

Introduction

Joseph is most popularly known for his coat of many colors. If you are at all familiar with his story, you know that throughout his lifetime he actually wore several different outfits - putting on the outward attire that was appropriate to the circumstances of his life:

{ As a son, he wore the coat of many colors, which is described and destroyed in Chapter Thirty-seven;

{ As a slave, also described in Chapter Thirty-seven, he would probably have been stripped naked;

{ He became a steward to Potiphar in Egypt and put on the tunic that was appropriate to his honorable position. His tunic was taken away when, in Chapter Thirty-nine, he fled from Potiphar's wife:

Genesis 39:12 that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.

Genesis 39:13 And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside,

Genesis 39:14 that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.

Genesis 39:15 "And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside."

Genesis 39:16 So she kept his garment with her until his master came home.

Genesis 39:17 Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me;

Genesis 39:18 "so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

{ As a prisoner, Joseph put on the outward attire of an inmate.

{ While in prison, Pharaoh called for him to come and interpret a dream. He puts on the clothing of a seer:

Genesis 41:14 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh.

After having accurately interpreted the dream, Joseph is given the outward adornment of a sovereign:

Genesis 41:42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.

So, you see, the story of Joseph is one that involves *many* changes of clothing. But, while his outward clothing constantly changed, his inward character never did!

Circumstances could change his clothing, but they couldn't change his character.

Outwardly you see Joseph as a son, then a slave, then a steward, then a prisoner, then a seer, then a sovereign...Inwardly you see a man separated and set-apart unto his God.

Who and what Joseph was inwardly is the key to his life, and it is our point of contact with his story. Who and what you are inwardly is of supreme importance. Circumstances may cause you to change your outward clothing, but they shouldn't change your inner character. In Second Corinthians 4:16 you read,

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day.

How is it you do not lose heart in your circumstances and instead have your inner man renewed each day? In another verse, Ephesians 3:16, you read,

Ephesians 3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

God, by His grace, can strengthen your inner man. Some of the ways He *does* strengthen your inner man can be seen in Genesis Thirty-seven as we see Joseph being strengthened in his inner man for the remarkable life God called him to live.

#1 Your Sonship Strengthens Your Inner Man (v1-4)

We first encounter Joseph as his father's favorite son.

Genesis 37:1 Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.

Genesis 37:2 This *is* the history of Jacob. Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.

Genesis 37:3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of *many* colors.

Genesis 37:4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

In Genesis 35:22 we are told that Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, "slept with his father's concubine Bilhah" and that Jacob "heard of it." This was an offense for which Reuben lost his father's favor and his birthrights as the firstborn son. Since Reuben had forfeited his rights by his shameful behavior, Jacob apparently exercised his sovereign choice and appointed Joseph, his firstborn son by Rachel, as his heir. This is the true meaning of Joseph's coat of many colors.

The Hebrew words that are translated are *kethoneth*, meaning "tunic," and *passim*, meaning "ankles" or "wrists." This has been defined as many colored, or richly ornamented. It is more likely that it means what it says, that Joseph's coat was one which extended the whole way to his ankles and wrists. Most tunics were sleeveless and stopped at the knees; they were worn by working men. A long-sleeved, tailored garment was worn by one who did not have to work. Joseph's coat was a sign of his father's choice of him to be a manager or an overseer of his affairs. This also explains why Joseph is said to have "brought a bad report" of his brothers to Jacob. He wasn't a sissy tattletale; it was his responsibility as overseer to report to his father about what was actually going on with the flocks and herds.¹

Joseph's preferred sonship is the theme of these opening verses. His father's great love for him as his son was a great source of strength as his circumstances changed throughout his life.

If you are a Christian, you are a preferred son or daughter of your heavenly Father!

¹ John 3:1 (KJV) Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...

You were born into this world as the children of the evil one, according to John 8:44. God, in His infinite love, regenerated you when you were born-again. He gave you a new birth and brought you into His family. To be called a son or a daughter of God conveys the Scriptural teaching that God has given you His nature by a new birth. This new nature that makes you alive unto God is the inner man we are talking about.

Just as Joseph received clothing appropriate to his sonship, so do you. You are given the righteousness of Jesus Christ at the moment of salvation, often described for us in God's Word as a spiritual garment.

