

Joseph and His Brothers

A Lad is sold into Slavery

Long ago in the early days of the Bible there lived in the land of Canaan a boy named Joseph. Joseph's father, Jacob, had eleven other sons. Ten of them were older than Joseph, and one was younger than Joseph. But Jacob loved Joseph most of all, for a very special reason. And this was the reason:

When Joseph was a very little boy, his mother died. Her name was Rachel. She was very beautiful and good, and Joseph's father had loved her very dearly. Now Joseph looked so much like his beautiful mother that every time his father looked at Joseph, he felt as if he were seeing his beloved Rachel again. And that is why Jacob loved Joseph so much more than his other sons.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved Joseph even more than he loved them, they were very jealous. They began to dislike Joseph. It wasn't Joseph's fault that his father loved him best, but his brothers disliked him just the same.

One day Joseph had a strange dream. He dreamed that he and all his eleven brothers were out in the field cutting wheat. They had each made a bundle of wheat. Then a remarkable thing happened: Every one of the bundles that his

brothers made had walked over to Joseph's bundle and bowed down to it.

When Joseph woke up he told his brothers what had happened in the dream. This made his brothers very angry.

"What do you mean!" they cried. "Do you think you're better than we are? Do you think that we all should bow down to you? Don't tell us about your conceited dreams!"

And they nicknamed Joseph *The Dreamer*. Whenever they saw him walking by they would call out, "Ha-ha! Here comes The Dreamer!"

They disliked Joseph even more because their father had given him a beautiful coat. This coat was of many colors and Joseph looked lovely in it. None of them had such a beautiful coat, only Joseph.

One day, when Joseph's ten older brothers were far away in the fields watching the sheep, Jacob called Joseph to him.

"My son," he said, "your brothers are far away in the fields. Maybe they didn't take enough food with them, or enough warm clothing. Go out and see how they are, and then come back and tell me if they are all right."

"I will go gladly," said Joseph. He was happy that his father trusted him to go so far away from by himself. So he took some food and clothes with him and set out.

After walking a long, long way he caught sight of his brothers in the distance, sitting under a tree. They could see Joseph, too, even though they were far away, for his beautiful many-colored coat looked very bright across the fields.

"Look," cried one of them, "here comes Joseph, that conceited thing, who dreams that he is better than we are. How I hate him! Come on, this is our chance. Let us kill him. We could throw his body down into a hole where no one would find it. Then we could take his fancy coat home to our father and say that a wild animal must have killed Joseph."

"Yes, let us kill him," cried most of the brothers.

"Oh, no," said the oldest brother. "We must not do anything so wicked as that. We don't have to kill him to get rid of him. Let's just throw him into a deep hole without killing him, and leave him there. He'll very likely die by himself, of hunger and thirst."

Now this brother, whose name was Reuben, did not want Joseph to die. He figured that if he could get his brothers to throw Joseph into the hole, he could come back by himself and help Joseph out and take him back to his father.

"All right, then, we'll do as you say," said the brothers.
"We'll throw Joseph into the hole."

As soon as Joseph came up to the brothers, they caught hold of him. They pulled his beautiful coat off his back. They tied him tightly with cords and threw him in the deep hole.

Poor Joseph! He cried and cried. He begged his brothers not to be so cruel to him. But they didn't care. They sat down on the grass and ate their lunch and paid no attention to him.

Now the oldest brother, Reuben, had to go away to another field for a short time. While he was gone it happened that a group of traveling merchants came along.

Then Judah, one of Joseph's other brothers said, "I have a good idea. Let us sell Joseph to these traveling merchants. They buy boys for slaves. They will take Joseph far away to a strange land, and we'll never be bothered with him again."

So they pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the merchants. When Reuben came back and looked in the pit, he was very much upset to find that Joseph was gone.

The brothers then killed an animal and dipped Joseph's beautiful coat of many colors into the animal's blood. Then they took the coat to Jacob, their father, and said, "See, we found this coat, all torn and bloody. Isn't this Joseph's coat?"

"Oh, no!" cried Jacob. "It is certainly my dear son's coat. Some wild animal must have eaten Joseph!"

And he wept. He covered his face and sobbed. His heart was broken, for he loved Joseph very dearly.

"I can never be happy again," he said, "now that Joseph is dead."

The brothers felt very sorry for what they had done, for they loved their father, Jacob. They knew that Joseph was not dead. But they had told a lie and they could not admit it. They could not admit that they had sold their brother as a slave. So poor Joseph sorrowed over Joseph, thinking that he was dead.

But Joseph was not dead. God had allowed Joseph to be sold into slavery for a very special reason. In another story you will learn how, many years later, Joseph saved the lives of his father and his brothers and many, many people besides.



