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Introduction

Jacob continues to sojourn in Canaan, Genesis 37:1. Joseph, being seventeen years of age, is employed in feeding the flocks of his father, Genesis 37:2. Is loved by his father more than the rest of his brethren, Genesis 37:3. His brethren envy him, Genesis 37:4. His dream of the sheaves, Genesis 37:5-7. His brethren interpret it, and hate him on the account, Genesis 37:8. His dream of the sun, moon, and eleven stars, Genesis 37:9-12. Jacob sends him to visit his brethren, who were with the flock in Shechem, Genesis 37:13, Genesis 37:14. He wanders in the field, and is directed to go to Dothan, whither his brethren had removed the flocks, Genesis 37:15-17. Seeing him coming they conspire to destroy him, Genesis 37:18-20. Reuben, secretly intending to deliver him, counsels his brethren not to kill, but to put him into a pit, Genesis 37:21, Genesis 37:22. They strip Joseph of his coat of many colors, and put him into a pit, Genesis 37:23, Genesis 37:24. They afterwards draw him out, and sell him to a company of Ishmaelite merchants for twenty pieces of silver, who carry him into Egypt, Genesis 37:25-28. Reuben returns to the pit, and not finding Joseph, is greatly affected, Genesis 37:29, Genesis 37:30. Joseph's brethren dip his coat in goat's blood to persuade his father that he had been devoured by a wild beast, Genesis 37:31-33. Jacob is greatly distressed, Genesis 37:34, Genesis 37:35. Joseph is sold in Egypt to Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard, Genesis 37:36.

Verse 1

Wherein his father was a stranger - $\text{m}^{\text{g}}\text{e}\text{r}\text{e}\text{y}\text{ } \text{a}\text{b}\text{i}\text{v}$ (megurey abiv), Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, as the margin very properly reads it. The place was probably the vale of Hebron, see Genesis 37:14.

Verse 2

These are the generations - $\text{t}^{\text{o}}\text{l}^{\text{e}}\text{d}^{\text{o}}\text{t}$ (toledoth), the history of the lives and actions of Jacob and his sons; for in this general sense the original must be taken, as in the whole of the ensuing history there is no particular account of any genealogical succession. Yet the words may be understood as referring to the tables or genealogical lists in the preceding chapter; and if so, the original must be understood in its common acceptation.

The lad was with the sons of Bilhah - It is supposed that our word lad comes from the Hebrew $\text{y}^{\text{e}}\text{l}^{\text{e}}\text{d}$ (yeled), a child, a son; and that lass is a contraction of ladess, the female of lad, a girl, a young woman. Some have supposed that King James desired the translators to insert this word; but this must be a mistake, as the word occurs in this place in Edmund Beke's Bible, printed in 1549; and still earlier in that of Coverdale, printed in 1535.

Brought unto his father their evil report - Conjecture has been busily employed to find out what this evil report might be; but it is needless to inquire what it was, as on this head the sacred text is perfectly silent. All the use we can make of this information is, that it was one cause of increasing his brothers' hatred to him, which was first excited by his father's partiality, and secondly by his own dreams.

Verse 3

A coat of many colors - $\text{k}^{\text{e}}\text{t}^{\text{h}}^{\text{o}}\text{n}^{\text{e}}\text{t}^{\text{h}}\text{ } \text{p}^{\text{a}}\text{s}\text{s}\text{i}\text{m}$ (kethoneth passim), a coat made up of stripes of differently colored cloth. Similar to this was the toga praetexta of the Roman youth, which was white, striped or fringed with purple; this they wore till they were seventeen years of age, when they changed it for the toga virilis, or toga pura, which was all white. Such vestures as clothing of distinction are worn all over Persia, India, and China to the present day. It is no wonder that his brethren should envy him, when his father had thus made him such a distinguished object of his partial love. We have already seen some of the evils produced by this unwarrantable conduct of parents in preferring one child to all the rest. The old fable of the ape and her favorite cub, which she hugged to death through kindness, was directed against such foolish parental fondnesses as these.

