

## Joseph in Prison

*Joseph is wronged for doing right!*

**Text:** Genesis 39:13-40:23

### Introduction:

1. In our last message we studied Joseph's courageous stand against the advances of Mrs Potiphar. Now we will see how suffers wrong for that godly stand. You can get into a LOT of trouble for doing what's right! God's hand of Providence is again seen over what transpires as Joseph is further prepared by God for his main life's work.
2. Each phase in Joseph's life formed another link in the chain of God's Providence.
  - Concerning Joseph's life, Griffith Thomas writes, "The outstanding feature of Joseph's life was faithful loyalty to God under all circumstances. He carried his convictions with him and lived them out...Joseph never compromised his position, and as a consequence he never lost spiritual power or weakened his witness for God."
3. We will study the account under **3 headings**.

### I. **THE ACCUSATION LEADING TO PRISON (VS. 13-20)**

Joseph is falsely accused with total lies from Mrs. Potiphar. In fact, she was the one guilty of the very things she accused Joseph of! How the devil loves to use the weapon of false accusation against the godly.

#### **A. The Slander against Joseph (Vs. 13-18)**

1. The Motivation behind her Slander (Vs. 13)
  - a. The response of Potiphar's wife is a reminder that there is a world of difference between lust and genuine love. Selfish lust, when denied fulfillment as it was here with Joseph, quickly turns to hatred and a spirit of revenge. She now determines to do all in her power to destroy this godly young man.
  - b. Illustration: Amon and Tamar – 2 Samuel 13:15 "Then Amnon **hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her.** And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone."
  - c. Joseph lost a lot for his godly stand but he would have lost a whole lot more if he had said yes to temptation! What blessings God had in store for Joseph including a dear lady named Asenath who would become his wife.
2. The Men in her Slander (Vs. 14-18)
  1. She lied to the household (Vs. 13-15)
    - a. She slandered her husband – "See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us". Potiphar's wife was a

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calculating woman. Her plan was to get the other men of the household on her side and stirred up against both Potiphar and Joseph. These men were probably already jealous of this Hebrew man who had been promoted above them as overseer and would be happy to see him brought down.

- b. She slandered Joseph
  - i. She accused him of trying to force her when in actual fact she had tried to force him! The word 'mock' is the same Hebrew word translated 'sporting' in Genesis 26:8 in reference to Isaac and Rebekah.
  - ii. She falsely claimed that she had cried out for help and that Joseph had fled leaving his garment with her. In reality, she had grabbed hold of his garment and tried to seduce him and the only way he could get away was to leave it in her hand. She now uses it as false evidence against him. This is the second time a coat had been unjustly taken from Joseph in order to mislead others about him.
2. She lied to her Husband (Vs. 16-18)
  - a. There is a tone of accusation against her husband – "The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us". Clearly her marriage was not a happy one!
  - b. She repeats her tapestry of lies to Potiphar. She may have secretly hoped that he would execute Joseph since that was an accepted punishment for a crime of this nature, especially from a slave.

### B. The Sentence against Joseph (Vs. 19-20)

1. Potiphar's anger (Vs. 19)
  - a. Potiphar anger is kindled upon hearing his wife's words.
  - b. We should not that it doesn't say his anger was kindled against Joseph. As the events unfold, it appears that Potiphar may have been somewhat in doubt of what his wife was claiming.
    - i. He did not execute Joseph which he could easily have done.
    - ii. He put Joseph into the royal prison. The prison was a roundhouse, from the form of its construction, usually attached to the dwelling of such an officer as Potiphar. It was partly a subterranean dungeon (Gen. 41:14), though the brick-built walls rose considerably above the surface of the ground, and were surmounted by a vaulted roof somewhat in the form of an inverted bowl. (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown commentary)
    - iii. He put the chief Butler and Baker under Joseph's care (Compare 39:1 and 40:4).

