

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 34

Chapter 39

Joseph and Potiphar

Genesis 39:1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.

At the end of Chapter 38, Moses summed up the events of Judah's life to the time of his move with the family to Egypt. Those events transpired over 22 years. At the beginning of chapter 39, Moses returned to the selling of Joseph into Egypt 22 years earlier when he was seventeen, 2259 years after the creation of Adam. Potiphar purchased him as a slave, but soon discovered that there was something special about Joseph that he needed to capitalize on.

Joseph's Success

Genesis 39:2 And the LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. ³ Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight, and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. ⁵ And it came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. ⁶ So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him *there* he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

The Lord was blessing Joseph just as He had blessed his father in Haran. Whatever he did the Lord blessed. It does not take long for people to notice when a person is, in general, prosperous. Joseph was supposed to be a slave, yet with every task he was assigned, Potiphar was delighted with the results. It is evident that Joseph assumed more and more responsibilities as the days passed and Potiphar was satisfied with all his work. Within time, Joseph controlled everything Potiphar owned except the selection of the family's food which was still under the control of Potiphar's kitchen staff before Joseph's arrival.

What did it matter that Joseph was "handsome in form and appearance?" First, right or wrong, appearance has a great influence on peoples' perceptions. The Lord was the secret to Joseph's success, but that was not always noticed by onlookers. Second, his appearance could also have been a point of temptation for others as will soon be the case.

Potiphar's Wife and Joseph

Genesis 39:7 And it came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his

master's wife, "Behold, with me *here*, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. ⁹ " There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And it came about as she spoke to Joseph day after day, that he did not listen to her to lie beside her, *or* be with her.

Nothing has changed in humanity; people notice the opposite sex; nothing is wrong with handsome and beautiful people. Nothing is wrong with an appropriate admiration and appreciation of such people. However, some people do not control their admiration and appreciation appropriately. Such was the case with Potiphar's wife; she was lustfully smitten with Joseph. No doubt, she had spent many days and nights dreaming of a sexual relationship with Joseph. He did not fall for her offers; he knew her request was evil. We must remember, if that act was evil in Joseph's day, it is still evil today. Any physical sexual relationship with a married person who is not your spouse is evil.

Potiphar's Wife's Plan

Genesis 39:11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. ¹² And she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. ¹³ When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled outside, ¹⁴ she called to the men of her household, and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. ¹⁵ "And it came about when he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled, and went outside." ¹⁶ So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she spoke to him with these words, " The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; ¹⁸ and it happened as I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled outside." ¹⁹ Now it came about when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, " This is what your slave did to me," that his anger burned.

As blessed by the Lord as Joseph was, he did not guard himself from the evil residing in the house of his employment. When Pharaoh's wife made her first plea to Joseph, he should never have entered the house alone again. Joseph's integrity was not in question; his standards were set in stone. Hers were not. Had he had just one servant accompany him when he entered the home, her testimony would have held no credibility.

Potiphar's wife was angry with Joseph's rejection. If she could not have him, then she intended to destroy him. This same trap has destroyed many men. Had Joseph accepted her offer, it, too, would have caught up with him and destroyed him. Joseph was not caught in her trap; yet, because he did not address the problem, a setback occurred in his life.

Joseph Jailed

Genesis 39:20 So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. ²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. ²² And the chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*. ²³ The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

The Lord is still Lord of those who love Him, regardless of their place in this world. Joseph was in jail and the Lord blessed him there just as He had before. The jailer discovered what Potiphar saw in Joseph and capitalized on it. Within some unknown period, the jailer had developed such trust in Joseph that he put him in charge of the jail population. The jailer was so confident in Joseph's work that he never inspected or evaluated what he did on the job. In short, Joseph never failed to make the chief jailer look good to his supervisor.

