

Joseph in the Pit

37: 12-24

DIG: In what ways did Yosef combine the best attributes of his family? Why did Joseph go to Shechem to find his brothers when he knew they hated him? Why didn't they kill him on the spot? Which brother wanted to rescue Yosef? Why? What **eleven** ways did Joseph foreshadow the life of Christ? How could Joseph hold up under the persecution from his brothers?

REFLECT: Are you in a deep, dark pit today? Where is your destiny? What can you do when you are in the pit? Who is in the pit with you? What are the *seven principles* to remember when you're in the pit?

Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem (37:12). This was the city that they slaughtered and looted, but there wasn't any opposition to their being there because ADONAI had protected them. As semi-nomads, Jacob and his family would continually move their flocks from one area to another. They did this in order to provide grazing land and water for the animals.⁵⁶²

The narrator uses Isra'el (Hebrew: Yitz'chak) here instead of Jacob (Hebrew: Ya'akov). Isra'el means *he who prevails victoriously with God*. And literally, Isra'el and his descendants would only survive with divine intervention from God. Isra'el said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing their flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." One must conclude that Isra'el was unaware of the seething hatred of his sons toward Yosef. And Joseph said to his father, "Here I am, I'm ready to go" (37:13 KJV). **12. Joseph was sent by his earthly father, just as His Heavenly Father sent Yeshua.** This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning Sacrifice for our sins (First John 4:10). **And He came on His mission of love freely, willingly and gladly.** Like Joseph, then Christ said, "Here I am, it is written about me in the scroll, I have come to do your will, O God (Hebrews 10:7).

Because he was concerned about the welfare of his sons, Isra'el said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me. Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron," about twenty miles south of Yerushalayim (37:14a). **13. Joseph was sent from Hebron, and Jesus was sent from Heaven. Hebron means fellowship or communion, which points to the relationship that the Son had with the Father in Heaven before His incarnation and coming to this place of sin, sweat and sorrow.** He would go to those who hated Him without cause and wanted to kill Him. Likewise, Joseph lived in peaceful *fellowship* with his father; there he was at home, known, loved and understood. But he went to a far away place, to those who hated him without cause and wanted to kill him.

Joseph was obedient and arrived at Shechem without delay (37:14b). This promptness and thoroughness characterizes his life. It seems that Yosef combined all the best attributes of his family, the capacity of Abraham, the quietness of Yitz'chak, the ability of Ya'akov and the physical attractiveness of his mother (see 29:17 and 39:6).⁵⁶³ And for this his brothers hated him, but he was obedient to his father and went anyway. The love of his father was more of a motivation for him than the hate of his brothers. It would have taken him at least two days to make the fifty mile trip north. Shechem was a place of disaster. There the brothers sinned, there Dinah was raped, and there the kingdom was divided (First Kings 12:1). 14. Joseph came to Shechem, a place of sin, and Jesus came to the earth, a place of sin. The word Shechem means *shoulder*, and the *shoulder* speaks of bearing a burden and implies service or subjection. At the end of Genesis when Jacob prophesies to Issachar, he says that his son will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor (49:15). How striking it is to read that on leaving the fellowship of his earthly father, Yosef came to Shechem. This foreshadowed the Lord's journey of leaving the fellowship of his heavenly Father and coming to earth, a place of sin and suffering. He became a servant, a person of service and subjection: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant (Philippians 2:6-7).

But after arriving, to his dismay, his brothers were nowhere to be found. He roamed the area, trying to find some clue as to what might have happened to them, but Shechem was apparently still in ruins and no one seemed to be around.⁵⁶⁴ At long last, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked the young boy: What are you looking for (37:15)? The rabbis teach that the man was the angel Gabriel because by directing Joseph to his brothers, he took the necessary step to the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan. 15. Joseph became a wanderer in the field, just as Jesus became a wanderer in the world. In His interpretation of the Parable of the Weeds, Yeshua said: The field is the world (Mattityahu 12:38). Like Joseph, Jesus became a wanderer, a homeless stranger, in the world. Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head (Luke 9:58). What a touching word in John's Gospel: Then each went to his own home. But Yeshua went to the Mount of Olives (John 7:53-8:1). Every other man had his own house to go home to, but Jesus was a homeless wanderer on this earth.

