

# Genesis 39-41

## I. Chapter 39 – From the frying pan to the fryer

After a brief interlude to follow the exploits of Judah, this chapter picks up the story of Joseph and explains that after being sold to the Ishmaelite's, Joseph was purchased by Potiphar an Egyptian leader, and became a household servant.

The text does not give us exact times but it has been suggested that the period Joseph spent as a slave and a prisoner lasted about 12 years.

In chapters 39-41 we will see Joseph elevated as a servant, only to be falsely accused and cast into prison. In prison he will face the circumstances that lead to his deliverance and his rise to power in Egypt.

Just as Jesus would wear a crown of thorns on his way to glory, so Joseph will wear the garments of a slave and a prisoner before the garments of a ruler.

The events of Genesis 39 illustrate at least 3 important Biblical truths:

**First – The Bible teaches the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men**

Daniel 4:17

'This decision is by the decree of the watchers,  
And the sentence by the word of the holy ones,  
In order that the living may know  
That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,  
Gives it to whomever He will,  
And sets over it the lowest of men.'

In what has become a very familiar verse, the NT puts it this way:

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

The same truth is also presented this way:

Hebrews 1:3

who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and **upholding all things** by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Colossians 1:17

And He is before all things, and in Him all things **consist**.

The word consist means to place together. God takes all things in our lives and places them together in order to accomplish His purposes

A casual reading of Genesis 39-40 might lead us to believe that the main characters of the story were the Ishmaelite traders, Potiphar, his wife, and the Egyptian jailers and that Joseph is an unwilling victim in the whole thing.

However a more careful reading will reveal that the main player is actually The Lord, who is mentioned 9 times in chapter 39, once in chapter 40 and 8 times in chapter 41. As the scene unfolds it is clear that God is manipulating circumstances in order to raise Joseph to a place of prominence in Egypt for the sake of the nation of Israel and ultimately the world.

The story of Joseph is really the story of the faithfulness of God.

Had Joseph never been a slave or a prisoner he never would have been in the position to meet the king and to rescue the nation.

## **Second –** The Scene in Genesis 39 is an example of how to deal with **temptation**

After being sold to Potiphar as a household slave, Joseph rises to a position of authority among the slaves. He is given responsibility over all that belongs to Potiphar

The problems arise from what we read in 39:6

*Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.*

This would lead to an unholy attraction from Potiphar's wife.

Joseph becomes for us a great example of how to deal with temptation

Temptation is the lot of all believers. We are constantly bombarded with things that are designed to distract our attention from the Lord and get us involved in things that are displeasing to God and harmful to us.

What the Bible says about temptation

1 Corinthians 10:13

**No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common** to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

James 1:12-15

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

There are at least 4 scenes in Scripture that emphasize this struggle and give insight into how to overcome temptation.

**The First** is recorded in Genesis 3 and explains the temptation Eve faced in the garden. Her failure is recorded to help us succeed. From her story we learn:

- **Satan** is cunning and will attack our area of **weakness**
- **Satan** M.O. is to **make sin look appealing**.

In reality sin is destructive and leads to death while obedience to God is healthy and provides true life. In the realm of the fantasy however sin is always portrayed as giving life while obedience to God is always seen as boring and

lifeless. This is one of Satan's greatest achievements. He is the master of making what will kill us and ruin life look appealing to us.

- **Practically** speaking we learn from Eve the danger of hanging around where we can be easily tempted and the danger of entertaining ungodly thoughts
- **We also learn** that sin is not a private matter. Her sin had **devastating effect on others**. Her husband was led into her sin and Paul wrote:

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—

**The second** Primary scene regarding temptation is that of David with Bathsheba.

From his failure we learn

- The danger of being in the **wrong place at the wrong time**
- The danger of taking that **second look**
- What happens when we **ignore "Stop signs"** Once he heard that she was "The wife of..." he should have taken an about face and ran for the hills

**The third** scene is found in Matthew 4 and records the temptation that Jesus underwent in the wilderness. From his example we learn

- That temptation can be overcome **without** the need of super powers
- The **strongest weapon** against the enemies attack is the Word of God

And finally our text reveals in detail the struggles Joseph underwent by the constant advances of Potiphar's wife

**Joseph becomes for us a great example of how to deal with temptation. His success is attributed to 3 things**

1. Vs 9 - he saw that his actions would be sinful in the eyes of God.

It is when we will consider what God thinks that we will change our lifestyle and behaviors.

We even see this with the thief on the cross who said - *do you not fear God?* It was his fear of God that caused him to repent of his faulty view of Christ

It is worth noting that Joseph refers to having a sexual relations with another man's wife as "A great wickedness"

We are living in a day and age where few things are considered wicked much less a great wickedness. His success had much to do with the fact that he drew a very clear line in the sand and knew what was pleasing and what was displeasing to the Lord

2. Vs 10 - He resisted daily, he did not give into little compromises and expect to be able to stand to when the big guns started firing.