^ Before we can talk about being strengthened in the inner man, you must examine yourself to see if you have been born again by God the Holy Spirit...

%o If you are spiritually alive, then your preferred relationship to God the Father through Jesus Christ will be a constant source of inner strengthening regardless of outward circumstances! No matter what others do to you, you are highly favored by your Father and you will inherit all that is His.

#2 The Scriptures
Strengthen Your Inner Man
(v5-11)

¹see Boice, Genesis, Vol. 3, p. 19

We move from Joseph's dress to Joseph's dreams. The dreams function as God's Word to him. There was no written word, no Bible; these dreams are God's revelation to Joseph, God's Scriptures for him.

Genesis 37:5 Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and they hated him even more.

Genesis 37:6 So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed:

Genesis 37:7 "There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf."

Genesis 37:8 And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Genesis 37:9 Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me."

Genesis 37:10 So he told *it* to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What *is* this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?"

Genesis 37:11 And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind*.

The dreams needed no interpreting! His brothers, and later his brothers and his father, all understood that the dreams meant that they would all one day bow down to Joseph as he provided for them. Of course this is exactly what the remaining chapters of Genesis describe - how through God's amazing providence Joseph goes from pit to pinnacle, rising to power in Egypt during a time of devastating famine, to provide the grain necessary to preserve his family.

The Word of God must have been a great source of strength to Joseph's inner man during his long years of exile.

It should be obvious that God's Word is your source of strength for your inner man. Someone who is truly born-again will desire and require God's Word the way a baby desires and requires milk:

1 Peter 2:2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

In other portions of Scripture the Bible is described as meat, solid food, and honey - emphasizing its importance if your new life in Jesus Christ is to mature and grow and be strengthened.

The way you remain steadfast in the midst of uncertain and changing circumstances is by being grounded in God's Word. There you learn one essential truth, recorded by Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Although originally spoken to the nation of Israel, these words reveal God's heart towards you as well. Notice that God has promised you "a future and a hope"; the order

is important. It is not that we have hope in the future; we have a secure future and that brings us hope *today*.

#3 The Spirit
Strengthens Your Inner Man
(v12-17)

In the next several verses Joseph encounters an unnamed stranger who gives him direction.

Genesis 37:12 Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.

Genesis 37:13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding *the flock* in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." So he said to him, "Here I am."

Genesis 37:14 Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.

Before we go on, I'd like to stop and comment on Joseph serving his father. The father's commission for Joseph was both difficult and dangerous; it required a difficult trip at the end of which there was a dangerous task, seeing how his brothers hated him and had a history of violence in Schechem. His only response was, "Here I am."

Christian service is not always comfortable. It is not always convenient. But it is your commission from the father and your response should be "Here am I!"

Joseph ran into a problem at Shechem: his brothers had departed. What should he do? He received and heeded the guidance of an unnamed man.

Genesis 37:15 Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?"

Genesis 37:16 So he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding *their flocks*."

Genesis 37:17 And the man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

Please notice the interesting wording of verse fifteen. "Now a certain man found him..." If you were Joseph you would have gone looking for someone who could help you find your brothers. Instead the Scripture says that a man was looking for him! This unnamed man who finds Joseph and guides him is a symbol of God the Holy Spirit.

The leading of God the Holy Spirit is a tremendous source of strength for your inner man! The Bible is full of precepts and principles for your Christian life. Precepts are the explicit commandments and directions the Bible gives you for your conduct. Principles are more general. For example, concerning marriage, the Bible gives you both precepts and principles:

^ A precept would be 1 Corinthians 7:39, where the Apostle Paul instructs you to "marry in the Lord." If you are a Christian, you are commanded to not marry an unbeliever.

%o In the same chapter, you have many principles. For example, in First Corinthians 7:1-2 & 7 you read,

1 Corinthians 7:1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: *It is* good for a man not to touch a woman.

1 Corinthians 7:2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband...

1 Corinthians 7:7 ...For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

Paul encourages you not to marry, but gives you principles to determine whether you should remain unmarried or not.

It should be clear that there is a great deal of decision making that needs to take place in your Christian life. Even with God's precepts and principles you still need the supernatural leading of God the Holy Spirit.