Isra'el had sent Yosef to see if all was well with his brothers. So he replied: I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks (37:16)? 16. Joseph sought the welfare of his brothers, just as Jesus sought the welfare of the Jews. However, Joseph's brothers rejected him, just as the Jews rejected their Messiah. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him (Yochanan 1:11). Yosef was not sent to condemn his brothers, but to see if all was well with them, so, again, it is with Christ: For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him (John 3:17).

They have moved on from here, the man answered, I heard them say, "Let's go to Dothan" (37:17a). This was his chance to return to Hebron if his heart was not fully committed to doing the will of his earthy father. Dothan was another fifteen miles north. It was on the normal caravan route from Gilead to Egypt, crossing at Bethshean, passing through the Harod Valley to Jezreel, then crossing through the Valley of Dothan to the coastal plains and south to Egypt.⁵⁶⁵ So he had a good excuse to turn back and give up the work that his father had entrusted to him. **17. Joseph sought his brothers until he found them, just like Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19:10). He entered the synagogue and read from Isaiah with what purpose? It was so that His brothers might be reached. He walked by the Sea of Galilee, seeking out those who would become His disciples. He went through Samaria instead of going around it, and why? It was because there were some of his brothers and sisters in that place. How many years did the heavenly Joseph seek you out?** From start to finish, the Chief Shepherd had a single-minded devotion to His Father and an unwavering love of His lost sheep, continuing the painful search until He found them (Luke 15:4). No seeming failure in His mission, no lack of appreciation in those to whom He ministered managed to overcome Him. He set His face like a flint to the cross to suffer because He knew He would not be put to shame (Isaiah 50:7). He pressed on until it was finished (Yochanan 19:30).

So Joseph went north after his brothers and found them near Dothan on the trunk route (37:17b). Dothan connected with a trade route between Gilead and the coastal plain that went down into Egypt. This would set the stage for the selling of Joseph. Dothan means *the law or custom*. **18. This was how Yeshua found His brothers, living under the bondage of the Oral Law** (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law](#)), which had degenerated into the traditions of men (Mark 7:8).

But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him (37:18). Far away from the safety of home, he was fair game for their hostility. It was ironic that earlier they slaughtered the men of Shechem in revenge for their sister, but now they plotted to kill their own brother! Joseph had no idea how far their hatred would carry them. Although it would be a horrible and bitter experience for him, God intended it for good (50:20). **19. Joseph and Jesus were both plotted against. The hatred of Joseph's brothers found its opportunity in the love that sought them out.** When someone hates you when they see you in the distance, they really hate you. It is striking to notice how the plot was formed against Yosef before he reached them. How this reminds us of what happened during the days of our Lord's infancy. No sooner was He born into this world than Herod hatched a horrible plot in an attempt to kill Him. But it didn't stop there. Thirty years later when Yeshua presented Himself to the Jews as Messiah: The Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Him (Mattityahu 12:13).

Here comes that dreamer wearing the pride of his position! That seamless robe, the tallit that Joseph was wearing was like waving a red flag in front of a bull.⁵⁶⁶ They said to

each other: Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams (37:19-20). **20. Joseph's words and his supremacy over his brothers was really the heart of the issue. They refused to believe what he had said. So it was with Christ. After He had been nailed to the cross those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God" (Matthew 27:39-40)! The Jews didn't believe Him and His teaching was nothing more than empty dreams to them. Soon after His death and burial the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate and said, "We remember that while He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again,' so give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day" (Mattityahu 27:62-64). When the stone was sealed and the watch was set, the disbelieving Pharisees said in effect:** Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.