When writing regarding physical intimacy in marriage, Paul referred to allowing ourselves to be tempted beyond what we are able to resist.

Satan is relentless and will look for an opportunity to create irresistible temptation

3. Vs 12 - he fled

This may have been what Paul was referring to when he declared that we should flee youthful lust

2 Timothy 2:22

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Sometimes the only course of action is to get as far away from the temptation as possible.

**Third - The question is often asked, "Why do bad things happen to good people"**

We might expect that a man who chose to do what was right would find instant earthy benefit, but that is exactly what did NOT happen.

Instead we find that Joseph is accused of attempted rape and thrown into prison.

This chapter will serve as good illustration of the proper Biblical perspective.

Allow me to suggest 4 thoughts

## ONE

**“Why do bad things happen to good people?”**

*"That actually only happened once and it happened to Jesus and he went through the difficulties willingly." (RC Sproul)*

He allowed Himself to be mistreated for our benefit

**Hebrews 2:10**

**10** For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

**Hebrews 4:15**

**15** For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.

## Two

**“Why do bad things happen to good people?”**

*No one is good but God alone*

The Bible explains that through one man sin entered the world and affected all mankind. The evidence for this is seen in the actions of all men. When the Bible claims that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God this statement is proved daily by each of us. To suggest that bad things happen to good people is to fail to see that man has proven himself not to be inherently good.

That however does not fully answer the question because all of Joseph's brothers were equally sinners and yet it was Joseph who suffered by their hands

## THREE

### “Why do bad things happen to good people?”

Joseph suffered **NOT** because he was a sinner but because others were. It was not God who in a jealous rage threw Joseph in a pit. It was not God who was willing to treat a human being like an object to be bought and sold, it was not God who lusted after Joseph and falsely accused him of rape and had him thrown into the dungeon; all of that was accomplished by the hands of sinful men who were choosing to violate the standards of God and ignore His word.

God is often wrongly accused of wickedness that is really caused by men who are rebelling against God and His word

#### SUDAN AS A LIVING EXAMPLE

SUDAN ACQUIRED INDEPENDENCE IN 1956 : however constant fighting ever since has resulted in More than **2.5 million** deaths and **millions** of people becoming **refugees**

**In 2011** South Sudan became an **independent state** but has experienced civil unrest and battle ever since. More than **10,000 people** have been killed and over **1 million** have been displaced.

This has nothing to do with acts of God but reveals the sinful heart of man and is but one example of a myriad of others

When considering why bad things happen it is critical that we look to the correct source in order to find the proper solution. The problem with humanity is the heart of man; the solution is a saving relationship with Christ that will forever alter our worldview

## FOUR

### “Why do bad things happen to good people?”

With our limited vantage point it is really hard to see what is really bad and what is actually good.

We would say it is bad for a man like David to be forced to flee from an insane king and live as a fugitive in the desert

But it is good to learn the principles that will enable you to be a godly shepherd over the nation of Israel

we would say it is bad to be betrayed by a friend, sold for silver, condemned, beaten and crucified

But it is good to provide atonement for the sin of man and make a way for all of us to have a relationship with God and go to heaven

We would say it is bad for a person to be kidnapped, sold to slavery, falsely accused and cast into prison

But it is good for a man with a heart for God to be raised to a position of authority where he can influence the affairs of a nation and deliver the people of God from starvation

Joseph could not see the end of the story. All he could do was see what was right in front of him and to trust God and remain faithful to him in the midst of it.

It might be worth noting that the one person who could have derailed the plan of God for Joseph was Joseph.

Had he given into Mrs. Potiphar or allowed bitterness to poison him regarding his brothers the story would read quite differently that it does

Instead of complaining regarding why bad things happened, Joseph focussed on being faithful

Genesis 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.**

## II. Chapter 40 – Almost Forgotten

A chapter 39 closed, Joseph was incarcerated in Pharaoh's prison. He had been falsely accused of attempting to rape Potiphar's wife.



Chapter 40 will begin to show how The Lord was working behind the scenes to accomplish his purposes in Joseph. One of the underlining truths that is revealed in Joseph's story is the faithfulness of God.

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### Summary:

The story is a simple one. Two of the king's servants had angered the king and were sent to prison.

**Chief** is a word that speaks of their rank. They were men who were in charge of all others who served the king in that capacity. We have the head of the kitchen staff and the head of security

**Offended** is a word used for sin that carries the idea of "*Missing the mark*" the implication was they were failing to do their jobs

Their malefaction resulted in being incarcerated in the same prison where Joseph was being held and because he was over all the prisoners he had direct contact with the butler and the baker.

One morning, after some time had passed Joseph noticed that they seemed particularly troubled. The word used for **sad** can speak of a wide gamete of emotions including sorrow, anger or even fret

It is worth noting that the ministry opportunity that ultimately led to his release from prison and being exalted as grand vizier or prime minister came out of him simply keeping his eyes open and looking to minister to others

This is particularly revealing when we consider the condition Joseph was

in personally. Later in the chapter he will state:

Two texts in this chapter reveal that while Joseph remained faithful to the Lord and did not waiver in his duties or responsibility he did have to navigate through some pretty difficult emotions

The first came after revealing the dream to the butler

Genesis 40:14-15

But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and **get me out of this house.**

For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I **have done nothing** here that they should put me into the dungeon.”

