

Union United Methodist Church
Fall FOCUS Bible School, 2022
FOCUS: Followers Of Christ Understanding Scripture
Study: Book of Genesis

Week 10: December 07, 2022

Joseph's Trials & Elevation

This Week's Study: **Genesis chapters 39 through 42**

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1. Recap & Reminder

- **Overview of Genesis**

The table below gives a breakdown of the chapters of Genesis, with themes that we shall be exploring in this study. We shall cover one theme per week. Our next week's study is Genesis 39 through 42 for the week.

From	To	Theme
1	4	Creation & The Fall, Original Sin
5	10	Adam through Noah: Judgement & New Covenant
11	14	Babel, A New Beginning in Abram
15	17	Abrahamic Covenants
18	20	Intercession & Judgement: Sodom & Gomorrah
21	25	Isaac - A Promise Fulfilled; Faithfulness Proven
26	30	Abrahamic Covenants: Second Generation - Jacob & Esau
30	33	Jacob's Family; Reconciliation with Esau
34	38	Abrahamic Covenants: Third Generation - Jacob's Children
39	42	Joseph's Trials & Elevation
43	47	Joseph & Migration to Egypt
48	50	Israel in Egypt, Death of Jacob

Please refer to previous weeks' outlines and messages for more background and to catch up. You can find these on our website: <https://unionumcnc.com>

2. Genesis 39 to 42 Overview

In Genesis 37, we saw Joseph sold by his jealous brothers as a slave to some Midianites, who in turn sold him as a slave in Egypt to Potiphar, an official in the household of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. These chapters examine what happens next.

- **Genesis 39: Joseph in Potiphar's House - Success, Temptation, Jail**
 - Joseph's story continues in Egypt.
 - Joseph is subjected to slavery and sold to Potiphar, who is a captain of the guards, but 39:2 -
"The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man..."
 - He rose quickly to a position of responsibility. He became his master's personal attendant and Potiphar put him in charge of his entire household.
 - Potiphar's wife is attracted to Joseph.
She repeatedly attempts to seduce him.
 - Joseph is a righteous man, and refuses her advances, so she frames him and has him thrown in jail.
 - Surely he knows how powerful she is. Is he concerned with violating his master's trust?
 - **39:9 - "How could I do this immense evil, and how could I sin against God?"**
 - **39:21 - "But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden."**
 - How is it that he is able to maintain himself in each situation?
 - Repeating theme throughout the story.
 - Some Key Points to Note:
 - **Joseph a slave in Potiphar's Houses "became a successful man" -v2**
 - How could this be?
 - "The Lord was with Joseph" - v2, 21, 23
 - It was due to "the blessing of the Lord" - v5
Potiphar's house was blessed for Joseph's sake
 - **Potiphar connected the dots ...**
 - He made Joseph "overseer in his house and over all that he had" (v5), and,
 - "he left all that he had in Joseph's charge" - v6.
 - Clearly Joseph gained managerial experience in Potiphar's house that served him very well later in life

▪ Joseph & Temptation

- Joseph wasn't looking for trouble - his good looks (v6) and success contributed to the temptation of being pursued by Potiphar's wife.
- Joseph resisted the temptation by:
 - Showing reverence for Potiphar - v8,9
 - Acknowledging how well Potiphar had treated him, and how abusing that trust constituted "great wickedness" - v8,9
- In resisting this temptation and paying the price, Joseph was bearing the fruit of righteousness. He was a righteous man, and lived accordingly.

"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." 1 Corinthians 10:13

• Genesis 40: Joseph in Jail

- Once again, in a time of despair and unjust treatment, we see that:
 - "the Lord was with Joseph" - 39:21
 - The blessing of God was on Joseph ...
the Lord "showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor" - 39:21
 - The effect was similar to what happened in the Potiphar's house:
 - The chief jailer gave him managerial charge of affairs and
 - whatever Joseph did, "the Lord made it prosper" - 39:21
 - Joseph was put in charge of other prisoners - notably the Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker - 40:1-4
- Some Lessons for us, disciples of Christ
 - The Lord promises never to leave us - Jesus said to his disciples: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" Matthew 28:20 NRSV

- We can count on God's steadfast love.
"... he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" Hebrews 13:5-6 NRSV

- **Joseph's Attitude in Tribulation**

In spite of his own dire circumstances, Joseph seemed to have seemed to have a great attitude of equanimity. When two prisoners in his charge, the Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker had troubling dreams, Joseph's attitude is revealed in the question he asked them the next morning:

"Why are your faces downcast today?" 40:7

- **Joseph brings God into the challenging situations**

On hearing that these fellow prisoners had dreams that they did not have interpretation to, Joseph brings God into the matter,

"Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me" - v8.

