD for these special chosen descendant of Abraham. It would take years of guilt on the part of the older brothers; and years of discipline on the part of Joseph for all of them to come to realize that God uses the things that He allows to come into our lives to help shape us and make us ready for His eternal purposes.