

The Character Of Joseph

When you think of characters of the Old Testament, there are certain accounts that come to mind with those characters in them. Whether it is Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, or Daniel, all these stick in your memory because of something significant that they did. Abraham believed God's promise to him and left Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 12:1-3), Jacob worked 14 years under Laban to win his love Rachel (Genesis 29:26-28), Moses delivered Israel out of Egyptian bondage (Exodus 1-14), David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), and Daniel survived a night in a lion's den (Daniel 6:21).

Joseph, the son of the patriarch Jacob was also one of these men. He is known mostly for his righteous act of running away from Potiphar's wife when she enticed him with the words, "*Lie with me*" (Genesis 39:7). However, too little attention is paid to the other character traits that Joseph had to attain to live the righteous life that he did.

After Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers (Genesis 37:27-29), he was taken by the Ishmaelite caravan to Egypt. Joseph then became a very productive servant to Potiphar, the man in whose house he worked. Potiphar set Joseph as "*overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority*" (Genesis 39:4). But, Joseph was also a handsome man, both in form and appearance. When Potiphar's wife saw this she could not resist, and invited him to lie with her. However, Joseph was a man of God, and knew this would not be right. Even though this was a time before the Law of Moses, Joseph still knew the marriage laws God gave in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:24). And here, he obeyed them knowing that this was a "*sin against God.*" He ran from her sight and fled from the house. Joseph's triumph over temptation is a great attribute of his noble character.

While Joseph was in Egypt, he was held in high esteem in the presence of Pharaoh. During this time Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife, Asenath, who was the daughter of Poti-Pherah, a priest to On. Egypt was a nation full of idolatry, with thousands of gods for various purposes. On was a city in northern Egypt noted for its worship of Ra, the sun god. Joseph had a pagan priest as a father-in-law. Living in a land full of idols, Joseph had to keep himself devoted to the one true God, the God of the Hebrews. While we know that Joseph's sons were worshippers of God, the account never said if his wife worshiped God. One can really see, living day in and day out surrounded by idols, that Joseph had tremendous strength toward God. This was another mark of his character.

Before Joseph became a high ranking man in Egypt, he was a part of a family with 10 other older brothers. While Joseph was young, it was he who Jacob favored the most and even gave a coat of colors to him. In turn, this made his brothers hate him. But Joseph also had two dreams, both of which had his brothers bowing down to him (Genesis 37:3-9). One might think that Joseph could recognize the favoritism bestowed upon him by his father, and the authority that was in the dreams, producing maybe some feelings of pride. Pride was yet another sin that Joseph had to contend with in his life. He was blessed beyond imagination by God throughout all his stay in Egypt. He was only a Hebrew slave, but he rose as the cream of the crop in all Egypt (Genesis 41:40)! He became the second ruler in all Egypt, only behind Pharaoh. The meekness and humble spirit in which Joseph lived is surely a trait we can all benefit from.

In Genesis 42, there is the famine going on as predicted by Joseph in the interpretation of the dreams. This sends Joseph's brothers to Egypt to purchase grain. Joseph, now being the second most powerful ruler in all Egypt, certainly had the prime opportunity to unleash revenge on his brothers for selling him into slavery so many years ago. He didn't take the opportunity though; instead he tested his brothers to see if they had repentant hearts. In the end, he welcomed his brothers and treated them the total opposite they once treated him.

We see truly that Joseph was a man of good, moral character. Joseph had many battles within his years. But he was a devout man of God, and left us an example that we should follow in his wake. James tells us that we should be "*doers of the word, and not hearers only*" (James 1:22). Joseph fits this description, he knew of God's will, and acted upon it each day he lived.

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