

## What if Joseph had Traveled a Different Path [Trusting in God No Matter What] 231230

The story of Joseph is one of the most interesting in the Bible<sup>1</sup>. It is one of the longest, as well. It is such an amazing story of personal and family drama, and the faith of a man who was betrayed by his own family as well as the wife of his Egyptian master<sup>2</sup>.

It is interesting to think about how this man might have responded if things had been different in his life, starting with his dreams of authority. What if he had not ultimately risen to prominence and seen the high-level show of God's providence? What would his attitude towards God have been?

If the brothers (or the Midianites, or the Egyptians) had killed Joseph, naturally, the story would have been all over<sup>3</sup>, and God would have developed a nation through another person to accomplish His plan. Perhaps it would have been pursued a different way, without the stress of bondage (but I doubt that).

If Joseph had not been sold, similarly God would have created His nation in another way. But what about Joseph's faith in God's providence? Would he have been at peace, living at the home of his father, taking care of the family flocks?

We know that if he had succumbed to the charms of Potiphar's wife, then he would not been in the place he needed to be in order to interpret the dreams of the baker and the butler – and most especially the critical dreams of Pharaoh.

Even if he had been sent to prison, the path might not have led to the interpretation of dreams and thus his release<sup>4</sup> and service to the world in the global famine. What if he had stayed in prison? He must have looked at possible outcomes every day of his confinement. Think about him after years of taking care of business as a trustee in line with his great personal integrity, and helping those who were suffering. Was he on the path to survival and release (or parole)? He was in a special prison with the King's prisoners<sup>5</sup>, so this would seem to have been possible.

What if he had decided not to help with the interpretation of dreams, considering how unfairly he had been treated? He would certainly never have been given the opportunity to help Pharaoh, Egypt, and the surrounding nations with the famine. What if the butler had not remembered Joseph at the right time (too early, and Joseph might have been released; too late and the famine would have struck without warning). What if he had interpreted all of the dreams, but then was just returned to jail with an inadequate "Thank you"? Perhaps the butler would write a helpful recommendation for him! He could also have interpreted all of the dreams but then not be put in charge of the collection and storage of food.

I wonder if he would have ever thought to reach out to his family from prison, or even afterwards. Would they have come to see him, and perhaps to help him after years of separation? Would they ask him for forgiveness (as they did in the actual events?) Would Joseph have found a way to check to see if they would protect Benjamin, or if they had changed their attitudes towards him?

Perhaps the famine had come and gone when he was released. Would he have gone back to his homeland and to his family to reconnect? Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."<sup>6</sup> This indicates to me that he had no interest in seeing them again. Maybe he would stay and live in Egypt. He would have nothing, and would likely have to work in service to someone – but who would employ him given the reputation that was ruined by the claim of Potiphar's wife? He might not have ever married and had sons that carried on his name. If so, his line would have not have been gone forward, and Israel would have been left with only eleven tribes.

He certainly would have had the option to return home. How would he have approached his family, especially the brothers that had treated him so badly? Would they have found another way to get rid of him?

If he had gone home, he would likely have watched the brothers at first from a distance, to make sure that his full brother Benjamin was being treated well. Then he might have gone closer and revealed himself. One wonders what story that he would have told. It is hard not to consider a consider the comparison to Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son<sup>7</sup>; even though he did not run away from home, his return and the possible response of his older brothers makes it interesting.

We have the actual reaction of the brothers after years of separation<sup>8</sup>. How much of this was caused by seeing their father's sorrow (caused by their own actions), and how much because they had come to realize their mistreatment of him? We also know the response Joseph had to his brothers, telling them that it was God's will and that it was for the greater good<sup>9</sup>. He told them to let it go, as he himself had. In thinking about the other possibilities, I believe that he would have made the same kind of statement about his faith in God's plan for him in those circumstances as well.

All in all, thinking about the faith of Joseph in God's providence is a fascinating thought exercise. The actual story is a rags-to-riches story, while any other path for Joseph (except for that of the Prodigal Son) would have left him very poor indeed. The young man Joseph maintained his faith in the dreams he perceived to be from God even when things turned completely wrong – being sold by his brothers, accused of sexual misconduct with his employers, and jailed in the Egyptian prison for several years. In spite of his troubles, he behaved very well in that view of God's purpose for him for a greater community. His faith in God was deep enough that it stayed with him no matter what happened to him. His resentment did not grow over the years to blot out this view of the Worthy Way of God.

God worked through the life of Joseph to accomplish His purpose, from the life and history of his family ancestry to the presentation of the dreams indicating his prominent purpose in God's providence. I also believe that God's plan would be worked in spite of any changes in events, though He would have surely worked it out differently. God would have evolved a new chosen nation from these events in a similar way<sup>10</sup>. He would then have enabled His people to have received riches<sup>11</sup> through another avenue.

The final point to make is that we must discern our own purpose in God's plan - no matter how big or how small our role is. And we must keep the faith no matter what!

1. Genesis 37-50
2. In the real story, I wonder how Potipher's wife (and husband) felt when Joseph rose in power. Did Potipher's wife ultimately self-destruct so that Potipher saw her real character? Did Potipher understand and believe in Joseph? Either after his wife's accusation or later; perhaps he helped Joseph attain his special position in the prison...
3. Joseph's brothers did not appreciate his dreams of future leadership – yet their actions in selling him to the Midianites were actually essential to make it happen (with God's direction, of course)
4. We have no idea of the length of his prison sentence.
5. Genesis 39:20; see also Genesis 41:10 (the house of the captain of the guard)
6. Genesis 41:51
7. Luke 15:11-32

8. Genesis 50:15-20
9. Joseph's father Jacob knew about God's providence as well, Genesis 48:3
10. Remember that God was about to create a new nation from Moses after planning to destroy the Israelites (Exodus 32:9)
11. Exodus 3:22 and 12:36

© Copyright 2024, Heard Lowry