

Joseph in Potiphar's House

While Jacob believed the lie that Joseph was dead, in reality he had been sold as a slave to the Ishmeelite traders for twenty pieces of silver.

It is about 500 kilometers from Shechem to Egypt's border, so it would have taken up to a month to walk all the way down to Egypt, even with camels and beasts of burden that carried the spices, balm and myrrh. Joseph, had been hauled out of the pit and sent on his way to become a slave in Egypt. It was a long, slow journey in the hot sun that rose blisteringly hot each morning. Joseph must have been sad that his brothers didn't care about him, nor consider what he might suffer at the hands of the Egyptians, who were rich and powerful, and often worked their slaves to death. Joseph must have wondered what kind of master he would be sold to and what kind of work he might have to do. Would he be beaten and despised as a worthless animal? Many slaves in Egypt were.

For Joseph, entering Egypt was like arriving at another world. The people were so different for they dressed differently, ate different food and even smelled differently too. They spoke another language that Joseph couldn't understand. The Ishmeelites would have taken him to a slave market in the centre of a noisy city full of traders and wily gangster-like people. Dozens of young men and women were made to stand almost naked in the open air in the hot sun. They would be checked over for any hurts, cuts or weaknesses in their bodies. Even the other slaves looked different and talked differently. For Joseph the slave market was the loneliest and scariest place on earth.

Eventually, along came a very important man called Potiphar who was looking for a slave to work in his large mansion. He wanted the very best, and was willing to pay extra to get the right slave to enhance the importance of his own stature in Egypt. Potiphar saw Joseph and liked what he saw of him, so he bought him to become his household slave.

Going into Potiphar's house was like entering a palace with endless rooms filled with rich, fancy furniture. It was a home fit for a king, though Potiphar was not Pharaoh. He was the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Potiphar, therefore, worked closely alongside Pharaoh and saw that his laws were carried out among the people. Pharaoh's law was Potiphar's command, and he enjoyed the authority of carrying out Pharaoh's commands before the people of Egypt.

To live and work in Potiphar's house meant Joseph had to wash himself from head to toe and dress in fine Egyptian clothes. He must not look poor or untidy. He must look happy, at least on the outside, even if he wasn't happy on the inside. In Pharaoh's house other slaves worked as cooks, cleaners, gardeners, horse groomers, or page boys, who ran messages with scrolls in their hands. Many guards stood with swords at every door and gate. Slaves kept out of sight when not wanted and were to be ready at an instant when called upon. If they made a mistake or broke something they would be punished harshly. If they did do well, they were given no thanks. After all they were only slaves who could be replaced at the slave market.

It was as if Joseph was hopelessly lost to Potiphar's Egyptian world working as a slave, but he excelled. He learned the language of the people. He worked hard and did things really well, and

before long was put in charge of other slaves. His good work made Potiphar's life easier and pleased all who visited his house. Joseph got noticed for being an outstanding slave. Joseph's secret was that the Lord was with him and made his work to prosper.

Joseph is a good model to follow. No matter how difficult life is, or how hard your work might be, if you do it well seeking God's blessing you will find that things will improve. Nothing goes unrewarded. The Lord Jesus said about the man who used his talents properly, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."* With prayer and a with good Christian attitude as an obedient worker you will find joy in your work and gain the support of others, just as Joseph did in the house of Potiphar.

So, all was going well for Joseph until Potiphar's wife began to trouble him. You know that it is wrong for a married woman to be alone with another man. In Egypt it was very wrong for a married woman to court the attention of a slave. So, Joseph had to protect himself from the temptation posed by this wicked woman. He didn't allow himself to be in her company. He avoided her when possible and tried his best to stay away from her. Finally, Potiphar's wife laid hold of Joseph's clothing to lure him into sinning with her. Joseph said, "No" and ran away from her. This made Potiphar's wife angry. She felt offended. Joseph's proper response of running from her made her feel cheap. So, she resorted to telling the lie that Joseph had attacked her. She held up Joseph's garment to convince others in the house to accept her wicked story about Joseph.

I want you to think about this situation that Joseph was in. He was a lowly slave. He was working in Potiphar's house where Potiphar's wife was very powerful. He could have reasoned, I must do what I am told. But Joseph knew what was right and what was wrong. Not because he was in Egypt, but because he was a Hebrew, taught in the law of the Lord. Joseph, therefore, chose to obey God rather than a wicked forceful woman.

He did the right thing to avoid her as much as possible. The Bible tells us to flee temptation. We are not to think that we can withstand it in our own strength, nor to allow it just to please men or women. Here are three Bible verses that should guide us in any time of temptation:

1Ti 6:11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

2Ti 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Jas 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Do you do that when you are tempted to sin? You should. Otherwise, you are willfully sinning. You are opening the door to sin in your life. It is not wrong to be tempted, for that is sin knocking at your door. It is wrong, however, to open the door to temptation to let the evil into your life.

When Potiphar heard his wife's evil story against Joseph, he believed it. He was horrified that a slave in his house would dare to attack his wife to cause her to sin. Because he believed his wife's lie, He didn't understand that his wife was the sinful one. So, Potiphar, who was enraged

with great anger, commanded that Joseph be sent to a horrible prison and kept bound in chains with no freedom. Joseph was in that cruel place for two years in great suffering, but the Bible gives us a word of hope for Joseph. It says, “But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Genesis 39:20).

What happened to Joseph was so sad and seemed so hopeless but, in reality, God was working to His master plan. He was working for good through the evil of Potiphar’s wife and through Joseph’s time in that jail. For there he met the butler and the baker whose dreams Joseph would interpret. And through that Joseph would be called upon to interpret Pharoah’s dreams about the seven good years followed by the seven bad years.

So, even though Joseph had to go through years of suffering, he came to know that God was working in his life for good. Remember the apostle Paul’s words, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Romans 8:28). This is still how God works in our lives.