Here we see Joseph's

- confidence in God ("interpretations belong to God")
- confidence that God was with him ("please tell them to me")
- expectation of God's help ("please tell them to me")

His own dreams, when narrated to his family, had brought on such jealousy and hatred from his siblings. It is, thus, curious that Joseph was now talking about the interpretation of dreams and God's involvement in that.

- Could it be that in the intervening years he had been given special insight into the dreams he had had in his teens?
- Did he now possess a greater understanding of his destiny as a result?

Note the growing faith of Joseph. In his youth (at 17 years of age - Genesis 37), he could not interpret his dreams and simply blurted them out to

others, to his cost. Here Joseph has learnt to trust God even with the interpretation of dreams.

- Growing Confidence (faith) in God leads to boldness

Joseph was pretty bold and honest in giving the interpretation to the dreams. It must have taken a lot of courage for Joseph to give this starkly prophetic interpretation to the dreams, but he did not hold back from doing so

- The cupbearer's dream meant that he was going to be restored to office in Pharaoh's court - v12
- while the baker's dream meant he was going to literally lose his head v18-19.

- Good turn not returned ...

In giving a favorable interpretation to the cupbearer, he also asked for a favor:

"So he asked Pharaoh's officers, who were with him in custody in his master's house, "... remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place" v14, and pled his innocence v15

Joseph's prophetic interpretations turned out to be accurate, but the cupbearer forgot Joseph when he regained his freedom. Thus, Joseph languished in jail for two more years - Genesis 41:1

Does God ever forget the good we do for others? Does God reward us?

"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." Hebrews 13:16 NRSV

“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them”
Hebrews 6:10 NIV

- **Genesis 41: Joseph’s Elevation**

In Chapter 40, we saw that Joseph accurately interpreted the dreams of two out of favor officers from Pharaoh’s court who were in jail with him. One of them, the chief cupbearer was restored to his position in the court but forgot about Joseph once he regained favor with Pharaoh - 40:23. Joseph languished in jail for two more years 41:1. Joseph might have thought that the cupbearer, in gratitude, would act promptly to secure his release.

However, God’s providential wisdom seemed to be at work. When Joseph’s redemption eventually came its ramifications were profound and far reaching.

- **Pharaoh’s Dreams & Their Interpretation**

- Pharaoh himself, the ruler of Egypt, had two dreams that no one could interpret - not even his magicians could- 41:8
- It is at this point that the freed cupbearer remembered Joseph - he confessed his fault of forgetting Joseph - v9. More important than his confession, he testified that his restoration to the royal palace happened exactly as Joseph had predicted in interpretation to the dream he had in jail.
- Here was Joseph’s resume being presented with credibility to the king.

“As he interpreted to us, so it turned out;
I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged.” 41:13

Thus, Joseph was hurriedly brought out of jail, cleaned up, and prepared for an audience with the king - v14

- **Joseph was quick to give credit to God, and to express continuing confidence in God and dependence on God for the interpretation of dreams:**

"It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" v16

Joseph

- was humble
- confident in God's help
- put God on the spot for the desired answer.

God apparently honored Joseph's faith with revelation of prophetic significance and clarity, to the extent that Joseph could confidently say,

**"Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same;
God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do" 41:25 NRSV**

He even repeated this assertion with confidence,

**"It is as I told Pharaoh;
God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do" 14:28 NRSV**

- **Joseph Gives Interpretation & Proposes a Plan of Action**

In summary, the interpretation was that Egypt was going to experience seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine.

Remarkably, Joseph went further and proposed a workable plan of such import and wisdom that Pharaoh and his court were impressed

His proposal was for Pharaoh to select a man, "discerning and wise, and set him over the land" and other overseers who would set about storing up reserves from the produce of the land during the years of abundance so there would be enough for the country during the subsequent seven years of famine - 41:33-36

- **Pharaoh Elevates Joseph**

Clearly impressed, Pharaoh responded:

“Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you” 41:39 NRSV

Pharaoh proceeded to make Joseph his second in command over all of Egypt (41:40-44). Pharaoh also gave Joseph a wife, Asenath, with whom he had two sons (v45).

- **Joseph’s Meaningful Names for His Sons**

The names he gave his sons are full of meaning,

- Manasseh, “For God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house,” and
- Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes” 41:51-52 NRSV

- **Joseph Starts Executing the Plan**

The prophetic interpretation of the dreams of Pharaoh that Joseph had given was coming true and Chapter 41 ends with the start of the predicted famine.

Joseph started and continued to execute the proposal he gave Pharaoh and by the time the famine started there were sufficient reserves ready to serve the people - Genesis 41:53-56

All Pharaoh had to say to the people when they cried to him for bread was, “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do” - 41:55.

