



God is With Joseph Genesis 39-40

Introduction

While Judah was struggling with sin and deceit in his family, Joseph was experiencing God's blessing in spite of the injustice which continued to crop up in his life. You will recall that Joseph's brothers had sold him to a band of Ishmaelite traders on their way to Egypt. There Joseph was sold as a slave.

OUTLINE of GENESIS 39-40

- I. Joseph Serves in Potiphar's House - Genesis 39:1-10**
- II. Joseph is Falsely Accused - Genesis 39:11-23**
- III. Joseph Gives Interpretation of Dreams - Genesis 40**

I. Joseph in Potiphar's House - Genesis 39:1-10

The Lord was with Joseph as the Ishmaelites placed him on the auction block in Egypt. Because "*Joseph was handsome in form and appearance*", he probably brought a good price for the Ishmaelites. Perhaps that also prompted Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard, to notice him and purchase him as a slave.

A. Joseph Finds Favor - Genesis 39:1-6

Joseph may have been forsaken by his brothers but he was certainly not forsaken by God. These verses reveal that the Lord "*was with*" Joseph, and that He "*made all he did to prosper*". As a result, Joseph found favor with Potiphar who made him overseer of his household.

1. Joseph serves - 39:4

Joseph served Potiphar. There was no spirit of rebellion, anger or self-pity evident in Joseph. He had been treated unjustly, lost the position of favored son and sold into slavery in a foreign land. But Joseph did not dwell on what he had lost. He made the best of what he had and served faithfully where God had placed him.

2. God blesses - 39:5-6

As Joseph served, God blessed and Potiphar noticed. Potiphar gave Joseph authority over his entire household and "*the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake*". Potiphar put his wholehearted trust in Joseph as he experienced God's blessing of prosperity on his home and his fields.

Application

Although he had lost everything, Joseph never complained that God was unjust. Joseph went forward with what he had and he worked hard. God began to bless and soon Potiphar began to see that his household was prospering under Joseph's care.

What injustice and loss have you suffered in your life? Are you still dwelling on these things and blaming God? Or are you going forward and serving, expecting God's blessing to be poured out in your life? As you do this, others will notice and God will be glorified. Please take the time to read about all of your spiritual blessings in Christ in Ephesians 1:1-14. Appropriate these in your life.

As Joseph found himself alone in a strange country and in a stranger's home where a strange language was spoken, perhaps his earlier dreams (Genesis 37) helped bolster his hope. Perhaps he clung to those dreams as a promise from God. As a Christian, God has given you His precious promises in the Bible. As you read and study, will you look for God's promises to you and cling to them in hope?

B. Joseph is Desired - Genesis 39:6-10

"*Joseph was handsome in form and appearance*" and this did not escape the notice of Pharaoh's wife who made sexual advances toward him ("*lie with me*") on a daily basis.

1. Joseph's dilemma - 39:6-6

This must have seemed like an impossible situation for Joseph. As a slave, he was bound to obey Potiphar's wife, but as a trusted servant of Potiphar, he was bound to refuse her. In any event, it was a test of Joseph's character. In his commentary on Genesis, W. H. Griffeth Thomas notes that temptation is one of the great tests of life and character. It transforms innocence into virtue. Sin lies not in being tempted, but in yielding to it.

2. Joseph's refusal - 39:7-10

In the face of temptation, Joseph did not simply turn down Potiphar's wife, he gave her three reasons for his refusal: (1) it would violate the trust of his position; (2) it would be a sin against her husband; (3) it would be a sin against God. Joseph stood strong and did not yield to temptation. His character was grounded in the will of God.

II. Joseph is Falsely Accused - Genesis 39:11-23**A. Joseph Flees - Genesis 30:11-12**

In spite of the fact that Joseph “*did not heed*” Potiphar’s wife, she continued to harass him. In her persistence, she one day cornered Joseph as he was working in the house and grabbed hold of his clothing. He fled temptation, running outside and leaving his outer garment in her hand.

B. Potiphar’s Wife Lies - Genesis 30:13-18

Here is a perfect illustration of the saying “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” (William Congreve, The Mourning Bride, 1697). When faced with rejection by a Hebrew slave, Potiphar’s wife’s love turned to hate. She called together the household servants and accused Joseph of trying to seduce her as a mockery of the whole household. She probably used the term “*the Hebrew*” to refer to Joseph in a disparaging way.

When Potiphar returned home, his wife repeated the same story to him. To enhance her lies, she placed Joseph’s garment next to her to provide a visual image of Joseph’s daring mockery. Notice also that she again referred to Joseph as the “*Hebrew*” and then placed blame on her husband for bringing him into the household.