Verse 4

And could not speak peaceably unto him - Does not this imply, in our use of the term, that they were continually quarrelling with him? but this is no meaning of the original: $\text{v}^{\text{e}}\text{l}^{\text{o}}\text{ } \text{y}^{\text{a}}\text{c}^{\text{h}}^{\text{e}}\text{l}^{\text{u}}\text{ } \text{d}^{\text{a}}\text{b}\text{b}^{\text{e}}\text{r}^{\text{o}}\text{ } \text{l}^{\text{e}}\text{s}^{\text{h}}^{\text{a}}\text{l}^{\text{o}}\text{m}$ (velo yachelu dabbero leshalom), they could not speak peace to him, i. e., they would not accost him in a friendly manner. They would not even wish him well. The eastern method of salutation is, Peace be to thee! $\text{s}^{\text{h}}^{\text{a}}\text{l}^{\text{o}}\text{m}$ (shalom lecha), among the Hebrews, and (salam), peace, or (salam kebibi), peace to thee my friend, among the Arabs. Now as peace among those nations comprehends all kinds of blessings spiritual and temporal, so they are careful not to say it to those whom they do not cordially wish well. It is not an unusual thing for an Arab or a Turk to hesitate to return the (salam), if given by a Christian, or by one of whom he has

not a favorable opinion: and this, in their own country, may be ever considered as a mark of hostility; not only as a proof that they do not wish you well, but that if they have an opportunity they will do you an injury. This was precisely the case with respect to Joseph's brethren: they would not give him the (salam), and therefore felt themselves at liberty to take the first opportunity to injure him.

Verse 7

We were binding sheaves in the field - Though in these early times we read little of tillage, yet it is evident from this circumstance that it was practiced by Jacob and his sons. The whole of this dream is so very plain as to require no comment, unless we could suppose that the sheaves of grain might have some reference to the plenty in Egypt under Joseph's superintendence, and the scarcity in Canaan, which obliged the brethren to go down to Egypt for corn, where the dream was most literally fulfilled, his brethren there bowing in the most abject manner before him.

Verse 9

He dreamed yet another dream - This is as clear as the preceding. But how could Jacob say, Shall I and thy mother, etc., when Rachel his mother was dead some time before this? Perhaps Jacob might hint, by this explanation, the impossibility of such a dream being fulfilled, because one of the persons who should be a chief actor in it was already dead. But any one wife or concubine of Jacob was quite sufficient to fulfill this part of the dream. It is possible, some think, that Joseph may have had these dreams before his mother Rachel died; but were even this the case, she certainly did not live to fulfill the part which appears to refer to herself.

The sun and the moon and the eleven stars - Why eleven stars? Was it merely to signify that his brothers might be represented by stars? Or does he not rather there allude to the Zodiac, his eleven brethren answering to eleven of the celestial signs, and himself to the twelfth? This is certainly not an unnatural thought, as it is very likely that the heavens were thus measured in the days of Joseph; for the zodiacal constellations have been distinguished among the eastern nations from time immemorial. See Clarke at Genesis 49:33 (note).

Verse 14

Go - see whether it be well with thy brethren - Literally, Go, I beseech thee, and see the peace of thy brethren, and the peace of the flock. Go and see whether they are all in prosperity. See Clarke on Genesis 37:4 (note). As Jacob's sons were now gone to feed the flock on the parcel of ground they had bought from the Shechemites, (see Genesis 33:19), and where they had committed such a horrible slaughter, their father might feel more solicitous about their welfare, lest the neighboring tribes should rise against them, and revenge the murder of the Shechemites.

As Jacob appears to have been at this time in the vale of Hebron, it is supposed that Shechem was about sixty English miles distant from it, and that Dothan was about eight miles farther. But I must again advertise my readers that all these calculations are very dubious; for we do not even know that the same place is intended, as there are many proofs that different places went by the same names.

Verse 19

Behold, this dreamer cometh - בַּחֲלֹמוֹתָיו (baal hachalomoth), this master of dreams, this master dreamer. A form of speech which conveys great contempt.

