

When Midianite Merchants Came by, His Brothers Sold Joseph for Twenty Shekels of Silver 37: 25-36

DIG: How did God care for Joseph in the midst of his brothers' hatred? What was Reuben selfishly worried about? What was the convenient lie the brothers agreed to tell their father Isra'el? What five ways did Joseph foreshadow the life of Christ?

REFLECT: Do you have the assurance that you will see your loved ones again and never be separated? On earth? In heaven? Can you look back on some events in your life and see how ADONAI guided your steps as He guided Yosef's? How? When?

The brother's mistreatment of Joseph did not diminish their appetite.⁵⁷⁰ They sat down to eat their meal (37:25a), while Yosef pleaded for his life from the pit (42:21). But they would not listen. It was to this fearful hardness and cruelty that the prophet Amos referred, when he said: You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of your brother Joseph (Amos 6:6). The brothers who had slaughtered all the men of Shechem were not likely to trouble themselves with the cries of one they hated. **23. This reminds us of when Jesus was being crucified on the cross. After the Romans soldiers had stripped him of His clothes, they sat down and kept watch over Him there (Matthew 27:36).**

At that point, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, where Laban and Jacob had their confrontations some years before. They were descendants of Ishmael (25:13-16). Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt for trade (37:25b). It is ironic that these same three items are the very gifts Joseph's brothers bring him while he is in Egypt (43:11).

Judah now assumes a leadership role concerning Yosef's fate, and said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood" (37:26)? From this point on Judah takes on an increasingly prominent role in the family.⁵⁷¹ He said: Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him. His brothers welcomed his suggestion. They could avoid the sin of murder and make a profit at the same time. **24. Joseph's brother's, who hypocritically didn't want to defile themselves with his blood, sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites, and the Jews, who hypocritically didn't want to defile themselves with Messiah's blood, brought Yeshua to Pilate (John 18:28). After**

all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood. His brothers agreed (37:27). **The rabbis teach that the brothers sought to punish him measure for measure. Because Joseph wanted to rule over them, he would become a slave.**

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the pit alive and sold him to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt (37:28). Ishmaelites were descendants of Abraham by Hagar (16:15) and the Midianites descended from Abraham by his concubine Keturah (25:2). The term Ishmaelites became a general designation for a desert tribe, so the Midianite merchants were also known as Ishmaelites. Slavery in most places was like a living death, so they felt that they would never see him again. **25. Likewise, Jesus was brought up out of the pit of Sheol and on the third day He was raised to life (Matthew 17:23; Luke 24:7; Acts 10:40).**

After bargaining a bit, Joseph was sold for twenty shekels of silver (37:28). Later, Moses would fix the value of a boy between five and twenty shekels of silver (Leviticus 27:5); the average price of a slave he fixed at thirty shekels (Exodus 21:32).⁵⁷² His brothers didn't realize it, but when they sold Joseph they made certain that his dreams would be fulfilled. It is hard to imagine the sense of horror that must have gripped Yosef as he gradually realized the enormity of his brothers' hatred of him. As the caravan carried him step by step away from his father, and step by step closer to slavery, anguish must have overwhelmed the teenage boy.⁵⁷³ In both biblical and cuneiform law, what his brothers did to Joseph was considered a crime and a capital offense. **26. Jesus and Joseph were both betrayed in exchange for silver. Yosef was sold for the price of a slave by his brother Judah and Yeshua was sold for the price of a slave by his talmid Judas. When Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matthew 27:3-4a).**

Reuben was not present at the time of the sale, but when he returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not there, he assumed the worst and believed Yosef was dead, so he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said: **The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now from my father's grief (37:29-30)?** Reuben had failed in his responsibilities of the firstborn and Ya'akov would hold him personally accountable. Reuben would have never permitted Yosef to be sold into slavery. If Reuben had come back a half hour sooner, Joseph would never have ended up in Egypt.

