

• *Joseph's story*

The story of Genesis now turns mainly to Joseph, although Jacob will come into the story later. As with all of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph – Joseph is a person with a special destiny in the plans and purposes of God.

1. Joseph is a man with a calling

• *A spiritual gift – dreams that predict the future*

1. **Joseph is a man with a calling** ^{☞1}. His background was a fairly ordinary one. He was a shepherd ^{☞2}. Like many young men he had his own problems. He was a tale-bearer towards his brothers ^{☞3}. The fact that Jacob made a favourite out of him caused a great deal of pride in the young Joseph and a great deal of bitterness and jealousy in his brothers ^{☞4}. The important thing about him is that he had a destiny in the purpose of God. At this point in the story we do not know what that destiny is but like all believers in the promises of God, he has a spiritual gift. His gift is an unusual one: he is able to receive dreams from God which give accurate predictions of the future ^{☞5}. At this point in his life the dreams are about himself. They come more than once ^{☞6}.

☞1 Genesis 37:2–11
 ☞2 37:2
 ☞3 37:2
 ☞4 37:3–4
 ☞5 37:5
 ☞6 37:6–8, 9

• *Big mistake – sharing them with his family!*

Joseph makes the mistake of sharing his dreams with his family. This does not do him any good. His brothers do not think well of him for his sharing his visions about himself. It only creates pride in the young Joseph and jealousy in his brothers ^{☞1}. Even Jacob rebukes him, although he is thoughtful about the matter since he had received his own greatest spiritual experiences in two dreams, one at Bethel and another at Peniel.

☞1 37:10–11

Every Christian has a calling, something in which God will give him or her a little eminence in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Joseph needed training

• *His training starts suddenly*

2. **Joseph needed training** ^{☞1}. As with every man and woman that God uses. Joseph needs some preparation. God has chosen him. He has a destiny and a spiritual gift, but God also wants to work in Joseph Himself.

☞1 Genesis 37:12–35

• *His training starts surprisingly – unexpected happenings*

His training starts **suddenly**. There is a day in his life which starts as a fairly ordinary day. His brothers are working as shepherds. Joseph, as his father's favourite, is at home ^{☞1}. Jacob sends him on a journey of about 80 kilometres to enquire about the welfare of his brothers ^{☞2}.

☞1 37:12
 ☞2 37:13–14

His training starts **surprisingly**. Jacob did not feel that Joseph would be in any danger, but something unexpected happened. The brothers were not easily to be found. However Joseph persevered in his search for them and discovered that they had moved a further twenty-five kilometres away to Dothan ^{☞1}. Shechem was a regular visiting-place for Abraham's family but Dothan was further away from where they were known. The brothers were evidently camping at a spot where they felt they could do as they liked and no one would know what they were doing. They see Joseph coming and because they were far from home immediately see an opportunity to get rid of Joseph once and for ever. With the exception of Reuben they all wish to kill him ^{☞2}. What they hate most about him is the feeling they have that his dreams might come true. They are hoping to overthrow his predictions. *'We shall see what will become of his dreams,'* they say ^{☞3} (37:20).

☞1 37:15–17
 ☞2 37:18–20
 ☞3 37:20

Reuben persuades them not to kill him there and then but to allow him to die of exposure in one of the many deep pits of the area ^{☞1}. Secretly

☞1 37:21–22

• More unexpected events

• The events are obviously being controlled by God

For us

• Greater plans require greater training

• Painful but purposeful – God knows what he is doing

he plans to rescue Joseph. They proceed to carry out their plans ^{□2} but again the unexpected happens. At a time when Reuben was not present a caravan of Ishmaelite traders pass by (also called Midianites and Medanites in 37:28, 36). They are on their way to Egypt with goods for sale ^{□3}. The brothers see a way of making some money and getting rid of Joseph at the same time. They sell Joseph as a slave ^{□4}. Reuben comes back, finds out what has happened but it is too late to rescue Joseph ^{□5}. He has no choice but to go along with the brothers' plan. They convince Jacob that Joseph has been accidentally killed by a wild animal ^{□6}.

The important point of the story is that the events are surprising and obviously are being controlled by God. If Jacob had not sent Joseph on that day, if the brothers had not been a bit further away from home, if the traders had not been coming by, if Reuben had not been away at the time.... The precise set of circumstances were all necessary for this unexpected event to happen. But God was in control and the chosen time for God to set some events in motion had arrived. God sets events in motion that prepare to train us, prepare for our future, prepare the way for His kingdom. They can be sudden and surprising. When we look back on them we see clearly that God was in what happened. The circumstances are so surprising. God is behind what is happening.

So it will happen in the life of every Christian. The greater God's plans for us, the greater will be His training. Joseph is a gifted young man but he needs more than one kind of training before he will be ready for his life's work. A shepherd cannot become a senior administrator in the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, without some preparation, some training in character, and some unexpected manipulations of God. But this is what is happening to Joseph. It is painful but purposeful. God knows what He is doing. The last line of this part of the story is a hint that greater things are in store for Joseph. *'The Midianites had sold him to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh'* (37:36).

□2 37:23–24
 □3 37:25
 □4 37:26–28
 □5 37:29–30
 □6 37:31–35

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