Reuben was absent when they agreed to the plan. Who knows, Yosef might have been in the pit for three days! But when he heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. He said: Let's not take his life. Reuben had a plan. He said: Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this pit (KJ) here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him. Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father (37:21-22). **The eldest son knew he would be held responsible and takes advantage of his status to intervene and save Joseph's life.** Even though Reuben knew that Ya'akov was going to replace him as the first born son with Joseph, he did not want to see him murdered. You would think he would be the most envious of all the brothers, but he plotted to keep his brother alive and come back later to rescue him out of the pit. They all knew ADONAI's command against the shedding of blood (9:6), and although they might have felt justified in the slaughtering of the men of Shechem, with Reuben's prodding, they ultimately realized there was no justification in shedding Joseph's blood. So they decided to put him in a pit and let him die of thirst. But first, they would mock and humiliate him.

21. Yosef and Yeshua were both stripped and mocked. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his seamless tallit (37:23). **How this brings out their hatred of him. Like beasts of prey, they immediately sprang upon him. It was not enough to kill him; they had to insult him, too. They shamed him by stripping him of his royal robe. Jesus was also insulted and stripped. Then the governor's soldiers stripped Him and took His seamless garment (Matthew 27:27-28; John 19:23). Like Joseph, it was not enough to kill Yeshua, they also mocked Him, insulted Him, spat on Him and flogged Him before they killed Him (Luke 18:33).**

22. Both Joseph and Yeshua were cast into a pit. And they took Yosef and threw him into the pit. When used with a person as its object, the pit almost always refers to the placing of a dead body in a grave (Second Samuel 18:17; Second Kings 13:21; Jeremiah 41:9), or to the placing of a living body into what is assumed will be its grave (Jeremiah 38:6).⁵⁶⁷ Now the pit was empty; there was no water in it (37:24). A cistern, or a pit,

was either hollowed out of limestone bedrock or dug in the ground and lined with plaster. Since most of Israel's rainfall is confined to three or four months of the year, these cisterns collected the rainwater and made it available during the dry season. It was not unusual that **there was no water** in them during part of the year.⁵⁶⁸ **Yeshua also went down into the pit known as Sheol, which had no water on one side (Zechariah 9:11). Sheol was the underworld abode of the dead before the resurrection. In the story of Lazarus in Sheol, the rich man called out to Abraham, "Have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire" (Luke 16:24). During the three days and three nights that His body was in the grave, Jesus' Spirit was in Sheol, in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40). He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also He went and preached to the ungodly spirits in prison (First Peter 3:18b-19). Then He led the righteous of the TANAKH up to heaven (Ephesians 4:8-10).**

The reason that **Yosef** could hold up under this persecution from **his brothers**, is that he didn't focus on his circumstances, but on **the Shepherd (Genesis 49:24; Yochanan 10:14).**

There are seven principles to remember when you are in **the pit**. *First, the intolerance of your present condition creates your future.* If you become comfortable in **the pit**, you will never get out. Don't get accustomed to your sin, to your addictions, or the things in your life that Satan has used to destroy your potential. Who **the Son** sets free is free indeed and you can be set free from your addictions if you trust in **Him**. Don't get accustomed to living in fear. Do not fear your past; it is forgotten. Do not fear your future; it is in the hands of **God**. Don't fear failure. I do not know what tomorrow holds, but I know who holds tomorrow. Don't get accustomed to **the pit** because it is not your destiny; the palace is your destiny.

Second, when you're in the pit, remember that Satan always attacks those who are next in line for a promotion. Satan attacked **Joseph** because he knew **Joseph's** potential. If he could crush **him** in **the pit**, or cause **him** to give up hope in prison with despair and depression, **he** would never get to the palace where **he** would change the destiny of the world. The devil knew when **Jesus** was in the wilderness that if he could get **the Lord** to bow down to him, **He** would not go to the cross. And if **He** didn't go to the cross, no one would ever be saved. When we look in the Bible, we see how quickly **ADONAI** can promote. **Joseph** went from **the pit** to the palace *in a day*; **Daniel** went from the lion's den to the palace *in a day*; David went from the caves of Saul to the palace *in a day*. You are next in line for the promotion and Satan is attacking you because he knows your potential. He is trying to crush your dream in **the pit**. He is trying to destroy your hopes in the prison. **God** is going to give back to you seven times over what the Adversary has taken from you because your destiny is in the palace with **Him**.

