
Leadership: Joseph Left His Old Garments Behind

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
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We have been taught to consider Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the ancestors of our faith. Those great Hebrew patriarchs, with whom God established a life-giving covenant, generation after generation, rightly merit our honor. Their actions were willful and strong; for them, their faith was reckoned to them as righteousness. May our faith, too, be counted as righteousness—as relationship—with God!

However, after the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Book of Genesis turns to Joseph. In fact, the last thirteen chapters of Genesis are devoted to Joseph. Beginning as a dreamer, and maybe even as an oblivious daydreamer, Joseph develops into a remarkably effective leader. The way Genesis recounts it, whatever Joseph touches, prospers. He is savvy. His gift of dream interpretation may well be an indication of his God-given ability to read the times well.

Joseph was born with a gift, but the gift needed development. I believe his gift of leadership can be examined by noting two of the famous garments associated with him.

Perhaps we all remember the first garment associated with Joseph. Favored by his father, Joseph received some kind of special coat. Maybe we all learned of it as the “many-colored” coat. Or, perhaps following Broadway, we know it as his “technicolor dream coat.” Later translations call it a “long-sleeved” coat, which might have been more representative and even practical.

Whatever coat it was, it represented position and honor. But it was seized from him. His resentful brothers tore it from him, dipped it in blood, and showed it to their grieving father as a sign that wild animals had killed Joseph. Joseph left that prized garment behind, but he then ended up as an honored part of the pharaoh’s household. He left the old garment behind.

Then, happily ensconced in the household of pharaoh’s officer (Potiphar), travesty struck. In one of the more risqué stories of the Bible, Joseph has to resist the seductive attempts of Potiphar’s wife. When she grabs his garment, he flees, leaving his garment in her hands; with it, she falsely accuses him. Again, he left his garment behind.

While in prison, he learns to use his dream-interpretation gift more wisely. He develops. In fact, he develops into a place of even more honor with the pharaoh, entrusted with storing up and stewarding grain for the upcoming famine. In that capacity, he is actually able to help save his family, the same brothers who had once betrayed him. His leadership saves the Hebrew people, and it continues the covenant of God.

Joseph was still another of the great leaders of scripture. There are other features of his leadership, but the ability to discard the old is a key one. He was able to leave the old garment behind, and so grow into a new garment. He is a solid lesson to us in this Lenten season. It may be that the habits or clothes that we give up during Lent must stay behind us. Only when they are discarded, even if they are sometimes ripped from us, are we able to take on the new garments of leadership and wisdom.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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