

Lesson 46

God Blesses Joseph

God blessed Joseph in Potiphar's house and in prison.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Joseph remained faithful even in difficult circumstances as a servant in Potiphar's house and then in prison after he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife. God blessed weJoseph wherever he went and had a plan for him.

Key Passages

Genesis 39:4, 39:20–21

Memory Verse

Proverbs 3:5–6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Throughout the life of Joseph recorded in Genesis, we see that in spite of amazingly adverse circumstances, Joseph remained obedient and God remained faithful. Although Joseph's arrival in Egypt was extremely traumatic (sold as a slave by his own brothers), we know that God was with him (Genesis 39:2).

After the account of Joseph's betrayal at the hands of his jealous brothers in Genesis 37, the following chapter switches main characters to Joseph's brother Judah. In a sense, chapter 37 ends with a cliffhanger as we are left to wonder what will happen to Joseph in Egypt. Judah left his brothers and befriended an Adullamite named Hirah (Genesis 38:1). Then he married a Canaanite woman and had three sons. Judah found a wife, Tamar, for his firstborn son Er. But Er was wicked, and God put him to death (Genesis 38:7). Judah's second son Onan refused to raise up children for his brother with Tamar, and God killed him, too (Genesis 38:10). Judah was afraid to give his third son Shelah to Tamar and sent Tamar back to her family to live as a widow. Eventually, Tamar realized that Judah was not going to give her to Shelah as promised, so she disguised herself as a harlot and slept with her father-in-law Judah. When he found out she was pregnant, he reacted with harsh judgment and planned to burn her (Genesis 38:24). But she proved that he was the father, and Judah acknowledged that he was in the wrong (Genesis 38:25–26). The firstborn of the twins born to Tamar would be the carrier of the Messianic promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Matthew 1:1–3). His name was Perez.

After the birth of Judah and Tamar's twin boys, the account jumps back to Joseph and his new life in Egypt in Genesis 39. After purchasing Joseph, Potiphar quickly realized that the Lord was with Joseph and caused all that he did to succeed. Because of this, Potiphar made Joseph the overseer of the house (Genesis 39:3–5). Joseph's position would provide crucial training for an even more important responsibility God had planned for him. Joseph learned the language and culture of the Egyptians, managed other servants, and successfully administered a large household. While Joseph served there, God orchestrated another difficult situation for him when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of immoral behavior. Her lies landed Joseph in prison (Genesis 39:20). But once again, God showed his faithfulness to Joseph by giving him favor in the eyes of the jailer and arranging for Joseph to become the administrator of the prison (Genesis 39:21–22).

While in prison, Joseph met two of Pharaoh's officials: the chief cupbearer and chief baker. Both men had dreams that upset them. Knowing that God could provide the interpretations of the dreams, Joseph asked to hear them. He explained that both men dreamed of their futures. In three days, the cupbearer would be restored to his position by Pharaoh, but the baker would be hanged. In three days, the dreams came true, just as Joseph had said (Genesis 40:20–23). Although Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him and mention his innocence to Pharaoh, the cupbearer forgot about Joseph after he was released.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Over the past several years, there has been a revolution in Egyptology (the study of ancient Egypt), particularly as it relates to the chronology of Egyptian dynasties. A new, shorter chronology is being accepted, which confirms many of the dates and details regarding the Israelites' time in Egypt.

Some conservative biblical scholars identify Pharaoh Sesostri I as the Pharaoh who appointed Joseph over Egypt, with Joseph himself possibly being identified as Mentuhotep, Sesostri's vizier or prime minister near the beginning of the 12th Dynasty in Egypt (1703–1480 BC).

Details of Joseph's time in Egypt as recorded in Scripture correlate well with other known details of this era. Some of these include:

- Potiphar's purchase of Joseph (Genesis 39:1)—There was private ownership of slaves in ancient Egypt.
- Joseph purchased for 20 shekels (Genesis 37:28)—The price of a slave during the Middle Kingdom period was about 20 shekels.
- Joseph serving as Potiphar's house steward (Genesis 39:4)—House stewards oversaw the finances and agricultural holdings of their masters.
- Joseph thrown in prison (Genesis 39:20)—Egypt was one of the few nations in the Ancient Near East that had prisons.
- Joseph cleaning and shaving before seeing Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14)—Egyptians of the Middle Kingdom were very concerned about personal cleanliness and the removal of all facial hair.
- A gold chain given to Joseph (Genesis 41:42)—This was a customary Egyptian reward for services rendered.

Egypt was unique in its imprisonment of criminals since other cultures typically imposed harsher forms of punishment, such as death and mutilation. Egyptians used imprisonment along with other forms of punishment including fines, beatings, forced labor, mutilation, banishment, or death. Places used as prisons included pits, temples, palaces, and fortresses. Because adultery was a capital offense in Egypt, Potiphar may have believed Joseph was innocent of his wife's accusations since he chose to imprison him rather than put him to death. Joseph was placed in a prison for the king's prisoners. Joseph rose to an administrative position within the prison due to God's blessing and his experience in Potiphar's house. Egyptians kept records of prisoners, which required the position of a scribe. If Joseph were the prison scribe, he would have been second to the keeper of the prison, which fits the biblical account and his abilities (Genesis 39:22–23). Prisoners under Joseph's charge could be serving a sentence of forced labor or awaiting a sentence, as were the baker and the cupbearer. The fact that the cupbearer was restored to his position on Pharaoh's birthday (Genesis 40:20) also fits historical evidence of Pharaohs releasing a prisoner on their birthday.

While we don't look to external evidence to try and "prove" the Bible, historical and archaeological evidence does provide confirmation and can be useful for showing others that the Bible's history can be trusted, just as its gospel message can be trusted.

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