

When God Speaks, Will We Be Jealous or Zealous?

Recently, I was speaking with one of my friends when he asked me if I believed that G-D really spoke to the people we read about in the Bible. When I answered yes, he asked me if I thought that G-D still spoke to people today. I once again said yes. Then he asked me, “If G-D still talks to people today, why hasn’t He ever spoken to me?”

Believing that it is the height of arrogance for any human to think that we can answer a question about why G-D did this or doesn’t do that, I redirected the conversation by asking him what he would do if G-D did speak to him. Asking him that question that caused me to look at how different people in the Bible responded to a message from G-D. That led me to Genesis 37:11, which shows two vastly different responses to the same message from G-D.

“So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the speech in mind” (Gen. 37:11, TLV).

This verse is talking about Joseph’s brothers and his father, Jacob, and how they reacted when Joseph shared a dream that he had received from G-D. In the dream, Joseph saw the sun, the moon and 11 stars bowing down to him. We are told in Genesis 37:10 that initially Jacob rebuked Joseph, questioning what was in the dream.

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“He told it to his father as well as his brothers. Then his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What’s this dream you dreamed? Will we really come—your mother and I with your

brothers—to bow down to the ground to you?'" (Gen. 37:10).

However, one verse later, we read the reaction Joseph's brothers had to Joseph's dream. The verse says his brothers were jealous of him. This means that in between verse 10 and verse 11, Joseph's brothers transitioned from doubt and unbelief that their parents and all of his brothers would bow down to Joseph to a place where they believed it was going to happen, and they became jealous of Joseph. In other words, Joseph's brothers got the "why-not-me syndrome." Their jealousy was based upon the question: Why would G-D choose Joseph instead of me? Or more accurately, why didn't G-D choose me instead of Joseph? Or maybe I deserve this more than Joseph does?

In the first part of verse 11, we read the reaction of Joseph's brothers, but in the last part of the verse, we read the reaction of Joseph's father, Jacob. In between verse 10 and verse 11, Jacob also has a change of heart concerning Joseph's dream. However, Jacob's reaction is significantly different than his son's reaction. The above translation says, "but his father kept the speech in mind." However, the actual Hebrew of the text doesn't include the words "in mind." It says, "and his father kept the word."

I understand why translators would translate the verse "and his father kept the speech in mind." But, I believe there is more to this statement than saying Jacob just kept thinking about the dream. The word that is translated as kept is the Hebrew word *shamar*, which means, "to keep, guard or preserve." This is the word the Torah uses when it says to "keep the commandments." *Shamar* isn't used to mean "thought about" in the way it is translated in this text.

I believe the intent of the descriptions of the reactions of both Joseph's brothers and Jacob in verse 11 is to show a difference in their response to Joseph's dream after they had concluded it was truly from G-D.

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Joseph's brothers became jealous, but Jacob begins to *shamar*, guard or preserve the promise. In other words, while Joseph's brothers become jealous, his father becomes zealous. As we see when we read the next few verses, we find Jacob sending Joseph to check on the welfare of Joseph's brothers and their flocks and bring word back to him. It is clear that Jacob has made Joseph a supervisor over his brothers. We find that Jacob is doing everything he can to guard Joseph's dream by doing what he can to set the stage for the promise to come to pass. We also see that his brothers are doing everything they can to act upon their jealousy by first wanting to kill Joseph and then selling him into slavery.

So, in this story, we find G-D giving a message to Joseph and his family, and we see two different reactions to G-D's message. The first is the reaction of his brothers, which is jealousy. The second is the reaction of Jacob, his father, whose response is to guard the promise, even if it means that one day he will have to bow down before his own son.

My study of this verse caused me to wonder how do we, or *would* we, respond to a message such as Joseph's dream from G-D? What if our rabbi or pastor got up this week and said, "G-D spoke to me last night in a dream and told me to take up an offering to buy a homeless person a house?" Would we respond like Joseph's brothers with the "why-not-me syndrome," becoming jealous and asking ourselves and G-D questions such as "Why would G-D choose them instead of me?" or "Why didn't G-D choose to give me a house instead of them?" Or maybe "I deserve a house more than they do?" Or would we become zealous like Jacob and do all we could to guard the dream and make sure the dream came to pass?

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Eric Tokajer *is the author of* Overcoming Fearlessness, What If Everything You Were Taught About the Ten Commandments Was Wrong?, With Me in Paradise, Transient Singularity, OY! How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry, #ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer, Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians *and* Galatians in Context. *Visit his website at* .