

The Story of Joseph

Convictions

Part 23 – August 19, 2012



Joseph's "reward" for holding to a conviction, is a conviction!

When we left off, Mrs. Potiphar was accusing Joseph of attempted rape!

We've talked about how Joseph foreshadows Christ. And now he's being *so* unjustly condemned, *because* of his obedience to God, this NT scripture about *Jesus* could easily be about *Joseph*:

"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. – *1 Peter 2:22-23 NIV*



Joseph is a foreign slave, accused of a death penalty crime, by the wife of a high ranking official. I've said that Daniel learned faith in the lion's den, but Joseph in the cougar cage. A few weeks ago I asked: If you find yourself *in* the cougar cage, where's the safest place to be? *As far* from the cougar as *possible*! Today's riddle: what would be the only *guaranteed* place of protection in the cougar cage? Another cage! A cage *within* a cage.

And *that's* exactly where Potiphar puts Joseph.

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. – *Genesis 39:19-20a NIV*

Knowing how Mrs. Potiphar relentlessly pursued poor Joseph, I imagine his most frequent and earnest prayer request was, "Lord, protect me from this woman!" And if so, this *was* an answer to prayer! Answers to prayer often come wrapped in unexpected packages that you'd *never* pick out for yourself. But, don't be too quick to exchange 'em ... because they are *always* just what you need.

When we ended last week, I said verse 19 is the setup, and verse 20 is the punch line but, after 3900 years, we miss the humor! In a good joke, you make it *sound* like you're saying one thing (without *actually* stating it), and then you "pull the rug out". The statement in verse 19 is intentionally incomplete. It *should* say, "he burned with anger" *toward Joseph* (or toward his wife). But, it deliberately avoids stating who his anger is aimed at. It makes it *sound* like it's Joseph (without stating it), but the rug is pulled out when we're told what Potiphar *did*, because what he *did* reveals that it *wasn't* aimed at Joseph!

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him [...] and put him [...] in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined. – *Genesis 39:19-20a NIV*



Potiphar is the chief executioner! People are brought to the prison that’s *in his house* (40:2-7) to be *put to death!* If he’s *mad* at Joseph it means he *believes* his wife. And if he thinks *his slave* attempted to *rape his wife* and *stain his honor*, Joseph would be a stain on his carpet! Executed on the spot! He doesn’t even have Joseph flogged or beaten or tortured ... not even a *little*. And ancient Egypt wasn’t exactly soft on crime!

Instead, he puts him in the royal holding pen under white collar care. This is where V.I.P.s, who have offended the Pharaoh, are kept until his anger subsides or he decides their fate.

A foreign slave (let alone one accused of raping his master’s wife) wouldn’t even be *allowed* in this “private prison” except, it operates under Potiphar’s authority, *and* under his house.



And look how Young’s Literal Translation renders the unique Hebrew word that’s *only used* to describe Potiphar’s prison.

... and Joseph’s lord taketh him, and putteth him unto the **round-house**, a place where the king’s prisoners are bound; and he is there in the **round-house**. – *Genesis 39:20 YLT*

Because of this, many scholars assume it’s a basement dungeon (similar to this 2,800 year old grain silo at Megiddo).

So, why does Potiphar believe in Joseph? He *knows* him! The same convictions that caused Joseph to flee, formed his character.

And why doesn’t he believe his wife? He knows her *too*. And so do a bunch of guys, I’ll bet! She’s too brazen. I’m sure Joseph wasn’t her first attempt, just her first unsuccessful one.

What happened to the House Steward Joseph replaced?

As she’s spinning her story, how many red stains are on that carpet?!

And I doubt he had any problem intimidating the witnesses! But here’s the crazy part, he’s not *just* an intimidator, as Chief of the Palace Guard, Potiphar is *also* the Chief Investigator.

Potiphar would’ve conducted investigations and surveillances to root out royal plots and solve government crimes. A Jewish legend says that he *deduced* the truth from a tear in Joseph’s garment.

Potiphar is the Columbo of the 12th Dynasty!



Later, Potiphar imprisons the cup bearer and baker for a capital offense. (40:1-4) The baker is executed, but the cup bearer is returned to guarding Pharaoh's life. (40:21-22) Why? They were most likely *under investigation!*

The baker was found guilty, the cup bearer was found innocent.

If he was even *slightly guilty*, he wouldn't have been reinstated.

So, Mrs. Potiphar is spinning her web of lies to the one man in all Egypt who happens to be an experienced investigator!

"You said you screamed for help?" "Yes." "Would that have been a *loud* scream, ma'am?" "Yes!" "Did you *wait* to call your servants in?" "No! They were right here." "You see, that's what's bothering me. Why didn't they come when you screamed? Does that make sense to *you*?" "Are you saying I didn't scream?!" "Oh, no ma'am, I think you *screamed*. I just don't think it was a cry for help."

