

The life of Joseph is a fascinating study in how the sovereignty of God works in the lives of His children. Through the ups and downs of Joseph's life God was moving him ever closer to the place where He wanted Joseph to be in order for God's plan for him to be accomplished. We should trust that God is working similarly in our lives to bring His will to pass.

Verses 1-2: These verses give us important pieces of information. We are reminded that Jacob is now living in Canaan where his fathers had lived. We are also told that Joseph is seventeen years old and that he is a bit of a tattler because he runs to his father to tell him everything that his brothers do wrong, which no doubt plants the seeds of their hatred for him.

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. ⁴ And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age” – Joseph was the son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, and he had been born after Jacob had likely given up on ever having children through her. So when Joseph was born Jacob may have felt that he finally had the son for whom he had been waiting for so many years.

“and he made him a coat of many colours” – Some commentators believe that this coat represented Jacob's intention to make Joseph his heir, a privilege usually reserved for the oldest son. However, Joseph was his firstborn by the wife he originally intended to marry before his father-in-law Laban deceived him (Gen. 29:25). Perhaps Jacob felt justified in choosing Joseph as the heir since God had chosen Isaac as Abraham's heir over his older half-brother Ishmael (Gen. 17:18-21, 21:10-12).

“And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him” – It was no secret that Rachel was Jacob's favorite wife and he continues this pattern by not hiding the fact that Joseph was his favorite son. If the coat of many colors did indeed represent Jacob's intention that Joseph was to be the chosen heir then the other sons would have even more reason to be jealous of him.

“and could not speak peaceably unto him” – The brothers hated Joseph so much that they could not talk to him without their words being laced with anger, sarcasm or malice. There was tension every time Joseph was in their presence.

⁵ And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told *it* his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. ⁶ And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: ⁷ For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. ⁸ And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.

“And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told *it* his brethren: and they hated him yet the more” – Joseph has a dream that portrayed him as superior to his brothers and so when they heard it, it only added fuel to their hatred for him.

“And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed” - The fact that he made a point to describe the dream to his brothers tells us something about Joseph's immaturity at the age of seventeen. He had to be aware of the animosity his brothers had for him and yet he still shared the details of a dream that he had to know would antagonize them even more. He seems to have been spoiled by his father's favoritism and he wanted to annoy his brothers.

“For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field...” - Joseph describes his dream that the sheaves of his brothers were bowing before his sheaf. The obvious meaning is Joseph's superiority over his brothers.

“And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?” - The brothers resented the dream and the one who dreamed it, but the dream was actually prophetic because the brothers would indeed eventually bow before Joseph many years later. It seems that God in His sovereignty gave Joseph this dream, knowing that Joseph would not keep it to himself and that it would help bring about the result of Joseph being taken to Egypt. God will use the hatred of the brothers to accomplish His will for Joseph (Rom. 8:28).

“And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words” – The content of the dreams only served to intensify the hatred of Joseph's brothers as well as “his words.” “His words” could refer to the fact that Joseph described the annoying dreams to his brothers or perhaps to irritating comments he may have made about the dream.

⁹ And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. ¹⁰ And he told *it* to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What *is* this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?

Joseph has another dream and this time the meaning is clear that not only will his brothers bow before him but also his father and mother. Jacob may have found the first dream amusing but this one seems to anger him. The culture of the day required the utmost respect for your parents and so it was unheard of for the parents to bow before their children.

Verses 11-22: The brothers have gone to feed the flock of their father in Shechem some 50 miles away and Jacob sends Joseph to check on the welfare of the brothers and the flocks. Joseph discovers the brothers have taken the flocks to Dothan and so he heads there to find them. The brothers see and recognize Joseph coming long before he arrives at their camp (he was wearing the distinctive coat of many colors) and conceive a plan to kill him. Reuben, the eldest son, convinces the other brothers to not kill Joseph but to throw him in a pit, because he secretly planned later to rescue Joseph from the pit and send him home. God is controlling the circumstances of Joseph's life as Dothan was on a caravan route between Damascus and Egypt, paving the way for what happens next.