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- iv. Barnhouse said, "If Potiphar had really believed his wife, Joseph would probably have been tortured to death."  
Leupold said, "The customary punishment for adultery was extreme. To be cast into a prison was a relatively light penalty."
2. Potiphar's action (Vs. 20)
  - a. Potiphar puts Joseph into the prison of which he was personally in charge (40:3-4).
  - b. Even if Potiphar doubted his wife's claims (we don't know for sure), he could not side with a slave over his wife. Further, she had already waged an effective smear campaign against Joseph to the rest of the men in the household, increasing the pressure on Potiphar to act.
3. Note: Rewards for doing right are not always immediate. You have to look at the long-term perspective! Blessing and reward were coming for Joseph but he would have to endure suffering for righteousness's sake first. Matthew 5:10-12 "Blessed *are* they which are persecuted **for righteousness' sake**: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, **for my sake**. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: **for great is your reward in heaven**: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."
4. Note: Nothing is recorded as far as a response from Joseph is concerned. Joseph pictures the Lord Jesus in his silence in the face of these accusations. Isaiah 53:7 "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

## II. THE CONSOLATION IN PRISON (VS. 21-23)

God's hand was upon Joseph in prison and he experienced the comfort of:

### A. The Presence of God (Vs. 21a)

1. Joseph suffered greatly in this situation.
  - a. He suffered the injury of injustice. Imagine what this must have been like for Joseph. He had acted with the utmost integrity and purity in the situation and yet was punished as if he had been guilty. One of his main stated reasons for refusing this hussy's advances was because of his loyalty and sense of responsibility to Potiphar his master (Vs.8-9). Now that very man he had done the right thing by throws him in prison, probably for his own political expediency!

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- b. He suffered the injury of imprisonment. Joseph was treated like any other prisoner initially. We get some insight into his sufferings from Psalm 105:17-18 “He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron:” Joseph was hurt for being holy!
- 2. Joseph sensed the Lord’s presence in this situation.
  - a. God is everywhere present but he is present with his children in a special sense. Joseph lost much at this time but no one could rob him of the presence of his God.
  - b. It was the presence and power of God that helped Joseph become better rather than bitter when he suffered. Clearly Joseph was a man of faith who walked closely with His God during this time. Three times it is stated in this chapter that the Lord was “with Joseph” (Vs. 2, 21 & 23).
  - c. Joseph had known the presence of God when he was sold into slavery (Vs. 2). No doubt the fact he had proved the faithfulness of God during his first major trial gave him faith to trust God for this trial also.
  - d. God not only was “with Joseph” but also “shewed him mercy”. God in His mercy preserved Joseph from what could have been a much worse outcome.
  - e. How can you have the presence of God in your life? Like Joseph, you need to have a relationship with God. You need to be **born again** and **blood washed**.

### B. The Promotion of God (Vs. 21b-23)

- 1. God gave him favour with the keeper of the prison (Vs. 21-23a)
  - a. Joseph was a man of exceptional gifts and talents but his promotion was not first and foremost because of that. It was the Lord’s doing.
  - b. We note a similar pattern with each promotion in Joseph’s life where he becomes second in command and is entrusted with much authority and responsibility.
  - c. It was good of the Lord to give Joseph a sphere of service in his imprisonment as it would give him a focus in his trial. While in some trials, one may have to relinquish some ministry responsibilities, it is wise to seek to continue in Christian service as God allows. It is therapeutic to get your mind off yourself and to serve the Lord by serving others in your trial.
- 2. God blessed the labours of Joseph’s hands (Vs. 23a). God made what Joseph did “to prosper”.

## III. THE PREPARATION OF PRISON (VS. 21-23; 40:1-23)

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This period in Joseph's life was another period of Divine preparation. Nothing is wasted in God's economy. Joseph was sold into slavery at the age of 17 his main life's ministry didn't commence until he turned 30. He needed all 13 years of preparation in God's school! Take note of:

### A. The Preparation of Joseph's Gifts

God was further refining and preparing Joseph in the gifts He had given him; the gifts that he would exercise for his main life's work as second in command to Pharaoh. God was developing these gifts in a humble context where Joseph would not be tempted to get puffed up.

