

The Story of Joseph

Going Through Goshen

Part 17 – June 17, 2012



I guess I just lie. After the sale of Joseph (from *Potiphar's* perspective), I said we were going into his house ... but then we went back to the *marketplace* (to see it from *Joseph's* perspective) and ended up in Potiphar's *fields*. So, I said we'd explore his house *today*. Well ... We're just gonna ring the doorbell and run - all the way back to verse one. I almost totally missed the *third perspective!* The camel! Not really. We left off with a progression of events.

[After Joseph was sold,] The Lord was with Joseph and [because of this] he prospered, [not by magic, but by doing the things that God prospers] and [because of this] he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. – *Genesis 39:2 NIV*



Tomb of Menna, c. 1400 BC

That would mean “he prospered” *outside* the house. Officials were compensated with land, and Genesis 39:5 says that Potiphar, a *high-ranking* official, had “fields”, plural. Besides animals and various grains, wheat would've been the mainstay crop because of bread.

Potiphar's fields were the perfect place for God to prepare an unaware shepherd for an unprecedented agricultural destiny.

Also, they didn't bring foreign slaves *inside* till they're fairly certain they wouldn't cut their throats, rob 'em, and run off. Here's how the Message paraphrase puts it ...

As it turned out, GOD was with Joseph and things went very well with him. He ended up living in the home of his Egyptian master. – *Genesis 39:2 TMOT*

Potiphar had been keeping his heavily-eyelinered eye on Joseph.

When his master saw that the *Lord* was with him and [saw] that the *Lord* gave him success in everything he did, [outside and inside] Joseph found favor *in his eyes* ... – *Genesis 39:3-4a NIV*

Potiphar *saw* what Joseph *believed*, and it was attractive. Which means that Joseph demonstrated his faith in a very visible way ... which actually can't be helped. Everyone who watches you sees *exactly* what you believe. It's like the old expression: “I can't hear what you're saying; your actions are too loud.” What's so amazing is that even though Joseph has been horribly victimized, he refuses to play the victim. That's eye-catching! Especially when there are so many people he could blame! There're his resentful brothers (that's 10 men right there!) and the Ishmaelites (a whole caravan!), but, if you're going to point the finger, don't stop there.



If Abraham and Sarah hadn't doubted God and disobeyed, and used Hagar, their servant, as a surrogate, there would've been no Ishmael ... and no *Ishmaelites*.

The story would be: "As Joseph's brothers sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw ... nobody. And Judah said to his brothers ... "Well, let's eat!"

If Jacob hadn't shown such favoritism; and honestly, if *Joseph* hadn't been so condescending and insensitive, it would've read like this: If "When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe and took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was ... filled with water! And they all dove in, "Shalom little bro! Don't get his coat wet. It's special."

But don't stop now, because really – isn't it pretty much God's fault? He *allowed* all of it. Joseph takes responsibility in the face of his adversity, and openly demonstrated trust, faith, love, and worship. Wow. When *we* feel abandoned by God and hurt by others, we tend to *default* to playing the victim and giving ourselves *permission* to seize control in self-centered ways that satisfy the flesh. Instead of humbly submitting to and trusting in the God who lovingly created us in *His* image, we grow angry and bitter toward the *unloving god* that we've resentfully created in *ours*. You see, we can't play the victim without ultimately making God the villain. Because deep down, you know that whatever you're going through, He *allowed*. This is what the brothers *and* the Ishmaelites did: they played the victim, made God the villain, and seized control. They rejected God's chosen because *they* felt rejected, so ... "revenge is *sweet!*"

Now, the Bible is pretty clear in regard to dating Joseph; it's well agreed that Solomon's Temple began construction about 966^{BC}.



Solomon began to build the Temple 480 years after the people of Israel had left Egypt. [c. 1446^{BC}] – 1 Kings 6:1a NCV

[Moses writes:] Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. [c. 1876^{BC}] – Exodus 12:40 NIV

They moved to the land of Goshen, in Egypt, 9 years after Joseph's promotion, which was 13 years after the Ishmaelites took him: c. 1898^{BC}. (Gen 45:11, 41:46, 37:2) And, well respected, secular, Egyptian chronology sets this in the reigns of the 3rd and 4th Pharaoh's of the 12th Dynasty. And it was *their* father, and grandfather, Senusret I (we'll call him *Big Sen*) who made it fashionable to wear a bowling pin on your head; that's not true.

2nd Pharaoh of the 12th Dynasty, Senusret I (there are multiple spellings, including Sesostris and Senwosret)



The Nile flows north (downhill)

But what Big Sen *did do*, was to secure the fertile Nile Delta, which included the land of Goshen on the east/right side, closest to the Promised Land. That's a satellite photo of Egypt, with the lights along the Nile flowing north, through Goshen, to the Mediterranean Sea. And in a radical change of policy, Big Sen establishes diplomatic and trade relations with Syria (the Ishmaelites' home) and Palestine (Joseph's home) for the first time.



Tomb of Khnumhotep II, c. 1890 BC

This is what made the Ishmaelite caravan possible. The painting I've shown of the Asiatic traders, is from the tomb of the guy who worked for Big Sen! And we know that the trade route went through the land of Goshen and along the Nile. And it passed through On, the temple city of the sun god, Ra; and a center of astronomy, geometry, medicine, history, and philosophy. Joseph's wife, Asenath, was from the city of On. (Gen 41:45)



120 ton Obelisk of On

To celebrate Big Sen's 30th year in office, about 43 years *before* Joseph arrived (c. 1941^{BC}), Big Sen installed two 68' obelisks in On (later called Heliopolis). And one of 'em is *still* standing, after 3953 years! The oldest standing Obelisk in Egypt, and the only surviving remnant of On. On was one of three main storage cities where grain was held for winter.

