

This chapter of Genesis introduces “the account of Jacob” of which the central figure is Joseph. The context is important so that we do not lose sight of the bigger picture in the midst of familiar stories. There is (1) the bigger picture of God's plan of redemption through the seed of Abraham, (2) the immediate needs of the people of Israel as they left Egypt and traveled to Canaan (*cf.* Gen. 15:13-16; 46:2-3), and (3) the whole story of Joseph within Genesis. The last points out the evil intent of Joseph's brothers (Gen 50:20) which is developed in this chapter.

### **I. *Evil hearts***

Joseph's brothers were filled with hatred toward Joseph (vv 4, 8). At least two reasons, humanly speaking, can be observed in the text.

#### **1. *Preferential treatment***

Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons. He demonstrated this with his gift of a “richly, ornamented robe” for him. Another evidence of his preference may have been Jacob's use of Joseph to report on his brothers' activities (see vv 12-14; *cf.* v 2). This preferential treatment stirred up the hatred of the brothers.

#### **2. *An imagined sense superiority***

Joseph had two dreams which his brothers correctly understood as symbolizing their submission to Joseph. Their reaction was clearly negative. His dreams caused Joseph's brothers to hate him all the more (v 5) and to become angrily jealous (v 11).

We know from reading the rest of Genesis, that these dreams did come true. They were probably given by God who gave them in two forms as an indication “that the matter has been firmly decided by God” (Gen 41:32). The brothers were pre-inclined by their own hatred of Joseph to project on him a personal self-inflation.

The problem with the brothers was their own evil heart. They hated Joseph because the father preferred him, though Joseph had nothing to do with that. They hated Joseph all the more because of the dreams, though Joseph had not imagined these things for himself, but had them from God.

### **II. *Evil actions***

The evil actions of the brothers emerge as Joseph approaches to check how they are doing.

1. They plotted murder. Hate led to murderous actions.
2. They sought material profit, selling their brother into slavery
3. They planned deception.

James (1:13-15) describes well the process which we find here. “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.<sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” (NIV) Joseph's brothers were full of hate and envy. Their evil hearts gave birth to sinful, evil action.

### **III. *Evil results***

1. Slavery for Joseph
2. Personal guilt: both real and sensed (*cf.* Gen 42:21).
3. Family sorrow

Four centuries later the nation of Israel would be leaving Egypt to return to the promised land of Canaan. God had made them a great nation in Egypt but the path there was through the evil actions of their ancestors. God graciously had provided for them, although they were evil in heart and action.

We too were thoroughly sinners. But “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God's grace continues for sinful creatures who do not deserve it.