

Joseph Is Sold As a Slave to Potiphar

Genesis 39:1-6

Genesis 39:1-6 - *“Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. ² The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³ And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority. ⁵ So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. ⁶ Thus he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.”*

Background Notes

The Joseph story began in Genesis 37. The record of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 was a parenthesis in the account of Joseph’s life. Judah’s immoral activity is in great contrast to Joseph’s faithfulness, and clearly the Holy Spirit included the account of Judah’s sin to highlight Joseph’s faith and obedience.

In Genesis 39 the story of Joseph resumed. Joseph’s brothers sold him to a caravan of Ishmaelite traders who were on their way to Egypt. In Egypt, the traders sold Joseph to Potiphar, who appears to have been a high-ranking official of the Pharaoh. He was “captain of the guard” - probably Pharaoh’s personal bodyguards. Thus Potiphar would have had a large home and many servants.

Before long Joseph’s abilities, hard work, and integrity were noticed, and Potiphar elevated Joseph to be overseer of his entire household (v4). This was quite a position! It meant that Joseph was in charge of all the other servants. It meant that Joseph was the purchasing agent for the whole estate. It meant that Joseph made all the administrative decisions for the household. His position would have been similar to a manager running a very successful small business today. And remember, Joseph may still have been a teenager, because he came down to Egypt when he was only seventeen years old (Genesis 37:2)!

Joseph was over everything, except for the food that Potiphar ate (v6). This comment may reflect the practice of the Egyptians not to eat with non-Egyptians. *“So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians”*(Genesis 42:32). So perhaps that attitude is reflected here. On the other hand, verse 6 may just be a

figurative expression, meaning that Joseph was so capable that Potiphar didn't have to concern himself about anything except to show up for meals!

Doctrinal Points

1. God's plan for the believer's life will include unexpected blessings.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man in the house of his Egyptian master (v2). And the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake! The Lord's blessing was on all that Potiphar owned, in the house and in the field. So Joseph was blessed, and in turn the household of pagan Potiphar was blessed because of Joseph's presence in it! These blessings were certainly unexpected! When Joseph was thrown into the cistern and was pleading for his life with his brothers, what if someone had told him that he would be blessed in Egypt, and that he would be a blessing to the pagan Egyptians? That would have been hard for Joseph to believe! But the unexpected happened - and what was the key? The key is in verse 2, *"The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian."*

The Lord was with Joseph because Joseph was faithful to the Lord, and the Lord blessed Joseph and everything he touched. It was like the "Midas Touch." We could call it the "Joseph Touch" - not gold, but blessing! And this can be true for the believer today. If you as a believer are faithful to the Lord as Joseph was, the Lord will be with you. You will be blessed, and others will be blessed as a result. No exceptions! Many of these blessings will be unexpected.

The blessing on your life will flow out even to unbelievers. You may be lying on a hospital bed, for example, and you don't expect to find blessing there, but you will! You will find the expected blessing of the Lord's close presence - and you may find the **unexpected** blessing of doctors, nurses and other patients being blessed by your testimony. You may lose a job, and find the expected blessing of other Christians helping you out - and perhaps the **unexpected** blessing of a non-Christian coming to faith because of the way you handled the situation. Being in a hospital or losing a job may not seem like a blessing, but if you are walking faithfully with the Lord, you will be blessed - even in those kinds of situations. God's plan for the believer's life will include unexpected blessings.

This past week I received a form letter from the ministry, "Answers in Genesis." For some time this ministry has been trying to get permission to build a "Creation Museum," but the county planning commission has turned them down because of their creationist position. This has been a great disappointment, and yet there have been unexpected blessings. They have gotten tremendous media coverage because of this controversy, and as a result, many people have come to know about the "Answers in Genesis" ministry. They have gotten "free advertisement" in the press, and Christians have been united as a result. It was a great disappointment to have their plans for a creation museum turned down - but *the story is not over yet!*

Even with this disappointment, these believers have seen unexpected blessings. God's plan for the believer's life will include unexpected blessings.

2. God's plan for the believer's life may include unexpected detours.

Do you remember Joseph's dreams about his brother's sheaves of grain bowing down to his sheaf, and the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him? Joseph knew that these dreams were from God, and he knew that they would come true. I wouldn't be surprised if Joseph now began to think that God was now bringing about the fulfillment of his dreams. He may have thought that as Potiphar's chief steward, he could eventually be given his freedom. He may have imagined that he would become successful in Egyptian society. He would then travel back home to visit his father and brothers, and it would be obvious to them that he had become very successful! Joseph may have been thinking that this was how God would fulfill those prophetic dreams.

Of course we don't know whether Joseph thought this way or not, but it would be a logical way to think. However, God was not working that way. Little did Joseph know that within a short time he would be in prison - not for any wrong that he had done, but because he was faithful!

Joseph's life was about to take an unexpected and very unhappy detour. The good news is that Joseph did not give up on God. He appears to have realized that this was not a dead end, but only a detour. A most unexpected detour, but only a detour. God's plan for the believer's life may include unexpected detours.

The apostle Paul had a number of unexpected detours in his life. In his letter to the Christians at Rome, Paul wrote, "*Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles*"(Romans 1:13).

Paul experienced an unexpected detour. Little did he realize that when he would finally get to Rome, it would be as a prisoner! But God had reasons for the unexpected (and seemingly undesirable) detour. From that prison situation in Rome, the gospel penetrated the entire palace guard and into Caesar's household (Philippians 1). And during that imprisonment, Paul wrote four books of the Bible, now known as the "Prison Epistles."

Maybe you have had some unexpected detours lately. Maybe, like Joseph, you thought you finally saw how God was working things out in His plan for your life - but suddenly everything changed – seemingly for the worse! And you can't figure it out. Don't quit, and don't waver in your faith. Detours are not dead ends! God has his reason for the detours, as we'll see in Joseph's life. God's plan for the believer's life may include unexpected detours.

Practical Application

1. If you are a Christian, you should be a “better” employee!

Joseph was a great employee. He was a slave, but he was honest, and industrious, and hard working. Any employer today would love to have Joseph as an employee.

This should be true in the believer’s life as well. Christians **should** be *better* employees! There should never be any question as to our honesty, and integrity, and hard work. Joseph didn’t show up late to work, or take extra-long coffee breaks, or “borrow” company property – and neither should we!

If we are faithful believers, God’s blessing on our lives will spill over to our employer’s life, just as it did with Joseph. And our employers will notice! If you are a Christian, you should be a *better* employee.

2. Use your blessings as a witness to unbelievers.

Verse 3: *“And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand.”*

“Wait a minute!” you may say. “I thought Potiphar was a pagan Egyptian, who worshiped Egyptian gods?” Yes, he was! “Why, then, was he talking about the Lord?” Well, take a guess! Joseph had been witnessing to Potiphar. No doubt Joseph used the Lord’s blessings on his life as a witness to Potiphar.

If you are walking with the Lord, there will be blessing on your life, and unbelievers will notice. Now use the Lord’s blessing on your life as a positive witness for Him.

The blessing of joy can be used as a witness. If you are walking with the Lord, you will have the joy of the Lord. Non-Christians will see that joy, and they will ask “Why do you have a smile on your face?” or “Why are you always so happy?” Don’t just say, “I’m happy because my favorite NFL team is winning in the playoffs!” There’s your opportunity! Use the comments of unbelievers as an opportunity to talk about the Lord, and how He has blessed your life.

Use your blessings as a witness to unbelievers!