

# Genesis – Lesson 27

## Joseph Enslaved, Imprisoned and Forgotten

### Read Genesis 39.

1. (a) What do verses 2, 3, 5, 21, and 23 have in common about the *relationship* of God to Joseph?

In each case, the narrative indicates that God was “*with*” Joseph, blessing his endeavors and giving him success. God purposed for Joseph to be successful in all that he did, so that Joseph would rise to positions of greatness and responsibility. In Potiphar’s house, Joseph became so successful that Potiphar put him in charge of everything; the same thing happened in the prison, where Joseph rose to a position of authority. All of this was because God was *close* to Joseph, and purposed these things to be.

- (b) List some ways that Potiphar *benefited* from the blessings of God over Joseph.

Potiphar benefited 1) economically, since Joseph’s success led to an increase in everything Potiphar had (see v. 5) and 2) emotionally, since Joseph took care of everything, Potiphar didn’t have to worry about anything being left undone, but could live his life in peace.

- (c) Compare these verses to Joshua 1:7-9. What must we do to have similar blessings?

Joshua reminds the people to remain faithful and obedient to the law of God and they would experience his blessings. Obedience is essential to a relationship with God, and God blesses those who choose to follow his ways. This blessing is not necessarily *economic*, but the blessings of peace and freedom that come only through knowing God. Obedience is the *hallmark* of those who have been born-again, and our entire lives are predicated on the notion that we *will* obey the one who has rescued us from judgment and made us new creatures in Christ. Such rescue produces the blessings of peace and assurance, blessings that come through trusting and obeying God.

2. (a) List three ways from verses 9 through 12 that Joseph *avoided* the temptation of falling to sin.

Joseph avoided sin: 1) by *understanding* his place in the house and recognizing that what Potiphar’s wife was suggesting was sinful, 2) by *refusing* to listen to her as she tried to tempt him into sin, and 3) by *fleeing* from her when she attempted to lure him physically.

- (b) From the following references, describe what we are to do to *avoid* sin:

Matthew 4:3-4

1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:13-14

1 Timothy 6:9

Hebrews 2:18

know the word of God well and understand what sin is

flee from those things that are tempting

understand your own physical desires and passions

look to Christ (who understands) and pray for strength

3. (a) What do you learn *about* Potiphar from his reaction in verse 20?

Potiphar appears to be a very *unfair* man: Joseph is useful to him as long as he brings success, but Potiphar immediately assumes Joseph’s guilt when a bad report comes to his ears. Apparently he does not know his wife well enough to see that she has made up this accusation against Joseph, and he does not attempt to find out if Joseph is innocent. Instead, he just throws Joseph into prison to rot, never coming back to release him. He does not seem to have any *care* for Joseph, other than as a slave; once Joseph’s usefulness is “lost,” Potiphar simply discards him. This, of course, is important: the lack of regard by Egyptians for the Hebrews will be *essential* in God’s purpose of protecting the Hebrews from the Egyptians throughout the next 400 years.

(b) How does Joseph *prosper* in the prison? How is this *reminiscent* of his value to Potiphar? *Why* is this important?

When imprisoned, God grants to Joseph another round of success; the keeper of the prison raises Joseph to a position of prominence, and the keeper doesn't have to worry about anything. This is very reminiscent of what happened to Joseph in Potiphar's house: because the Lord was with Joseph, once again, he is put in charge of everything and the master no longer needs to be concerned with anything. This will be critical as the story unfolds, for it indicates what *God is doing in the life of Joseph*. Everywhere that Joseph goes, God blesses him, and this will be essential to Joseph saving his family later. It is all about what *God* is doing; Joseph is the *conduit* through which God's blessings are coming, and the focus is here on God, not necessarily on Joseph.

## Read Genesis 40.

4. (a) What kind of *reaction* did Joseph have to being unjustly imprisoned?

Although Joseph certainly is disappointed in his circumstances, and does what he can to get out of them, he does not appear to act angrily or vindictively towards those who imprisoned him or those who can help him. He makes friends of the cupbearer and baker, and interprets their dreams, in the hope that this will help release him, but he does not appear to be angry to point where he lashes out at them or others.

- (b) From Psalm 105:17-19, what *else* do you learn about Joseph's imprisonment?

From the psalm it would appear that Joseph was shackled while in prison and experienced the physical pain of being locked up in this place. Undoubtedly, the prison was not a comfortable experience, and may have included a great deal of physical suffering. This anecdote reminds us of the horror that Joseph must have been experiencing, and helps prevent us from "whitewashing" the events too much.

- (c) How does Joseph *testify* about God? What becomes his greatest *disappointment*?

When the cupbearer and baker tell Joseph that they have had dreams, Joseph says that these dreams (and their interpretation) are from God. The two men are about to discover what God intends for their future, and Joseph has been given the ability to discern their meaning. Thus, Joseph points the two men to God; what is about to happen to them has been ordained by God and they are about to experience whatever God has in store for them. Ironically, this is exactly the *means* by which Joseph found himself in this predicament: the dreams he had, and shared with his brothers, led (eventually) to where he is now. Yet, the nature of his dreams has not *yet* been fulfilled. This may be his greatest disappointment. Sure, the cupbearer forgets about him languishing in prison, and that is deeply hurtful. But, the fact that Joseph can still remember his *own* dreams, and how they have *not yet* come to pass may be the most disappointing thing in Joseph's life. After all, how can these things *possibly* be true if he is stuck in prison?

5. (a) Why do you think God *allowed* Joseph to suffer these humiliations? From Genesis 45:4-8, what did Joseph *eventually* come to understand about why this happened?

Again, like so often in this book, God *breaks* Joseph of any sense of "self" or pride. The goal is to make Joseph a useable instrument in the hands of God, and to make sure that Joseph *never* feels that he *himself* is important. Instead, as he moves forward, Joseph finds himself being *used* by a loving God to do great things, all things that are planned out and carried out by God himself. By the time that Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, he has come full-circle: no longer is he arrogant or audacious as being more important than they, but all of these circumstances were God's way of accomplishing the rescue of his family in Egypt.

(b) How would you connect the events of this chapter to the *life* of Jesus?

**Although Jesus did not need to be broken of any personal pride, his life was *used* by God to “qualify” him for the salvific work he did on Calvary. Specifically, Jesus *learned* what it meant to be obedient through hardship and the trials of an ordinary human life. He was forced, by having to live as one of us, to endure the temptations, hurts, and sufferings we all do. Only then was he *fully* qualified to stand-in for us on the cross and bear our guilt and shame. Joseph needed time in various trials to learn humility and patience, and in many the same ways, Jesus had to endure a life of humanity in order to be fully ready to substitute for us.**