Was He a Priest of the True God or a Pagan Priest?

 Genesis 41:45 (ESV)

“And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.”

 Who Was Potiphera, Priest of On?

The Bible tells us that after Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream and was elevated to second-in-command over Egypt, Pharaoh gave him a wife — Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, a priest of On.

“On” was the ancient name for a major Egyptian city also known as Heliopolis (Greek for “City of the Sun”). It was one of the most important religious centers in Egypt, especially for the worship of Ra, the Egyptian sun god. The priesthood of On was deeply involved in pagan sun worship, making Potiphera a high-ranking pagan priest — not a servant of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

 Was He a Priest of the True God?

No. Potiphera was not a priest of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Egypt at that time was steeped in polytheism and idolatry, and On was a central location for this. The Bible consistently condemns Egypt’s spiritual practices:

- Jeremiah 43:13 (ESV) — *“He shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the land of Egypt, and the temples of the gods of Egypt he shall burn with fire.”*

- Joshua 24:14 (ESV) — *“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”*

So, Potiphera was likely a devoted servant of Egypt’s false gods, not a believer in the One True God.

🤔 Why Did Joseph Marry a Pagan Priest’s Daughter?

This may seem surprising at first — Joseph, a faithful Hebrew, marrying into a pagan priestly family. However, this move was political and symbolic.

1️⃣ It Was a Political Alliance

Pharaoh gave Asenath to Joseph to elevate his status and integrate him into the Egyptian elite. In ancient cultures, marriage was often used to seal political favor and alliances. Marrying the daughter of a high priest would immediately associate Joseph with Egypt’s religious and political elite.

> *This did not mean Pharaoh was trying to convert Joseph to Egyptian religion — he had already recognized Joseph’s unique connection to the God of Heaven:*
>
> *Genesis 41:38–39 (ESV)* — “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God? … Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are.”

2️⃣ It Shows Joseph’s Faithfulness in a Foreign Land

Despite being in a pagan environment and married to a woman from a pagan background, Joseph remained faithful to Yahweh. There’s no evidence in Scripture that he ever compromised his faith or joined in Egyptian worship.

> *His continued reliance on God is seen throughout his leadership — from how he interprets dreams, to how he manages the famine, and how he names his children:*
>
> *Genesis 41:51–52 (ESV) —*
> “Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, ‘For,’ he said, ‘God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.’ The name of the second he called Ephraim, ‘For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.’”

His naming of his sons shows that his spiritual identity remained intact, even while living in and benefiting from a foreign culture.

What’s the Theological Significance?

Joseph’s marriage to Asenath, a Gentile woman, foreshadows a profound truth in the New Testament:

A Picture of Christ and the Church

Just as Joseph, the suffering and exalted servant, took a Gentile bride while exalted among the nations, so also Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant and Risen Lord, takes for Himself a bride from the nations — the Church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

> *Ephesians 5:25–27 (ESV) —*
> “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her… that he might present the church to himself in splendor…”

Joseph’s story is full of Christological symbolism:

- Rejected by his brothers → later exalted

- Falsely accused → remained righteous

- Became a savior to the world during famine → just as Christ is the Bread of Life

- Took a Gentile bride → as Christ takes the Church

This shows that God was already revealing His plan for the nations through the life of Joseph.

 Did Asenath Believe in the True God?

The Bible does not say much about Asenath’s personal beliefs, but given that Joseph was deeply faithful, and given the spiritual heritage he passed to his children (Ephraim and Manasseh, who would become tribes of Israel), it is possible — even likely — that Asenath came to respect or even follow the God of Israel.

Some Jewish and early Christian traditions even suggest that

Asenath converted, though this is extra-biblical and speculative.

 Conclusion

- Potiphera, priest of On, was a pagan priest, not a follower of the God of Israel.
- Joseph married Asenath as part of Pharaoh’s plan to honor and integrate him into Egyptian society.
- Joseph remained faithful to God and never compromised his faith.
- The marriage foreshadowed God’s plan to bring Gentiles into His covenant family, fulfilled in Christ and the Church.

 Want to Learn More?

Explore the full prophetic meaning of Joseph’s life in light of the Gospel.
(*Coming soon — insert link here if you have a resource.*)

 Be blessed — and feel free to share this insight with others who love God’s Word.

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