

The Slave who Saved the World



By Ben Godwin

Life is full of peaks and valleys, pits and pinnacles. Sometimes it feels like you're on a non-stop roller coaster ride. Whether it's your job, school, marriage, church, family, or just life in general, everything is a mixture of bitter and sweet. Emotions fluctuate like the stock market—up one minute, down the next. Of all the Bible characters who experienced life's ups and downs, Joseph comes to mind. In fact, if adversity is God's university, he had a Ph.D.

Joseph was Jacob's favorite son by his favorite wife (Rachel) whom he sired in his old age. The age disparity made him more like a grandson to Jacob who showed his favoritism by making him a multi-colored tunic. His ten older brothers were not amused by Joseph's fancy clothes or by his absurd dreams. If Joseph had a fault, it was being a blabber mouth—he couldn't keep his dreams to himself.

God gave Joseph two prophetic dreams that provided glimpses into his future and propelled him to his destiny. In the first dream, the brothers were bundling wheat in the field when all his brother's sheaves (bundles) bowed down to his sheaf. In the second dream, the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. Even Jacob rebuked him for such an outlandish idea.

His jealous brothers resented him for his bright clothes, his big dreams, and his big mouth. "So you want to be our king, do you?" his brothers derided. And they hated him both for the dream and for his cocky attitude" (Genesis 37:8, TLB). Then they conspired to kill him to ensure that none of his fantasies ever materialized.

The opportunity came when Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were grazing their flocks. But Reuben, the oldest brother, intervened and spared his life. Instead, they stripped Joseph's coat off, threw him in a pit, brought their father his torn tunic covered with goat's blood, and let him assume the worst. Meanwhile, they secretly sold Joseph to a band of Midianite merchants bound for Egypt.

When Joseph arrived in Egypt as a slave in shackles, perhaps he wondered if he had misinterpreted his dreams. He was purchased at auction by Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's

guard. Joseph worked hard, proved himself trustworthy, and quickly rose through the ranks to become his top manager. God's favor on his life was obvious.

When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Him, Joseph fled the scene, leaving another coat behind. With scant evidence and no witnesses, she claimed he tried to rape her and had him thrown into prison. There, God gave him favor with the warden and soon Joseph, an inmate, was running the joint as the jailer's assistant. As time passed, word spread that he had a keen ability to decipher the meaning of dreams.

Before long, he interpreted the chief butler and baker's dreams, which had fallen out of favor with Pharaoh. Just as Joseph predicted, the butler was restored to his post serving the king's court while the baker was executed. Two years later, Pharaoh had a nightmare about seven healthy cows which were eaten by seven sick cows. Awakened, he dozed off and dreamed again about seven plump ears of corn being devoured by seven scrawny ears of corn. When Pharaoh's magicians couldn't interpret the dreams, the butler suddenly remembered Joseph and had him summoned from prison.

God gave Joseph the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams. He predicted seven years of plenty would be followed by severe famine and proposed a plan to stockpile 20% of every harvest to sustain them through the drought. Pharaoh appointed Joseph over all of Egypt as his right hand man to implement the plan. Ironically, Pharaoh placed a royal robe (another new coat) on Joseph, gave him his regal signet ring and a golden necklace, and paraded him through Egypt in a chariot. Imagine that—a prisoner promoted to prime minister!

Pharaoh renamed Joseph "Zaphnathpaaneah" (quite a mouthful), meaning "Savior of the World." God used him to literally save the ancient world from starvation. Joseph was thirty years old when he was promoted. He was seventeen when he had his dreams, a thirteen year wait. Then there was seven years of bounty plus two years of famine before his brothers showed up in Egypt looking for food. So a total of twenty-two years after Joseph dreamed his brothers would bow down to him, it finally came to pass. Don't give up on your God-given dreams.

Joseph is a fitting type of Jesus. Notice the striking similarities: both were favored by their fathers, both were rejected by their brothers, both were betrayed and sold for silver, both were tempted to extreme measures, both were falsely accused of crimes they didn't commit, both forgave their enemies, both were exalted to positions of honor, and both saved the world.

When Joseph revealed his identity to his guilt-ridden brothers, they expected him to kill them. Instead, Joseph forgave them, was reunited with his grief-stricken father, and moved their clan to Egypt to take care of them. Here's how he summarized his difficult journey: "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good...to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20 NKJV).

That is the essence of redemption—how God brings good out of bad! God can take the bad things that happen in our lives and turned them around in our favor. He can lift us out of our pit and put us on the pinnacle. So when life gets you down, remember how He used a slave to save the world. Then imagine what He can do through you.

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