

JOSEPH'S TESTIMONY (by Noel Morris)

Just a few days ago I was in a prison, and now I'm out, I'm all cleaned up and shaved, and I'm the Governor of all the land. I can hardly believe it myself, but God has set me free and promoted me, and here I am.

I want to tell you how I came to be in this situation.

I come from a large family of 11 brothers and a sister, a father and 4 mothers! Actually my own mother died when I was quite young, but I was Dad's favourite son and I grew up quite spoilt. My Dad gave me this special rainbow coloured coat.

I was a bit of a snitch and used to tell Dad what my older brothers got up to. So my brothers didn't like me much and wouldn't even speak nicely to me.

I was a dreamy kid, and sometimes had dreams from God. I guess I was immature and naive, because I told my brothers about this one dream.

"We were binding sheaves of corn out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered round mine and bowed down to it."

And they said to me, "Will you really rule over us? Are you going to be our boss?" So they hated me even more for my dreams and what I said.

Then I had another dream which they didn't like either. This time I dreamed that the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me. My Dad was also upset about that, but not as much as my brothers were.

One day when I was 17 Dad sent me out to check up on my brothers. They were supposed to be looking after the sheep near Shechem, about 90KM away. It took me a few days to get there, and I couldn't find them. A man there told me that they had gone on to Dotham, another 15KM further north.

I thought they might be pleased to see me because I brought them some treats. But no, they grabbed me, stripped off my nice coat, and threw me in a deep pit in the ground. I thought they were going to kill me. I hadn't realised they hated me that much! But Reuben my oldest brother, talked them out of doing it, and they left me in the pit while they ate all the food I had brought them. I curled up and shivered in that cold pit.

Some hours later I heard voices. I thought I was saved, but when my brothers hauled me up out of the pit, they handed me over to some passing traders. They actually sold me for money. I became a slave.

My emotions were somewhat mixed up as the camel train headed south. The next day we actually passed quite close to my home. I wondered what kind of story my brothers would tell Dad when they got back. I wish now that I had learned to keep my mouth shut a bit more. Right then I really did have to

keep my mouth shut though, because I was being dragged along behind a camel!

A few weeks later we arrived in Egypt. The traders took me to the slave market, and I was put on display like a piece of merchandise. This important-looking Army officer came up and bought me. Over the next few weeks I found out how important he really was. Turns out that his name was Potiphar, and he was in charge of Pharaoh's security service, and in particular he ran the prison for political prisoners.

My mind and emotions had been going through turmoil. One day I was the favorite son of a rich man, the next day a potential murder victim. Then I was sold, then resold like an animal, and finally a slave in this soldier's house.

Naturally I had a lot of resentment against my brothers. How could they do this to me? Why God, did you let this happen to me? Many nights I cried myself to sleep. Slowly God helped me to get some peace in my heart.

I thought I should make the best of my situation. So I set out to do a good job for my new master Potiphar. I became a trusted member of his household staff, and after a few years I found myself in charge of his whole house and farm. My good choices brought God's blessings on Mr P, and he recognised it too.

By this time I had dealt with a lot of the feelings in my heart. I had forgiven God - yes I had blamed Him, remember. I mostly forgave my brothers. I actually had a very important job now, not just a menial slave. I was like the Manager of Potiphar's farm and house. All my needs were provided, except freedom. I dressed well, I ate well, and apart from some times of homesickness, I slept well too.

Potiphar's wife was a lot younger than him, and I guess she was a bit lonely at home by herself. A few times she had looked sideways at me. Of course I didn't respond. Then over the next few weeks she started making suggestions to me. The more I ignored her, the more she kept on at me, making suggestions that I sleep with her. I told her "How could I betray my master's trust and sin against my God?"

One day when Mr P was away at work, she pressured me and grabbed me. I wriggled free, leaving her holding my coat, and I ran a way and hid out on the farm.

When Mr P came home, Mrs P accused me of trying to rape her, and she gave him my coat as evidence. Mr P was furious and I was taken and thrown in his prison.

Lying there in a cell with my wrists and ankles in chains, I had time to deal with my feelings again. Why was this happening to me - again?

I was falsely accused and my feelings towards Mrs P weren't too good. I

slowly began to realise that God had allowed it to happen, and that He was more interested in my reactions than anything else.

Little by little I turned all my hurts over to the Lord and forgave the Potiphar. And the joy of the Lord filled my heart in that dark and smelly cell. I was discovering that being in a prison didn't necessarily make me a prisoner. My heart was free because I had forgiven them.

One day when Mr Potiphar was inspecting the prison he recognised me and noticed that I wasn't miserable like the other prisoners. We got talking, and I'm sure that now he doesn't really think I was guilty, but his wife is an Egyptian and I am only a slave and so I should stay in prison. But I was released from the chains and given more and more responsibility in the running of the prison. I think he figured I could help run the prison just as well as I ran his household. And so the years passed.

One day Potiphar brought two new prisoners to me. They were Pharaoh's Butler and Baker. He told me to take good care of them. But one morning I found them with long sad faces. They explained that they had each had dreams last night, and didn't know how to interpret them. This was something I did know about, and I told them that interpretation of dreams is God's business.

The Butler told me: "Look, in my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine were three branches; they budded, and blossoms burst out, and the clusters brought forth ripe grapes. Then Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."

I told him: "This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will take you out of here, and restore you to your job, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand again and be his butler again."

I realised that this was a great chance to get out of this place, so I also asked him to promise me to put in a good word with Pharaoh for me, because I was in prison falsely accused.

Then the Baker told me his dream. "I also was in my own dream, and there were three white baskets on my head. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head."

I told him: "This is the interpretation: The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will take you out of here, and hang you from a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh."

With an interpretation like that I didn't think it was worthwhile asking him to put in a good word for me to Pharaoh.

Then on Pharaoh's birthday 3 days later, they were both taken out of the prison to the birthday party, and the Butler was restored to his position, but the Baker was hanged.

I waited for the Butler to keep his word, but nothing happened. I had to forgive him too! And another two years passed.

Then suddenly some guards came from Pharaoh and took me out of the prison. I was wondering what was happening when someone took out a sharp knife, but it was only to shave off my beard. Somewhat disgraceful for a Hebrew, I thought, but they shaved me, washed me, dressed me in fine clothes and took me before Pharaoh himself.

It turned out that Pharaoh had also had a dream, and that nobody could interpret it. Pharaoh had asked all his magicians, and nobody could do it. The Butler had suddenly remembered that I had interpreted his dream when he was in prison, and told Pharaoh about me. And now Pharaoh wanted me to interpret his dream too.

He told me: "I have had this disturbing dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it."

I answered him: "It is not a natural gifting in me, but God will give you an answer."

Pharaoh explained his dreams about seven fat cattle and seven skinny ones who swallowed up the fat ones; then seven fat ears of corn and then seven skinny ones that swallowed up the fat ones. Even his magicians couldn't explain the meanings to him.

But my God gave me the answer, and I told Pharaoh. "Both dreams are the same, and God has repeated them because it is so important. God is showing you that there will be seven years of great prosperity, followed by seven years of great famine. So therefore appoint someone to prepare by storing up grain during the years of plenty so there will be food during the years of famine."

Pharaoh was so impressed that he appointed me to be the person to make this plan happen, and that is how I became the Governor of all of Egypt.

But I am sure my story won't end here. One of these days I'm really looking forward to seeing my father again if he is still alive, and I'm sure I'm going to meet up with my brothers again too. I know I can greet them with open arms because over the last 13 years God has worked forgiveness in my heart. What they meant to harm me, God has made all turn out for our good.