

The Coat of Different Colors



SABBATH—APRIL 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 24; Genesis 29:21–30; Genesis 34; Genesis 37; 1 Corinthians 9:24–26; Genesis 42:13.

MEMORY VERSE: “Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons. Joseph had been born to him [Israel] when he was old. Israel made him a beautiful robe [coat of many colors]” (Genesis 37:3, NlrV).

THE SEED FOR THIS WHOLE STORY BEGAN IN GENESIS 29. Jacob had two wives and two concubines.¹ This means a family with one father, four mothers, and about a dozen children between them! One did not have to be a prophet (special messenger) to know ahead of time what troubles this family would have.

How much better it would be if Jacob had followed the earliest example from Eden: one husband, one wife. Period. This was the ideal model for all homes, for all times.

But as we have seen, God created people with free will. That freedom includes the freedom to do wrong. Jacob's mistake of making the famous “coat of many colors” is an example that shows how one mistake can lead to results that get out of our control.

How much better, then, to stop sin early before it destroys us and those we love.

¹ concubines—women who live with a man but who are not his wives; also, in some countries, concubines are additional (other) wives who have less power and importance than the first wife.

SUNDAY—APRIL 17**THE BEGINNINGS OF A FAMILY PROBLEM (Genesis 29:21–30)**

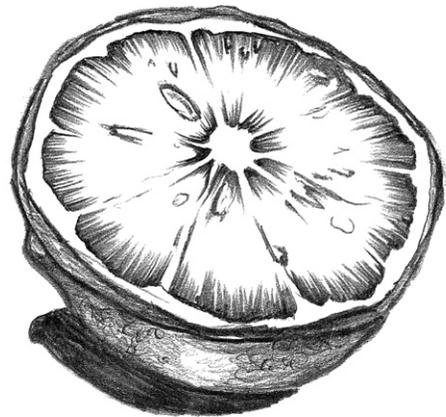
Everything in life influences just about everything else. In fact, Einstein’s theory of general relativity² teaches that all matter in the universe has a gravitational pull on all other matter. For example, your body has a gravitational pull not only on your neighbor but on the sun and everything else in the created world too.

Of course, we do not need a lesson in physics³ to recognize that the actions of one person can greatly influence others, even generations later. Who we are, where we are, why we are what we are—these all have been influenced by the actions of others beyond (out of) our control. For example, a mother’s heavy drinking during pregnancy might ruin the health of her children, or even her grandchildren. How careful we need to be about the things we say and do. Who knows the influence that our actions may have on others? The influence may last a short time or a long time. The influence may be for good or for bad.

Read Genesis 24 and Genesis 29:21–30. What kind of family is being created here? What lesson can we learn about how following

the customs of the world can lead us to ruin if we go against principles (important rules) of truth?

“The sin of Jacob caused a chain of events that led to evil. His sin showed its bitter fruit in the character and life of his sons. As these sons became men they developed serious faults. The results of polygamy⁴ were clearly seen in the household. This terrible evil dries up the very springs of love, and its influence weakens the most holy ties. The jealousy of the several mothers made family relationships bitter. The children had grown up quarrelsome [fighting] and did not want to be controlled. And the father’s [Jacob’s] life was shadowed with worry and sadness.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*,⁵ pages 208, 209.



Jacob’s sin showed its bitter fruit in the lives of his sons.

2. Einstein’s theory of general relativity—a theory (idea) developed by Albert Einstein teaching that the movement of one thing may impact (influence) all other things in the universe.

3. physics—a science that deals with matter and energy and the way they act on each other in heat, light, electricity, and sound.

4. polygamy—marriage in which a husband has more than one wife.

5. Patriarchs and Prophets—patriarchs were leaders of God’s people in early Bible times, men such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men or women who are spokespersons for God.

What things have you been given that were out of (beyond) your control? A lot, right? Right now, think about some important choices you are going to make. Ask yourself: how might these choices influence others? Is that what you really want to happen?

MONDAY—APRIL 18

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS (Genesis 34)

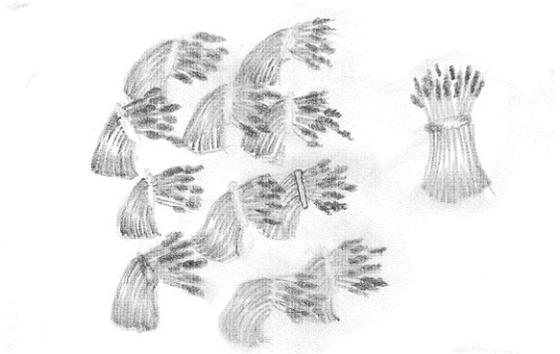
Children fighting with one another, even in the best of homes, can be bad enough. But in Jacob's home, it turned into very serious trouble. This is because the household was full of hatred and jealousy and favoritism⁶ and pride.

