

Joseph and His Brothers

Genesis 37

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word."

Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." When Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this **pit**¹ here in the wilderness."

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. They took him and threw him into a pit. Then they sat down to eat. Looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites² coming from Gilead, with their camels on their way to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites. And they sold him for twenty shekels of silver³ to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?"⁴ They took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They sent the robe of many colors to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not."

He identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." Then Jacob tore his garments and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning."⁵

Explanatory Notes

¹Hole or well. ²Also called Midianites. ³The price of a young slave. ⁴As the oldest, he was responsible for Joseph's welfare. ⁵He felt he would die of grief.



His brothers sold him for twenty shekels of silver, and they took him to Egypt.

For Reflection

1. Jacob's sons tricked him into thinking Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Jacob had at one time tricked his father. Recall the incident.
2. The evil thoughts of Joseph's brothers led to evil actions. Explain.
3. Reuben intercedes (speaks on his behalf) for Joseph, and saves his life. Who has interceded for our lives? How?

Words to Remember

[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. *Hebrews 7:25*

Sons of Jacob/Israel

In narrative birth order grouped according to wife/concubine (see Genesis 37:2 and 35:22).

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Birth Reference	Leah	Zilpah	Rachel	Bilhah	Relevant Notes
Gen 29:32	Reuben				Lay with Bilhah in Gen 35:22; cf. 49:4; tried to save Joseph in Gen 37:21-22; confer 42:22
Gen 29:33	Simeon				Problematic reaction to defiling of Dinah in Gen 34; cf. 49:5-7
Gen 29:34	Levi				Problematic reaction to defiling of Dinah in Gen 34; cf. 49:5-7
Gen 29:35	Judah				Suggests selling Joseph in Gen 37:26; involved with daughter-in-law Tamar; tries to protect Benjamin in Gen 44:18-34
Gen 30:5-6				Dan	Joseph gave a bad report of him in Gen 37:2
Gen 30:7-8				Naphtali	Joseph gave a bad report of him in Gen 37:2
Gen 30:10-11		Gad			Joseph gave a bad report of him in Gen 37:2
Gen 30:12-13		Asher			Joseph gave a bad report of him in Gen 37:2
Gen 30:17-18	Issachar				
Gen 30:19-20	Zebulun				
Gen 30:22-24			Joseph		
Gen 35:16-18			Benjamin		

Confer John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament Revised and Expanded* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p.18.