Chapter 40

Cupbearer and Baker Jailed

Genesis 40:1 Then it came about after these things the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. ² And Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. ³ So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the *same* place where Joseph was imprisoned. ⁴ And the captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time. ⁵ Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his *own* dream *and* each dream with its *own* interpretation. ⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected. ⁷ And he asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" ⁸ Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *it* to me, please." ⁹ So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, *there was* a vine in front of me; ¹⁰ and on the vine *were* three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, *and* its clusters produced ripe grapes. ¹¹ "Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's hand." ¹² Then Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; ¹³ within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ "Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. ¹⁵ "For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."

At the beginning of the next chapter, we will discover that this event with the cupbearer and the baker occurred two years before Joseph ascended to the position of second in charge in the Kingdom at the age of 30. Therefore, Joseph was 28 years old in this chapter, having been in Egypt 11 years. We do not know how long he served in Potiphar's house and we do not know how long he had been in jail. Joseph heard the cupbearer's dream and interpreted it for him. Joseph also used the opportunity to implore the cupbearer to help him find the favor of Pharaoh and move him out of the jail.

Baker's Dream and Interpretation

Genesis 40:16 When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also *saw* in my dream, and behold, *there were* three baskets of white bread on my head; ¹⁷ and in the top basket *there were* some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." ¹⁸ Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; ¹⁹ within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh off you."

Joseph's interpretation of the baker's dream was in direct contrast to that of the cupbearer. It was not what he wanted to hear.

Fulfillment of Dreams

Genesis 40:20 Thus it came about on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. ²¹ And he restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand; ²² but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Three days after Joseph's interpretation of both dreams, they were fulfilled exactly as described. One returned to his place of employment at Pharaoh's side and the other was sent to the gallows. The whole event should have made a major impression on the cupbearer, but it did not. He was so absorbed in his freedom from jail and the restoration to his job that he forgot the one who foretold his good fortune even though Joseph asked him to return that good fortune.

Chapter 41

Two Years Later – Pharaoh's Dream

Genesis 41:1 Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. ² And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. ³ Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the *other* cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good.

⁶ Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. ⁷ And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, *it was* a dream. ⁸ Now it came about in the morning that his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

Joseph was 30 years old. It was about the time of Pharaoh's birthday, a full two years from his reinstatement of the cupbearer to his position in his court. He had a dream that disturbed him so much that he called the wisest and most learned men in his kingdom to give him an interpretation. None could! We do not know if Pharaoh's anger burned toward his magicians or if he was deeply depressed. The Scriptures give no definitive description of his demeanor in this instance. Simply, no one in his court could help him.

Cupbearer Remembered Joseph

Genesis 41:9 Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I would make mention today of my *own* offenses. ¹⁰ "Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, *both* me and the chief baker. ¹¹ "And we had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream. ¹² "Now a Hebrew youth *was* with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related *them* to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his *own* dream. ¹³ "And it came about that just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him."

The cupbearer dared to remind Pharaoh of their interaction two years before. This admittance could have been a deadly mistake, but evidently, the cupbearer felt that the risk was worth the reward if success was obtained. He told Pharaoh about Joseph and testified about the accuracy of his interpretation. Finally, the cupbearer remembered Joseph.

Pharaoh Sent for Joseph

Genesis 41:14 Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." ¹⁶ Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." ¹⁷ So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, behold, I was standing on the bank of the Nile; ¹⁸ and behold, seven cows, fat and sleek came up out of the Nile; and they grazed in the marsh grass. ¹⁹ "And lo, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such as I had never seen for ugliness in all the land of Egypt; ²⁰ and the lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows. ²¹ "Yet when they had devoured them, it could not be detected that they had devoured them; for they were just as ugly as before. Then I awoke. ²² "I saw also in my dream, and behold, seven ears, full and good, came up on a single stalk; ²³ and lo, seven ears, withered, thin, *and* scorched by the east wind,

sprouted up after them; ²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed the seven good ears. Then I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me."

In this passage, Pharaoh revealed his dream to Joseph and his frustration with his magicians.

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dream

Genesis 41:25 Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one *and the same*; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁶ "The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one *and the same*. ²⁷ "And the seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind shall be seven years of famine. ²⁸ "It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁹ "Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; ³⁰ and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will ravage the land. ³¹ "So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it *will be* very severe. ³² "Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, *it means* that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about.