As much as he may have trusted The Lord through his experience he did realize that he was in prison for no fault of his own. He also expressed a great desire to be released

Later in chapter 41 when naming his children we learn:

Genesis 41:51-52

Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh “For God has made me forget all my **toil** and all my father’s house.” **52** And the name of the second he called Ephraim:[b] “For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my **affliction.**”

**He speaks of the toil he was facing and of being under affliction**

Too often we allow our own personal woes to limit us from looking for ways to minister to others

Miraculously it was getting his eyes off himself and onto others that led to his deliverance.

The same is true today. If you are struggling with depression, self worth issues or even overcoming a weakness of the flesh you will find great help in getting your eyes off yourself and in vesting in others

Joseph learned that their sorrow or fretting was stemming from unsettling dreams they each had experienced the night before.

Joseph knew by personal experience that God was capable of speaking through dreams so he ventured out in faith that God would be able to interpret theirs.

The psalmist commented on this:

Psalms 105:17-21

Joseph—who was sold as a slave.

They hurt his feet with fetters,

He was laid in irons.

**Until the time that his word came to pass,**

**The word of the Lord tested him.**

The king sent and released him,

The ruler of the people let him go free.

He made him lord of his house,

And ruler of all his possessions,

Joseph was tested by the word. He had to learn to trust in the promises of God although they seemed impossible

**They went on to explain their dreams**

**The butler declared -**

**Behold, in my dream** a vine was before me, and in the vine were three branches; it was as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. Then Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

To which Joseph explained

**This is the interpretation of it:** The three branches are three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former

manner, when you were his butler

At this point Joseph makes a request that when the butler is restored that he would not forget Joseph but help to get him released

The baker then declared his dream

I also was in my dream, and there were three white baskets on my head. In the uppermost basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head

To which Joseph explained

This is the interpretation of it: The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you.”

The chapter closes explaining that Joseph's interpretation was fulfilled but that the butler forgot about Joseph and he remained in prison another two years.

Genesis 40:23

Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

This may have been a classic case of **divine amnesia**. It was not the law of Egypt or the metal bars of a prison cell that kept Joseph in prison. Instead it was the hand of God keeping Joseph's story quiet until the appropriate time

### III. CHAPTER 41 - Promotion

In what is a clear evidence of the divine plan Pharaoh himself had a dream and was in need of interpretation.

Learning from dreams.

Throughout the story of Joseph we see how God used dreams to communicate to His people.

- Joseph himself so prophetic dreams designed to reveal God's ultimate plan for his life
- The butler and baker each had prophetic dreams
- Pharaoh has a prophetic dream

There are other cases in Scripture where dreams are used to reveal the mind of God

- In Daniel 2 King Nebuchadnezzar had a famous dream
- In Acts 10 Peter had a dream that opened the door of ministry to the gentile world

There are a few things that must be kept in mind regarding the use of dreams

**First**, not all dreams are from The Lord. Joseph likely had hundreds of dreams that are not recorded only two of which were divine in origin. We cannot assume that every dream has spiritual significance, sometimes it may be a result of something we ate

**Second**, the dreams were given to reveal what God wanted to do. It would require faithful and continued obedience from Joseph before he would see their fulfillment

#### The dream itself is recorded twice

- 41:2-7 - once to Pharaoh's counselor
- 41:17-24 - once to Joseph after his release from prison

Pharaoh's counselors were unable to interpret the dream which began a series of events that led to Joseph's release from prison.

It was his faithfulness in the dark and dry seasons of life that opened the door for his release and the opportunity to serve in a capacity few others have ever known.

Jesus put it like this

Luke 16:10

He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

Standing before Pharaoh and his counselors, Joseph provided the interpretation

Genesis 41:28

This is the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what **He is about to do**

The purpose of the dream was to reveal the future to pharaoh in order to save the nation of Israel

Genesis 41:29-31

Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land. So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it will be very severe.

At this point Joseph offered some unsolicited advice

Genesis 41:33

“Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh took Joseph's advice and promoted Joseph to rule alongside him over what was the most powerful empire in the ancient world.

This would lead to the Israel being rescued from the coming famine, and ultimately the coming of Christ as savior of the world

In addition to a position, Joseph was given a wife who I turn provided him with two sons

After more than a decade of slavery and imprisonment Joseph finally experienced the fulfillment of the prophetic dreams he had so many years before. He was in a position to deliver the nation

Keep in mind that it was not the promise of God alone that put Joseph in this position. His faithfulness to The Lord also played an important role. Along the way bitterness, anger or giving into temptation could have easily derailed Joseph from the plan of God. It was that he faithfully clung to The Lord despite the obstacles that kept him available and useable

Remember many others had faltered under far less a strain

