

Cindy Cottone

The Bible Corner



Israel's family coat

A long, long time ago, in the ancient land of Canaan, there lived a man named Jacob. Jacob was a good man and worshipped the one, true God, just as his father, Isaac, had done. God was pleased with Jacob, and said to him one day, "Jacob, I am going to make you the father of an entire nation. You will have many descendants, and even kings will be numbered among your offspring. From now on, you will be called Israel." Israel thanked God, and he believed that the special promise, called a covenant, would surely come to pass.

Just as God had promised, Israel did become the proud father of 12 sons and one daughter. "God has indeed blessed me," he said. "I see a part of myself in each one of my children. Through them, a great nation of God's people will be born."

One day, Israel had an idea. "I must show my children how each one of them possesses special talents from God," he decided. So Israel made a fine coat with many colors, and when he had finished it, he called his children to him and said, "This coat is a symbol of our family. Each one of us is part of the fabric and the colors that make up the coat. Our lives are all unique, but together we can pull the threads of ourselves together as God's family and make the coat whole. I love you all, and without each of your special talents, a part of the coat would be missing."

Then Israel turned to Reuben and said, "You who are my first-born must be a faithful leader and show the others how to be a good family."

Simeon, you have a strong, stubborn mind, like me," Israel said to his second son. "Use it for good. Levi, watch over your brothers with your helpful, caring way. And Judah, your wisdom is needed to guide our family to make good decisions.

"Naphtali, you will be our family spokesman with your graceful manner of speech," Israel continued. And to Dan, he said, "Use your sense of justice to govern the behavior of your brothers."

"God, you have the strength of spirit to keep us going in times of trouble. Asher, you are my noble son. Let your actions always befit your character."

"Your great physical strength, Issachar, will serve us all well," Israel went on. "And, Zebulun, your sensitivity will remind us not to be hurtful to each other."

"Dinah, my daughter, through you, we will never forget the beauty in life. Joseph, you are our dreamer. The colors of this coat are a reflection of the joy that you have brought to your father in his old age. We must all dream great things for each other."

"And, last my little Benjamin, although you are still a little child, you too have made a unique contribution to our family," the patriarch concluded. "You have brought the laughter of innocence to us."

Israel regarded his entire family, as they gathered round him. With tears in his eyes, he said, "I guess what I am trying to say is how grateful I am for each one of you. You have all brought something special to our family."

Israel decided to give the coat of many colors to Joseph. But something terrible happened when the 10 eldest sons saw Joseph wearing the coat. They forgot all about their own talents and, instead, became jealous of Joseph. "What has Joseph done to deserve this special coat?" they cried bitterly. "Father pays more attention to Joseph than to us." And they refused to speak to Joseph, even though he was their brother.

One day, Joseph said to them, "I had a very strange dream last night. We were all

out in the fields binding up the wheat in sheaves. My sheaf stood up and your sheaves bowed down to it."

"So now Joseph thinks that he is going to be our king?" they cried. "We'll see about that." And they started to hate Joseph, even though he was their brother.

A few days later, Israel called Joseph and said, "Go and see how your brothers are doing. They are over in Shechem grazing the flocks."

Joseph went to Shechem, but found his brothers had gone to Dothan, so he continued on in that direction. When his brothers saw Joseph in the distance wearing the coat of many colors, they became very angry. "Now's our chance!" they decided. "Let's get rid of this dreamer once and for all. Then maybe father will stop thinking only of Joseph!" So they planned to kill Joseph, even though he was their brother.

"No!" Reuben shouted angrily. "We must not kill Joseph. Throw him down into the empty well over there. In a few days, without food or water, he'll die by himself." Reuben really planned to return alone later and rescue his brother from the well.

"Hello, my brothers," Joseph called out as he came near. "Father has sent me to see how you are all doing."

"Is that so?" Dan said. "Well, it's going to be a long time before you ever see Father again!"

Before Joseph knew what was happening, his brothers pulled off the coat and pushed him down into the well. Although he cried out to them, they pretended not to hear Joseph and sat down to supper. While they sat eating, Reuben went to go check on the sheep.

Judah watched a caravan of camels coming towards them and then he turned to his brothers and said, "I don't really want to kill Joseph. I have thought of a way that we can still get rid of him forever."

"Well, tell us," Gad replied eagerly. "I bet those men coming our way are Ishmaelite traders," Judah began. "Let's sell Joseph to them."

"Great idea!" they all agreed. Quickly,

they pulled Joseph up from the well. They sold him to the traders for 20 pieces of silver, even though he was their brother.

By the time Reuben returned, the traders had already left with Joseph for Egypt. "What have you done?" he moaned. "A fine family we've turned out to be. What will we tell Father?"

"Perhaps Judah knows what to do," Zebulun suggested. "Father thinks your wisdom would lead to good decisions. Boy, was he ever wrong!" he chided.

"Look who's talking," Judah returned. "And Father said you were sensitive."

"Maybe Naphtali will tell Father," Gad added. "He's supposed to be our family spokesman."

"Stop it, all of you," Reuben scolded. "We have all failed as a family, myself included. I'm supposed to be a good leader. I'll tell Father."

In the end, none of the 10 brothers could bear to tell their father the truth about Joseph. They were all very ashamed of the result of their jealousy. Instead, they killed a goat and spattered its blood on the coat of many colors. Sadly, Reuben gave the coat to Israel.

"Who will be our dreamer now that Joseph is gone?" Israel cried. "I will die mourning for my son."

Israel cried about the loss of Joseph for a long time. None of his other sons was able to console him. Far away in Egypt, Joseph had been sold to an officer of the pharaoh. Early one morning, Israel went by himself to a field and built a fire. He knelt down and prayed to God, and when he was finished, he carefully placed the coat of many colors in the fire.

For discussion:

- 1) What is another name for the promise that God made to Israel?
- 2) Why were the other brothers so jealous of Joseph? What was the result of their jealousy?
- 3) What special talents do you have? Are they different from those of your brothers or sisters?
- 4) How can you use your talents to serve God and others?

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