What does Genesis 34 tell us about what kind of men Joseph's brothers were?

Then, too, there was the issue of Joseph's dreams (Genesis 37:5–11). In the dreams the whole family bows toward him. If the brothers did not like him before, these dreams would only make their dislike worse. In fact, that is exactly what Genesis 37:8 says.

But there is more.

How would the situation in Genesis 37:2 only make relations worse between Joseph and his brothers?



In Joseph's dream his brothers bow to him.

No one likes someone to tell on him or her. No matter how bad the brothers were, they surely did not like Joseph telling on them to their father. The verse does not say what the brothers were doing. But knowing their actions, it was probably something that should be stopped before they brought even more shame on themselves and their family.

Finally, too, the biggest issue was that "Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children" (Genesis 37:3, NKJV). The brothers were not stupid. Surely they picked up on their father's attitude. This could have made a bad situation worse.

The brothers' actions toward Joseph were shameful and without excuse. But this background helps us better understand what led to them.

We all are trapped in our situations. Things happen that are beyond our control. The questions for us always must be: how do I act in those situations? Do they control me so that I compromise my

6. favoritism—the unfair practice of treating some people better than others.

principles? Or do I let my principles guide me through my situations?

TUESDAY—APRIL 19

THE COAT OF MANY COLORS (Genesis 37:3, 4)

The bad character⁷ of the brothers stood out even more when compared with the character of Joseph.

“There was one of a widely different character. He was Joseph, the elder son of Rachel. His rare personal beauty seemed but to show an inward beauty of mind and heart that was pure, active, and joyous. Joseph gave proof of being faithful and firm in his beliefs. Joseph listened to his father’s instructions, and loved to obey God. Joseph already showed the character that would one day make him special in Egypt. His gentleness, honesty, and truthfulness were already seen in his daily life. When Joseph’s mother died, he reached out more to his father. And Jacob’s heart was bound up in this child of his old age. He ‘loved Joseph more than all his children.’”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 209.

Read Genesis 37:3, 4. How did Jacob’s act make the situation worse?

The expensive coat was given to Joseph by a loving father. It was beautifully woven in different colors.

It was more expensive than any of his brothers’ cloaks. It was the kind of cloak worn by great people. The brothers no doubt guessed that their father would give further honors to Joseph. That could mean that Joseph would get the birthright.⁸ The brothers easily could have guessed that Joseph would get the greater inheritance.⁹ Jacob’s act of giving Joseph the coat could have been just an act of love and nothing more. But it was a big mistake, because it made the brothers hate Joseph even more.



Joseph’s coat was beautifully woven in different colors.

In a way, the coat symbolizes (stands for) earthly honors, which

7. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves; someone’s personality.

8. birthright—the gifts and blessing that belong to a person who is born into a certain family or place.

9. inheritance—money, property, and so forth that is received from someone when that person dies.

last only a short time. But in writing the story, Moses gave the impression (idea) that Jacob loved Joseph more than the other children. This action made the brothers hate Joseph even more. And that hatred led to much worse situations.

Have you ever been given a worldly honor? How good did you feel at the time? How long did it take before the good feeling you had wore off, and the honor came to mean little or nothing? What lesson should you take from that? Read 1 Corinthians 9:24–26 for help when coming up with your answer.

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 20

THE COAT STRIPPED (TAKEN AWAY) (Genesis 37:12–25)

Read Genesis 37:12–25. What great difference do you see between good and evil, between innocence and treachery (not being loyal)?

Joseph's brothers planned his death. They also planned in advance just what they would tell their father. "Oh, father," they would say, "we're so sorry. We found this coat. Is it Joseph's? If so, then a wild animal must have eaten him up." It is hard to imagine how people could be so full of hatred toward their own brother that they could do something like this.

What is important about what happened in Genesis 37:23?

