

## **JOSEPH'S EMERGING LEADERSHIP** (Genesis 37:1-11)

The story of Joseph occupies the majority of the final chapters in Genesis. Joseph's life reveals the sovereign hand of God as Joseph goes from favored son to slave to trusted steward to prisoner to honored vizier of Egypt. Throughout the story, Joseph's faith and character shine. It's popular to import into Joseph's story some modern concepts of family life, making Joseph out to be a haughty teen who needs the refinement brought about by hardship. However, the Bible never portrays Joseph as less than a man of conviction and character, traits that can be seen even in the earliest descriptions of his life. Even as a teenager, Joseph was an emerging leader. Yes, God refines His people. But it's also true that some of God's people begin life well, and God's refining work simply makes the good great. Joseph became a great leader, a great example of a man of God. He stood out among his brothers as one who was sensitive to the work of God in his life. He stood out and he stood up for God. We, too, become spiritual leaders when we make our commitment to God known to others around us. God calls each of us to stand out and stand up for Him.

### **Emerging leaders demonstrate industry and integrity (37:1-2).**

Easily overlooked is the fact that Joseph was a hard worker. He displayed industry as well as integrity in the tasks to which he was called.

#### ***Jacob settled his family in Canaan, the land of promise (37:1).***

Abraham's grandson Jacob had returned from his sojourn in Mesopotamia and settled his sizeable family and flocks in the land of his ancestors. This was the land of promise, Canaan. The fact that Jacob had at last returned to his ancestral land indicates that he had also returned to his ancestral God, the God of Abraham and Isaac.

#### ***Joseph shared in the work of caring for the flocks with his brothers (37:2a).***

Genesis 37:2 provides the familiar structural marker, "these are the generations of . . .," in this case the account of Jacob. Isaac had died, so Jacob becomes the patriarchal leader. However, most of this account of Jacob from this point forward focuses on his son Joseph. Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son and his first son by his favored wife Rachel. Rachel died giving birth to Jacob's last son, Benjamin (Genesis 35:16-20). This meant that Joseph lost his mother when he was a very young boy. His mother's sister Leah, his step-mother, likely raised him into his teenage years. These circumstances could have produced bitterness, but instead seem to have engendered tenderness in young Joseph's heart.

Joseph's story begins when he was a young man of seventeen. He had been assigned the task of tending his father's flocks with his half-brothers from Jacob's two

secondary wives, Bilhah and Zilpah. Bilhah's sons were Dan and Naphtali, and Zilpah's sons were Gad and Asher. These half-brothers would have been just a few years older than Joseph, but they seem to have had none of their father's faith in God. Joseph worked among them, tending the flocks as was expected. This little glimpse into Joseph's life indicates that he was a young man accustomed to hard work. He was not idle, but industrious.

***Joseph reported on his brothers' evil behavior to his father (37:2b).***

Joseph was a hard working young man and he was a man of integrity. Although the specific incident isn't recorded, Joseph's half-brothers were involved in some form of sinful behavior. Their lives didn't reflect the faith of their father. Joseph reported on their actions, telling Jacob about the situation. While some might see Joseph's actions as selfish and petty, in fact Joseph was honoring his father by revealing these facts to him. Later, the Law of Moses would require such reporting (Leviticus 5:1). Withholding information that might damage someone else's reputation or bring them harm is never the right thing to do. Joseph was acting with integrity, knowing full well that his report could jeopardize his own wellbeing. Such is the character of those who are spiritual leaders.

**Emerging leaders win  
respectability and resistance (37:3-4).**

Joseph's character and actions earned him the favor of his father, but his brothers harbored a deepening hatred for Joseph. Those who succeed at life are often despised by those who don't.

***Jacob showed special love for Joseph and honored him with an ornamental robe (37:3).***

At this point a change seems to have taken place. Possibly Jacob recognized that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah would be a bad influence on Joseph, or that they might even pose a threat. In addition, Jacob held a special love of Joseph as the son of his favored wife, Rachel, and the son of his older years. Such favoritism is understandable given Joseph's character, but it was also not a wise way for Jacob to lead his family. Instead of sending Joseph back to tend the flocks, Jacob presented Joseph with a special robe. This "coat of many colors" or "richly ornamented robe" indicated that Joseph would no longer participate in the day to day labor of the fields and that he was now the appointed heir of the family's fortunes. Joseph had earned the respect of his father and became the heir apparent to his father's wealth.

***Jacob's brothers hated Joseph because of their father's special love for him (37:4).***

Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph quickly formed a rift in the family. Instead of learning from Joseph's example of character and changing their ways, Joseph's brothers turned to hatred. They hated Joseph so much that they couldn't say a kind word to him—

they couldn't "speak peace" to him. Hearts that resist God also reject God's people. Joseph's brothers were far from God and therefore rejected and despised Joseph. While we may win the respect of some for our commitment to God, we're certain to experience rejection as well. Such is the nature of spiritual leadership.

**Emerging leaders operate out of a  
sense of conviction and courage (37:5-11).**

God now spoke to Joseph through two dreams, dreams that predicted Joseph's future elevation to power. Joseph could have kept this revelation to himself, but his conviction regarding truth and his courage in the face of hatred demonstrated the qualities of an emerging leader.

*Joseph had a dream about ruling over his family and described it to his brothers (37:5-7).*

God revealed the future to Joseph in a dream. Joseph told his brothers about the dream, and his brothers hated even more because of what he told them. In this dream Joseph and his brothers were binding sheaves in the field when Joseph's sheaf stood up and his brothers' sheaves bowed to his sheaf.

*Joseph's brothers contested his dream and hated him more because of the dream (37:8).*

Joseph's brothers knew that the dream implied that Joseph would rule over them. They hated Joseph because of his dream and because of his words—the content of the dream. These brothers didn't simply reject Joseph. They also rejected God's revealed truth.

*Joseph had a second dream about ruling over his family and described it to his father and brothers (37:9).*

God revealed the future to Joseph in a second, similar dream. This repetition of the message served to affirm its certainty. In this second dream the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed before Joseph. Joseph related this dream once again to his brothers, and then to his father.

*Joseph's father rebuked him and his brothers became jealous because of the dream, but his father also reflected on the dream (37:10-11).*

On hearing about this dream, Jacob rebuked Joseph. Jacob couldn't imagine bowing to his son. He couldn't imagine Joseph's mother (probably a reference to Leah) and brothers bowing to him. Joseph's brothers also reacted against him, becoming deeply jealous. Although Jacob contested Joseph's dream, he didn't dismiss the message. Jacob retained these thoughts, and he doubtless recalled this dream when one day he did

indeed bow before his son who rose to power in Egypt. It took great courage and conviction of heart for Joseph to tell his father and brothers about these revelations from God. He could have simply kept this to himself. But God had spoken, and God's truth needs to be shared. Like Joseph, we need the conviction and courage to speak up for God. God calls each of us to stand out and stand up for Him.