

Transformed Characters **The Pre-Transformed Joseph – The Arrogant Dreamer** **Gen 37:3-28**

God works in ways that are often quite different from our understanding of His ways. For instance, when God tells us that He is going to use us, it may take some time before He gets round to using us in the way He has intended. Some of you may have found yourself in a situation where God has just spoken to you – you are excited and you could not wait to go 'out there' to accomplish great works for Him right away. But things did not turn out quite the way you expected. Consequently, you have given up expecting anything because you have yet to see God's calling and purpose working out in your life. The story of Joseph will teach us not to give up because God is often doing a transforming work as part of the preparation process.

Transformation Takes Time

Transformation and preparation for the task does take time, as we shall see from the story of Joseph. Pastor and teacher R.T. Kendall remarks,

"There is a kind of preparation that cannot be found in a university or a theological seminary. It is not even necessarily found in gaining more experience. It is that which God sovereignly ordains for a specific purpose and which drives us to our knees and to tears. The task to which we are called may be unique, therefore the preparation we need is also unique. There may be no precedents to which we can point in order to explain what is going on. The biblical word for it is chastening (Heb 12:6-11)."

We see this happen in the life of Joseph. God had in mind an important role for Joseph within the covenant history of Israel – to preserve and to bless Israel, and ultimately the world. Yet before God could use him, Joseph had to be changed, so that when the time was right, Joseph would be the appointed man, ready to accomplish God's purposes.

We also learn from the story of Joseph that God is more than able to transform us regardless of our background, personality and past experiences.

The Pre-transformed Joseph

Joseph was a spoilt brat. Joseph's family was a complex one. His father had four wives resulting in Joseph having numerous siblings by Jacob's different wives. He was the eleventh of the twelve sons of Jacob. Significantly however, he was the firstborn of Jacob's favourite wife, Rachel. Warren Wiersbe reminds us that the full intent of Jacob's heart was to marry Rachel, but Laban tricked him. Hence, Jacob might have reasoned, "In God's sight, Rachel was my first wife, and Joseph was her firstborn. Therefore, Joseph has the right to be treated as the firstborn."

We are told that Jacob loved Joseph more than any other of his sons (v.3) and Jacob

displayed this favouritism blatantly. He made Joseph a special coat, which set him apart from his brothers. According to J. E. Hartley, the coat – probably a long garment reaching to the ankles or the wrist, is a type of clothing worn by the upper class and precluded manual labour. Hence, while his brothers were out working in the field, Joseph was likely exempted from such hard labour.

Joseph was alienated from his siblings. Joseph was the object of his father's special love but the target of his brothers' great animosity. Three times it was said that they hated him (vv. 4, 5, 8). The special coat he received from his father served as a perpetual reminder to his brothers of their father's preferential treatment of Joseph. Joseph faced constant hostility, alienation and rejection from his brothers. The brothers hated him so much that they plotted to kill him and in the end sold him as a slave to traders going to Egypt. Joseph was betrayed by his own siblings.

Joseph was self-righteous and a talebearer. Out feeding the flock one day, Joseph brought a bad report about his brothers to his father (v.2). It is not clear if the report was true but he was willing to put his brothers in their father's bad books. Gordon Wenham noted that the Hebrew term translated "report" here is always used elsewhere in a negative sense of an untrue report. Hence, it seems likely that Joseph misrepresented his brothers to his father and influenced his father's attitude negatively toward his brothers.

Joseph was arrogant, boastful and insensitive. Joseph was unapologetic about the special relationship he enjoyed with his father. Despite knowing his brothers' hatred and envy, he was unembarrassed in the way he displayed his special coat. Judging from his journey to Dothan, it is likely he wore the coat often, if not on all occasions. Joseph was happy to be the recipient of his father's special love and proud to display this fact.

When Joseph received the first dream revealing his future exaltation over his brothers, he arrogantly recounted the dream to them. They hated him for telling them the dream and for the content of the dream. When Joseph had the second dream, again he told it to his brothers, ignoring the hatred that was already building up in their hearts. His cockiness and the insensitive manner he told his dreams elicited a rebuke even from his father. Steinberg remarks,

"God's future agent and mouthpiece in Egypt could hardly make a worse impression on his first appearance: spoiled brat, talebearer, braggart."

God revealed to Joseph His plans, that he would one day be a ruler, when he was seventeen years old. Joseph might have thought he was ready to rule the world there and then, or at least, to rule his family. But the pre-transformed Joseph was obviously not quite ready to be used by God. It would take another thirteen years before Joseph would step into the role that God had in mind for him.

In the meantime, God had to work on Joseph – to shake him, break him and to transform him. God's work of transformation on Joseph would begin as he sat at the bottom of the pit, stripped of his special coat, separated from his father and wondering if he might live to see another day. There was nothing he could do in the pit but pray. Later, as he travelled to Egypt, facing an uncertain future and sensing that he was moving further and further away from his doting father, Joseph would learn that through it all, God was with him always, sovereignly working out His plans in utmost detail.

Sources:

Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000).

R.T. Kendall, *God Meant It For Good* (Wilkesboro, NC: Morningstar, 1986).

Gordon Wenham, *Genesis*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Nelson, 1987).

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Authentic* (Chariot Victor Publishing, 1997).

Questions for Cell Discussion

Question 1

Read the passage in Gen 37. What do you observe about Joseph's character and personality? In what ways did he contribute to the hostility he faced from his brothers?

Question 2

What does this story tell us about God's sovereignty and providence over the events that took place in this part of Joseph's life? What lesson can we learn about the experiences we go through in life?

Question 3

Can you identify with any character flaw or personality deficit you observe in the pre-transformed Joseph? Or perhaps there may be other untransformed traits that come to mind. How would you like to change?

Share with your group that you may pray for one another, believing that God will do a transforming work in you.