How do you receive the Spirit's leading? Just as with Joseph, I believe that the Spirit comes to you. For your part you need to be open and obedient.

^ Openness means that you must recognize your need for the Spirit's leading. That may seem obvious, but it is not. It is precisely at this point that you can fail.

Churches can fail to be open to the Spirit's leading due to their traditions...

Christians can fail to be open to the Spirit's leading for many reasons: Peer-pressure is one reason...

%o Obedience is needed to follow the Spirit's leading once it received. We disobey for many reasons: Fear of men is one common reason why we disobey...

You need to be open and obedient to the leading of God the Holy Spirit for many reasons, but especially if you are to remain strong in your inner man during changing and challenging circumstances.

#4 Your Sufferings Strengthen Your Inner Man (v18-36)

The cruel treatment of Joseph by his brothers sets the stage for the remarkable outworking of God's providence in Chapters Thirty-nine through Fifty.

Genesis 37:18 Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him.

Genesis 37:19 Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming!

Genesis 37:20 "Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"

Genesis 37:21 But Reuben heard *it*, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him."

Genesis 37:22 And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit which *is* in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"; that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

Genesis 37:23 So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph *of* his tunic, the tunic of *many* colors that *was* on him.

Genesis 37:24 Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit *was* empty; *there was* no water in it.

Genesis 37:25 And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry *them* down to Egypt.

Genesis 37:26 So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit *is there* if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?

Genesis 37:27 "Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh." And his brothers listened.

Genesis 37:28 Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Genesis 37:29 Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he tore his clothes.

Genesis 37:30 And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad *is* no *more*; and I, where shall I go?"

Genesis 37:31 So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood.

Genesis 37:32 Then they sent the tunic of *many* colors, and they brought *it* to their father and said, "We have found this. Do you know whether it *is* your son's tunic or not?"

Genesis 37:33 And he recognized it and said, "*It is* my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces."

Genesis 37:34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days.

Genesis 37:35 And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

Genesis 37:36 Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh *and* captain of the guard.

Joseph suffered and went on suffering for many years. Yet we will read four times that "God was with him." God was with him, and the presence of God in his life strengthened his inner man even during his sufferings.

Your sufferings can serve to strengthen your inner man as you realize four things:

- { God cares for you in your suffering...
- { God comforts you in your suffering...
- { God comes to you in your suffering...
- { Your sufferings will soon cease...

Conclusion

Genesis Thirty-seven can be studied and taught in many fruitful ways besides what we have done here this morning.

{ It has tremendous prophetic significance...

Joseph's second dream, while referring to his elevation as second to Pharaoh, also provides a key to unlocking an important symbolic chapter in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. There, in 12:1 you read,

Revelation 12:1 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.

This description of the woman as clothed with the sun and the moon is an allusion to Joseph's second dream and is one important clue to help us to identify the context of Revelation Twelve as a reference to the nation of Israel.

{ Genesis Thirty-seven has tremendous typical significance...

The whole story of Joseph, beginning here, is typical of Jesus Christ. Joseph is a type, or an illustration, of Jesus. Arthur W. Pink, in his commentary on Genesis, has identified more than one hundred comparisons between Jesus and Joseph in Genesis!

As Jacob sent Joseph to see to the welfare of his brothers, so God the Father sent the Son, Jesus Christ, for the welfare and salvation of Israel. As the man guided Joseph, so Jesus was filled with and led by the Holy Spirit. Joseph's brothers rejected him and sought to kill him; so, too, was Jesus rejected by their descendants. As they sold Joseph for the price of a slave, so Judas sold Jesus to the authorities for the price of a slave. Joseph was handed over to Gentiles and his disappearance glossed over with a lie. Jesus was handed over to the Gentiles for crucifixion, then His disappearance - His empty tomb - was glossed over with a lie that persists to this day!

There are other types in Chapter Thirty-seven, and throughout the account of Joseph's life. Look for them and be blessed!

{ We have spent our time this morning describing Joseph as an example of how you can strengthen your inner man. Are you God's son or daughter by spiritual birth? If you are not, receive Jesus as Savior...

If you *are* His child, look to your sonship, the Scriptures, the Spirit, and your sufferings to strengthen you. Your outward clothing will change; your inward character need not - except to be conformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.