

JOHN BERRY

A
HEART
OF
DREAMS





*A Heart
of Dreams*



By
John Berry



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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my beloved children,
Emma, Jonathan and Matthew.



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Preface

Are you a dreamer who dreams of distant realities? Has your mind ever wandered into a parallel universe where life is constantly exciting and meaningful? For a few shining moments, you live the life of a true hero, only to be jolted back to boring reality. The Old Testament Joseph must have felt a bit like that. He dreamt a lot and eventually it got him into trouble.

The story of Joseph is very familiar to most people, if only through the Lloyd Webber musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. But we often forget there was a real person behind the Broadway musical. Joseph was the fourth patriarch, or great leader, of the Jewish nation after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He was born in 1915 BC, four thousand years ago.

Yet we are still fascinated by his story today. Why? Joseph experienced the whole range of emotions and problems of human life, yet he coped with his troubles and still managed to fulfil the call on his life. Joseph lost everything—his home, family and job—only to regain it all. This was only possible because he kept his eyes fixed on God and nothing else. This is a valuable lesson for us all.

Joseph's family feuds have echoed through time, yet still feel contemporary. His is a human story of rivalry, betrayal and false accusations. But it is also an account of how, through the faithfulness of one man, God brought about his plan to save the entire Jewish nation. What encouragement and hope that gives us!

Come with me to a distant land steeped in the mists of time. Let us gently peer into a land called Canaan, the chosen land of God, nearly 4000 years ago.



Acknowledgments

To all the people who have inspired me over the years to write about spiritual matters—thank you. I'd especially like to thank my wife Tricia for all her help, support and encouragement.



Chapter I

Joseph's Family Background

In Genesis 37:2 Joseph's biography begins with the words '*This is the account of Jacob.*'

Excuse me, but isn't this Joseph's story? Well, it is, but the events of Joseph's life in many ways are an inevitable outworking of Jacob's bad family management. The account of Jacob is really the history of the descendants of Jacob. This is Jacob's line.

To show clearly why the events of Joseph's life unfolded as they did, we need to look closely at the formative influences on his life. Let's begin with his closest relationship—the one with his father, Jacob.

Jacob

Jacob was a very wealthy man, having made his money in livestock. The family lived well, far out in the country where life was rough and tough. Everyone worked. The only concession was that the younger sons worked a shorter day.

Jacob had himself been on the receiving end of bad parenting. Favouritism, sibling rivalry and a split between his parents formed a major part of his life. Jacob had apparently learned



nothing from the experiences of his childhood. Consequently, all the faults of the previous generation were passed on to the next. In simple terms, Joseph was born into a classic dysfunctional family. If this family were alive today, Joseph, at the very least, would be on the ‘at risk register’ under close scrutiny.

Yet his family tree serves to reinforce and highlight the forging of the Jewish nation.

Jacob (or Israel as he is sometimes known) was the third patriarch and founding father of the nation of Israel. He is a revered and esteemed figure as a result of his valuable contribution to Judaism. Even so, he was far from perfect—a fallen hero, a supreme example of human brokenness. You just get the feeling that his life would

Birth right in the Bible means something completely different from its meaning today. Esau’s birth right was his right as the eldest son to inherit promises God made to his grandfather Abraham. Read Genesis 25:27-34.

How did Esau show that God was not important to him?

have turned out a whole lot better if only he had paid a bit more attention to what happened to him in his childhood.

Jacob’s father Isaac and his wife Rebekah were blessed with twin boys, Esau and Jacob. As the eldest, Esau stood to inherit not only his father’s property but the God-given promises reserved for the firstborn son. Unfortunately, the boys harboured an intense rivalry, fuelled by their mother Rebekah, who loved Jacob more than Esau and would do anything to enhance his chances in life. Jacob should definitely have learned from her mistake.

Instead, Jacob obtained the birth right and the blessing reserved for the eldest son, Esau, by deceit. Jacob was an opportunist who exploited other people’s weaknesses. This became acutely apparent when he took full advantage of his brother’s folly and his father’s blindness (Genesis 25:29-34, 27:1-40).

Jacob was also an astute businessman. This trait, coupled with a ruthless ambition, made him a formidable opponent. He sounds a bit like a dodgy car dealer who would do anything to get a sale. And that shouldn't be surprising, since basic character flaws are just the same today as they have always been.

