

Pentwater Bible Church

Joseph in Potiphar's House
Genesis Message Seventy-Four
Genesis 39: 1-23



Joseph and Potiphar's Wife, Guido Reni, 1630

Daniel E. Woodhead – Pastor Teacher

Dentwater Bible Church

Genesis Message Seventy-Four

Joseph in Potiphar's House

July 8, 2012

Daniel E. Woodhead

Review:

JUDAH SONS AND TAMAR

Genesis 38: 1-11

Judah, who was aligned with Reuben in steering the other sons of Jacob away from killing Joseph left them and travelled to Adullam. It later in the invasion under general Joshua was made a part of the tribal inheritance of Judah and it was also associated with the life of David (I Samuel 22: 1-2 etc.). Judah must have had a disagreement with his siblings regarding the disposition of Joseph because he chose not to stay with them. This account will span a time frame of approximately twenty-three years.

In Adullam Judah meets and befriends a man named Hirah. Through Hirah he is introduced to Shua who has a marriageable daughter. So he marries this unnamed Canaanite woman and ends up having three children with her. Both Abraham and Isaac went to great lengths to prevent their children from marrying Canaanite women. Esau of course violated that and intermarried with the Canaanites and Ishmaelites. Judah who was of the chosen family line began the intermarriages into the Canaanites. The text simply says that *he took her, and went in unto her*. He then had three sons by her: Er (עֵר), Onan, and Shelah. Judah named Er and his wife named Onan and Shelah since he was away in the nearby town of Chezib. Hebrew naming shows the parents wish to commemorate some meaningful event through the child's name. Er means *forsaken or lonely*. Onan means *sorrow* and Shelah means *deception*. This seems to indicate that Judah was quite remorseful over the events that brought Joseph into slavery into Egypt.

When Er was grown he was married to a woman named Tamar. The text further tells us that he was wicked in the sight of Jehovah. The Hebrew word for wicked is *ra* רָע. It is a designation of a degree of wickedness that merits divine retribution. And in this case his death was the result of Jehovah God taking his life in some undisclosed manner. Jehovah who knows all things was keeping Tamar from this evil man. As a result of his death Judah instructs the second born son Onan to do his duty and "*Go in unto thy brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her, and raise up seed to thy brother.*" This concept is called the law of levirate marriage. It was codified into the Mosaic Law and became a standard practice (Deuteronomy 25: 5-6, Ruth 4: 5-6; Matthew 22: 24). The idea was to keep the name of the individual who died through his son. Therefore the son would keep the family name alive even though the father was not alive to propagate.

Onan seemed to have no qualms against marrying Tamar Er's widow. He seemed to accept the easy part of having sexual intercourse with her and accepting his inheritance. Er was first born so he would have gotten Judah's estate when he passed. Er

realized this and complied with Judah's instructions. However, Onan realized that the children would not be his per se but that of Er's so during intercourse with Tamar he continually withdrew from her before he deposited his semen into her. Thus, she was not allowed to become pregnant. Some mistakenly teach through this example here that God prohibits contraception. The sin here was, Onan did not want to obey his father and honor his brother by taking up the responsibility that was given to him. Because his sin was in the same category of wickedness of his brother Er the Lord executed His divine will and caused him to die too. Tamar was now a widow again and Judah instructed her to "*Remain a widow in thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown up; for he said, Lest he also die, like his brethren.*" Judah was certainly considering Tamar to have some major issue that both her husbands received divine executions. So he told her that when his third son Shelah was of age she could have him in levirate because he feared that Jehovah would take him too. Judah had no intention of letting Tamar marry Shelah because of the curse he thought she had. She trusted Judah and went to her father's home to live and wait for Shelah to come of age and marry her.

THE STRANGE CASE OF TAMAR AND JUDAH

Genesis 38: 12-26

So time passed and Judah was making no effort to arrange another levirate marriage between Shuah and Tamar who desired children and not wanting to make a career of widowhood. She was still a young woman. Judah's wife died and he went through a period of ritual mourning as the text says that *and Judah was comforted*. Later he and his friend Hirah went up to the sheep-shearers. This was a festive time for them and Judah now done with mourning was going to join in the party atmosphere.