#### 1. The gift of Administration (Vs. 22-23)

Joseph clearly had the gift of organisation or 'ruler' to use the language of Romans 12:8 "...he that ruleth, with diligence". God was developing Joseph to be able to handle a large level of responsibility. Joseph went through three periods of preparation before he would finally be 2IC to Pharaoh.

- a. As overseer of his father's flock (Gen. 37:2). Remember, Joseph held the position of firstborn.
- b. As overseer of Potiphar's house (Gen. 39:4-6).
- c. As overseer of the prison (Gen. 39:21-23).

#### 2. The gift of Interpretation (40:1-23)

Divine dreams are a prominent feature of Joseph's life. In fact, dreams feature three times in Joseph's life and each time it was at a critical juncture in his life. Each time the dreams also came in pairs. This chapter deals with the dreams of the chief Butler and Baker which would form another important link in the chain of God's Providence.

##### a. The context of the dreams (Vs. 1-8)

- i. Their imprisonment (Vs. 1-4). The chief butler and chief baker offended Pharaoh in some way and he put them into the prison under Potiphar's charge, the same prison where Joseph was incarcerated. We see the Providential Hand of God in this as the Butler would become a key link in Joseph's life in the near future. The captain of the guard (Potiphar. See 39:1) puts them under Joseph's care. Again, this raises a very strong question mark over whether Potiphar really believed Joseph to be guilty. Whatever the case may be, he still saw his value as a gifted administrator. It is noted that Joseph "served them". Note Joseph's servant's attitude in the midst of his trial.
- ii. Their dreams (Vs. 5-8). God gave both of these men a dream in one night. They sensed that there was something significant about the dreams and yet had no way of knowing the interpretation. Joseph came in to check on them in the morning and discerned the sorrow

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on their countenances and inquired as to the reason behind their sadness. Joseph's own trials and sufferings had made him compassionate towards the misfortune and sorrow of others.

- b. The content of their dreams (Vs. 9-19)
  - i. The Butler's dream and interpretation (Vs. 9-15). The Butler had dreamed of a grape vine with here branches. In his dream he saw the branches blossom and clusters of ripe grapes form. Pharaoh's cup was in his hand and he squeezed the juice from the grapes into the cup and gave it to Pharaoh. Joseph was enabled of God to see the interpretation of the dream. The three branches represented three days and in three days Pharaoh would restore him to his former position as chief Butler. Joseph then appeals to the Butler to make mention him before Pharaoh so he could be released from prison. We get another window into Joseph's heart and personal thoughts. He was very aware of the injustice of his situation and struggled with it.
  - ii. The Baker's dream and interpretation (Vs. 16-19). Seeing that the interpretation of the Butler's dream had been a positive one, the Baker proceeds to tell Joseph his dream. In his dream he was carrying three white baskets on his head and in the topmost basked there were various baked goods for Pharaoh. However, the birds were swooping down and eating the them out of the basket. This dream had a sad and difficult interpretation but Joseph was faithful to communicate the Divine message all the same.
- c. The carrying out of the dreams (Vs. 20-23)
  - i. God's Word through Joseph's interpretation of these two dreams was fulfilled exactly.
  - ii. The butler forgot Joseph and Joseph would spend another 2 full years in prison before his exaltation. On the human level we are reminded of the tendency of human nature to neglect thankfulness even when we have been the recipients of great kindness in the midst of suffering. On the Divine side, we see the Providence of God again at work. God, in His infinite wisdom knew that Joseph would need another two years of waiting before he was exalted to the high position of ruler over Egypt.
  - iii. Joseph would have been 28 years at this time (See Gen. 41:46).

