

January 2, 2022

“Joseph Shows Character”
Lesson 4 of Unit

Genesis 39:7-21

Intro

The teaching theme for this quarter is “God Established a Faithful People.” Last month we looked at how God began that establishing by studying three parts of Abraham’s life as God directs him.

Today’s study focuses on Joseph, the 11th son of Jacob, who was the grandson of Abraham. Jacob showed favoritism for Joseph when he gave him a multi-colored robe, an action which produced big time jealousy in Joseph’s brothers. Joseph doesn’t help his cause when he tells of two dreams he had, both which show his father and his brothers bowing down to him. They sell him into slavery, where he is taken to Egypt.

Joseph is 17 years old at this time, and is described as “well-built and handsome.” He’s an attractive guy, which along with his work ethic, his wisdom, and God’s blessing, leads him to be made the overseer of his master Potiphar’s household. Consider what kind of character Joseph is displaying during and after each of these negative experiences.

Read Genesis 39:7-21

1. vs. 7: Potiphar’s wife tempts Joseph, saying, “Come to bed with me!”

Joseph is only 17, but his good looks and other qualities make him attractive

He has gone through some hard times, and there are more in front of him

Joseph’s life demonstrates the quote, “Hard times don’t develop character, they reveal it.”

How Joseph deals with this temptation is a result of who he already is

2. vs. 8: Joseph’s answer in an unequivocal refusal

Note some of the supporting reasons he gives

My master doesn’t worry about anything with me in charge

He has entrusted me to care (rightly) for everything in his house

It is likely that Joseph is able to resist so strongly for one of 2 reasons

1. He has experienced this temptation before, either from Potiphar’s wife or someone else

2. He has a pre-developed plan for how to respond should this situation arise

Whichever (or another?) is the reason, Joseph is prepared to deal with this event

3. vs. 9: Joseph adds to his vs. 8 answer with three other points

His master has withheld nothing from him except for his wife

How could I do such a wicked thing?

This would be a sin against God.

Perhaps Joseph has learned from watching two of his brothers fail in this area

Reuben in Genesis 35

Judah in Genesis 38 (interestingly, just before this event in chapter 39!)

4. vs. 10: The temptation in vs. 7 is not the only one
This goes on “day after day”!
Potiphar’s wife shows determination to seduce Joseph
Joseph shows determination to act righteously
He refuses every offer she gives
He makes sure he’s not even with her in the house.
5. vs. 11: This verse shows the set-up of a trap
Joseph must go into the house to take care of something which is his responsibility
Potiphar’s wife surely knows what his duties are
The verse says, “None of the household servants was inside”
Were they there when he went in, but left under orders after he came in?
Were they already gone, and Joseph had no choice but to come in to meet his obligations?
This verse shows that even while trying to do everything rightly, one can still get put in a compromising situation
6. vs. 12: Potiphar’s wife tried to take advantage of this (orchestrated?) situation
She not only speaks to Joseph, but she holds on to his cloak
She is going to force him to stay there with her!
Joseph goes to Plan Z, the last thing he can do—he flees, leaving his cloak behind
This is Paul’s advice to the Corinthians in I Cor. 6:18
“Flee from sexual immorality”
Joseph does everything in his power to keep himself pure and righteous
7. vs. 13: Potiphar’s wife takes note of the fact that Joseph left his cloak
We can almost see the wheels turning in her head when she sees the cloak
She will use it to accuse Joseph, and she has the “proof”
8. vs. 14: She calls the household servants to her
Wherever they went, Potiphar’s wife seems to know where they are
She uses them as “witnesses” to Joseph’s crime
Her story is “He came here to sleep with me, but I screamed”
We know this is the opposite of the truth, but the servants don’t
She also points out that Joseph is “this Hebrew”—he’s “not one of us”
9. vs. 15: She finishes by saying Joseph left when he heard her scream
This story sounds plausible
The servants might also realize it’s in their best interest to go along with the story
10. vs. 16: Two things of note here
First, she keeps the cloak near her until her husband comes home
This is the crucial piece of “evidence”; it can’t be misplaced or lost
Second, Potiphar is described as “his (Joseph’s) master”
The emphasis is on Joseph’s relationship with Potiphar, not his wife’s

11. vs. 17: Potiphar's wife alters the story so that she puts the blame on others, not herself
Joseph is "that Hebrew slave"
He is "low class" and unworthy to be in her presence
She blames Potiphar, saying, "you brought (him to) us"
In other words, "This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't done something so stupid!"
She makes herself seem innocent and the victim
He "came to me to make sport of me"
These words suggest his attitude was mocking toward her
Joseph's reputation and character are completely smeared by what she says to Potiphar
12. vs. 18: The finish of her "story"
She screamed, he ran out and left his cloak
Here she is able to show the "evidence"
Joseph left his cloak behind
"Why would he do that if he wasn't guilty of something?"
13. vs. 19: This verse shows that Potiphar believed his wife's story
Did Joseph get a chance to tell his side? We aren't told.
Potiphar is angry, for possible one of two reasons (maybe more)
He has to punish a trusted and valued servant
This servant has acted very inappropriately with his wife
14. vs. 20: Joseph gets put into prison by Potiphar
This may sound bad, but based on other sources, it could have been worse
Egypt's laws call for "1000 blows" for an attempt at adultery
The punishment for rape has got to be more severe
The prison sentence sounds less harsh than it could have been
Perhaps Joseph got to tell Potiphar his side....
From Ps. 105:18, we learn that Joseph's feet and neck were shackled
Joseph describes his experience as "being put in a dungeon" in Gen. 40:15
The captain of the guard ("keeper of the prison" is mentioned in vs. 21
This person would have been the one who watched over political prisoners
15. vs. 21: This bleak story ends with a ray of hope
"But the Lord was with Joseph..."
This same phrase is used in Gen. 39:2 when Joseph is being sold to Potiphar
These verses emphasize that God is always present with His people
There may be difficulties, but God is always there

Application: Joseph's experience here in Genesis 39 shows several qualities that we Christians should be trying to copy. He lives righteously even when in unfair and unpleasant conditions. He is prepared for temptations when they come, and handles them in the best way he can. His relationship with God is never in doubt for him. He looks for God's presence in his life no matter what is going on.

Prayer: Father God, please help us as we apply the practices of Joseph into our own lives. Help us to live for you regardless of the circumstance. Help us to plan for temptations and trials in our lives, and do our best as we face and overcome or avoid them. Thank you for Your constant presence in our lives that gives us hope and strength. In Jesus' name, Amen.