

The brothers wanted to kill Yosef but Reuven tried to save him by suggesting he should be thrown into a pit and then he, Reuven, planned to come back later and rescue him.

37:24 ויקחהו וישלכו אתו הברה והבור רק אין בו מים
and they took him and cast him into the pit and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.

Rashi, quoting Berashit Rabbah Shabbat 22, says that though there wasn't any water in it, there were snakes and scorpions.

If this was so, why does Reuven suggest to put Yosef in this pit when his intention is supposedly to save him ?

Berashit Rabbah points out that the first time the word pit appears it is spelt without the ו – הברה , and then later in the same sentence it appears in full with the ו – והבור .

They suggest that the missing letter means that the pit was missing (empty) of everything, when Reuven looked but when the brothers threw Yosef in the pit had these snakes and scorpions.

This raises the question why Reuven didn't see them, to which Berashit Rabbah gives two possible answers.

- 1) the snakes and scorpions were in nooks and crannies where Reuven couldn't see them and then they came out after the noise of Yosef being thrown in.
- 2) or the pit was more than 20 amot (cubits) – about 10 meters – deep and so they couldn't see to the bottom where the snakes and scorpions were.

Berashit Rabbah points out that we learn from the laws of Hanukah why you can't see 20 amot down, since we are told not to light the Hanukah candles more than 20 amot above the public pathway – why ?

This is the height above which you can no longer see the lights from below.