"May I see his garment again? Oh, this is nice, *very* high quality. My mother was a weaver; she would've *loved* this. Couldn't afford it herself; you know, *servants'* wages. Does Joseph own a lot of these?" "Yes, we supply our servants' clothes. Is that a *crime?!*" "No, no, it's just that, well, the other house servants aren't dressed nearly as nice. I'll be going now."

"Oh! Uh, one more thing: Did you notice the tear? See this here?" "It's ripped, so what?" "Why would the Chief of Staff wear a torn garment to work?" "I probably tore it, defending myself." "Hmm, that's baffling. Did you *not scream* when he first attacked, or did he *not run* when you first screamed? *Usually* when a woman is assaulted, *sexually*, the clothes are torn off of the *victim* – but in *your* case, the clothes were torn off of *the perpetrator!* That's a *first* for me, ma'am!"

"Okay, goodbye. Sorry to bother you. Oh! Just one more thing. Could you tell me what you've perfumed your bed with? It's so strong and seductive; my wife would just love some. She's romantic that way." "I am your wife!" "Of course."

If Potiphar knew that Joseph was innocent, why did he imprison him? And if he knew his wife was guilty, why'd he pardon *her?!* Potiphar appears to be in a predicament. A good guess is that she's the daughter of someone very important. She may have been gifted to Potiphar by Pharaoh, as he'll later do for Joseph. Flash-forward a few years ...



Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah [ZAF-ee-nath-pan-EE-uh] and gave him Asenath [ASS-eh-nath] daughter of Potiphra [poh-TIH-fih-ruh], priest of On, to be his wife. – Genesis 41:45a NIV

Besides enduring palace gossip about not being able to protect and/or satisfy his wife, Potiphar might risk offending *Pharaoh*. If he indicts his wife, he may as well announce that Pharaoh makes unwise choices!

Even if Pharaoh *isn't* involved, it seems Potiphar can handle a stain on his good carpet, but not his good name. It was a big deal in the 12th Dynasty (as well as the 21st century) to keep up appearances at the cost of convictions. Apparently theirs was a marriage of mutual benefit, and had been for some time, which explains why Joseph bore the brunt of Mrs. P's unwanted pursuit and now Mr. P's unwarranted punishment.

Funny thing is, he most likely discussed all this with the man he trusted most: *Joseph*. "I don't want to loose *you*, but I'm stuck with hurr. How can I keep you in the house and keep you safe from the coo-gar?" Then the light bulb goes on: Protective Custody! A cage within a cage. It *looks* like punishment *and* he can continue benefiting from Joseph's abilities. It's brilliant ... except for one small thing ... It's a sin against God, against Joseph, and against Potiphar's *own* integrity. The very thing Potiphar does, demonstrates that he *knows* he shouldn't do the very thing he does!

You do *what's right* and *then* (eventually) you get to see why it was the right choice. Otherwise, you *never* know how God *could've* used it, and would've worked it out, for *your* eternal best.



That's why, when Joseph was tempted to violate his convictions, he chose harsh consequences over easy compromise, in obedience to God. Just as Joseph parallels Jesus, Potiphar parallels Pilate! Though Pilate had said, "I find no fault in Him", (John 18:38) for the sake of appearances, he violated his own convictions.

[But, as the Apostle Paul said,] We [stand firm and] live by faith, [not by appearances] not by sight. – 2 Corinthians 5:7 NIV

Joseph grew up hearing the family stories of compromise and consequence. Abraham. Sarah. Hagar. Ishmael. Jacob. Esau. And as a pastor, I've seen more than enough personal *train-wrecks!* And nothing strengthens your faith in God's will and Word and ways like watching example after example confirm its veracity!

Joseph saw the outcome of compromise in others. He was convinced that God's ways were *always* the best ways. And he wanted to please *supremely* the One who loved him and he loved *supremely*. The more you value someone, the more you *want* to bless them and bring them delight in every way. It's a conviction of love! If your child needs bone marrow, and *you're* a match, the pain you'll endure isn't even a factor. That's a conviction of love.

Likewise, "For the joy set before him [Jesus] endured the cross" (Heb 12:2) And for the joy set before *us*, we live by faith and stand on our convictions of love, *without* compromise, *in spite* of appearances. And the *big reveal*, the big pull-the-rug-out punch line, is that it's actually for *our* sake, *our* joy, *our* eternal best, and *our* greatest good, as well as, and above all, *His* glory! And when you *really get that*, you'll do whatever it takes to hold onto His righteousness, even enduring disdain and the loss of privilege, rather than risk compromising your conviction of love.

But, the enemy is tricky. And Joseph's conviction will bring about the *third* deadly temptation in Potiphar's house. The *first* was power, the *second* was sexual lust, and the *third* is ... next time.