

Joseph, the teenager

Background information:

Joseph was born in Paddan-Aram, an area in the north of what is now Iraq.

He lives with his mother Rachel and his father Jacob.

His father has another wife: Lea. Lea is his mother's sister. Jacob and Lea also have children: 6 sons (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun) and a daughter (Dinah).

And then Jacob is also married to his mother's slave girl, her name is Bilha. Jacob and Bilha have 2 sons, Dan and Naftali.

And finally, Jacob is also married to Leah's slave girl. Her name is Zilpa. Jacob and Zilpa also have 2 sons: Gad and Asher.

They all live with Grandpa Laban on the property.

Is it 1 big, cozy family? No, between Rachel and Lea there is much strife: they both want to be the most important woman in Jacob's life.

It is inevitable that the children have inherited (and adopted) that.

Because, of course, Jacob can only be with one woman at a time.

Jacob prefers to be with Rachel, whom he loves the most. And of course the others notice this too. It is written of Rachel that she is pretty and that she has a beautiful figure. Later, the same is said of Joseph. I think Joseph looks a lot like his mother.

One day father Jacob says he would like to return to the land where he was born: Canaan, today's Israel.

With all their possessions and with many animals, they travel by foot about 800 kilometers.

Interpreters of the Bible believe that Joseph is then about 6 years old.

When they enter the land of Canaan, Esau, Jacob's brother, comes to meet them. What a beautiful reunion.

Then Jacob and his family move further into the land. They go to live near the city of Shechem. That city was founded by Chamor. He had the city built and named it after his son Shechem.

This Shechem saw Dinah, Joseph's half-sister, when she went to see girls in the city. He grabbed and raped her.

When her brothers heard this they were furious and took revenge: they killed all the men in town, including Chamor and Shechem. They looted the entire city.

Jacob and his family traveled further into the land. But further on, something terrible happens: Rachel dies while giving birth to her second child Benjamin. She is buried by the side of the road.

Jacob and his family travel on until they come to Mamre, the place where Jacob's grandfather (Abraham) and father (Isaac) lived.

In Genesis 35, you can read that Isaac dies and Jacob and Esau bury him. Although that section is before the Bible portion of this Bible study (Genesis 37) in the Bible, interpreters think that Isaac lived another 20 years or so from the time Jacob settled in Canaan.

From here we read from the Bible (ERV): Genesis 37:1-25

Joseph the Dreamer

1Jacob stayed and lived in the land of Canaan. This is the same land where his father had lived. 2This is the story of Jacob's family.

Joseph was a young man, 17 years old. His job was to take care of the sheep and the goats. Joseph did this work with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. (Bilhah and Zilpah were his father's wives.) Joseph told his father about the bad things that his brothers did.

3Joseph was born at a time when his father Israel was very old, so Israel loved him more than he loved his other sons. Jacob gave him a special coat, which was long and very beautiful. 4When Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than he loved them, they hated their brother because of this. They refused to say nice things to him.

5One time Joseph had a special dream. Later, he told his brothers about this dream, and after that his brothers hated him even more.

6Joseph said, "I had a dream. 7We were all working in the field, tying stacks of wheat together. Then my stack got up. It stood there while all of your stacks of wheat made a circle around mine and bowed down to it."

8His brothers said, "Do you think this means that you will be a king and rule over us?" His brothers hated Joseph more now because of the dreams he had about them.

9Then Joseph had another dream, and he told his brothers about it. He said, "I had another dream. I saw the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowing down to me."

10Joseph also told his father about this dream, but his father criticized him. His father said, "What kind of dream is this? Do you believe that your mother, your brothers, and I will bow down to you?" 11Joseph's brothers continued to be jealous of him, but his father thought about all these things and wondered what they could mean.

12One day Joseph's brothers went to Shechem to care for their father's sheep. 13Jacob said to Joseph, "Go to Shechem. Your brothers are there with my sheep."

Joseph answered, "I will go."

14His father said, "Go and see if your brothers are safe. Come back and tell me if my sheep are all fine." So Joseph's father sent him from the Valley of Hebron to Shechem.

15At Shechem, Joseph got lost. A man found him wandering in the fields. The man said, "What are you looking for?"

16Joseph answered, "I am looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are with their sheep?"

17The man said, "They have already gone away. I heard them say that they were going to Dothan." So Joseph followed his brothers and found them in Dothan.

Joseph Sold Into Slavery

18Joseph's brothers saw him coming from far away. They decided to make a plan to kill him.