Tamar became aware of Judah's travel to the party with the sheep shearers with Hirah and she devised a plan to force him into a role of a levir for her. She planned to entrap him. She changed out of her widow's clothes and made herself appear as a sacred prostitute. She then put on a veil, which had several connotations of that day. Brides principally wore them on their wedding night and so did prostitutes wanting to appear as a wholesome bride. So a veiled woman in public gave off the message that she was a prostitute available for sexual intercourse. She had essentially dressed herself as a cult prostitute and waited for Judah to appear at the city gate of Enaim. Her actions while retaliatory for not getting Shuah put her into a doubly sinful situation. She was legally betrothed to Shuah regardless of what Judah was preventing and she was planning on an incestuous relationship with Judah.

When Judah saw her he was enticed by her. She played the role of seductress and lured him into a sexual union. It was Judah who suggested the sex when he said to her, "*Come, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee: for he knew not that she was his daughter-in-law.*" He was coming off a period of mourning and was exceptionally vulnerable to temptation of this sort and didn't realize that this was his daughter-in-law in disguise. Tamar who played the role of a prostitute asked for payment for gratifying his sexual desires. This was a normal request from a prostitute. She says, "*What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me?*" He promised her a kid of the goats of the flock at a later time for sexual favors now, but she did not trust him and wanted something of more significance as a promissory to pay. She was actually looking for something to provide as

evidence proving him to be the father of the child who would come from the union. So Judah asks, *“What pledge shall I give thee?”* She being very savvy says to him in response, *“Thy signet and thy cord, and thy staff that is in thy hand.”* These three items had identifying significance for her to later prove who the father’s child was. The signet was used to seal documents, the cord was a necklace that the ring was kept on, and the staff in his hand established his profession. So she received them and she had sex with him, after which she became pregnant. She then left, removed the veil and put back on the widow’s clothes.

Judah then tried to make good on the promise to give her a goat kid. He sent Hirah to her with the payment. He of course wanted his personal items back, which she was holding as a deposit. When Hirah was unable to find her he begins asking *the men of her place, saying, “Where is the prostitute, that was at Enaim by the wayside?”* they just said, *“There hath been no prostitute here.”* Hirah tried to honor Judah’s commitment to pay her and when that failed he returned to Judah with the kid. Judah decided to forget the entire incident.

Now comes the revelation to Judah of what actually happened. After three months when Tamar is just entering her second trimester a report was given to Judah that Tamar had become a harlot and she is pregnant as a result of her prostitute activities. So Judah still not knowing that he impregnated her says in response to learning what she did, *“Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.”* He was the patriarch of the clan and had a right to do this since she was guilty of prostitution. During the trial she pleaded, *“By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and the cords, and the staff.”* Judah then had to confess when he was exposed and simply admitted his guilt by saying, *“She is more righteous than I; forasmuch as I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.”*

TWINS ARE BORN TO JUDAH AND TAMAR

Genesis 38: 27-30

This section of Scripture regarding the story of Judah and Tamar ends with the birth of twin sons. When they were about to be born one put his hand out of the womb and the midwife tied a scarlet thread on his hand to indicate he was the first born. However he drew his hand back in and returned into the womb. So the second one was born first. This caused the midwife to say, *“Wherefore hast thou made a breach for thyself?”* This is a Hebrew play on words, which means you breached a breach or you forged through. This is the meaning of the name Perez who was the first-born. He became a seed son of the Messianic line (Ruth 4: 12, 18-22; Matthew 1:3; Luke 3:33). The second son then came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand and he was named Zerah meaning the shining one probably due to the scarlet thread. This account while seemingly out of place in the story of Joseph traces the Messianic line. It also shows that they were intermarrying into the Canaanites. This is one of the reasons God took Judah and the rest of the family into Egypt. Finally there is a strong contrast illustrated here between Judah and Joseph. One brother was resisting temptation and the other caving in to it.

Today’s Message:

JOSEPH'S SECOND ELEVATION TO OVERSEER

Genesis 39: 1-6

¹And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hand of the Ishmaelites, that had brought him down thither. ²And Jehovah was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that Jehovah was with him, and that Jehovah made all that he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴And Joseph found favor in his sight, and he ministered unto him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. ⁵And it came to pass from the time that he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that Jehovah blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of Jehovah was upon all that he had, in the house and in the field. ⁶And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not aught that was with him, save the bread, which he did eat. And Joseph was comely, and well-favored (ASV 1901).