Verse 20

Come now and let us slay him - What unprincipled savages these must have been to talk thus coolly about imbruing their hands in an innocent brother's blood! How necessary is a Divine revelation, to show man what God hates and what he loves! Ferocious cruelty is the principal characteristic of the nations and tribes who receive not the law at his mouth.

Verse 21

Reuben heard it - Though Reuben appears to have been a transgressor of no ordinary magnitude, if we take Genesis 35:22 according to the letter, yet his bosom was not the habitation of cruelty. He determined, if possible, to save his brother from death, and deliver him safely to his father, with whose fondness for him he was sufficiently acquainted. Josephus, in his usual way, puts a long flourishing speech in the mouth of Reuben on the occasion, spoken in order to dissuade his brethren from their barbarous purpose; but as it is totally unfounded, it is worthy of no regard.

Verse 23

They stripped Joseph out of his coat - This probably was done that, if ever found, he might not be discerned to be a person of distinction, and consequently, no inquiry made concerning him.

Verse 25

They sat down to eat bread - Every act is perfectly in character, and describes forcibly the brutish and diabolic nature of their ruthless souls.

A company of Ishmaelites - We may naturally suppose that this was a caravan, composed of different tribes that, for their greater safety, were traveling together, and of which Ishmaelites and Midianites made the chief. In the Chaldee they are called Arabians, which, from אַרְבִּי (arab), to mingle, was in all probability used by the Targumist as the word Arabians is used among us, which comprehends a vast number of clans, or tribes of people. The Jerusalem Targum calls them אֲרָבִי (Sarkin), what we term Saracens. In the Persian, the clause stands thus: (karavanee iskmaaleem araban aya). אֶתְּ אַרְבִּי אֲרָבִי אֲרָבִי אֲרָבִי אֲרָבִי This seems to give the true sense.

Verse 28

For twenty pieces of silver - In the Anglo-Saxon it is thirty pence. This, I think, is the first instance on record of selling a man for a slave; but the practice certainly did not commence now, it had doubtless been in use long before. Instead of pieces, which our translators supply, the Persian has (miskal), which was probably intended to signify a shekel; and if shekels be intended, taking them at three shillings each, Joseph was sold for about three pounds sterling. I have known a whole cargo of slaves, amounting to eight hundred and thirteen, bought by a slave captain in Bonny river, in Africa, on an average, for six pounds each; and this payment was made in guns, gunpowder, and trinkets! As there were only nine of the brethren present, and they sold Joseph for twenty shekels, each had more than two shekels as his share in this most infamous transaction.

Verse 29

Ruben returned unto the pit - It appears he was absent when the caravan passed by, to whom the other brethren had sold Joseph.

Verse 30

The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? - The words in the original are very plaintive, אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי (haiyeled einennuclass="translit"> vaani anahclass="translit"> ani ba)!

Verse 32

Sent the coat of many colors - to their father - What deliberate cruelty to torture the feelings of their aged father, and thus harrow up his soul!

Verse 33

Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces! - It is likely he inferred this from the lacerated state of the coat, which, in order the better to cover their wickedness, they had not only besmeared with the blood of the goat, but it is probable reduced to tatters. And what must a father's heart have felt in such a case! As this coat is rent, so is the body of my beloved son rent in pieces! and Jacob rent his clothes.

Verse 35

All his sons and all his daughters - He had only one daughter, Dinah; but his sons' wives may be here included. But what hypocrisy in his sons to attempt to comfort him concerning the death of a son who they knew was alive; and what cruelty to put their aged father to such torture, when, properly speaking, there was no ground for it!

Verse 36

Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's - The word אֲרָבִי (saris), translated officer, signifies a eunuch; and lest any person should imagine that because this Potiphar had a wife, therefore it is absurd to suppose him to have been a eunuch, let such persons know that it is not uncommon in the east for eunuchs to have wives, nay, some of them have even a harem or seraglio where they keep many women, though it does not appear that they have any progeny; and probably discontent on this ground might have contributed as much to the unfaithfulness of Potiphar's wife, as that less principled motive through which it is commonly believed she acted.

