

Genesis

Creation, Covenants, All Grace – study 26



LIES, LICENTIOUSNESS and LOYALTY

JACOB in his OFFSPRING (37:1-38:30)

37:1-11 Are Joseph's dreams born of arrogance, therefore justifying his brothers' hatred? (40:8; 41:15,16)

(1) ... since at Joseph's elevation in his 30th year 13 years had elapsed since he was sold in this 17th year, Isaac was, when Joseph disappeared, 167 years old. Hence he shared for 13 years the grief of his son Jacob for the loss of Joseph, and his life ended in the deep unilluminated darkness of this sorrow. The history buries him thus early in order to pass over his grave to the new great turn in the history of Israel. Hitherto the history of Jacob had been always subordinated to the history of Isaac, from which Jacob starts and to which he returns. But now that he has become the father of twelve sons, from whom the twelve-tribed nation of Israel descends, his own independent *Toledoth* may begin. -- **Franz Delitzsch**, *New Commentary on Genesis* Vol.2 p.237

(2) Like Isaac and Jacob before him, Joseph is introduced as a specially chosen member of his family. This divine election is one of the themes of Genesis (cf. Rom. 9:11ff.), and God's design is seen to be no more thwarted by the indiscretion of its allies (here Israel and Joseph) than by the malice of its opponents. The account of the dreams, coming at the outset, makes God, not Joseph, the 'hero' of the story: it is not a tale of human success but of divine sovereignty. ... Israel had learnt nothing from his early experience of favouritism. It would bear an even heavier crop of hatred and deceit than it had yielded in his own youth. -- **Derek Kidner**, *Genesis* p.180

(3) For the proper understanding of what follows it is necessary to bear in mind that what may be called the *personal* history of the patriarchs ceases with Jacob; or rather that it now merges into that of the *children* of Israel -- of the family, and

of the tribes. The purpose of God with the patriarchs as *individuals* had been fulfilled, when Jacob had become father of the twelve, who were in turn to be the ancestors of the chosen people. Hence the personal manifestations of God to individuals now also ceased. -- **Alfred Edersheim**, *Bible History* vol.1 p.142

37:12-36 Assess the brothers' morality? (cf. Luke 15:30,32)

(4) Yet they had just enough of conscience left to keep them from being absolutely at their ease. After all, the dreamer was their brother. That might not be a reason for showing him any kindness, but it was a reason for being prudent about their own safety. Fratricide was perhaps too risky a business. The stain of a brother's blood has always been a nasty thing, and the remorse of Cain had better be avoided. But if conscience is afraid of blood, it will not be troubled at the thought of bondage. ... 'Kindness and truth' are wedded in Genesis (24:49; 47:29); they naturally draw to each other everywhere; there is a pre-established harmony between them. The same is true of their opposites. Jacob's sons, having sold their young brother, made it next to impossible for themselves to speak the truth. -- **James Strahan**, *Hebrew Ideals in Genesis* p.283

(5) No doubt, his brothers had been unwilling enough to be embarrassed by his presence, for there is nothing that wild young men dislike more than the constraint put on them by the presence of an innocent youth; and when they found out that this 'milk-sop' of a brother was a spy and a telltale, their wrath blazed up. -- **Alexander Maclaren**, *Expositions: Genesis* p.235

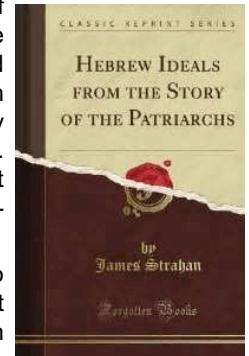
(6) Reuben had every cause, in addition to his natural temperament ... to hesitate over the plot. *Blood*, especially a brother's (4:10; 9:5b), was sacrosanct, and he as eldest of the family would be chiefly answerable for it. Also he was already out of his father's favour (35:22). What he did with Joseph could either ruin him or reinstate him. -- **Derek Kidner**, *op. cit.*, p.182

(7) [Sheol] ... the place to which all terrestrial beings are summoned. Thither is Joseph gone, thither where human existence continues in a shadow manner, will Jacob follow him; till then there is no more comfort or joy for him. -- **Franz Delitzsch**, *op. cit.*, p.264

(8) There are few bitterer sorrows than for a parent to see the children of his own sin in the sins of his children. Jacob might have felt that bitterness, as he looked round on the lovelessness and dark, passionate selfishness of his children, and remembered his own early crimes against Esau. He might have seen that his unwise fondness for the son of his Rachel had led to the brothers' hatred, though he did not know that that hatred had plunged the arrow into his soul. Whether he knew it or not, his own conduct had feathered the arrow. -- **A. Maclaren**, *op. cit.*, pp.247,248

38:1-23 What is the reason for this digression in the story?

(9) Sheep-shearing was a festive time (cf. 1 Sa. 25:4,11,36), when sexual temptation would be sharpened by the Canaanite cult, which encouraged ritual



fornication as fertility magic. The word for *harlot* in verses 21,22 suggests that Tamar posed as a cult-prostitute, perhaps to make doubly sure of her victim. The *veil* of verse 14 seems to confirm this, since (if Assyrian law is any guide) no prostitute except a (married) cultic one might wear it. -- **D. Kidner**, p.188

(10) Perez, Zerah and Shelah are the three ancestors of the three chief families of the tribe of Judah at the departure from Egypt, Num. xxvi. 20. -- **F. Delitzsch**, *op. cit.*, p.275

(11) The picture of the moral condition of the fathers of the Jewish tribes is surely a strong argument for the historical accuracy of the narrative. It would be strange if the legends of a race, instead of glorifying, should blacken the characters of its founders. No motive can

be alleged which would explain such a picture; its only explanation is its truth.