The story line picks up where it left off at the end of chapter thirty-seven. Joseph's brothers in their hatred of him sold him to a group of itinerant merchantmen of the Midianites/Ishmaelites. Their desire to kill him had been tempered by Reuben and Judah's alternate scenario of selling him and making a profit on the transaction. They sold him to Midianites who are essentially interchangeable with Ishmaelites. Even though they are different groups they intermarried and travelled together.

Some understanding of the geopolitical environment in the Mid-East at that time is helpful to forming a basis for some of the dynamics associated with this story. Sometime during the seventeenth century B.C there was a migration of Semitic peoples from the Mid-East to Egypt. They are known as the Amorites and had a warrior aristocracy known as the Hyksos. They took control of the eastern delta area then gradually extended their power over all of Egypt. The time frame for this story of Joseph's time in Egypt begins approximately in the year 1898 B.C. This was the time of the Hyksos' control over Egypt and the Pharaoh using Manetho's chronology was Sesotris. He ruled from 1897 to 1879 B.C. It seems that the Hyksos' were in control of Egypt during the time that Joseph entered Egypt. Egyptian history and the succession of Pharaoh's are unclear. The only known source of a complete list of the Pharaohs' is Manetho's. He was a third century B.C. Egyptian priest whose accuracy has been suspect. Nevertheless because the text emphasizes the fact that Potiphar is an Egyptian by stating this three times (Genesis 39: 1, 2 & 5) it is reasonable to accept the Semitic Hyksos rule in Egypt during Joseph's time there. Some believe that the Hyksos were in Egypt at a later time period than Joseph but that does not explain the fact that Potiphar's Egyptian nationality is emphasized. Hyksos control in Egypt help to explain the favorable treatment Joseph received from Potiphar and Pharaoh. Certainly God led the people

involved in this story to act favorable to Joseph in the ninety-three years he was in Egypt.

Potiphar probably bought Joseph because the text states that *Joseph was comely, and well favored*. It is noteworthy that only two men in the Bible are characterized in this manner. Joseph and David are both called handsome. It could also be because Potiphar being Egyptian wanted a Semitic man in his household as political protection against the Hyksos if his relationship with them soured. Joseph had some familiarity with the language used by the Amorites/Hyksos as he lived in Haran for most of his life and could be an ally to Potiphar if his relationship to Pharaoh declined.

God blessed Joseph and this is stated four times in this chapter (Genesis 39: 2, 3, 21 & 23). God was with him as He was with all the Patriarchs. God never spoke directly to Joseph as He had to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He was with him as the text declares seven times and is obvious as the story unfolds. Potiphar saw the fact that Jehovah God was with Joseph too. Within a very short time Potiphar appointed Joseph to be the overseer of Potiphar's household. Joseph had complete control over the entire household with the exception of the food. Egyptians did not eat with foreigners and did not allow foreigners to eat their food (Genesis 43: 32). This was the second time that he had been given the responsibility over others as overseer. His father Jacob did it as well, placing him over his brothers. Here is the outworking of the Abrahamic Covenant with the blessing and cursing components. Joseph did personally strive to be the best at what he did and he made the best of a difficult situation as a slave in a foreign nation. He had God given natural ability and knew God and what He required of him.

Potiphar is called an officer of Pharaoh. He was chief executioner. He had a highly desirable and envious position. The Hebrew word is *saris*, which means eunuch. Potiphar had been castrated so as to be close to the Egyptian Pharaoh without being a threat to him or his harem. This was a common Mid Eastern practice beginning with the Sumerians. Potiphar consented to this in order to take his high position. He was also married so his wife knew and lived with his physical deformity. Perhaps his political influence and financial well-being was an acceptable trade off. In any event this was a highly probably reason for Potiphar's wife to be prone to adulterous affairs. Potiphar and his wife may have even had an arrangement whereby she could discreetly engage in affairs since he was unable to provide her with normal sexual relations. Joseph would end up spending about eight or nine years in Potiphar's employ.