²³ And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, *his coat of many colours that was on him*; ²⁴ And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, *there was no water in it*.

When Joseph arrived the brother's camp, they seized him and stripped the coat that they hated so much from off him and threw him into a nearby pit where he couldn't climb out. The pit was likely a cistern or similar hole intended to catch rainwater but God sovereignly made sure that it was empty so that Joseph wouldn't drown.

Verses 25-27: The brothers display the hardness of their hearts by sitting down to eat after casting their brother into a pit. As they are eating they see Ishmaelite traders on their way to Egypt passing by and Judah gets an idea (which likely came from God). He proposes that instead of killing Joseph, why not make a little money instead by selling him as a slave? The other brothers agree.

²⁸ Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty *pieces* of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

“Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen” – Traveling in large groups helped guard against bands of robbers, so these Midianites apparently were traveling with the group of Ishmaelites. The Midianites were also closely related to the Ishmaelites because both groups were descended from sons of Abraham. The brothers see their opportunity to sell Joseph.

“and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver” – Twenty pieces of silver was the average price for a slave under the age of 20. Joseph apparently made heart-wrenching pleas for his brothers not to do this to him but they hardened their hearts against him (Gen. 42:21-22).

“and they brought Joseph into Egypt” – God has sovereignly guided the circumstances to cause Joseph to be transported to Egypt.

²⁹ And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. ³⁰ And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child *is not*; and I, whither shall I go?

Reuben apparently was not present when the other brothers had decided to sell Joseph but when he returned to make his move to rescue Joseph he discovered he was too late. He expressed his grief at not being able to rescue Joseph by tearing his clothes and saying to his brothers “Joseph is gone and where can I go?” As the oldest brother he likely felt he would be held responsible for the actions of the other brothers and now his opportunity to rescue Joseph was gone. He didn't want anything to do with harming Joseph but now he felt he had no choice but to go along with covering up what the other brothers had done.

³¹ And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; ³² And they sent the coat of *many colours*, and they brought *it* to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it *be* thy son's coat or no.

The brothers plant fake evidence on Joseph's coat to make it appear that he was dead and returned home with it. They show the coat to their father and allow him to draw his own conclusions, even pretending to not to know for sure if this was Joseph's coat. Modern forensics would have been able to prove that this blood was not Joseph's but Jacob was not able to recognize that it was only a goat's blood on the coat.

³³ And he knew it, and said, *It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces*.

³⁴ And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

“And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat” – Jacob recognizes that this is Joseph's coat but he doesn't seem to question why the brothers didn't seem to recognize Joseph's one-of-a-kind coat.

“an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces” – The brother's deception works as they planned because Jacob believes the worst and immediately assumes that Joseph is dead.

“And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days” – Jacob is devastated at the perceived loss of his favorite son and goes into an extended period of mourning.

³⁵ And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.

Jacob's children attempt to comfort him in his mourning but he refuses their comfort, declaring that he will mourn for Joseph for the rest of his life. Being responsible for their father's intense grief was no doubt painful for the brothers and was something they never forgot. Years later when faced with the prospect of having to leave Benjamin (Joseph's full brother) behind in prison in Egypt, Judah makes an emotional plea for mercy because he doesn't want to see his father go through such grief again (Gen. 44:30-34).

³⁶ And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, *and* captain of the guard.

When the Midianites get to Egypt, they sell Joseph as a slave to a man named Potiphar, who is described as an officer of Pharaoh's, specifically the “captain of the guard.” Some commentators believe that “captain of the guard” meant that Potiphar was in charge over Pharaoh's executioners while others believe he was captain over the royal bodyguard. This connection to Pharaoh shows that God had positioned Joseph so that circumstances will continue to move him closer to the position and role that God has planned for him.