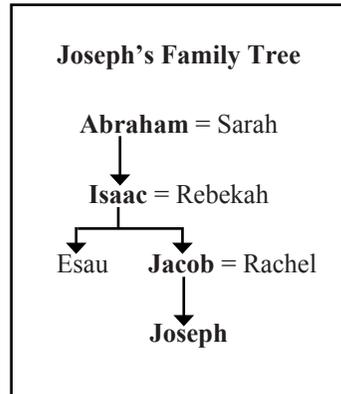
Jacob honed his skills to good effect when he outwitted his wily father-in-law Laban, which in itself was no mean feat. This single act amassed him great wealth (Genesis 31:25-43). And he was not above making a deal with God which was mutually advantageous to both of them (Genesis 28:18-22).

However, like most people, he did possess redeeming qualities. Although he was a deceiver and manipulator, he was a man of God. It was Jacob's faithfulness to God alone that allowed God to work through his brokenness to rescue his chosen people. Jacob had twelve sons and at least one daughter, Dinah. Women were rarely written about in those days unless they played some pivotal role. Dinah obviously didn't merit further scrutiny. The only fact we know about her, though no fault of her own, is that she was raped by Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite. You can read all about it in Genesis 34.

Task - Try drawing your own family tree.

Rachel

To have one deceptive parent was unlucky—but two proved disastrous. Rachel too proved unreliable and lacking





Jacob's Wives/Mistresses and their Respective Children			
Leah	Bilah	Zilpah	Rachel
Reuben	Dan	Gad	Joseph
Simeon	Naphtali	Asher	Benjamin
Levi			
Judah			
Issachar			
Zebulun			
Dinah			

in moral fibre.

Rachel was indeed Jacob's first true love and his favourite wife. There's that word again—'favourite.' What is it with this family? This was bound to end horribly. Rachel was the younger sister of Leah. Jacob loved Rachel from the start and made a promise to her father that he would work for him seven years if in return he could marry Rachel. Her father tricked Jacob and gave him Leah in marriage instead. Jacob agreed to work for Laban seven more years if he could marry Rachel as well (Genesis 29:18-28).

Rachel should have realized that anyone willing to work fourteen years just to marry her was a keeper, but she had a hard time accepting the fact that she was Jacob's favourite wife. Moreover, she was frustrated (to say the least) by her apparent barrenness, and she was jealous of her older sister Leah who easily gave Jacob child after child (Genesis 30:1). Rachel constantly competed with her sister for Jacob's affection. She felt insecure in her relationship with Jacob and so was constantly trying in vain to earn the love that Jacob had already declared and given to her. This is probably why polygamous relationships never work.

She needn't have felt this way, but she did. This was

another human frailty exposed in this tale of woe. Her envy and selfishness not only marred her relationship with her sister, but it also affected the dynamics of the family as a whole.

Finally, Rachel became pregnant and gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin; these became Jacob's favourite sons because of his love for their mother. It was in giving birth to Benjamin that Rachel died (Genesis 35:19). This is the stuff of which soap operas are made! No wonder so many problems arose.

We now move on to Joseph's siblings, who were the predictable result of their upbringing.

Reuben

Reuben was the eldest of the brothers. Being the rightful heir to Jacob, he assumed the responsibility that goes with that position. As the eldest, he would have the unenviable job of controlling the excesses of his siblings. He had good intentions but lacked the charisma to stand firm against the crowd. Consequently, he generally resorted to compromise, which on certain issues is not recommended.

Regrettably, his biggest claim to fame was sleeping with his father's concubine.

This was a great pity, as he did show signs of real potential.

Judah

In contrast to Reuben, Judah, Jacob's fourth son, was a natural leader. He was also opposite in character to Joseph. He was outspoken, decisive, and usually the first to take action in high-pressure situations, although his motives were not always commendable. This flaw was always juxtaposed with Joseph's high moral character. Joseph made wise choices and



had integrity; this sharply contrasted with Judah's lack of good judgement as revealed in Genesis 38.

In his favour, when Judah recognised his mistakes, he was willing to admit them. His final confrontation with Joseph (Genesis 44:16) is an example of his willingness to bear the blame when confronted.

We all share Judah's tendency to be blind towards our own sins, yet it is far from wise to wait till our errors face us to admit our wrongdoing. It is better to shoulder the blame immediately and seek forgiveness from the outset.

Simeon and Levi

These brothers were the second and third eldest sons, respectively, of Leah. Their infamy was much more bloodthirsty and gruesome. It entailed wholesale pillaging and the slaughtering of all the males of the tribe of Hamor the Hivite.

This was a simple act of revenge. You may remember from earlier that one of their members, Shechem, had defiled Jacob's daughter Dinah (Genesis 34).