The first thing the brothers talked about when they saw Joseph from afar were the dreams. The dreams made their hatred for him grow. Now, once and for all, they would see what would come of those dreams. It is interesting to note that the first recorded act against Joseph by his brothers was the stripping (taking) away of his coat. The Hebrew makes it clear that they were talking about the much-hated coat, the one that the father had made for Joseph. The verse points out that it was "on him [Joseph]." Seeing Joseph come to them, wearing the coat, must have made the brothers more angry.

So, here the brothers try to undo or get rid of all the things that caused them so much hatred and anger. The coat symbolized all that they hated about their brother. The coat also symbolized all the good things about him and the bad things about themselves. It must have been with a lot of joy and satisfaction that the brothers stripped off the coat. Now that Joseph was without that expensive coat, the brothers felt that Joseph was not any better than they were. The brothers also felt that Joseph was too helpless to make them bow before him as they had done in his dreams.

Look at how foolish the brothers' actions were as a result of their emotions. How often do we let our emotions make us do foolish things? How can we learn to keep our

emotions under the power of God and thus save ourselves (and often others) from the often terrible results?

THURSDAY—APRIL 21

“THY SON’S COAT” (Genesis 37:31, 32)

“Then they [the brothers] got Joseph’s beautiful robe. They killed a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took it back to their father. They said, ‘We found this. Take a look at it. See if it’s [it is] your son’s robe’ (Genesis 37:31, 32, NIV).

How could they be so low as to give their father the blood-stained cloak and ask him to recognize it? Maybe even a day before they had done this crime, nothing like it had entered their minds. But once we start on a train of sin, who knows where it will end?

What is so interesting about the way the brothers worded what they said to their father in Genesis 37:26–36?

Notice, the brothers said “your son’s coat” instead of “our brother’s coat.” The coldness and the hard feeling are shocking. Perhaps, it is their way of “forgetting” the evil they had done to Joseph.

So, the coat had a role both in the beginning and in the end. At first it was a symbol of the relationship between Jacob and Joseph. Then it was covered in blood, a symbol of Joseph’s “death.” The brothers might have thought that it would be the end



“Is this Joseph’s?”

of Joseph and all their hatred toward him. But we know that this act solved one problem only to bring on more problems. Surely the brothers must have been pained by their father’s grief. Surely, seeing Jacob mourn day after day, these men must have struggled with much guilt.

What do Genesis 42:13, 21–23, 32 and Genesis 44:28 tell us about the long-lasting result of the brothers’ actions on themselves and their family?

In the end, the Lord brought good out of the evil that the brothers had done. But that does not excuse what they did. However terrible their actions were, this story should remind us of how quickly sins can get out of hand, blind us, and lead us to do things that often lead to sadness and suffering.

FRIDAY—APRIL 22

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Return to Canaan,” “Joseph in Egypt,” and “Joseph and His Brothers,” pages 209–240, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; pages 428–432, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 1.

“Joseph, did not suspect what was about to happen to him. He came to his brethren with gladness of heart to greet them after his long, tire-some journey. His brothers refused to listen to him. Joseph told them his errand, but they did not answer him. Joseph became afraid of their angry looks. . . . The brothers blamed Joseph for not being true to them. As the brothers spoke of their envious [jealous] feelings, Satan controlled their minds. The brothers had no sense of pity and no feelings of love for their brother. They took away from him his coat of many colors that he wore. The coat was a token of his father’s love. But it stirred up the brothers’ jealous feelings.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 1, pages 128, 129.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What other kinds of “coats of many colors” are there? What are things of the world that we want but that sooner or later can easily be stripped from us and stained with blood? What kind of worldly honors seem to mean so much but really mean nothing in the end?
- 2 Think about this week’s lesson and

then read Genesis 45:22. What irony¹⁰ or strange thing is found there?

3 Joseph often has been seen as an example of Christ. Go through the Joseph story and see what comparisons you can make between Christ and Joseph. Share your answers with your class.

4 There is probably little doubt the brothers were really sorry for their actions. We do not know what the father did with the bloodied coat. Maybe he kept it as a reminder of his beloved son. Imagine how the brothers would have felt each time they saw this coat. Remember that the coat was once a symbol of their jealousy but now is a symbol of their guilt. How can we learn to think before we act and not to do things foolishly? How different this story would have been if the brothers had known the Lord whom their father served! If the brothers knew how to pray, how to die to self, how to surrender to the Lord in faith and obedience, none of this would have happened. And so much pain and suffering would not have happened to them. How can we learn not to fall into the same trap that these men did?

10. irony—a situation that is strange or funny because things happen in a way that seems to be the opposite of what you expected.