

The Brothers of Joseph Decided to Sell Him

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that God had to allow Joseph to go through testing and trials to prepare him for godly leadership. God does the same for us. In this topic, we will see that the brothers of Joseph decided to sell him into slavery.

The brothers of Joseph had thrown him into a pit so they would not be guilty of murder. Genesis 37:25-28 says, “And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry *them* down to Egypt. So Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit *is there* if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh.’ And his brothers listened. Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.” A little later that day, we see that most of the brothers sat down to eat a meal together. Reuben had probably gone to care for the flocks because he was not there while the brothers ate.

As the brothers were eating, they saw a caravan of camels coming in the distance. The men in this caravan were traders. They were traveling from the land of Gilead to the land of Egypt. The land of Gilead was an area of mountains on the east side of the Jordan River. These traders are called both Ishmaelites and Midianites. Ishmaelites were descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Hagar. Midianites were also descendants of Abraham. After the death of Sarah, we read that Abraham married Keturah. Genesis 25:1-2 says, “Abraham again took a wife, and her name *was* Keturah. And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.” We see that Midian was one of the sons of Abraham and Keturah. Apparently, the descendants of Ishmael had intermarried with the descendants of Midian. We see that this group had become traders and bought goods in the land of Gilead and then took them and sold them in Egypt.

Judah saw these traders and suggested a different plan to get rid of Joseph. Possibly, he was beginning to feel a little guilt at the thought of leaving Joseph in the pit to die. As a result, he made a suggestion to the other brothers as they ate. He said that they would not gain any benefit by killing their brother and hiding his blood. He also reminded the brothers that Joseph was their brother and their flesh because they had all come from the same father. As a result, Judah suggested that instead of leaving Joseph in the pit to die, they sell him to the Ishmaelites as a slave. That way, they would not be guilty of murdering their brother and they could also make a little profit. Then, they pulled Joseph up out of the pit and sold him to the traders for twenty shekels of silver. The price of an adult slave was later set at thirty shekels of silver. Leviticus 27:5 says, “...and if from

five years old up to twenty years old, then your valuation for a male shall be twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels...” Since Joseph was seventeen years old, this verse shows that this was the common price for a slave of his age for a period of several hundred years following his sale. Then, we see that the Ishmaelites took Joseph with them as they traveled to the land of Egypt.

Genesis 37:29-32 says, “Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. And he returned to his brothers and said, ‘The lad *is* no *more*; and I, where shall I go?’ So they took Joseph’s tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. Then they sent the tunic of *many* colors, and they brought *it* to their father and said, ‘We have found this. Do you know whether it *is* your son’s tunic or not?’” Here, we see that Reuben came back to the pit where Joseph had been placed. He saw that Joseph was not in the pit. Reuben showed his sorrow by the fact that he tore his clothes. This was a common way to show sorrow. This is also shown a few verses later when we read, in Genesis 37:33-34, “And he recognized it and said, ‘*It is* my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.’ Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days.” Then, Genesis 44:13 says, “Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city.” Reuben felt great sorrow and inner pain when he did not find Joseph in the pit because he felt responsible as the oldest brother.

However, he apparently joined the other brothers in the plan to deceive their father as we see what the brothers did. The brothers planned the way to deceive their father. The brothers killed a young goat and dipped the shirt of Joseph in the blood. This meant that it was partially covered with blood. This gives another example of the fact that we reap what we sow. Galatians 6:7 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” Jacob had deceived Isaac when he was a young man. Genesis 27:22-24 says, “So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, ‘The voice *is* Jacob’s voice, but the hands *are* the hands of Esau.’ And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him. Then he said, ‘*Are* you really my son Esau?’ He said, ‘*I am.*’” Jacob had deceived his own father, and now, he was about to be deceived by his own sons.

We saw that the brothers had killed a young goat and taken the tunic of many colors of Joseph and dipped it in the blood of the young goat. Then, the brothers returned home to their father. Just like Jacob had done many years earlier to deceive his father Isaac, the sons of Jacob now told their father a lie to deceive him. They showed the coat of many colors that had been dipped in the blood to their father and said, “We have found this...” Instead, Genesis 37:23 tells what actually happened when that verse says, “So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph *of* his tunic, the tunic of *many* colors that *was* on him.” In conflict, such as a war, the word “stripped” can speak of a violent or judgmental action. God warned Israel that the enemy would do this to them, in Ezekiel 16:39, where we read, “‘I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your shrines and break down your high places. They shall also

strip you of your clothes, take your beautiful jewelry, and leave you naked and bare.” In this verse, we see that the clothing of the Jews would be forcibly removed. That was what the brothers of Joseph had done when they stripped Joseph of his tunic.

Genesis 37:33-36 tells us the response of Jacob when he saw the tunic of Joseph. Those verses say, “And he recognized it and said, ‘*It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.*’ Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, ‘For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.’ Thus his father wept for him. Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh *and* captain of the guard.” Jacob had deceived his father with a bowl of stew made from two young goats. Here, he was deceived by his sons with a piece of clothing that had been dipped in the blood of a young goat.

Jacob easily recognized the tunic of Joseph. There was no question in his mind that it was the same tunic. However, the conclusion that Jacob reached as he saw the tunic was exactly what the brothers had hoped. Jacob decided that a wild animal must have killed Joseph. In fact, Jacob even decided that Joseph must have been torn to pieces by that wild animal. For more than twenty years, the thought of a wild animal tearing Joseph to pieces stayed in his mind. We see that all of his sons and all of his daughters tried to comfort their father. However, we see that he refused to be comforted. In fact, Jacob said that he would mourn for his son until he went to the grave.

The word translated “refused” is a very strong word. As a result, the word is used only once of God. Numbers 22:13 says, “So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, ‘Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you.’” However, the word is used several times to speak of Pharaoh. Exodus 7:14 says, “So the LORD said to Moses: ‘Pharaoh’s heart *is* hard; he refuses to let the people go...’” Then, Exodus 10:3 adds, “So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”’” The Lord makes it clear that in the case of Pharaoh, the refusals were the result of a hard heart and refusing to humble himself. In the case of Jacob, it was his way of saying that he would continue to mourn for his son until the time of his death.

Meanwhile, we see that the Midianites did not keep Joseph when they arrived in Egypt. Instead, they sold Joseph to Potiphar. Genesis 39:1-2 says, “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.” In these verses, we learn several things about Potiphar. He was an officer of Pharaoh. He was the captain of the guard. He was an Egyptian. However, we see some even more important things about Joseph. The Lord was with Joseph. Even though he

was just a young man, and a slave in a foreign country, the Lord was there with him. The Lord caused his life to be successful even though he was a slave. In fact, the Lord was using that period of slavery to train him for the future position of leadership the Lord knew would be given to him. We want to help our physical and spiritual children really understand that the Lord is with us wherever we go. He allows us to go through difficult situations to prepare us for the ministry that He has for us. As a result, the Lord allows everything that happens in our lives to help us become conformed to the image of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.