

Irritations

While the world puts their hopes into politics, the highly educated and affluent to make things happen, God has always worked with ordinary, imperfect, and sometimes even irritating people from around the corner. I love him for that. And I love him for the way he orchestrates events to fulfill his divine purposes, albeit respecting every individual's decisions.

Jacob's (Israel's) family is a point in case. Genesis 37. Joseph, the eleventh of his twelve sons is not very much loved by his older siblings. In fact they hate him. First, because he is daddy's favorite and thus receives the famous richly ornamented robe, like a visible reminder to everyone that he is something special (V3-4), thank you very much. Second, he has a couple of irritating dreams. We can't decipher from the text whether Joseph shared his dreams innocently or deliberately to get his back on his brothers. Be it as it may, those dreams infuriate the family and Israel rebukes him (V 5-11).

At the first given opportunity the brothers decide to kill their younger brother and with him his dreams (V19-20). With some conscience kicking in they agree to throw Joseph into a dry cistern instead, but not before stripping him of his special robe (18-24). Not sure whether they were discussing the further strategy while enjoying a meal, but when a caravan "coincidentally" rocks up, the brothers decide to sell Joseph for about 200 g of silver (V 25-28).

The ensuing events create emotional pain beyond understanding, heartache and feelings of guilt within the family for the next almost two decades: To deceive their father about the truth, the brothers dip Joseph's robe into a slaughtered goat's blood and bring it back to their dad. They don't tell Israel anything, just give him the robe and let him do his own deductions and let him live for years unending in excruciating pain, assuming his son is killed (V 31-35). How far can a person go in hatred?

- One thing is for sure: they didn't know then what we know in retrospective. It's easy for us to say today that it had to happen like this. Did it really? I wonder. Sure, God used it. He is a master strategist and extremely capable of fashioning our decisions into his ultimate purpose and plan. But does it mean that we can do as we please?
- The brothers, guilty of selling their younger sibling into a terrible future of slavery, now become slaves themselves. Slaves to guilt feelings. Slaves to covering up a lie. Slaves to each other perhaps, watching each other not to betray their secret. Joy, a certain light heartedness and freedom are gone. For many years they have to live with watching their dad in pure agony and can't tell him the truth. What a disaster. What a mess. And all of this just because they couldn't stand this boy and his dreams.
- I wonder what went on in Joseph's mind? How do you cope with the knowledge that your brothers want you dead? How do you handle being sold by your own siblings into slavery, leaving you at the mercy of your masters? Only much later (Genesis 42:21) do we learn how distressed Joseph was when pleading for his life. And how cruel the brothers must have been.
- The amazing part is that those irritating dreams were God-given! And the boy who drove his family mad was God's chosen vessel to bring those dreams alive and so, ultimately, save two nations! So how many dreams are we killing just because they irritate us? How many people do we abandon or "cut" down just because they drive us mad?