

Joseph's Coat Identified

They got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornamented robe back to their father.—Genesis 37:31,32

Jacob had become the father of twelve sons. The oldest son was Reuben who was kind but not wise. Simeon was clever, but not kind. Each of the sons was quite different from the others. Joseph and Benjamin were the youngest and still at home while the ten other brothers were tending the flocks. Jacob especially loved Joseph and made him a beautiful coat of many colors. The older boys became jealous of Joseph and when he had two dreams which seemed to indicate that all of the family would some day bow down to him and he (Joseph) would bless them, it only made them more jealous.

One day Joseph went out to the fields to bring messages and food to his brothers from their father. The brothers could see him coming and they plotted to get rid of him. The cruel brothers sold him as a slave to a caravan of Ishmaelite merchants on their way to Egypt. Then they killed a goat and smeared Joseph's beautiful coat with its blood. When they gave Jacob the coat, he thought exactly what they wanted him to think: Joseph had been killed by a wild beast.

Jacob was heart broken and bitter—no one could comfort him. He cried, "In mourning will I go down to the grave [*sheol*] to my son" (Genesis 37:35).

This is the first use of the word *sheol* in the Bible and it is the only word translated *hell* in the Old Testament, King James ver-

sion. Jacob did not think of his beloved son as having gone to a place of eternal torture. He knew of no such place. Some teach that because *sheol* is translated hell in the common version it means a place of everlasting punishment, yet the words “hell,” “grave,” and “pit,” were used interchangeably as a translation of *sheol* in the Old Testament. Bible scholars now agree that it simply means tomb or grave.

In the New Testament the word which means tomb or grave is *hades*. Some modern translators leave *sheol* and *hades* untranslated (such as the Revised Standard Version). One of the meanings of the word hell is “a place that is covered or hidden.” There is neither eternal fire nor everlasting torment associated with either *sheol* or *hades*.



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Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave to Ishmaelite merchants.