

JOSEPH THE FAVORITE

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Today we will look at a story from the Word—the story of Joseph, one of the sons of Israel. You may remember that Israel had twelve sons, and the youngest were Joseph and Benjamin, who were the children of Rachel. Israel loved Joseph more than all the other sons, because Joseph was the son of his beloved wife Rachel. So Israel gave Joseph the place of honor over all the other brothers. To show honor to Joseph, so that all who saw him would know that he was the greatest of his twelve sons, Israel prepared a special coat for him—a coat of many colors. A coat like that was worn by the son and heir of a prince, and Joseph wore this coat while he was still a boy, although the other brothers were nearly grown men. When, they saw Joseph in his coat of many colors, they envied Joseph. They were jealous because their father loved him so much, and so they hated him. They would have liked to drive him away from their home so that he would not be seen by them ever again.

The other brothers were sent far away for a time to care for the sheep, for in those days men had to travel to find good grazing lands where the sheep could get enough to eat. So the brothers traveled all the way to Shechem, which was about sixty miles away from their home. There they cared for the sheep while Joseph remained at home with his father. But after a time, Israel called Joseph to him, and said: “Your brothers are out caring for the sheep far away. I want you to travel to them, to see if they are all right, and if the sheep are prospering.” Joseph was still just a young boy, and he had to travel over sixty miles to do what his father wanted. So he started out on his journey. When he came to Schechem, his brothers were not there. They had moved on with the sheep to better grazing land. Joseph found out that they had gone on to the plains of Dothan. So he hurried on, obedient to his, father’s wishes. He wanted to find his brothers to see how they and how the sheep were doing so that he could bring back word to his father Israel.

When Joseph came to the plains of Dothan, he saw his brothers watching a great flock of sheep in the distance. His brothers also saw him. They talked together, saying, “Here comes that brother of ours whom we don’t like. Let us take him and kill him.” This was very evil, but they envied him and were so jealous of him that they even wanted to kill him. One of the brothers, Reuben, the oldest; said, “No, Let’s not do that. Let us take the boy and put him in a pit in the field. We can leave him there.” Now a pit is a deep hole in the ground from which a man could not escape without help. If they put Joseph in the pit they would not have to kill him. Reuben suggested this because he felt sorry for Joseph. He wanted to go back later and pull him out of the pit and take him back to their father. So, they took Joseph and put him in the pit where he could not get out. And Reuben went out to look after the sheep while the other brothers sat down and ate their lunch.

As they were eating a big caravan came along, with many merchants who were going down to trade in the land of Egypt—a very powerful, rich land in those days. And as they approached, the brothers saw that they had many slaves to take to Egypt. So they said to one another, “Why should we kill our brother Joseph? Let us sell him to these men and then we will get some

money, as well as get rid of our hated brother without killing him.” So they pulled him up out of the pit and sold him to the traders. The traders took Joseph away with them to be sold in the land of Egypt. Later on, Reuben returned and found that Joseph was gone from the pit. He could not do anything to help him.

The brothers knew that they would have to tell their father something about Joseph when they got home. They didn’t want to tell what they had really done, so they took his coat of many colors and dipped it into the blood of a kid—a young goat. When it was all covered with blood they took it back to Israel and said, “We found this on the ground all covered with blood. Some wild animal must have attacked and killed Joseph.” His father was filled with great grief and sorrow, but his sons did not help him by telling him that Joseph was still alive.

This first part of the story of Joseph—of how he was sold into slavery in Egypt—teaches us a very important lesson. It shows the result of envy, jealousy and hatred. These brothers hated Joseph so much that they were even willing to kill him or to sell him into slavery in Egypt where they would never see him again. They hated him so much that they were willing to let their father suffer by thinking that Joseph was dead. We must learn from this story not to be jealous—not to envy what other people have. For the Lord has given you everything that you need, and He is with you always to give you happiness and prepare you for heaven. No one can ask for more than that. For the Lord gives us everything that it is good for us to have.

And now for one final word. When Joseph was sold to the Midianite traders and taken down to Egypt, he did not worry too much, for Jacob, or Israel, had taught him that the Lord would always care for him. So Joseph prayed to the Lord for help. And the Lord was with him. He turned the evil things which his brothers had done to him into a great blessing, not only for Joseph, but also for all people, as we will see in the rest of Joseph’s story.

Amen.

Lesson: Genesis 37-portions