

With Malice Aforethought

by Wayne Goff

Genesis 37:1-11 introduces us to the family of the patriarch Jacob, and the issues that arose because of his son, Joseph. In a few words, Joseph is named as the seventeen year old who was “*loved*” more than all his brothers because he was the son of his father’s old age (v. 3). He also “*brought a bad report of them to his father*” (v. 2). Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colors (v. 3) which further incensed his siblings. Finally, and I believe somewhat naively, Joseph tells his brothers and father of the dreams he had been having. The sheaves of his brothers bowed down to his sheaf (vv. 6-7), and the sun, moon, and stars bowed down to Joseph (v. 9).

The brothers had gotten to the point of so **hating** Joseph (v. 4) that they could not speak peaceably to him. They hated him **even more** when they heard of his dreams (vv. 5, 8). Their hatred turned into malignant “**envy**” (v. 11), so they determined to kill their own brother!

One does not have to defend Joseph to understand that the brothers’ hatred and envy of their sibling was wrong. They could have controlled their hatred and overcome it with love, patience, longsuffering and goodness. They **chose** not to do so! God used their sinful disposition to providentially accomplish his plan of saving Jacob’s family during a time of famine, and to build up a people *separated* from Egypt by enslavement. When we read the results of God’s plan, we understand the need for Jacob’s sons to live in Egypt for many years. But that does not excuse their sin! The lesson for us is to be sure that we do not let our personal opinions, judgments and disagreements evolve into dislike, anger, resentment and then hatred. We can practice the fruit of the Spirit and do much better (Gal. 5:22).

In Joseph’s own words to his brothers, we read: “*But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive*” (Gen. 50:20). But just think how bad things could have gotten if Joseph had decided to return evil for evil! Some things are better off left in the hands of God, Who will judge all of us *wisely, fairly, and mercifully*. Don’t let Satan rule over you.

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