19They said to each other, "Here comes Joseph the dreamer. 20We should kill him now while we can. We could throw his body into one of the empty wells and tell our father that a wild animal killed him. Then we will show him that his dreams are useless."

21But Reuben wanted to save Joseph. He said, "Let's not kill him. 22We can put him into a well without hurting him." Reuben planned to save Joseph and send him back to his father.

23When Joseph came to his brothers, they attacked him and tore off his long and beautiful coat. 24Then they threw him into an empty well that was dry.

25While Joseph was in the well, the brothers sat down to eat

Bible Study:

Joseph is herding small livestock with his brothers. He is 17 years old; his brothers are a lot older. His brothers are not kind to him.

Joseph has a very different character from them. When he sees them doing something that is not right, he tells father.

Then, when his father also gives Joseph a beautiful cloak, they become jealous and hate him. Now they cannot be friendly to him at all.

Then Joseph dreams. He tells the extraordinary dream to his brothers, "I dreamed that we were working in the fields and we were tying corn into sheaves. Suddenly my sheaf went upright and your sheaves went around him and bowed deeply before my sheaf."

The brothers don't like the dream at all, they say angrily, "Do you sometimes think that you will be king?" And that you can rule over us?

Because of that dream, the brother hate Joseph even more.

Later, Joseph dreams again. This dream, too, he tells his brothers, "I dreamed that the sun, the moon and 11 stars took a deep bow to me!"

Even Father Jacob takes this too far. He says, "What kind of a dream is that? Surely you don't think your mother, your brothers and I will bow before you?"

Yet Father Jacob still often thinks about these dreams. For he himself has also had dreams that were revelations from God. (For example, in Genesis 31:10-13.)

These dreams, too, are from God. Joseph also finds them special, different from "ordinary" dreams. Years later, these dreams also came true.

Now he is not quite sure what to do with them. Joseph shares them with his brothers. But from them he gets only resistance.

It can be the same with us: if God reveals something to you (through a dream, a voice, a vision, or through something someone says that touches your heart, for example through a sermon), others will not understand it. It is something between you and God. Write it down or keep it in your heart. God will show in His time what He means by it.

One day Joseph is at home with his father. Who says, "your brothers will be away with the flock for some time, I would like to know how they are doing. Go and see what they are doing and tell me."

Joseph looks for them in the field near Shechem. But there they are not. As he is wandering one a man speaks to him: "What are you looking for?"

Joseph asks if he has seen his brothers. The man tells him that he heard them say that they had moved on about 30 kilometers, to Dothan. That is where Joseph walks toward.

The brothers see him, with his beautiful cloak, already approaching in the distance.

"Look, there you have that dreamer. Shall we kill him? Then we'll throw him into a well and tell Father that a predator ate him. "We'll see if those beautiful dreams come true then!"

Ruben says, "No, let's not kill him. "We'll throw him in this well."

Ruben thinks, "Then I'll get him out later and I'll take him to father.

As soon as Joseph gets to his brothers they grab him. They take off his beautiful cloak and they throw him into the well. Fortunately there is no water in there.

They themselves sit down to eat quietly. This shows how hard and cold they are.

For Joseph, these are oppressive hours. How can his brothers do this? And what will happen next? What are his brothers going to do?

Lonely and alone, he sits in the pit. He can't get out by himself. Will his brothers do?

Prayer: Lord, Joseph has been through a lot as a child and as a teenager. He grew up among brothers who did not like him. Thank You for being there, for being with him in his loneliness. This is also how You take care of people today who are out of the group. You have compassion for people who do not count. I also want to ask Lord: if there are people who are figuratively in the pit today: will You help them? Would You care for them and give people around them who love them. Would You give light again in their darkness? Amen.

Questions:

1. Joseph emigrates from one country to another. His whole life is taken away in a number of possessions. Even today there are many people who go (sometimes by necessity) to another country. How such an impact does this have in a life? What would you take with you if you were walking to move to another country?
2. Joseph, after his mother dies, has only his little brother and his father. His brothers dislike him. Which people around you are important to you? Why?
3. God gives Joseph special dreams. Have you ever experienced something special? What happened?
4. The brothers use violence and are ruthless. They react hatefully and unkindly when Joseph says something. Joseph must have felt lonely many times. What would you do if you were Joseph?
 - 4a. What is loneliness and can you do something about it?
5. Do you know people who are down in the dumps? What can you do for them? How can you help?