

**A Technicolor Joseph by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 12050807**  
**Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 and Matthew 14:22-33**  
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You might say Joseph came from a dysfunctional family. His grandfather Abraham was an old old man before his son Isaac was born. Abraham kicked out his first son Ishmael and Ishmael's mother Hagar. Isaac's wife Rebekah and son Jacob were conniving cheats. Jacob, who had two wives and two additional concubines, favored his youngest son Joseph, our character for today. This led to terrible jealousy on the part of his other brothers. Joseph was also a fink who told on his brothers.

Joseph was what we would today call a spoiled brat because he was the first son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. You heard that right: Jacob had more than one wife.

Father Jacob was quite blatant about his favor of Joseph. He made for him a long robe with sleeves. Andrew Lloyd Webber has called it a "technicolor dreamcoat."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it wasn't that flashy, but it made his brothers quite jealous. They saw that their father loved Joseph more than them.

I knew of a grandfather who liked to give Christmas gifts of money to his grandchildren. This is normally a good procedure, for few grandparents know what their grandchildren really want or need, or how it works if they do! Money allows the recipient to purchase the exact desired item or to save the money for something special. This grandfather, however, did not give the gifts equally. He favored a couple of the grandchildren over others and would give more to those favored ones. The parents of these grandchildren were particularly distressed because they wanted to show no favorites. They loved their children equally. Stealthily, the father would go through the envelopes on Christmas eve and equalize the financial gifts! On Christmas morning, when the children opened the grandfather's gifts, each one received the same amount.

Some psychologists and therapists say we should not use that term "dysfunctional family." It becomes an excuse for destructive actions, an excuse to function as a victim, and an excuse to blame others for one's misery.

Joseph's brothers did not need the dysfunctional excuse. They were just plain jealous and they were angry. When Joseph came to the fields to see his shepherd brothers, they conspired to kill him! This is reminiscent of the story of Cain and Abel. Cain killed Abel because he thought God favored his brother!

Jealousy is a dangerous and terrible emotion. We must do all we can to rid ourselves of jealousy and envy. Talk to a counselor if you think your parents favored your sister. Share your feelings if you think your brother got all the credit even though you know he was lazy! Take that jealousy, expose it to the light of day and neutralize its power over you.

Another reason that the brothers hated Joseph was because he was a dreamer. He had dreams that predicted his superiority over his older brothers. In a fashion, this was a reprise of Jacob's superiority over his older brother Esau. Family dysfunction can be passed from generation to generation. That does not mean we are doomed to repeat the problems of our parents and grandparents. If we are aware of those problems, we can work to overcome them, to control them rather than allowing them to control us. With God's help, we can be victorious.

The problem was not that Joseph had the dream of superiority. If he kept the dream to

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<sup>1</sup>© 1969 by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice

himself, he may never have had troubles with his brothers. However, he told his brothers his dream. He may even have told them in a mocking/chiding fashion: “You’re going to bow down to me in the future.”<sup>2</sup> They decided to put him to death.

Dreamers can have problems in relationships with others. By dreamers, I mean those of our society who have creative new ideas. Buckminster Fuller was a dreamer and inventor. He invented the geodesic dome which can enclose a space using fewer raw materials than any other design, but he drove investors and business people mad because he had no interest in the profit motive!

The conservative tendency of most of us is to resist innovation and change. We do not want the status quo threatened, so, we kill the dreamers. We take children in kindergarten and force them to color within the lines. We take the peacemakers who dream of a new world order where international disputes are settled through international courts, accuse them of being unpatriotic, and vote them out of office, or worse. Practical people need dreamers, and dreamers need practical people.

Our story today ends with Joseph being sold into slavery. The story of Joseph is part of the story of the nation Israel. It is our story, for we are descendants of his. The story depicts the movement from an individual to a nation. In telling this story, we understand better our place on the family tree.

What a wonderful feeling it is to discover family ties. The truth is, we are all related. The six handshake theory says we are six handshakes away from everyone in the world.<sup>3</sup> We shake hands with someone. That person’s relationships lead to relationships with others, so that in six generations of handshakes, we will have shaken hands with everyone in the world.

We are all related as family, but we must end the jealousy and dysfunction.

In the coming weeks, we will continue to look at salvation history, because it is the story of God’s acting in creation. It will help us to see God’s acting in our time.

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<sup>2</sup>Genesis 37:9

<sup>3</sup>The small world phenomenon (also known as the small world effect) is the hypothesis that everyone in the world can be reached through a short chain of social acquaintances. The concept gave rise to the famous phrase six degrees of separation after a 1967 small world experiment by psychologist Stanley Milgram which found that two random US citizens were connected by an average of six acquaintances. – Wikipedia