The famine was not confined to Egypt, for “all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world” (41:57)

- **Genesis 42: Joseph Reconnected with His Brothers in Egypt**

In this chapter, we see Joseph's brothers come back into his life. The drought prophesied by Joseph reached Canaan. When the draught was felt in Canaan, Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain v1-5. Fearful that he might lose Benjamin in addition to Joseph, he did not let Benjamin go with them v4.

- **Joseph's first encounter with his brothers.**

- **Joseph's self-control on seeing his brothers**

Joseph's self-control in not immediately revealing his identity, on seeing his brothers come and bow before him, is striking v6-8.

The last time they saw him he was a powerless seventeen-year-old whom they hated, abused, and sold into slavery. At least twenty years had elapsed since, given he was thirty when he assumed power and the seven years of abundance had come and gone. He immediately recognized them, but they didn't recognize him - v8.

- **On seeing them bow before him, Joseph remembered his dreams about them:**

"Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them." 42:8-9 NRSV

He must have felt that God had brought all his dreams to fulfilment.

- **Joseph tested his brothers**, accusing them of being spies, and using their time in captivity to gain information about his father and brother Benjamin - 42:7, 12-17

What were Joseph's motives in this test?

- **information gathering, clearly**
- **he might also have wanted to test whether they had become more honest men and repented of the treatment they meted out**

to him. Thus, when he heard them blaming their treatment of Joseph for what had just befallen them, he turned away and wept v21-24

- he does not appear to have been looking for revenge as he didn't harm them.
- he also seemed to strongly desire to see his brother Benjamin, thus the condition of their release being that Simeon was kept in jail in Egypt while they were sent back to fetch Benjamin v19, 24-25

- **God's Providence at work**

Through this story, the providential work of God is evident. Through events unknown to Jacob and his sons, other than Joseph, God was bringing Jacob's family back together. God's purposes were also being fulfilled in meeting the needs of the world in a famine through what God had done in elevating Joseph to a position of power.

3. Daily Study Schedule & Questions

- **Day 1: Genesis 39: Joseph in Potiphar's House - Success, Temptation, Jail**

As you read and study the verses, here are some suggestions of themes to reflect on:

- Joseph's prosperity and success in Potiphar's house though a slave
- Can God elevate us and grant us success when we are in dire straits that seem to persist for a long time?
- The reasons for Joseph's success
- The training Joseph received in Potiphar's household
- The reasons why Joseph attracted the attentions of Potiphar's wife
- Joseph's reasons for refusing the advances of Potiphar's wife
- Joseph's reactions (or no reactions) on being falsely accused and imprisoned
- How Joseph's time as a slave in Potiphar's household prepared him for his future calling.

- What lessons do you learn from this chapter that are particularly applicable to your own life, and life of faith in God?
- **Day 2: Genesis 40: Joseph in Jail**
Suggested reflection themes:
 - Joseph's attitude while in jail
 - How God protected and elevated Joseph even in jail
 - Do we always have to get out of every difficulty, or can God work with us even in the time of difficulty to bless others?
 - Joseph's willingness to use his gifts to help those in need
 - Joseph's growing confidence in God and the abilities God had blessed him with.
 - Does Joseph seem to have gained more wisdom and insight into the revelations of God through dreams at time?
 - What does Joseph's apparent growing confidence in God teach us about the spiritual walk with God and growth in Christ in our own lives?
- **Day 3: Genesis 41: Joseph's Elevation**
Suggested reflection themes:
 - How God used the earlier help Joseph gave the Pharaoh's cupbearer to eventually bless Joseph
 - Joseph's attitude when he was summoned to appear before the king
 - Joseph giving credit to God for his ability to interpret dreams
 - Joseph's growing confidence and trust in God holding him up, and he did not appear fazed by the grandeur of the king and his court
 - Joseph's boldness in expressing the revelation and wisdom God must have clearly given him to accurately interpret the Pharaoh's dream
 - Can God give us such wisdom and revelation today?
Homework: Read and meditate on Paul's prayer for the Christians in the church at Ephesus 1:15-20
 - Joseph's courage in stepping up to a place of authority and leadership when he was elevated.
 - The names Joseph gave his sons, and the meanings of the names

- Day 4 : **Genesis 42: Joseph Reconnected with His Brothers in Egypt**

Suggested reflection themes

- Joseph's self-control on meeting his brothers after over twenty years, the same brothers who had sold him into slavery
- Joseph's possible reasons for deciding to test his brothers
- Was Joseph motivated by revenge?
- Why did Joseph weep when he overheard his brothers blaming each other for selling him into slavery?
- Do you think Joseph was angry or upset with his brothers?