The ugly story, too, throws vivid light on that thought, which prophets ever reiterated, 'not for your sakes, but for My Name's sake.' The divine choice of Israel was grounded, no on merit, but on sovereign purpose. And the undisguised plainness of the narrative of their sins is but of a piece with the tone of Scripture throughout. It never palliates the faults even of its best men. It tells its story without comment. It never indulges in condemnation any more than in praise. ... Many misconceptions of Old Testament morality would have been avoided by keeping that simple fact in view. -- **A. Maclaren**, *op. cit.*, p.243

"No motive can be alleged which would explain such a picture; its only explanation is its truth."

38:24-30 What is the providential reason for this sordid tale? (Matt. 1:1-16; esp. vv.3,5)

(12) Before Moses proceeds in relating the history of Joseph, he inserts the genealogy of Judah, to which he devotes more labour, because the Redeemer was thence to derive his origin; for the continuous history of that tribe, from which salvation was to be sought, could not remain unknown, without less. And yet its glorious nobility is not here celebrated, but the greatest disgrace of the family is exposed. -- **J. Calvin**, *Genesis Vol.2* p.277

(13) Through Perez, Tamar was the ancestress of the first and of the second David. How homely are the pictures of the ancestors of Israel! There is almost more shadow than light in them. National ambition played no part in, or with them. Not a trace of mythic idealization is to be seen. The ancestors of Israel do not appear as demi-gods. Their elevation consists in their conquering, in virtue of the measure of grace bestowed upon them, or, if they succumb, in their ever rising again. **Franz Delitzsch**, *op.cit.*, pp.275,276

JACOB'S OTHER SON (39:1-23)

39:1-5 What does Moses want us to see? (12:3; 26:4; 28:14)

(14) Probably nothing is more indicative of the wide chasm separating Israel from its neighbours than the line of argument used by Joseph in rejecting the repeated entreaties of the would-be adulteress. Speaking to a pagan woman,

he says that his submission would be both a violation of the confidence placed in him by his master, and a sin against God. ... It is not a matter of social impropriety or breach of convention, not just an indignity to the husband or an outrage upon society. ... This concept of morality as God-given, rather than utilitarian, suffuses the Torah legislation and explains a fundamental difference in its treatment of adultery from that of the ancient law codes of the Near East. In the latter, the guilty parties are regarded as having committed an affront to the husband who, for that reason, is accorded the power to determine the punishment. -- **Nahum Sarna**, *Understanding Genesis* p.217

(15) The story of Joseph's life in Egypt begins with the quiet statement that the LORD was with him (v.2) ... repeated 3 times ... (vv.3,21,23)... It was sometimes said among the Hebrews that Jahveh's presence was confined to the land of Canaan, to the streams and hills and groves of the country of their birth, while He left other territories to be ruled by other gods, so that when any of His people crossed the border they were beyond His reach and care. This was a popular notion which the writers of Genesis nowhere countenance. They say that the LORD was with Jacob in Syria and with Joseph in Egypt, and that in these lands the same God directed the minds of such men as Laban and Pharaoh. He was Joseph's Guardian in his exile. -- **James Strahan**, *op. cit.*, p.286

39:6-23 Does Joseph always know the Lord is with him? (vv. 2,21; Psalm 105:18)

(16) Joseph's reasons for refusal (8,9) were those that another man might have given for yielding, so neutral is the force of circumstances. His freedom from supervision and his rapid promotion, which have corrupted other stewards (*cf.* Is. 22:15-25; Lk. 16:1ff.), and his realization that one realm only (9) was barred to him (which others, from Eve onwards, have construed as a frustration) were all arguments to him for loyalty. By giving the proposition its right name of *wickedness* (9) he made truth his ally, and by relating all to God (9c) he rooted his loyalty to his master deep enough to hold. -- **Derek Kidner**, *op. cit.*, p.190

(17) It is a common mistake to suppose that earnest religion and uprightness must necessarily be attended by success, even in this world. It is, indeed, true that God will not withhold any good thing from those whose Sun and Shield He is; but then success may not always be a good thing for them. Besides, God often tries the faith and patience of His people -- and that is the meaning of many trials. Still oftener are they needed for discipline and training, or that they may learn to glorify God in their sufferings. In the case of Joseph it was both a temptation and a trial by which he was prepared, outwardly and inwardly, for the position he was to occupy. ... he firmly resisted evil, alike from a sense of integrity towards his master, and, above all, from dread "of this great wickedness and sin against God." -- **A. Edersheim**, *op. cit.*, pp.149,150

(18) It is a striking fact that the main impression of this whole section is that of the corruption of the family of Jacob. In the midst of it however, there is the wonderful story of the eldest born son of his beloved Rachel, maintaining his purity in the midst of the most trying circumstances, and against fierce temptation ... -- **G. Campbell Morgan**, *The Analysed Bible: Genesis* p.223