

Genesis 39 – Joseph – Passing the Test when Temptation Comes

THEME: Overseer in the house of Potiphar; tempted, then framed by Potiphar's wife; Joseph imprisoned.

We return to the story of Joseph after the interlude of chapter 38, which we classified as one of the worst chapters in the Bible because it certainly tells a sordid story of the man Judah.

We will discover that Joseph is altogether different from Judah. I have always felt that Joseph and Benjamin got a great deal of teaching, instruction, and personal attention that the other ten boys did not receive. These seemed to be the only two boys in whom Jacob was interested.

Because of the hatred and animosity of Joseph's brothers, he was sold into slavery and taken to the land of Egypt.

To be in a foreign land and sold into slavery is a very dreary prospect for a seventeen-year-old boy. There is certainly nothing in the outward aspect of things to bring any encouragement to his heart. Joseph seems to be more or less a hard luck boy. Even in the land of Egypt, just as things would begin to move smoothly for him, something else would happen. Of course, it always happened for a purpose, even though that was difficult for Joseph to see.

There is no person in the Old Testament in whose life the purpose of God is more clearly seen than Joseph. The providence of God is manifest in every detail of his life. The hand of God is upon him and the leading of the Lord is evident, but Joseph is the one patriarch to whom God did not appear directly, according to the text of Scripture. God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not to Joseph. Yet the direction of God in his life is more clearly seen than in any other. He is the Old Testament example of [Rom 8:28](#): "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Joseph himself expressed it in rather vivid language. At the death of their father, Joseph's brothers felt that Joseph might turn on them, and they came to him asking for mercy. He told them that he held no grudge against them at all and said, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" ([Gen 50:20](#)). Although everything seemed to go wrong for him and the outward aspect was dark—it looked *terrible*—each event was a step bringing to fruition God's purpose in this man's life.

My friend, in our own lives we need to reckon on the fact that "... whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" ([Heb 12:6](#)). If we are the children of God, in the will of God, we can have the assurance of God that nothing comes to us without His permission. God works all things together for good to them who love Him. Even our misfortunes, heartbreaks, and sufferings are for our good and His glory.

There is a hedge about every child of God, and nothing gets through it without the permission of God. You remember that, when Satan wanted to test Job, he said to God: "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land" ([Job 1:10](#)). Satan asked God to let the hedge down. Even if Satan gets God's permission to test us, still all things will work for our good.

Dr. Torrey used to say that [Rom 8:28](#) is the soft pillow for a tired heart. And someone else has put it like this: "God nothing does, nor suffers to be done, but what we would ourselves, if we but could see through all events of things as well as He."

There is another aspect of the life of Joseph which should be an encouragement to every child of God. None of God's children today have ever had a direct revelation from God. Some modern false prophets claim to the contrary, but God has not appeared directly to any person today. It is for our encouragement that God did not appear to Joseph directly because we can still know that He is leading

Genesis 39 – Joseph – Passing the Test when Temptation Comes

and directing us. – McGee

Gen 39:1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.

Gen 39:2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

Life is great up to this point. You'd like to add that they all lived happily ever after, but they didn't. This is not a story; it is reality. The child of God is going to encounter temptation, trouble, and problems in this world. This is what is going to happen to Joseph. This fine-looking young man, seventeen years old, would be a prize as a slave in the market. He was bought by Potiphar who was a captain of the guard. Potiphar was in the military, he had his office in the Pentagon of that day, and he was part of the brass, a prominent official. Immediately, when he gets into the home of Potiphar who is an officer of Pharaoh, it is obvious that the Lord is with Joseph. Blessing came to that home when Joseph came. - McGee

Gen 39:3 And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand.

Gen 39:4 So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.

Life is great up to this point. You'd like to add that they all lived happily ever after, but they didn't. This is not a story; it is reality. The child of God is going to encounter temptation, trouble, and problems in this world. This is what is going to happen to Joseph. Just think of this! Because of the way Joseph serves, he is elevated to the position of handling all the material substance—the chattels and probably even the real estate—of Potiphar. The man trusted him with everything. – McGee

Can a non-believer “Egyptian” say you are obviously Bless by the Lord?

Do you believe that God can bless you and show His favor even when you are in Slavery?

Gen 39:5 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.

Gen 39:6 Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

Potiphar trusted Joseph so much that he never even demanded an accounting—he didn't have to hire a C.P.A. to go over the books. He believed in the integrity of this young man. The only thing that Potiphar worried about, as an officer of Pharaoh, was that he should please Pharaoh and do a good job there. He let Joseph handle his personal affairs. When he sat down at the table, the food was put before him. That's all that he was interested in because he trusted this young man. – McGee

Why is it important that Joseph has experience running the resources of the rich official both in the household and in the field?

Does God give you opportunities to gain experiences that He knows you will need later to accomplish His Will?

Gen 39:7 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph,

Genesis 39 – Joseph – Passing the Test when Temptation Comes

and she said, "Lie with me."

Potiphar had given him the full run of his home, and Joseph had charge of everything. While Joseph was busy, Potiphar's wife was also busy. She was busy scheming. Joseph was a handsome young man. It may be that Potiphar was an old man because it was generally the custom in that day for an older man to have a young wife. She sees Joseph, and she attempts to entice him. - McGee

Note: a temptation of this nature to a hormone filled boy was quite a strong temptation indeed.

Gen 39:8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.

Gen 39:9 There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Now do you notice that this young man is serving God in all of this? When he went down to Egypt, it was a land filled with idolatry just as much as Babylon was. In that land of idolatry, Joseph maintained a testimony for the living and true God and a high moral standard. When this woman enticed him, he said, "My master has turned over everything to me but you—you are his wife." Notice what a high viewpoint Joseph had on marriage.