There is no Biblical information given on the rest of the brothers who presumably did nothing of great note.

Sibling Rivalry

How well do you know your siblings?
 Do you know all their faults and weaknesses?
 In what way do you compete with each other?
 Who usually wins?
 Why do you think this is?
 Can you see parallel characters in your family to the ones in Joseph's?

Competition is healthy, but once ambition and greed take over, it becomes dangerous.

Joseph

Joseph was different from his brothers. He was cultured, unlike his brothers who were rough and coarse. He was clever and learned things easily. He grew into a handsome man, liked by almost everyone except his brothers.

Joseph was a man of destiny. He had a very definite calling on his life, a calling we all share—to serve God in our lives in whatever way we can.

He was aware of his destiny from a very early age and became increasingly drawn to it. Unfortunately, Joseph's focus took the form of boastful behaviour around his siblings. Jacob must also have been aware of this fact and either chose to ignore it or to protect Joseph from his resentful brothers as best he could. This, however, could have been misinterpreted as profound favouritism. Either way, the die was cast.

Summary

What a horrendous family to be born into!

The collective family had four different mothers, two of which were wives and two were maidservants. Such extramarital relationships are hardly conducive to a stable, secure family. It does not bode well for the future.

No wonder there was insecurity and competitiveness. Anger, resentment and jealousy were rife amongst the brothers. Rivalry was also evident, especially between the children of Leah and Rachel, and this jealousy mirrored the rivalry they themselves had in their younger years.

The cause of all this misery can be placed firmly on Jacob, whose parenting skills left a lot to be desired.

These brief family case studies demonstrate the many flaws



and pitfalls of this extended family. You would be able to find similar dynamics in any culture today, as the human condition has remained constant in every era of man's history.

However, in spite of all these problems, Joseph's story is a striking example of God's infinite patience in bearing with his creation and working through our failings and weaknesses to bring about his purpose.

In this story we see how Joseph, despite momentous setbacks, discerned the call of God in his life and never let go of what he knew was his destiny. This single-mindedness allowed God to work through him to save an entire nation. Joseph himself became God's message to his people. It is an uplifting story of encouragement in the face of adversity. It can be summed up by 1 Corinthians 1:26: *'Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.'*

All families have problems and Joseph's was no exception. He was the favoured son of an aging parent and was raised without the guiding hand of his mother, who died in childbirth. He was the product of a broken family and the cause and victim of sibling rivalry. He was forced to fend for himself at a young age and make a new life for himself. Yet from despair he prospered, floundered and prospered again, this time beyond his wildest dreams. Joseph's life is truly a 'rags to riches' story of everyday folk.

Does the 'ideal family' promoted so avidly in the media

What's in a name?

Jacob means one who undermines. He certainly undermined his brother Esau when he gained his father's birthright instead of Esau.

Joseph means increase. He certainly increased in stature and position in his lifetime.

really exist? Often our own experiences are a far cry from this utopian image. Although some families in our society are close-knit and happy, many are not. Indeed, even the most mature, balanced, and faith-filled families have their problems, as is evident from the story of Joseph.

The one constant that motivates us in all we do is love. This is not the slushy sentimentalism displayed in the media but a mutual giving and receiving of love. This is the key to survival, a two-way relationship that balances the whole equation. All

People-watching

Have you ever observed other people and tried to decide what they do for a living or what kind of people they are? It's often said that you can tell something about a person by looking at his or her face. Go ahead—try it!

It's not easy, is it? After a while, we begin to see stereotypes rather than actual individuals and put people in boxes because it is easier to categorise them in our mind.

It is too easy to label people, and often those labels are not a true reflection of a person's character. Sometimes labels stick and can be difficult to shake off.

In what ways do you label people? Is this fair?

family relationships should demonstrate love, loyalty, care, and respect, treating people as individuals in their own right. If this is absent, relationship problems will develop, and at an extreme level can lead to the breakup of the family.

For a country that prides itself on its Christian values, the statistics quoted in the box headed "Startling Facts" prove very damning.

We hear people comment that the family has never been under so much pressure. Or has it? Perhaps we haven't progressed much in four thousand years of human history. People are the



same today as they were in Joseph's day, but have we learned anything about life throughout our time on Earth? Surely it is better to live and walk in the destiny God wants for our lives than to risk everything by doing things our own way.

Startling Facts!

- Britain has the highest divorce rate in Europe.
- Four out of ten children are born out of marriage.
- More than a quarter of children in Britain live in single-parent families.

