

Genesis
Chapter Thirty-Nine

- Joseph and Potiphar's Wife
 - Joseph Imprisoned

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife Verses 1-18

Verse 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.”

The name Potiphar means “*devoted to the sun*”. It was a name connected with the Egyptian idolatrous religious system. Multiple Egyptian gods were everywhere. In contrast the LORD’s personal covenant name, Yahweh, is used eight times in this chapter, once in verse 2, twice in verse 3, twice in verse 5, once in verse 21, twice in verse 23.

It is interesting that we are told Potiphar was an “*officer of the king’s court*” because a common practice in the Egyptian culture was to castrate those highest in the royal courts making them eunuchs. This was done to ensure they would be wholly devoted to their king and be perceived to be no threat to the powers that be, since they could not reproduce or have sons who could assert eventually authority. This was a common practice, but we do not know if Potiphar was a eunuch. In modern day, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, India and Burma all have long histories of eunuchs in royal courts.

Potiphar was the “*captain of the bodyguard*”; He was the chief of police, the head of Pharaoh’s personal security. This made him a highly trusted official in the Egyptian government. Joseph, being a slave was sold once again, this time to Potiphar.

Verses 2-6

“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 that the Lord made all that he did 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 put him in charge of all that he owned. 5 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; so the Lord’s blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. 6 So he left Joseph in charge of everything that he owned; 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.”

From the human perspective it may seem as if God was not with Joseph. His situation is not anything like how he lived in his father’s house. Despite his circumstances, Joseph remained faithful to God and in doing so his trust in God was seen by Potiphar. The captain saw how this slave had God’s favor on him and because of this Divine favor, Potiphar made Joseph the overseer of his own house. If God was blessing this slave, which He was, then this Egyptian leader wanted some of God’s blessing for himself. Seeing how God continued to bless whatever Joseph put his hand to, Potiphar responded by giving Joseph more say in the matters of his house. If nothing else Joseph was successful in revealing to Potiphar that God was real.

Joseph’s increase in position and authority did not happen overnight; it took eleven years:

- Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery (37:2).
- He was 30 when Pharaoh promoted him (41:4-6).
- Joseph was in prison for two years before his promotion (41:1).

Which adds up to Joseph being in Potiphar's house for 11 years. We are told "*Joseph was handsome*". In Scripture, only two other men are called beautiful, David (1 Samuel 16:12), and Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25). Moses was called a beautiful child (Exodus 2:2).

Verses 7-12

"7 And it came about after these events that his master's wife had her eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Sleep with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put me in charge of all that he owns. 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 Though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. 11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the people of the household was there inside. 12 So she grabbed him by his garment, saying, "Sleep with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and fled and went outside."

Mrs. Potiphar was a skilled liar. Her three-word proposition is countered with Joseph's 63-word response. Joseph, now a young man in his twenties, showed his faithfulness towards God and to Potiphar by resisting this temptation for perhaps over a decade. Joseph remembered his responsibilities and how much he had to lose. He called the situation wicked. Had he given in he probably would not have "been caught", but he knew he would have been caught by God. He refused to sin against the trust given to him by God. He was faithful in all his relationships.

Potiphar's wife knew Joseph avoided her, so she made a deliberate plan to trap him. She arranged that none of the men of the house would be inside. Joseph did what we are all supposed to do when faced with this kind of situation; he fled (2 Timothy 2:22). As he left, his outer garment was stripped off.

Proverbs 20:20-29

"My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

²¹ Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck. ²² When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you.

²³ For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life, ²⁴ **keeping you from your neighbor's wife, from the smooth talk of a wayward woman.**

²⁵ **Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes.** ²⁶ For a prostitute can be had for a loaf of bread, but another man's wife preys on your very life. ²⁷ Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?

²⁸ Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? ²⁹ So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished."

Verses 13-18

"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 fun of us; he came in to me to sleep with me, and I screamed. 15 When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, 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 fun of me; 18 but when I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside.”

Mrs. Potiphar’s lies worked. The lustful, unbelieving world does not respect the desire for holiness and faithfulness. Potiphar’s wife knew her accusation would mean a death sentence for Joseph, so she didn’t say his name, but it was obvious who she was accusing. Had Potiphar believed his wife, he certainly would have put Joseph to death. The injustice is Joseph suffered for someone else’s sin.

Joseph Imprisoned Verses 19-23

Verses 19-20

“¹⁹ Now when his master heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him, saying, “This is what your slave did to me,” his anger burned. ²⁰ So Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; and he was there in the prison.”

Joseph, from privilege in his father’s house... to the pit his brothers threw him into... to the slave market... to managing Potiphar’s house... to Pharaoh’s prison.

Verses 21-23

“²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him and gave him favor in the sight of the warden of the prison. ²² And the warden of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*. ²³ The warden of the prison did not supervise anything under Joseph’s authority, because the LORD was with him; and the LORD made whatever he did prosper.”

God blessed Joseph in the pit, so there is no surprise that He blessed Joseph in prison. None of these terrible circumstances changed God’s plan for Joseph’s life. God sharpened the administrative skills Joseph would need to one day save his family and the Hebrew nation.

Genesis

Chapter Forty

- Joseph Interprets Dreams

Joseph Interprets Dreams Verses 1-23

Verses 1-4

“Then it came about after these things, that 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 prison, 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.”