After ascending to the second most powerful man in the world, **Joseph** would look back and see that from the moment **he** was cast into **the pit**, until then, **ADONAI** used every circumstance in **his** life. Let me say to you that you are as precious to **God** as **Yosef** was. You may feel like your life is being dragged around like you are a puppet, or like a dog on the end of a rope. But as a child of **the LORD** you are not manipulated by anyone; the divine hands of **God** control you. Your life, your business, your health, your family is being structured by **Him**. It may look like you are in **the pit** now, it may look like things are not going well now and you may ask, "Where is **ADONAI**?" I'll tell you where **He** is. The unseen hand of **the LORD** is dragging you toward the palace. **He** is dragging you through **the pit** to the palace. It's not what you are going *through*, it's what you are going *to*, that makes all the difference in the world. **The pit** is not your destiny. When your dreams are shattered, lift your voice in faith and say, "This is not my destiny." When your business is failing, that is not your destiny. When your marriage begins to disintegrate, that is not your destiny. When your health fails, that is not your destiny. When your grown children break your heart, that is not your destiny. Your destiny is in the palace with **the King**.

Once they told **Reuben** that **Joseph** had been sold, **they** all settled on a convenient lie. **The brothers** got his coat of many colors, slaughtered a goat (Leviticus 16:10), and dipped the robe in the blood (37:31). **27. Joseph's blood-sprinkled robe was presented to his father Jacob, and the blood of Christ is presented to God the Father as a once and for all offering for sin because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22b).**

They took the coat of many colors back to their father and said: **We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's coat.** The brothers knew full well that it was **Joseph's** coat, but they didn't say it was **his blood**. They let **Isra'el** jump to that conclusion. **Isra'el** never dreamed that **his sons** were to blame for **Yosef's** apparent death. **He** recognized it and said: **It is my son's coat! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Yosef has surely been torn to pieces** and must be dead (37:32-33). In **his** grief **he** didn't stop to notice that **his son's robe** was not **torn to pieces**. It is ironic that years earlier **Jacob** deceived **his father** by shedding the blood of a goat (27:9-10 and 16), now **he** is **the father**, being deceived by **his sons**, by the blood of a goat.

Then Isra'el, overwhelmed with sorrow, **tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days (37:34).** **He** had lost Rachel only a few years before. Now **he** had seemingly lost her firstborn **son**, the one to whom **he** had intended to convey the birthright and who would be the best equipped to carry on the responsibilities of spiritual leadership in

the family and the nation that they would establish.⁵⁷⁴ **All his sons and daughters (46:7 and 15) came to comfort him, but** the one's who were in on the little secret were skillful in putting on a facade. Nevertheless, **he refused to be comforted. No, he said: In mourning will I go down to the grave with my son. Isra'el** purposed in his own mind to mourn for **Joseph** for the rest of his life, until **he himself** went down to Sheol.⁵⁷⁵ **So his father wept for him (37:35).** There was no expression of submission to the will of **God**, no testimony of faith and no allusion to his new name **Isra'el** because **he** had not yet learned to walk by faith.⁵⁷⁶ Compare his grief here to the grief of a man like David (**Second Samuel 12:15-23**). David grieved and **wept** over the baby boy of his who died. He loved that little one just as much as **Isra'el** loved **Joseph**, but David was a man of faith. He knew the baby couldn't come back to him, but he also knew that he would be with him one day. Dear friend, perhaps you have lost a loved one. Cling to **the Lord**, grieve, and then walk by faith as you live your life. If saved, you will see that loved one again and never be separated. The world has no faith. It grieves as those without hope. But you can walk by faith.⁵⁷⁷

Meanwhile, the caravan of **Midianites** had arrived in **Egypt**. They sold **Joseph**, who was obviously a healthy and intelligent young man, to **Potiphar**, one of **Pharaoh's** officials, who was **the captain of the guard, in other words, the chief executioner (37:36)**. Here then is the beginning of the suffering of **Joseph**, the obedient servant. **ADONAI** would test his character through his suffering, so that **he** could be exalted.⁵⁷⁸