

Yet his father still favors Joseph.

One day Jacob calls Joseph in and says, “Your brothers are pasturing the sheep at Shechem. Go and see how they and the flocks are getting along. Then come back and bring me a report.” So Jacob sent him on his way and Joseph traveled to Shechem from their home in the valley of Hebron. When he arrived there, a man from the area noticed him wandering around the fields. “What are you looking for?” he asked. “I’m looking for my brothers,” Joseph replied. “Do you know where they are pasturing their sheep?” “Yes,” the man told him. “They have moved on from here, but I heard them say, ‘Let’s go on to Dothan.’” So Joseph followed his brothers to Dothan and found them there (37:13-17).

Do the details seem a little unnecessary to you? If the Bible would take out some of those details it would be a lot shorter and we might read it more. Why is this here? Does it really matter that he didn’t find them in Shechem? Does it matter now, a few thousand years later, whether we know that the boys had moved their sheep fifteen miles down the road?

It depends on what you believe. If you believe this book is God’s story and that the writer is revealing something about God, then **everything contributes to the theology of the story**. The details reveal something about God.

God knew all about the promise that goes back to Abraham. God knew God’s plans for this small family to become a huge family of God, which extends so far into the world that it includes you.

Shechem was in the middle of nowhere. Dothan was on the coast. The king’s highway went right through it. The promise had not died, although Joseph didn’t know much, if anything about God’s providence. He was just going along; obeying his father, trying to get blessed! Dreaming.

God’s providence involved no big splash, no angels, nothing but normal life.

Do you wake up every morning thinking about God’s providence in your life? Or do you just get up, shower, and go to work? Joseph went about his business. He just trudged along.

His business led him from an empty field to a town by the coast with a well-traveled road. In fact, traders traveled the Via Maris (then called Derech Ha Yam), or International Coastal Highway, going to Egypt from the area of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. The road is still there today.

His brothers saw him coming. There they are, looking out in the distance—the Bible says they recognized him right away. I don’t know how they recognized him but they did. 😊

What do you think they said? Would they have a party? Go and greet him? Be thrilled to host dinner?

Mob mentality took over. That means the mob takes over your individual judgment. So they said, “Come on, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, ‘A wild animal has eaten him.’ Then we’ll see what becomes of his dreams!” (37:20)

One of the brothers, Reuben, spoke up, “Why should we shed his blood? Let’s just throw him into this empty cistern in the wilderness.” He planned to secretly come back and rescue him and return him to his father. (37:21-22) **What do you learn about God?**

So that is what they did. When he arrived, they ripped off his beautiful coat and threw him in a dry well. Then they sat down to have dinner. After a while a caravan of Midianite traders came down the road, and the brothers decided that to kill him would give them a guilty conscience so why not sell him? And that is what they did. For twenty pieces of silver he was gone.

Decisions you make always have ramifications. Now he was gone. Then they realized, *what will we tell our dad?*

So they took his coat, killed a goat and spread its blood on the coat. When their father saw the coat, he mourned Joseph for a long time and refused to be comforted. “I will go to my grave mourning for my son.” (37:29-33) The other sons probably thought, *really Dad? That’s all that matters to you?*

You can see the problem in this family. Yet God was still at work among them. Perhaps that is the most important thing we need to learn from this passage. **God works within your family even when you have problems.**

Do you find yourself in difficult relationships with family members? God is still at work among you.

Do you find yourself wandering like Joseph, just marking time it seems, with nothing but dreams? God is still at work with you.

Sometimes what seems to be a circuitous route to you—wandering around, not knowing what’s coming next—is actually the most direct route for God’s will.

Divine providence, or God’s oversight of your life, does not mean God protects you in a bubble where nothing seems random and all seems perfect. Divine providence is simply going along with God at your side, directing you in a mysterious way, connecting the dots, even bringing meaning out of bad stuff.

Audrey Wetherell Johnson was born into a Christian family but she didn’t feel any great unction for God. She called herself agnostic. Born in England, she went to college in Europe where her studies amazingly led her back to her faith. She became a missionary and went to China. But it wasn’t long before she found herself in a prison camp during the Japanese invasion, subsisting on a tiny cube of meat and a little rice each day. Then things got worse. Eventually she was released and later returned to China. But she was put under house arrest for eighteen months by the Communist government and then forced out. She settled in California, feeling like she was going in circles, and certainly not feeling God’s leadership.

God's leading does not involve a yellow brick road. Often there are twist and turns which we do not understand. Miss Johnson could only think of returning to China, but that door was shut. Then five ladies from her church asked her to teach them the Bible. She was dismayed. What did that matter, compared to important work in China? But she reports that God said, "Stop worrying about trying to make a name for yourself and trust me."

The little Bible study grew into a movement called BSF which has taught hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children the Bible. Today class members total over 200,000 on six continents in thirty-eight nations.

Meanwhile, the Midianite traders that traveled that international route arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard (37:34-36).

God was watching over Joseph and his family. Are you wandering in circles? Do you feel that God doesn't care or doesn't have a plan for you? God knows exactly where you are going next. And you don't need to buy your own ticket.

God's promise to make you a blessing to others has not expired. Seek His will every day. And when you wonder who's in charge here, trust him.

Amen