

Joseph, sold by his brothers

Background information:

Joseph is a 17-year-old boy. He was born in Haran and emigrated when he was about 6 years old to Canaan, the land his father came from. To do this, they had to walk some 800 kilometers. When they arrived in Canaan, his mother died giving birth to his little brother Benjamin.

Joseph also has 11 older half-brothers and a half-sister.

But his brothers dislike him because they see that father Jacob loves Joseph very much. Joseph is the only one given a beautiful coat by father, a showy robe it says in the Bible. Joseph wears this coat a lot.

The brothers also find it irritating that Joseph tells them that he dreams that everyone bows before him. So they mockingly call him “the master dreamer.

One day, as the brothers are grazing the flock, they see Joseph approaching in the distance. He stands out because of his colorful coat. They plot a plan to kill him. But that goes too far for Ruben, the eldest. 'Let's throw him into a well,' he says. He thinks: then I'll get him out later to take him to father.

When Joseph arrives at his brothers' house, they grab him. They take off his coat and they throw him into a well.

We read from the Bible (ERV):

Genesis 37:23-36

Genesis 39: 1-6

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. They looked up and saw a group of traders traveling from Gilead to Egypt. Their camels were carrying many different spices and riches. 26So Judah said to his brothers, “What profit will we get if we kill our brother and hide his death? 27We will profit more if we sell him to these traders. Then we will not be guilty of killing our own brother.” The other brothers agreed. 28When the Midianite traders came by, the brothers took Joseph out of the well and sold him to the traders for 20 pieces of silver. The traders took him to Egypt.

29Reuben had been gone, but when he came back to the well, he saw that Joseph was not there. He tore his clothes to show that he was upset. 30Reuben went to the brothers and said, “The boy is not in the well! What will I do?” 31The brothers killed a goat and put the goat's blood on Joseph's beautiful coat. 32Then the brothers showed the coat to their father. And the brothers said, “We found this coat. Is this Joseph's coat?”

33His father saw the coat and knew that it was Joseph's. He said, "Yes, that is his! Maybe some wild animal has killed him. My son Joseph has been eaten by a wild animal!" 34Jacob was so sorry about his son that he tore his clothes. Then Jacob put on special clothes to show that he was sad. He continued to be sad about his son for a long time. 35All of Jacob's sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but Jacob was never comforted. He said, "I will be sad about my son until the day I die." So Jacob continued to mourn his son Joseph.

36The Midianite traders later sold Joseph in Egypt. They sold him to Potiphar, an officer of the king of Egypt and the captain of his palace guards.

Joseph Is Sold to Potiphar in Egypt

1The traders who bought Joseph took him down to Egypt. They sold him to the captain of Pharaoh's guard, Potiphar. 2The Lord helped Joseph become a successful man. Joseph lived in the house of his master, Potiphar the Egyptian.

3Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord helped Joseph be successful in everything he did. 4So Potiphar was very happy with Joseph. He allowed Joseph to work for him and to help him rule the house. Joseph was the ruler over everything Potiphar owned. 5After Joseph was made the ruler over the house, the Lord blessed the house and everything that Potiphar owned. The Lord also blessed everything that grew in Potiphar's fields. The Lord did this because of Joseph. 6So Potiphar allowed Joseph to take responsibility for everything in the house. Potiphar didn't have to worry about anything except deciding what to eat.

Bible Study

Joseph sits at the bottom of a well. Probably covered in scrapes. It is cold, his coat has been taken away, and there is only sunlight coming from the opening of the well.

Minutes then seem like hours.

Why did his brothers throw him in? And will they take him out again? Surely they won't leave him here!!!?

He hears voices. And then: thankfully, his brothers get him out again! 'Boy, what a fright you gave me!'

But then he sees strange men with camels. A caravan. And they give his brother a handful of coins. They won't...?!

Joseph has to go with those strange men; his brothers have sold him.

Later Joseph says of this, "I was dragged away by force from the land of the Hebrews." (Gen. 40:15)

His brothers have sold him. They leave Joseph to his fate. He cries and begs, but his brothers disappear like specks in the distance.

Reuben, the oldest brother, is not among them. He had briefly run away from his brothers. When he returns, he sees that the well is empty. He tears his clothes from fear and pain. He goes to his brothers and says, "the boy is not here, what should I do?"

They come up with a plan. They slaughter a goat and dip Joseph's beautiful coat in the blood. Then they don't even have the decency to bring the coat to father themselves, they have it done. Probably by a servant, asking, "we found this one, is this your son's coat?"

Father Jacob recognizes the coat and draws his conclusion: a wild animal has torn and eaten Joseph. Jacob tears his clothes and puts on a mourning robe. He is intensely sad.

The sons come home. They have deceived their father and pretend to be very sorry that Joseph is "dead. But Joseph is not dead; they sold him themselves. Away with him. Will they have thought of father when they sold him to the merchants?

Father is in deep mourning and will not be comforted by anyone. Now the brothers must keep up their lie. A collective secret: no one is allowed to say anything. Surely that must gnaw at them? Especially when they see father's grief day in and day out?

They cannot undo their act; Joseph is gone. And where to? No one knows.

No one? God knows. He sees what happens. He sees what the brothers do out of hatred. But God does not leave Joseph to his own devices. He does not leave Joseph alone.

The baptism form for children says that God wants to "make evil work for good" (after Romans 8:28).

What does that mean in Joseph's life? God causes the merchants to sell Joseph to Potiphar, a high-ranking courtier of Pharaoh of Egypt.

God also shows Joseph that He is with him. Everything Joseph does in Potiphar's house is blessed.

Even Potiphar sees this. He gets to share in the blessing God gives to Joseph.

God controls the life that Joseph lives in Egypt so that even though he is a slave, he is a prosperous man: he is doing well.

Potiphar appoints Joseph over his house. Here Joseph learns how to lead a household.

Joseph is successful in Egypt. Here he builds a new life, far from his brothers who hate him and are mean to him. But also far from his father and little brother whom he misses greatly. Will he ever see them again?

Prayer: Lord, we cannot imagine that we would be sold by family members because they hate us. And yet it happens to Joseph. As a slave, he has to go with them to a far country, far away from his family. Lord, what a comfort and encouragement to Joseph when he noticed that You were with him. That You blessed him in everything he did. And that he could develop new qualities there in Egypt. He did not know how his new life would proceed, but You did. You had great plans for his life. Thank You Lord that You saw Joseph's sorrow. You also see today who on earth are hated, ignored and bullied; will You also care for them Lord? And be near them with Your love? Amen.

Questions:

- The theme of this Bible study could be “rejection. In what ways is Joseph rejected by his brothers? What does rejection do to a person?”
- The brothers hate Joseph. How can hatred grow?

(How can you make hate grow smaller or even disappear?)

- 'A lie you must disprove as soon as possible to avoid much misery'.

How do you do this?

What happens when you perpetuate a lie?

- God turns everything around in Joseph's life. It begins with him doing well in Potiphar's house and God blessing him and the work of his hands.

Can you name an example of a contemporary situation that something bad can yet produce something beautiful?

- Unfortunately, modern slavery still occurs today. Forced labor and exploitation of children and adults in, for example, the sex industry/clothing factories/mines or fishing. But refugees or illegal immigrants can become victims of exploitation and mistreatment.

Delve into modern slavery. What story touches you and what can you/we do about modern slavery?

This Biblestudy was written by Carla Heuvelman and can be found on www.febebijbelstudies.nl