

Major People, Part III

Thursday, June 11: Joseph

[Genesis 37](#)

Joseph made no friends among his brothers. Of course, it's no fault of his own that he was the oldest son of Jacob's beloved wife, and he may have been a little spoiled because of that. Jacob certainly knew how to play favorites. But Joseph didn't help his case any in the way he acted toward his brothers.

I won't be too hard on Joseph, though, because I can relate. There are people out there—I know a couple of them intimately—who tend to see the world a little more black-and-white than others. These folks have a tendency to approach every incident without emotion and just coldly judge a thing right or wrong. Those of us who do that may take some maturity to learn to temper our judgement with compassion. One can still treat others right, even when they're wrong. It took me a while to learn that, and I can see a little of that in Joseph. It's probably what made him a good leader when he got older, but it definitely worked against him in his teen years.

Even in hardship God was with Joseph, and he seems to have understood that. As we see in chapter 39, Joseph had no desire to displease God. If God was on his side, why shouldn't he be likewise faithful?

Friday, June 12: Joseph (cont.)

[Genesis 39](#)

As I read this I wonder at Joseph's integrity. We know that Jacob was a deceiver and played favorites. Joseph's mother was a pagan polytheist. His own brothers sold him into slavery—certainly no role models there! Yet for all the mess that was his family, somehow he still learned to trust God. Not only that, but *his* faith moved him to act morally, something we've noticed is not a particularly prevalent trait in his family.

I think Moses means for us to learn something here. It's no accident that chapter 38 shows the sexual depravity of Judah, Er, Onan, and Tamar, just before we read in chapter 39 how Joseph refused to defile himself with his master's wife. What a contrast!

As I said previously, it doesn't appear that Joseph has yet learned to temper truth with kindness, but in this instance that probably helped him. I've seen people who are so judgmental that they can be especially hard on themselves, and this sometimes makes them even more diligent to do right in the face of temptation. Speaking from experience, I believe that that was at least part of what kept Joseph so unbending.

But where did he learn to trust God so? He unequivocally states that to take Potiphar's wife is an egregious sin against God. While Moses's audience would have understood this, I wonder where Joseph learned it.

Saturday, June 13: Joseph (cont.)

[Genesis 40](#)

Joseph continues to distinguish himself, doing what is right despite his circumstances. The guard of the prison puts him in charge over all the prisoners.

This was a big responsibility. This was not a dirty, dank dungeon, but a building where the king's political prisoners were housed. Some of these might be foreign dignitaries that were arrested to act as hostages in a prisoner exchange, or as surety to guarantee the safety of one of Pharaoh's officials abroad. These prisoners were typically well-treated, with clean lodgings, good food, and the freedom to move about within the confines of the structure. Joseph himself would have fared well, though imprisoned unfairly.

When the servants of Pharaoh mention that they have had troubling dreams, Joseph immediately glorifies God, and then asks to know the dreams. He seems to have not only great faith that God reigns, but also that he will give Joseph insight into these dreams. This harks back to our Thursday reading: "Now Joseph had a dream..."

He still hasn't learned to be too tactful, though, as his words to the baker are rather cold and heartless. Perhaps, the reason that the cup bearer forgot to mention Joseph was that God knew he wasn't yet ready for his next leadership role.

Sunday, June 14: Joseph (cont.)

[Genesis 41](#)

When the time is right, God acts. As part of his plan to preserve the line of Abraham, God is going to bring famine into the land and lead Jacob's family to Egypt. Jacob's sons had been marrying Canaanite wives, and God seemed to want to preserve the purity of the covenant lineage, so he moved Jacob and sons out of harm's way. He'd already sent Joseph on ahead to prepare the way for them, and now Joseph's dreams will come to fruition.

Joseph had made a name for himself by interpreting dreams, so when Pharaoh has some nightmares of his own he calls on Joseph. This time he seems to have matured—he's about thirty years old now—and he certainly answers the king with more grace and tact than we have yet seen him use in his dealings with people.

Not only does Joseph interpret the dream, clearly giving glory to God, but his insight allows him to offer advice on how to handle the coming calamity. Pharaoh is impressed with the young man and makes him the top administrator in Egypt. Before we marvel that a man can go from prisoner to leader in a day, remember that Joseph was held under the king's guard with political prisoners. It wouldn't be unusual to find an intelligent, savvy fellow among the residents, many of whom were well-educated and powerful in their respective nations.

Pharaoh gives Joseph the daughter of one of his highest officials to wed, something that would typically be done to help ensure his loyalty.

Of course, we've already seen that Joseph acts with integrity, so he certainly wasn't a threat to his new master, but *Pharaoh* didn't know that.

Monday, June 15: Joseph (concl.)

[Genesis 50](#)

Chapter 50 sets the stage for the Exodus story. Joseph weeps over his father and buries him in the cave of Machpelah. The greatness of Joseph is evident in the size and quality of the retinue that accompanied him in his funeral procession. It's little wonder that, upon their return to Egypt, his brothers feared for their lives. They seem to have learned nothing of Joseph's devotion to moral, upright behavior, and they presume that he will be petty and vengeful, just as they would be were the tables turned.

Perhaps this is why Joseph weeps at their request. They still don't "get" him. They still don't see him for who he is. They insist on seeing him through the lenses of their own depravity and ascribing to him base motives. We'll see that the passing of generations doesn't soften this attitude. Think how often the Jews accused Moses of trying to kill them! Nevertheless, Joseph comforts them and promises to be protector and provider for them. When Joseph finally dies, he extracts a promise from the Israelites that they will take his remains back to Canaan when God leads them to the promised land.