C. Potiphar Expresses His Anger - Genesis 39:19-20

According to Egyptian law, Potiphar could have had Joseph put to death, but instead he gave the lighter punishment of confinement with the king’s prisoners.

D. “The Lord was with Joseph” - Genesis 39:21-23

God showed mercy to Joseph, giving him favor in the eyes of the prison keeper. As a result, Joseph was given charge over all the other prisoners. Joseph had no experience as a prison keeper, but he had learned a great deal about people and this surely helped him with his new responsibilities. But more significantly, “*The Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.*”

Application

How encouraging to see that God blessed Joseph even when he was in a difficult place, even when his circumstances had gone from bad, to a little better (with a glimmer of hope) and then to much worse. What difficult situation do you find yourself in today? How have circumstances in your life gone from bad to worse?

Remember that although everyone else may forsake you, God is always with you. So, “*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’*” (Hebrews 13:5).

III. Joseph Gives Interpretation of Dreams - Genesis 40**A. Joseph Given Charge of Pharaoh’s Prisoners - Genesis 40:1-5**

As Joseph honed his leadership skills in prison, two of Pharaoh’s most trusted servants were arrested and put under his care. The “*butler*”, also known as the king’s “*cupbearer*”, served Pharaoh his drinks and the “*baker*” cooked his bread. Both were required to be loyal and above the influence of Pharaoh’s enemies since poisoning of political rivals was common in those days. Perhaps there had been an attempt on Pharaoh’s life and suspicions had fallen on these two servants who had close personal access to the king.

Note that these prisoners were remanded to the “*captain of the guard*” in the prison. Compare this with Genesis 39:1 where Potiphar is identified with the same title. Some commentators believe that these could be one and the same, but Unger’s Bible Dictionary finds it “not likely”. In any case, the captain of the guard remanded them to Joseph’s care and they were in custody “*for a while*”.

B. Joseph Interprets Dreams - Genesis 40:6-19

While in prison, both the butler and the baker had dreams which troubled them because there was no one to interpret. In ancient Egypt, dreams were considered a means of discerning the future. Both Egypt and Babylon had a professional class of dream interpreters as part of their religions.

When the butler and baker confessed the reason for their sadness, Joseph was quick to acknowledge that “*interpretations belong to God*” and he requested to hear the dreams.

1. The butler’s dream - 40:9-13

In the butler’s dream, he saw a vine with three branches that budded and produced clusters of ripe grapes. He saw himself press the grapes into Pharaoh’s cup and deliver the cup to Pharaoh.

Joseph interpreted that the three branches were three days and that within that time Pharaoh would “*lift up*” his head and restore him to his position as butler.

2. Joseph's request - 40:14-15

Joseph asked the butler to do four things for him when he was once again close to the king: (1) *"remember me"*; (2) *"show kindness to me"*; (3) *"make mention of me to Pharaoh"*; (4) *"get me out of this house"*. Joseph was careful to mention that he was innocent of the charges for which he had been imprisoned. Perhaps the butler would understand and be sympathetic since he had also been unjustly accused.

3. The baker's dream - 40:16-19

When the baker saw that the butler's dream had been interpreted favorably, he was eager to share his dream of the three white baskets on his head. He had dreamed that the uppermost basket contained baked goods for Pharaoh and that birds came and ate them out of the basket.

Joseph's interpretation was that the three baskets were three days within which Pharaoh would *"lift off"* the baker's head and hang him on a tree where the birds would eat his flesh.

4. Joseph's interpretations fulfilled - 40:20-22

Three days after the dreams, Pharaoh celebrated his birthday. As was the custom with ancient Pharaohs, he prepared a great feast for all his servants and released his political prisoners. Upon release, the butler was restored to his position but the baker was hanged *"as Joseph had interpreted to them."*

C. Joseph is Forgotten - Genesis 40:23

"Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." And the very next verse, Genesis 41:1, records that Joseph spent two more years in prison, not remembered, forgotten.

Applications

1. Do you ever promise to pray for someone and then forget? How do you think that person would feel to know you had forgotten them? From this point on will you make a point to remember your promises and not forget to pray?

2. Do you ever feel "not remembered" and "forgotten"? If so, you may understand some of Joseph's feelings as he waited day by day for two years for some evidence that he had not been forgotten. Scripture records that God knows how you feel as well. Many times in His word He speaks of being forgotten by His people. See Deuteronomy 32:18; Jeremiah 2:32; 13:25; Hosea 8:14. Have comfort and confidence in knowing that God will never forget you.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15-16).

"Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6-7).