Joseph is now 28 years old; we know this because in Genesis 47:46 we are told he is thirty years old, which is two years from here. The butler, or cupbearer, was in charge of Pharaoh's wine and the baker was in charge of Pharaoh's food. Both had to be men of integrity. They were imprisoned because they “*offended their lord, the king of Egypt*” which means there was probably a plot to murder the Pharaoh, possibly poisoning, and these two were suspects. They were probably there on suspicion of murder, but they were really there because God wanted them to meet Joseph. This favorable treatment of Joseph by the “*captain of the bodyguard*” shows that Potiphar did not really believe the accusations his wife made against Joseph, because Potiphar himself was the captain of the guard.

Verses 5-8

“⁵ Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, 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 saw them, behold, they were dejected. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, “Why are your faces so sad today?” ⁸ And they said to him, “We have had a dream, and there is no one to interpret it.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do interpretations not belong to God? Tell *it* to me, please.”

Joseph saw these men were disturbed by their dreams and approached each dream with a desire to help their troubled souls. If you remember, Joseph had experience with dreams. His two dreams about his future greatness antagonized his family (37:5-11). He was mocked as “the dreamer” (37:19-20). Joseph was confident that God could and would interpret the dreams.

The ancient Egyptians put great emphasis in dreams because they believed their dreams put them in contact with the other world. As a believer, one must recognize that not every dream is a revelation from God. But interestingly, in Scripture, God spoke to unbelievers or pagans in dreams almost twice as many times as He spoke to His people in dreams.

- God spoke to the pagan ruler Abimelech in a dream (Genesis 20:3)
- God spoke to Jacob in dreams (Genesis 28:12, 31:11)
- God spoke to Laban in a dream (Genesis 31:24)
- God spoke to the Midianite in a dream (Judges 7:13)
- God spoke to Solomon in a dream (1 Kings 3:5)
- God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream (Daniel 2:1)
- God spoke to Daniel in a dream (Daniel 7:1)

- God spoke to Joseph in dreams (Matthew 1:20, 2:13, 2:22)
- God spoke to Pilate's wife in a dream (Matthew 27:19)

Scripture also warns that false prophets might use dreams to validate their message (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Jeremiah 23:25-28).

Verses 9-15

“9 So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, saying 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 as in your former practice when you were his cupbearer. 14 Only keep me in mind when it goes well for you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. 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.”

For the cupbearer, God used pictures that made sense to the butler, such as vines and grapes. The butler saw himself serve the Pharaoh again, restored to his former position. The three branches representing three days which meant Joseph’s interpretation of this dream would be proved right or wrong within three days. In only three days, everyone knew if Joseph was correct or not. Hoping for favor, Joseph asked the cupbearer to keep him in mind, meaning when you are with the Pharaoh once again, put in a good word for me

Verses 16-19

“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 kinds 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 wooden post, and the birds will eat your flesh off you.”

Hearing the encouraging interpretation of the cupbearer’s dream, the baker also shared his dream with Joseph. The baker’s encouragement was short lived. Joseph was just as faithful to deliver the message of judgment to the baker as he was to deliver the message of restoration to the butler. This is a sign of a godly messenger, one who does not fail to bring the whole message of God, the good and the troubling.

Joseph told the baker he was going to die a gruesome death and *“the birds will eat your flesh off you.”* Whatever crimes these two were accused of, the butler was innocent but the baker was guilty.

Verses 20-23

“²⁰ So it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he held 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 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.”

It was a common practice for the Pharaoh to grant amnesty on his birthday; it was much more common to grant amnesty on the anniversary of his accession to the throne, which was considered the day a god was born. On the third day Joseph was proved right and was found to be a true messenger of God. The Third Day is a Day of Significance, a Day of Restoration, a Day of Rescue.

- Why was Jesus in the Tomb 3 days?
- Why not a week? Why not an hour? Why 3 days

The third day significance in Scripture

1. Genesis 1:10, 12 Twice on the 3rd day God said “*it was good*”.
2. Genesis 22:4 Abraham arrived at Mt Moriah – Isaac rescued
3. Genesis 40:1-23 Joseph interprets dreams
4. Exodus 19:10 The day the Lord came down on Mt Sinai
5. Leviticus 7:17-18 Sacrifices left until 3rd day could no longer be eaten
6. Leviticus 19:6-7 Sacrifices were to be consumed by flames
7. Joshua 1:11,3:2 After 3 days - Israelites cross the Jordan
8. Judges 20:30 The third day and the 3rd battle Benjamites defeated
9. 2 Kings 20:5 King Hezekiah healed
10. Ezra 6:15 Building of temple completed- 3rd day of the month
John 2:19-21 – “destroy this temple and I will raise it again in 3 days”
11. Esther 5:1 Esther calls for 3 day fast
12. Hosea 6:1-2 Rescued from death
13. Jonah 2:1-9 In the belly of the fish

Matthew 12:38-40, Matthew 16:21

- In the Old Testament the 3rd day is the moment when an event attains its climax.
- It is repeatedly the day when a situation is **completed** or **fulfilled**.
- In the Jewish culture the 3rd day is associated with **special divine activity**

Jesus in the tomb – on the 3rd Day “He Is Risen!”