

### The Brothers of Joseph Wanted to Kill Him

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain how the fact that Joseph was the favorite of his father caused his brothers to be filled with envy and jealousy. That feeling became even stronger when Joseph told them about his dreams. In this topic, we will see that the jealousy of the brothers was so strong, they were ready to kill him.

Genesis 37:12-16 says, “Then his brothers went to feed their father’s flock in Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, ‘Are not your brothers feeding *the flock* in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.’ So he said to him, ‘Here I am.’ Then he said to him, ‘Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me.’ So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem. Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, ‘What are you seeking?’ So he said, ‘I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding *their flocks*.’” Here, we see that at times the flocks would be fed quite a distance from where the family was living. Shechem was about forty miles north of Hebron. Later, they traveled still another twenty miles further north.

Jacob wanted to make sure the brothers were all doing well. As a result, Jacob reminded Joseph that his brothers were feeding the flock in the area of Shechem and asked Joseph to go and see that everything was going well, both for them and for the flocks. As we saw in an earlier topic, Simeon and Levi had killed all of the men of Shechem several years earlier and taken their wives and children as captives. Jacob may have had a concern that the people of the surrounding area might take revenge for what Simeon and Levi had done. In addition, anyone who has flocks and herds of animals has a concern for the animals. Joseph obeyed his father and left the region of Hebron and went to the area of Shechem. However, he could not find his brothers or the flocks.

Then, a man from that area found Joseph wandering in a field. The man began to talk with Joseph and asked him what he was seeking. Joseph explained that he was looking for his brothers. Joseph asked the man if he knew where his brothers were feeding their flocks. We will see that the Lord had led the right man to the field where Joseph was wandering to answer the question of Joseph. One of the things we have seen several times in the book of Genesis is that the Lord led various people to the people who could answer their questions. That had happened to the servant of Abraham when he went to look for a bride for Isaac. The same thing happened when Jacob went to Haran to look for the family of Rebekah. Here, the same thing now happened to Joseph. This time, the Lord brought the man to Joseph as he wandered in the field.

Genesis 37:17-20 says, “And the man said, ‘They have departed from here, for I heard

them say, “Let us go to Dothan.” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan. Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. Then they said to one another, ‘Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, “Some wild beast has devoured him.” We shall see what will become of his dreams!’” Here, we see that this man had heard his brothers say they were going to take the flocks to the area of Dothan. That was an area about twenty miles north of Shechem. The fact that this particular man had happened to walk by at the very time they were talking about moving the flocks to Dothan shows how the Lord worked to put the man in the right place at the right time to hear the brothers of Joseph when they decided to go to the area of Dothan.

Then, the Lord had brought that same man to the field where Joseph was wandering. This is a reminder of the fact that the Lord is very concerned about the little events that happen in our lives. Romans 8:28-29 tell us, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” The Lord wanted to conform Joseph to His image because the Lord had a plan for the life of Joseph that would save many people from starvation. However, the Lord had to do many things in the life of Joseph in order to prepare him for that opportunity. This was just one of many things.

Joseph did go to Dothan and did find his brothers. However, they saw him when he was still quite a distance from them. It was easy for them to recognize him at a distance because of his shirt of many colors. They were not happy to see him because of the fact that his father favored him over all of the brothers. In addition, they had developed hatred toward him because of his dreams. After his first dream, Genesis 37:5 says, “Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and they hated him even more.” Then, after his second dream, Genesis 37:11 says, “And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind*.” As a result, the brothers made a decision long before Joseph even got close to where they were located in the fields. We see that the brothers conspired against Joseph and decided to kill him. Here, we see the results of envy and hatred. They were ready to kill their brother because of the hatred in their hearts.

Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” We even see that the brothers called Joseph by a different title rather than calling him by his name. The brothers said, “Look, this dreamer is coming!” This shows how much the dreams of Joseph had angered them. The brothers decided to put an end to his dreams. They said, “Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit.” Here, we see that the brothers were ready to commit murder and then hide the evidence by throwing the body into a pit. In fact, before Joseph even got to them, they had already decided what they would tell their father. They planned to tell their father, “Some wild beast has devoured him.” We learn several things about the sinful condition of the hearts of people just from these few verses. We are also given the reason why they

decided to kill him as they said, “We shall see what will become of his dreams!” They thought if they could kill Joseph, then they would not have to bow down to him at some time in the future. This is just a reminder of the fact that when the heart is controlled by sin, people have no desire to do what is right.

Genesis 37:21-24 goes on to say, “But Reuben heard *it*, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, ‘Let us not kill him.’ And Reuben said to them, ‘Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit which *is* in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him’—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father. 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. Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit *was* empty; *there was* no water in it.” Reuben was the oldest brother and he felt responsible for his younger brother. He realized that his other brothers were very angry, yet he knew that it was not right to commit murder in their anger. As a result, we see that Reuben made a different suggestion to his brothers.

Reuben told the brothers that it was not right to kill and shed blood. God had told Noah when he came off the ark, in Genesis 9:5-6, “‘Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a *reckoning*; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.’” In these verses, we see that God had said that the penalty for murder was death. God said this was the penalty both for animals and for mankind. In fact, God also said that man is made in His image. We are made in the image of God and so we are to reflect His glory. That is the reason why if one person murders another person, God said the penalty for murder is death.

Reuben suggested instead that they just throw Joseph into a pit and leave him there. That way they would not be responsible for his actual murder. However, the plan of Reuben was to return later and rescue Joseph from the pit so he could return to his father. The brothers had completed this discussion before Joseph even got to them, so we can see that they had recognized him from a great distance because of his shirt of many colors. As soon as Joseph arrived, they took his shirt of many colors off of him. We will see they later brought this shirt to their father and let Jacob tell them that it was the shirt of Joseph. That way they also deceived their father. Once they had taken the shirt off Joseph, they threw him into a pit from which he would not be able to escape by himself. This meant it was probably a fairly deep hole in the ground.

We also read that this hole was empty and had no water in it. As a result, that meant Joseph was safe for a period of time in that pit because he would not drown. That was why Reuben thought he could come back later and rescue Joseph from the pit and return him to his father. This was the first of many difficult situations Joseph would face in the coming years. The Lord knew that Joseph would have to go through these difficult times to prepare him to save the lives of many people in the future. We want to help our

physical and spiritual children also realize that the Lord allows us to go through difficult times to prepare us for the future. James 1:2-4 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” Godly patience develops through trials. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand and explain these things.