

Chapter 3 – Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

As the summary on page 22 indicates, Joseph was a very annoying teenage brother. As you read chapter 3, watch for the role that dreams play in the story. This extended story about Joseph and his (mis)adventures uses the repeated phrase, “The LORD was with Joseph” to emphasize God’s presence even when it appears that God has forgotten all about Joseph.

Jacob continues the poor parenting practices of his own parents, Isaac and Rebekah. He shows open preference for Joseph and, of course, Joseph gets the idea that he is more special than his brothers. They become jealous and sell him into slavery. Notice that when they bring their father Joseph’s torn and bloody coat, the symbol of Jacob’s favoritism, they ask, “whether it is your son’s robe” --- not “our brother” but “your son.”

What are the various ways that Joseph might have responded to his brothers’ abuse and his life as a slave?

Can you see any evidence of increasing maturity in Joseph in the incident with Potiphar’s wife?

Joseph’s situation gets worse. Being thrown into prison might have led him to think that God had abandoned him. In fact, one of the two civil servants whose dream Joseph interpreted was supposed to recommend Joseph to the Pharaoh, but he forgot to do so until the Pharaoh’s strange dream reminded the civil servant about Joseph’s gift. He recommended that the Pharaoh get Joseph to tell him the dream and give the interpretation.¹

If Joseph had not been in prison and thus been put in contact with a member of the court who was temporarily out of favor with the Pharaoh, would his gift of dream interpretation have been known to anyone in the royal court?

What is this story pointing to about God?

How does Joseph behave when his brothers fulfill his dream about them when “they threw themselves down before him” to beg him not to revenge their mistreatment of him?

Do you know a story about someone (yourself?) who experienced great suffering and even injustice and later came to interpret the hard times by saying that “God meant it for good”?

¹ “Pharaoh” is not a name, but a title, like “king.” Those who first heard this story about Joseph would have known that the Egyptians were famous for putting great stock in dreams. Archaeologists have found Egyptian books about how to interpret dreams. So the ancient listener would have realized how impressive Joseph’s wisdom would have been in this context.

Thoughts on Christian maturity

One of the most difficult things to do is to let go of the “right to get even.” When a person refuses to take advantage of an opportunity to hurt another or even to embarrass another who has hurt or humiliated him or her in some way, it is a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in that person’s life. When we find it impossible to “let go” of a grudge we can give our experience of mistreatment to God and ask that our anger be removed. Otherwise, we get eaten up on the inside and become bitter and self-focused. Do you know otherwise “good Christians” who have fallen into this trap?

Our speaking up for and acting for justice are much more effective if we speak and act firmly but without bitterness.