Captain of the guard - אֲרָבִי אֲרָבִי אֲרָבִי אֲרָבִי אֲרָבִי (sar kattabbachim), chief of the butchers; a most appropriate name for the guards of an eastern despot. If a person offend one of the despotic eastern princes, the order to one of the life-guards is, Go and bring me his head; and this command is instantly obeyed, without judge, jury, or any form of law. Potiphar, we may therefore suppose, was captain of those guards whose business it was to take care of the royal person, and execute his sovereign will on all the objects of his displeasure. Reader, if thou hast the happiness to live under the British constitution, be thankful to God. Here, the will, the power, and

utmost influence of the king, were he even so disposed, cannot deprive the meanest subject of his property, his liberty, or his life. All the solemn legal forms of justice must be consulted; the culprit, however accused, be heard by himself and his counsel; and in the end twelve honest, impartial men, chosen from among his fellows, shall decide on the validity of the evidence produced by the accuser. For the trial by jury, as well as for innumerable political blessings, may God make the inhabitants of Great Britain thankful!

1. With this chapter the history of Joseph commences, and sets before our eyes such a scene of wonders wrought by Divine Providence in such a variety of surprising instances, as cannot fail to confirm our faith in God, show the propriety of resignation to his will, and confidence in his dispensations, and prove that all things work together for good to them that love him. Joseph has often been considered as a type of Christ, and this subject in the hands of different persons has assumed a great variety of coloring. The following parallels appear the most probable; but I shall not pledge myself for the propriety of any of them: â€œJesus Christ, prefigured by Joseph, the beloved of his father, and by him sent to visit his brethren, is the innocent person whom his brethren sold for a few pieces of silver, the bargain proposed by his brother Judah, (Greek Judas), the very namesake of that disciple and brother (for so Christ vouchsafes to call him) who sold his Lord and Master; and who by this means became their Lord and Savior; nay, the Savior of strangers, and of the whole world; which had not happened but for this plot of destroying him, the act of rejecting, and exposing him to sale. In both examples we find the same fortune and the same innocence: Joseph in the prison between two criminals; Jesus on the cross between two thieves. Joseph foretells deliverance to one of his companions and death to the other, from the same omens: of the two thieves, one reviles Christ, and perishes in his crimes; the other believes, and is assured of a speedy entrance into paradise. Joseph requests the person that should be delivered to be mindful of him in his glory; the person saved by Jesus Christ entreats his deliverer to remember him when he came into his kingdom.â€• - See Pascalâ€™s Thoughts. Parallels and coincidences of this kind should always be received cautiously, for where the Spirit of God has not marked a direct resemblance, and obviously referred to it as such in some other part of his word, it is bold, if not dangerous, to say â€œsuch and such things and persons are types of Christ.â€• We have instances sufficiently numerous, legitimately attested, without having recourse to those which are of dubious import and precarious application. See the observation on Genesis 40. (Genesis 40:23 (note)).

2. Envy has been defined, â€œpain felt, and malignity conceived, at the sight of excellence or happiness in another.â€• Under this detestable passion did the brethren of Joseph labor; and had not God particularly interposed, it would have destroyed both its subjects and its object, Perhaps there is no vice which so directly filiates itself on Satan, as this does. In opposition to the assertion that we cannot envy that by which we profit, it may be safely replied that we may envy our neighborâ€™s wisdom, though he gives us good counsel; his riches, though he supplies our wants; and his greatness, though he employs it for our protection.

3. How ruinous are family distractions! A house divided against itself cannot stand. Parents should take good heed that their own conduct be not the first and most powerful cause of such dissensions, by exciting envy in some of their children through undue partiality to others; but it is in vain to speak to most parents on the subject; they will give way to foolish predilections, till, in the prevailing distractions of their families, they meet with the punishment of their imprudence, when regrets are vain, and the evil past remedy.