

STUDIES IN BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

The Honorable Prime Minister Joseph Jacobovich

Joseph had humble roots. His father, Jacob, and his mother, Rebekah, were of lowly stock and the first mention of Joseph in the Old Testament is in the context of his work as a shepherd for his father's flock. Being a shepherd was hardly a position of prestige for a bright, young 17-year-old. In addition to his modest upbringing, Joseph came from a family that could best be described as "dysfunctional." There were twelve sons from four different wives and the rivalry among the boys was intense. Because Joseph was the product of Jacob's precious wife Rachel, his father favored him above all his other sons and, as an expression of that favor, made a rather insensitive decision to give Joseph a beautiful multicolored robe. Joseph, who already reaped the benefits of his father's special blessing, then added insult to injury by describing to his brothers a series of dreams in which they bowed down to him. Is it any wonder that his brothers hated him?

❖ **The Managerial Skills of Joseph**

The story of Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers is well-known. While they first considered murdering Joseph, Reuben, the oldest son, convinced the others not to shed "innocent blood," but rather to strip Joseph of his robe and put him into an empty cistern. Later, when a caravan of merchants passed by the idea of selling him into slavery was decided upon. At last the "pretty boy" was gone, on his way to Egypt.

Yet the Bible records that "the Lord was with Joseph and he prospered" (Genesis 39:2). Immediately, his leadership skills became evident to Potiphar, Pharaoh's captain of the guard, who bought Joseph as a slave, but quickly realized that he "had success in everything he did." Potiphar, obviously a gifted officer himself, put Joseph in charge of everything he owned.

Subsequently, when the handsome, well-built Joseph was propositioned by Potiphar's wife and refused to succumb to her lust, he was unfairly imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. The same managerial gifts that Potiphar recognized in his young slave were also noticed while he was in prison, and, before long, Joseph was put in charge of all the prisoners. Once again, the Bible makes it clear that "God gave him success in whatever he did" (Genesis 39:23).

Joseph's third management position came after he interpreted Pharaoh's dream and offered him suggestions on how to avoid the devastation of the coming seven years of famine. For the second time, Joseph, now thirty years old, was given a bright colored robe, plus the Pharaoh's credit card (his ring). He was now the Number Two man in Egypt, the Prime Minister. Quite a remarkable journey in thirteen years for the son of a humble Jewish shepherd!

❖ **Joseph's Character**

Joseph's remarkable rise to power is in part based on the quality of his character. Joseph was a man of integrity. The clearest example of this was his unwillingness to be seduced by the wife of Potiphar. He was also a gifted organizer and a hard-working man. He labored tirelessly to organize Egypt in preparation for the years of famine that brought death and destruction to many of the peoples in the Middle East and Northern Africa. He also gave credit to God, rather than to himself, when he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh.

The story of Joseph's life, as recorded in Genesis (chapters 17-34), does not give us much detail on what Joseph thought as he went through the victories and the defeats in his life. When, as a 17-year-old boy, he had dreams given to him by God, he seemed to think of how he would be honored and be the center of attention. Yet, years later, when his dreams actually come true, he was humbled and cried out as he now understood what God had in store for him. He also cried out when he was finally able to forgive his brothers for what they had done to him as a boy. Letting go of that hatred was not easy!

❖ **Lessons from Joseph's Life**

At the end of his life, Joseph could look back and see God's "finger" at work in his ups and downs. After he was reconciled to his brothers and brought his father Jacob and the whole clan to Egypt, where he could provide for them during the famine, Joseph then realized that his brothers "intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what now is being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20).

The point of this story is clear: God is the Hero, not Joseph. God gave Joseph his leadership abilities, God blessed his work, God prepared him -- even during desperate times -- for a position Joseph could never have imagined, Prime Minister of Egypt. Joseph proved to be faithful, honest, hard-working, and confident in God. Surely he must have had long nights of sorrow and doubt. But his life illustrates that often we cannot understand what we are going through when we are in the midst of a crisis. Those are the times when we must trust in God, resting in the confidence that we may understand how it will all work out, but only much later, if at all. Joseph learned that lesson, a lesson that we too can learn from the story of this gifted Prime Minister.

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