

Coptic Identity Through The Life Of Joseph The Righteous

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Introduction

It is amazing how Copts are trying to mingle with this world in a dangerous way that made us lose our identity. I am not really sure why does it matter to look like this world, which is led by the ruler and prince of this world, that is SATAN. I wonder why do we really care about this sinful world although God said it very clearly:

✠ “The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30)

Our fathers the apostles understood this fact and taught us to live as strangers, sojourners and pilgrims in this world because our true home is heaven. They said:

✠ “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13)

✠ “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11)

However, I am sure you would ask the question: should we isolate ourselves from this world. The answer is NO. God said:

✠ “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You... I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:1-15)

Let us study one good example who did not live in his home but in a foreign country. He did not lose his identity at all. As a matter of fact he, through his life, taught people how to be godly and he succeeded in every aspect; as the Bible summarized his success saying:

✠ “The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that The Lord was with him and that The Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand” (Genesis 39:2-3)

The Identity Of Joseph

Joseph is a good example of keeping his religious identity. He understood perfectly well that God will not forsake him or leave him alone. As a matter of fact, he know that God is preparing him for life mission through different and difficult circumstances, as well as endowing him with certain qualities, which suited his role.

To understand how he kept his identity and how God supported him, let us examine Joseph's main characteristics that allowed him to be a true religious person and a great leader in a foreign country.

1. Trustworthiness:

Joseph was able to gain the trust of his father when he sent him to check on his brothers. He also was entrusted by his Egyptian master on his entire house. Even the prison keeper entrusted him on the rest of the prisoners. Finally, he was entrusted by Pharaoh to save the whole land of Egypt from severe famine.

✠ “So Joseph found favor in his sight (his master Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard), and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority” (Genesis 39:4)

2. Tolerance:

Joseph tolerated so many hardships throughout his life. He was thrown in the well by his brothers.

✠ “So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan. Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him... Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it” (Genesis 37:17-24)

He was taken as a slave to the land of Egypt after being the favorite spoiled son by his father in his house.

✠ “Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt” (Genesis 37:28)

He was tempted by the wife of his master.

✠ “And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused” (Genesis 39:7-8)

He was finally left in the prison for many years although he was innocent.

✠ “So it was, when his master heard the words, which his wife spoke to him, saying, ‘Your servant did to me after this manner,’ that his anger was aroused. Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison” (Genesis 39:19-20)

Through all of these circumstances and hardships, Joseph demonstrated great tolerance and faith in God's deliverance.

3. Hard Working:

Joseph must have been a hard worker since he gained the trust of his master and of the jailer in the prison to take care of all the other prisoners.

- † “But The Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph’s authority, because The Lord was with him; and whatever he did, The Lord made it prosper” (Genesis 39:21-23)

Additionally, he organized and cared for the whole land of Egypt through a difficult time. The whole responsibility of maintaining the Egyptians through the famine years was left to him. This indicates that he was working hard for many years, if not continuously from the minute he was taken from his house.

4. Good Planner:

Joseph was a good planner. He immediately advised Pharaoh after explaining his dreams of the actions necessary to survive the famine. He gave him a clear plan with specific details, which impressed Pharaoh:

- † “Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine. So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants” (Genesis 41:33-37).

5. Likeable:

Joseph was liked by everyone who dealt with him. He was the favorite son of his father Jacob who gave him the robe of many colors. He was also liked by the Egyptian master. He was even liked by the prison keeper and by Pharaoh. Lastly, he was able to gain the love and gratitude of his brothers who initially were jealous of him.

All of that for one reason: The Lord looked at his strong faith and love to God and gave him favor in the eyes of everyone. Joseph never mingled with this world. Remember what the Bible said:

- † “So Joseph found favor in his sight (his master)” (Genesis 39:4)
- † “But The Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Genesis 39:21)
- † “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: In as much as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you” (Genesis 41:39)

6. Presentable:

When Joseph was called from the prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, he immediately shaved and changed his clothing to go and meet with Pharaoh. Thus, Joseph cared for his appearance in front of his superiors and others:

✠ “Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh (**how about you when you go to church to meet with God**)” (Genesis 41: 14)

Joseph must also have had a good appearance when he was in the house of Potiphar, so that his wife wrongfully desired him.

7. Acknowledged God as the reason for his success:

This is Joseph's most important characteristic, which enabled him to be a real godly person. He always acknowledged God as the reason for his talent of interpreting dreams. He acknowledged the fact that any evil he would commit would be a sin against God. He actually felt the presence of God with him despite all that he had been through.

✠ “So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of The Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field” (Genesis 39:5)

✠ “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9)

Throughout the life of Joseph, it was clear that God was with him so he was a successful man. Joseph knew that he could not succeed without God's support.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Copts are a great blessing to this world, if and only if they keep their godly identity and hold unto God, worshipping Him and serving His name anywhere they go and with anyone they meet in this world, without “mingling, alteration or confusion.”

All what it takes is to follow Joseph's example of godly life. I am very sure that many of us might have similar characteristics as Joseph had to become great and successful leaders.

Leadership can be in a spiritual field, at work or even in politics. The most important thing is to surrender to God's will and plan for us. If He would like to use any of us for a leadership position, then we need to work with Him and try to acquire more personal characteristics to be as good and as successful as Joseph was.