Okay. Schoolwork's over. Let's have some fun! The Ishmaelites are emphasized in the first verse of this chapter, and that's the *last* we hear of 'em. We've told most of their story, but we left them dangling. So, we need to tie 'em up, which is only fair ... *they* tied up Joseph.

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. **[By the Ishmaelites]** Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him *from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.* – Genesis 39:1 NIV

We talked about Joseph pleading, praying, and gagging on the nauseatingly sweet pungency of the spices, balm, and myrrh that Egypt's rich and powerful used in mass quantities. That must've tickled 'em. "Ah, revenge *is* sweet ... *sickeningly* sweet, eh kid?!" But, by the time they hit the border, he has probably acclimated, and he's reeking.

And as Joseph enters the land of Goshen, wild geese fly through a turquoise sky above fertile green pastures and towering palm trees, mirrored in duck ponds and freshwater channels. Grassland, grain fields, marshlands, as far as the eye can see. Herds and flocks grazing. Shepherds sitting serenely beside vigilant, jackal-eared dogs.

And the irony is that this is the *low point* of Joseph's life. Bought, bound and being brought through the world's largest oasis, the treasure God has prepared for his family, to enter as a tribe and exit, a nation. This is all gonna be yours, Joseph! But he can't see that – there's no way. We can't see the ways that God is working through the day to day misery when we're in the midst of it. So, Joseph is praying: "Where are you God?! What're you thinking?! *Boy this is beautiful land. Why won't you answer?! Why won't you save me from my enemies?! Wow, that's a lot'a ducks!*"

The "secret surprise" is that Joseph *isn't* a victim! This isn't something God is just "allowing" ... He's *providing!* Sometimes we give the enemy way too much credit. And as they make their way south, they pass the city of On. And Joseph can see the two towering obelisks, barely 40 years old. And somewhere in that city a little girl is running and playing and being prepared by God to become Joseph's wife, and the mother of two sons, who will become tribes in the nation of Israel. And Joseph is praying: "Why have you turned your back on me?!"

That's *you*, you know. And me. His work is too subtle to see. And we have to go through what we'll need for our created destiny. His plan is to help you conquer what you think has conquered you. The "secret surprise" is that *you* are *not* a victim! It may not be in His almighty plan for your eternal best to give you wealth or health or power; but, it's *always, always, always* in His plan, that you will conquer and grow and overcome, and grow intimately closer to the One that Joseph is foreshadowing, the One revealed through Jesus Christ. The only way you can miss, is by playing the victim and seizing self-centered control. The Apostle Paul reminds us and warns us, it's not by sight, but by faith and trust. (2 Cor 5:7) So ... when you can't see it, don't *seize* it!

So, they get to the hostile marketplace, and the Ishmaelites turn Joseph over to the slave trader, and maybe they find a balcony or a roof to watch the action from. When the crowd mocks and abuses the despised, young Hebrew, who smells like their rich oppressors, the Ishmaelites are jubilant. "It's the spices and the balm! They *hate* him for it! And with *us* here, it's amplified tenfold!"



And then, suddenly, an adrenaline charged freight train thunders through the vendors into the square, weapon drawn, eyes flashing. "Who's he?! What's he doing?! What's he want?!" "It's the king's guard. He must'a smelt yer perfume! He'll probably think that poor slave's a thief or a murderer!" As Potiphar scans the retreating ring of terrified onlookers, they all turn and point to Joseph, and Potiphar charges forward, breathing steam. "Oh, this is gonna be good! The kid's standin' his ground and prayin'!"

But, Potiphar interrogates the dealer, who looks around and then points at the *Ishmaelites*. "What're they sayin'?! What's goin' on?!" "I don't know. Hush up!" Potiphar sheaths his weapon, and examines the slave. Shackles are unshackled, fetters unfettered. And all the while, Joseph is staring into the eyes of his oppressors, the *Ishmaelites*. "Why's he starin' like that? It's unnerving; it ain't even like he's mad ... more like he's memorizin'." Egyptian slaves fortunate enough to be purchased by the upper-class were usually treated kindly and enjoyed a lot of liberty. Potiphar points out where to walk; and as Joseph steps forward, the crowd reflexively parts. "Boy, that kid sure hit the jackpot, huh!"

Joseph's brothers didn't know what became of Joseph, but the *Ishmaelites* did. They traded in the city where 13 years later, Potiphar's Hebrew slave becomes the most celebrated, and the second most powerful man in Egypt. And now it's the *Ishmaelites* who are sick to their stomach. They got more than they bargained for when they seized the control. And they're never mentioned again. You know why? I assume they retired! The fear of being found out and executed would've forced 'em to forfeit their lucrative trade. And I imagine they spent the rest of their lives looking over their shoulder, and jumping at every unexpected noise. They may have tied up Joseph, but they put themselves in bondage. Who was the *Ishmaelite's* real victim?

Revenge is sweet ... until the bitter aftertaste kicks in, which it *always, inevitably* does, because the sweetness is just a thin skin of reckless self-pity on a thoroughly rancid bargain.

And that's where we have to close God's story for today.