### **B. The Preparation of Joseph's Character**

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Through it all, we can see that God was using these trials in Joseph's life to shape and mould him into a useable vessel for His glory. God was growing Joseph through these trials in key areas. There was growth in the area of:

1. **Faith** – Joseph was proving God's faithfulness in his life despite the bleakness of the situation. He was learning to trust God to fulfill His promises in His way and in His timing. He was learning that God's grace was sufficient. Illustration: "In a certain coal-mining neighbourhood, where almost everything was covered with coal-dust, there was a beautiful white flower perfectly free from dust. When someone who was strange to the place remarked that the owner must take very great care of the flower to prevent it from being covered with coal-dust, another who was standing by threw over the flower some dust which at once fell off, leaving the whiteness and beauty as exquisite as ever. The explanation was that the flower had on it what might be called an enamel which enabled it to receive the dust and throw it off without feeling anything of the effects. So, it was with Joseph. His character was covered with the enamel of Divine grace, and all these sorrows and troubles came upon him and left him untouched except for the increased strength and power that came to him from God." (Thomas)
2. **Humility** – God allowed Joseph two seasons of great humiliation. The first was when he was sold into slavery by his brothers and he fell from the lofty position in the family. The second was the incident with Potiphar's wife where he was unjustly accused and imprisoned. We get a sense that God's work in this area went deep with Joseph. Despite the fact he was elevated at the age of 30 to the high position of second in command to Pharaoh of the mighty land of Egypt, he did not get puffed up. In fact, a spirit of humility pervades the life of Joseph from the time he first appears before Pharaoh (Gen. 41:16) till the end of his life (Gen. 50:20).
3. **Patience** – thirteen long years would pass from the time Joseph was 17 till the time he turned 30 before he would be ready for the main life's work God had in store for him. Joseph may have felt himself ready for the fulfillment of the Divine dreams at 17 but God in His wisdom knew that would have been disastrous for Joseph. Years of obscurity are important years of preparation for public ministry. God has a purpose in them.
  - a. Romans 5:3-5 "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh **patience**; And **patience**, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

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- b. James 1:2-4 “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh **patience**. But let **patience** have *her* perfect work, that ye may be **perfect** and **entire**, wanting nothing.”
- c. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones used to say, “It’s tragic when a person succeeds before he is ready for it.”
- d. John Butler writes, “Waiting patiently in lowly service purifies our passions and provides needed preparation for higher service. Unless we have passion for lowly service and patience for lofty service, we will not do the former nor get to do the latter.”
- e. Griffith Thomas writes, “God is never before His time but He is never behind. The clock of Divine providence keeps strict time and has never been known to vary either in one direction or the other.”

**Conclusion:** The prison was a part of what God used to fit Joseph for his life’s work. Joseph was in God’s school! “Training, whether physical or moral, must necessarily be attended with hardship; and those whom God uses most have to be trained in the hardest schools.” (Thomas)

Pain’s furnace heat within me quivers, God’s breath upon the flame doth blow,

And all my heart in anguish shivers, And trembles at the fiery glow.

And yet I whisper, ‘As God will!’ And in His hottest fire hold still.

He comes and lays my heart, all heated, On the hard anvil, minded so

Into His own fair shape to beat it, with his great hammer, blow on blow!

And yet I whisper, ‘As God will!’ And at His heaviest blows hold still.

He takes my softened heart, and beats it; The sparks fly off at every blow.

He turns it o’er and o’er and heats it, and lets it cool, and makes it glow.

And yet I whisper, ‘As God will!’ And in His mighty hand hold still.

Why should I murmur? For the sorrow thus only long-lived would be;

Its end may come, and will, tomorrow, When God has done His work in me.

So I say, trusting, ‘As God will!’ And, trusting to the end, hold still.

He kindles, for my profit purely, afflictions fiery, glowing brand;

And all His heaviest blows are surely, inflicted by a Master hand.

So I say, praying, ‘As God will!’ And hope in Him, and suffer still.”