Joseph's interpretation is straight forward and clear; over the next fourteen years there would be seven years of extremely good bounty followed by seven years of famine such as had never been seen before.

Instruction to Pharaoh from Joseph

Genesis 41:33 "And now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ "Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth *of the produce* of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. ³⁵ "Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard *it*. ³⁶ "And let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish during the famine." ³⁷ Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants.

Joseph was brave enough to give Pharaoh instruction in how to prepare in the first seven years in order to survive the last seven years. Joseph's instructions were not part of the interpretation; nevertheless, Pharaoh liked Joseph's plan. A man would have to be put in charge of the project, one who knew what to do and how to do it.

Pharaoh's Choice of Joseph

Genesis 41:38 Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" ³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰ " You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you." ⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See I have set you over all the land of Egypt." ⁴² Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his

hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put the gold necklace around his neck. ⁴³ And he had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, " Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴ Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "*Though* I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

From trustee in the jailhouse to second in command of the kingdom, Joseph changed places. He had found favor in Potiphar's eyes. He had found favor in the jailer's eyes. Now he had found favor in Pharaoh's eyes. Pharaoh would not make a single decision in any matter over the next 14 years unless Joseph had weighed in on it and whatever Joseph said was also Pharaoh's answer!

Joseph's New Name and Wife

Genesis 41:45 **Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt.**

Zaphenoth-Paneah means "one who discovers hidden things" and it was Joseph's new Egyptian name. Joseph was also given a wife that day named Asenath. Her name means "peril" or "misfortune" in Egyptian. Why she has this name, we do not know. Her marriage to Joseph brought her nothing but great fortune. For sure, she married Joseph while still a follower of her father's faith - the worship of On or "the Sun."

Joseph's Age

Genesis 41:46 **Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷ And during the seven years of plenty the land brought forth abundantly. ⁴⁸ So he gathered all the food of *these* seven years which occurred in the land of Egypt, and placed the food in the cities; he placed in every city the food from its own surrounding fields. ⁴⁹ Thus Joseph stored up grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea, until he stopped measuring *it*, for it was beyond measure.**

At the age of 30, Joseph took charge of all of Egypt. For seven years he worked the plan he presented to Pharaoh and prepared Egypt for the coming disaster of seven years of famine. We can only wonder what Potiphar and the jailer thought of their former slave now.

We must pause in the commentary concerning Joseph to address the death of Isaac. The year was 2271 years after the creation of Adam when Joseph was made second in command of all of Egypt. It was also the year that Isaac died in Hebron and was buried by Jacob and Esau in the cave purchased by Abraham for Sarah's burial as well as all those who would follow. At that time, Jacob inherited all of Isaac's possessions including his servants.

Joseph's Sons

Genesis 41:50 **Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore to him. ⁵¹ And Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, "For," *he said*, "God has made me forget all my trouble**

and all my father's household." ⁵² And he named the second Ephraim, "For," *he said*, " God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

The priest, Potiphera, was not the same as the captain of the bodyguards, Potiphar. Within those first seven years of plenty, Joseph and Asenath had two boys, Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh means forgetfulness. Ephraim means fruitful. For all the pain and despair Joseph had suffered over the past 20 years, his wife, along with the birth of his two sons, brought him great relief. Joseph had been directed by the Lord to a place of great power, and he would remain in that place until his death. He had the authority to return to Canaan, but in Egypt, he could help the world. Moses was specific about the boys being born before the start of the famine. Genesis 47, occurred in the year of Jacob's death. At that time, Jacob spoke a blessing on Joseph's two sons; that blessing was at least 19 years after the beginning of the famine, after the birth of the sons.

Famine Occured

Genesis 41:53 When the seven years of plenty which had been in the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said, then there was famine in all the lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, you shall do." ⁵⁶ When the famine was *spread* over all the face of the earth, then Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians; and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ And *the people of* all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth.

As chapter 41 ends, the famine had begun and Pharaoh had more confidence in Joseph than he had ever had before. Joseph was in charge.