You see, God has given marriage to all mankind. When a person begins to despise the marriage vows, he is beginning to despise God, my friend. A man who will break his marriage vows will generally break any vow he has made to God. It has been interesting for me to note in my ministry that a divorced person, that is, one who gets divorced because he or she has been unfaithful, generally will get as far from God as any person possibly can. I've seen that happen again and again.

Joseph here is attempting to be true to God. What a high viewpoint he has! Yet, look at what is going to come to pass because he attempts to serve the living and true God. - McGee

Gen 39:10 So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.

This man, Potiphar, as an officer of Pharaoh, would be away from home a great deal. Maybe he was away from home too much. This woman didn't tempt Joseph only one time, but again and again and again. It was a constant temptation to him, yet this young man did not yield. You can imagine that there begins to well up in her a boiling resentment against Joseph. The old bromide has it, "Hell hath no fury like that of a woman scorned." Believe me, she is going to take revenge on Joseph. – McGee

The enemy will continue to tempt you day by day, that is why we have to have the armor of God on and ready daily. Spiritual warfare is real today, and if we don't have the sword ready, and the shield oiled with the Holy Spirit, then the fiery darts can burn so up!

Gen 39:11 But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside,

Gen 39:12 that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.

Gen 39:13 And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside,

Gen 39:14 that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.

Genesis 39 – Joseph – Passing the Test when Temptation Comes

Things weren't so well between Potiphar and his wife. Notice how she speaks of him in such a mean, degrading way. She says that he brought in a Hebrew to mock them. In other words, the wife probably had been guilty of this before. The man whom I feel most sorry for is Potiphar. He is the sap if there ever was one. Possibly he suspected something all along.

She is beginning now to cover up her tracks—McGee

Gen 39:15 And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside."

Gen 39:16 So she kept his garment with her until his master came home.

So here is the boy Joseph in his teens, down there alone in Egypt, and he is being framed in the most dastardly manner. She brings this charge against Joseph to the other men. Her husband was away from home; so she has all this story built up to tell him when he arrives. - McGee

Gen 39:17 Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me;

Gen 39:18 so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

Gen 39:19 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.

On the surface it seems that Potiphar believes her story, at least it made him angry at the moment. He was an officer in the army of Pharaoh and must have been a pretty sharp man to be among the brass. But he certainly was a stupid husband. It is my personal feeling that he recognized the kind of wife he had and thought the expedient thing was to throw Joseph into prison and forget the whole matter. I feel sorry for him, married to this woman. I'm of the opinion that she had been unfaithful many times before and that Joseph was just another one in her series of conquests—only it just didn't work with Joseph, so she framed him. – McGee

Gen 39:20 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.

This boy is certainly having bad luck, is he not? There at home he was the favorite of his father, wearing a coat of many colors. The next thing he knew, his brothers had taken off the coat and put him down in a pit. He hears them dickering with some tradesmen, and then he is sold down to Egypt. He was only seventeen years old, and I am of the opinion that on the way down, and after he got there, he spent many nights wetting the pillow with his tears. He certainly was homesick.

Now he's getting along in this new position, just elevated to a high position because he is a capable and fine-looking young man. Then the wife of Potiphar attempts to lure him to commit sin. His high moral standard prevents him from yielding. As a result of that, she frames him. This poor boy just doesn't stand a chance.

We need to remember that, although Joseph had been elevated in his position, he is still a slave. Potiphar's wife would be like Caesar's wife—one just wouldn't dare say anything about her. Obviously, her word would be accepted. Poor Joseph! He doesn't need to even open his mouth. He is declared guilty before he can make any kind of a defense at all. He immediately finds himself put into prison, the

Genesis 39 – Joseph – Passing the Test when Temptation Comes

prison where the prisoners of Pharaoh were placed. - McGee

But where was this prison? It was in the Dungeon beneath the Palace.

Sometimes, the turns you take in life move you closer to your purpose than you even know.

Gen 39:21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Gen 39:22 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.

Gen 39:23 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.

The hand of God is obvious in this young man's life, but over against it are the terrible things that happen to him. Now he finds himself in prison. How discouraging that would have been to the average person. But the interesting thing is that the Lord is with Joseph. Although He does not appear to him, as He had to the other patriarchs, He shows him mercy. First, He causes the keeper of the prison to like him and to trust him. Although Joseph is naturally a very attractive young man and has tremendous ability, the important thing to note is that all of this would have come to naught had not God been with him. God is with him and is leading him. All of these experiences are moving toward the accomplishment of a purpose in this young man's life.

Joseph recognized this, and it gave him a buoyancy, an attitude of optimism. The circumstances did not get him down. He lived on top of his circumstances. I have a preacher friend who tells me my problem is that the circumstances are all on top of me! I think many of us live that way. But Joseph was one who was living on top of his circumstances. The Lord was with him. He recognized the hand of God in his life, and so he was not discouraged. Discouragement is one of the finest weapons Satan has— discouragement and disappointment. This young man seems to have surmounted all of his circumstances. He reminds us of the passage in Hebrews: “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb_12:11).

Certainly, the chastening of the Lord is going to yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness in the life of this young man.

The story of Joseph reveals that not every man has his price. Satan says that he does, but there have been several men whom Satan could not buy. Joseph was one of these. Job was another, and the apostle Paul was still another. Satan despises mankind, but these and many more are men whom Satan found he could not buy.

Is it the will of God that Joseph be in prison? Well, my friend, it is almost essential that he be there. We'll see that in the next chapter. - McGee

Do you have such firm faith that you believe you will honor God as a slave or in prison? Is it any wonder Joseph is promoted everywhere he goes? Even the unbelievers and idolators can see favor God has on him, but do you think it was hard for Joseph to see that favor at points through this story. Is this really any different than us?