POTIPHAR'S WIFE AND JOSEPH

Genesis 39: 7-18

⁷And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. ⁸But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath put all that he hath into my hand: ⁹he is not greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art

his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?
¹⁰*And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.* ¹¹*And it came to pass about this time, that he went into the house to do his work; and there was none of the men of the house there within.* ¹²*And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.* ¹³*And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth,* ¹⁴*that she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in a Hebrew unto us to mock us: he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice:* ¹⁵*and it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment by me, and fled, and got him out.* ¹⁶*And she laid up his garment by her, until his master came home.* ¹⁷*And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, whom thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me:* ¹⁸*and it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment by me, and fled out (ASV 1901).*

If Joseph had not been so handsome Potiphar's unnamed wife may not have been so attracted to him. But the text stating, *that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me,* comes right after the text stating his attractive physical appearance. Further he had a powerful position and this made him the target of her affection. As she came on to him demanding a sexual union he refused with two good reasons. *One*, Potiphar had put his complete trust in Joseph and God provided him with all the opportunities he realized and *two* Joseph would not violate his relationship to God. God would know because, "*The eyes of the lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good*" (Proverbs 15: 3). All sin is against God. But she was persistent.

The text says that *she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.* She harassed him daily to have sex with her, which caused him to begin avoiding her. So she concocted a plan to trap him into having sex with her. She made sure that the other workers of the house would be gone and she waited for Joseph to come in to do his work. She caught him by his garment and demanded sex. He fled the house leaving his garment there. The only thing to do when faced with a sinful temptation is to flee.

1 Corinthians 10:13

¹³*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (KJV).*

Potiphar's wife who was scorned brought, the men of the household back in and began to lie about the events of her harassment toward Joseph. She knew that they being Egyptians would be sympathetic toward her for two reasons. *One* Joseph was a foreigner, a Hebrew and *two* he had risen over them quickly which appealed to their envy of him. The Egyptians did not like their Hyksos rulers and Joseph's heritage would place him in

the same despised category as the Hyksos. She claimed he tried to rape her *and it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment by me, and fled, and got him out.* So she screamed and claimed that Joseph ran out as a result of hearing her screams.

POTIPHAR HEARS THE STORY

Genesis 39: 19-23

¹⁹*And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled.* ²⁰*And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.* ²¹*But Jehovah was with Joseph, and showed kindness unto him, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.* ²²*And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.* ²³*The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand, because Jehovah was with him; and that which he did, Jehovah made it prosper (ASV 1901).*

Her second accusation was to her husband. She told him the same story except with some embellishments. In this retelling she added that *The Hebrew servant, whom thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me.* She was essentially doing the same “blame others” tactic that came about at the Fall when Adam blamed his wife for his sin and she blamed the serpent all the while it was their own responsibility. She was suggesting that it was Potiphar’s fault for bringing Joseph, the Hebrew into their household. Nothing is said of the servants whether they believed her or not. They probably knew her well but were not in a position to refute her story. Potiphar became angry (*his wrath was kindled*). It may have been at his wife or Joseph. The text seems to favor his anger being directed at his wife. This, because as chief executioner he could have had Joseph killed. *One* God had plans for Joseph and *two* Potiphar knew his wife. Once she made the report to the household staff he was obligated to do something. So he put Joseph into a royal prison for political internees. Even though God was with Joseph he did suffer some physical torture. Psalm 105: 18-19 says his feet were put into iron clasps (fettters). Political prisoners would be treated more severely than others and Joseph suffered some. Potiphar was in charge of Joseph’s jailers so he had control over the situation. God then began to bless Joseph *and showed kindness unto him, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.* This resulted in another elevation to a position of authority, which certainly Potiphar had to approve. The text says that Joseph, even though the other prisoner’s leader, worked along side with them. He did *whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.* This is the mark of a well-respected leader who does and knows the people’s work drawing close to them and earning their respect. The warden realized benefits here too as he appeared more efficient and endeared Joseph to him. These experiences would prepare him for increased responsibility later.

NEXT WEEK: JOSEPH IN PRISON **Please Call or e-mail with any questions or comments**
Info@pentwaterbiblechurch.com Toll Free 877-706-2479