

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 39

39:1-5 *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard [TAN: "chief steward"], bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered [NKJ,TAN: "was a successful man"], and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. (NIV)*

Theme

God made a promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his descendant who would be the Savior. A major theme in the story of Joseph is that all who come into contact with Joseph are blessed, making Joseph a type of Christ.

God's Faithfulness

The main point of Joseph's story is not about how great a man he was, but rather how God then [and later through Jesus] would be faithful to the promises made to Abraham, because both Joseph and Jesus kept the "way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him" (18:19).

39:6-7 *So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a time his master's wife became infatuated with him. 'Come, make love to me,' she said. (NIV)*

Tables Turned

This situation is an interesting twist of the similar events of both Abraham and Isaac. In their cases powerful men wanted their wives while Joseph is wanted by the wife of a powerful man.

39:8-12 *But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. (NIV)*

Joseph's Morals

In the cases of Abraham and Isaac, it was either God's intervention or a sense of morality on the part of the man in power that prevented sin. The only thing that saved Joseph was his own moral convictions.

Joseph's Failings

All of the patriarchs prior to this had faith in God, but they are all recorded to have made some major mistakes. Yet, not one sin committed by Joseph is ever recorded. By omitting any record of Joseph's personal failings, God outlines by his example the obedience and faith required of a savior.

39:13-15 When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with [REB: "rape"] me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." (NIV)

Potiphar's Wife

As the events unfold, it seems that there were some great strains on Potiphar's marriage. His wife blames him for being responsible for what she is accusing Joseph of doing.

39:16-18 She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me [REB: "me an object of insult"]. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." (NIV)

Evil Intentions

Joseph was falsely accused of a criminal act that demanded punishment, just as Jesus would also be falsely accused.

Potiphar's wife's intention was to hurt Joseph out of spite, which was the same reason his brothers did what they did. Joseph would later state that they intended evil against him, but God allowed it for good (50:20).

39:19-20 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, (NIV)

Prison

Potiphar was no doubt angry with his wife, knowing what kind of woman she was. However, by her pronouncements prior to his arrival, she had put him into a very awkward position. He was forced to render punishment on Joseph. The fact is a slave would normally have been put to death for a crime of this nature. Yet, Joseph was sent to prison, and not the prison for ordinary-class criminals. He was placed in an institution for prisoners who were sent there directly on orders from the Pharaoh.

39:21 the LORD was with him; He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. (NIV)

Since God was ultimately behind Joseph being in his present plight, God made the situation as comfortable as possible for him, just as He had done with Potiphar.

39:22-23 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. (NIV)