Third, when you're in the pit, those who fail to get out focus on what they are going through and rather than focus on what they are going to. There is no prize without a cost. There is no crown without a cross. There is no dawn without a night, and there is no victory

without a fight. Don't look at **the pit**; look at the palace. Don't look at the crisis; look to **the Messiah**. You are a child of **the King**; live like it, act like it, think like it in **Jesus** name!

*Fourth, how do you react to other people when they get in **the pit**?* Your reaction to someone else in trouble determines how **ADONAI** is going to react to you the next time you get in trouble. That's the translation of the verse: **Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. So in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you (Matthew 7:1-2 and 12a)**. There will come a day that you will reap exactly what you sow. **Joseph's brothers** threw **him** in **the pit** and, absolutely unconcerned, **they** sat down and had lunch together. How do you respond to a drug addict? How do you react to a homeless person? How do you react to a pregnant teenager? How do you react to widows and orphans? The Bible says **religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:25a)**. The point is that if you want **ADONAI** to help you in your day of trouble, you help someone else in their day of trouble. When you see a brother or a sister who has fallen in sin into **the pit**, you need to lift them up with the strength **the LORD** has given you. Paul says: **Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently (Galatians 6:1)**.

Fifth, those who created the pain of the present do not control the pleasure of the future. Your bitter divorce is painful, but it does not control your future. The Bible says: **Whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things (Philippians 4:8)**. Your bankrupt business is painful, but it does not control tomorrow's opportunity. Being betrayed by your family, like **Joseph** was betrayed, is painful, but that does not mean that **God** will not orchestrate a day when your brothers come back, your aged father is reunited with you and your home is a thing of joy again. Just because someone ripped your shirt off does not mean you will not wear a royal robe tomorrow. Just because people who hate you have thrown you into **a pit**, it does not mean that tomorrow those people are not going to bow before you. **Isaiah** tells us that **the sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you and all who despise you will bow down at your feet (Isaiah 60:14a)**. Your destiny is not in the pain of **the pit**; it is in the pleasure of the palace.

*Sixth, remember that when you are in **the pit**, the tempter's favorite weapons of attack are those closest to you.* **Joseph's brothers** threw **him** into **the pit** and **his brother Judah** sold **him** for the price of a slave. Judas also betrayed **Jesus** for the price of a slave. In his personal remarks to Timothy, Paul tells us that **Demas**, his fellow partner in ministry, **deserted him because he loved this world (Second Timothy 4:10)**. Absalom wanted to kill his own father David (**Second Samuel 15:1 to 18:33**). Believe you me, when the Adversary gets ready to throw the knockout punch and put you down for the count, he is not going to use a stranger. He will use someone that you love, preferably someone in your own house.

Lastly, you will never win the spiritual battle logically. When **Joseph** was thrown into **the pit**, **he** had to be stripped of **himself** to be able to trust in **ADONAI**. **God** does not ask for you to defend **Him**, because **He** is almighty and **He** does not need it. **The LORD** does not ask for you to understand **Him**, because your intellect is far too inferior to understand **Him**. Therefore, **ADONAI** does not need you to explain **Him** because if you cannot understand **Him** you cannot explain **Him**. **God** has only said: **Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6)**. In the pit **God** strips you of your ego. **He** crushes the god of self that sits on the throne of your soul so that **He** can mold you into **His** image. As long as you strut into worship like a peacock, **He** can't use you. **He** is going to put you in **the pit**, and there, in **His** Gethsemane press, **He** will crush you and make you like **Himself**. Why? Crushed grapes make the finest wine. Crushed olives make the finest oil. Crushed petals of a rose make the rarest perfume. It is the crushed grain that produces the life- giving bread. It is a crushed person who can become a servant of **God**. **If anyone wants to be first, he or she must be the very last, and the servant of all (Mark 9:35)**. **ADONAI** is looking for someone **He** has crushed, and when **He** sees that person, **He** sees **Himself**. **God** only uses people who have been broken and when you are broken and crushed and you look like **Him**, then you are ready to reach your destiny.⁵⁶⁹