

CAPITOL STUDIES

FEBRUARY 1, 2023 • WEEK 4



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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Verse of the Week

Genesis 39:2

The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

From Steward to Prisoner Part I: Stewardship as a Slave



ONCE WE MOVE FORWARD TO GENESIS 39, the scene changes entirely out of Hebron and the surrounding area and moves to Egypt. Joseph will return only once in the next 93 years to the land of his fathers (to bury Jacob). Joseph, as God's man, enters Egypt bound but will rise to glory. The children of Israel (Jacob), God's people, will enter in glory but become bound.

Envision Joseph, deprived of the position and privileges of home, having been sold once to the Midianites, now waiting to be purchased again. Having been discarded as of little worth in his brothers' eyes, he now waits for someone to esteem him of some value. The magnitude of the change must have been overwhelming for Joseph. From the country town of Hebron where the cattle must have enormously outnumbered the people (22 years later, only 70 make the journey from Hebron to Egypt), he is thrust into a totally foreign environment in a role that is totally foreign to him. Compounding Joseph's situation is his total inability to make choices that might immediately improve the overwhelmingly discouraging circumstances. He had no control over his external circumstances, but he could adjust his internal disposition.

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INTRODUCTION

Joseph models an exemplary response under such perplexing circumstances. What pattern of character does he manifest that enables him not only to endure the difficulties of slavery but to rise above it?

I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD: GOD IS WORKING ALL THINGS FOR HIS GLORY AND JOSEPH'S GOOD

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.¹

Joseph is passed from his brothers to the Ishmaelites to the hand of Potiphar. On the surface, the arrangements are all economic and selfish.

Genesis 39:2

The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

God Placed Joseph Under the *Person* He Wanted: Potiphar

Probably Potiphar's position was that of a prestigious official of the royal court whose primary responsibility would have been to execute the sentences of rewards and judgments handed down by the Pharaoh. In addition, he probably aided in the protection of the Pharaoh and provided for his security. Others could have purchased Joseph, but God appointed that it should be a high-ranking court official who was willing to put confidence in Joseph almost immediately.

God Placed Joseph in the *Place* He Wanted: Potiphar's House

Of all the places where Potiphar could have had Joseph serve, Potiphar chose him to serve in *his* house. Assigning Joseph to a position where Joseph's labors and their success were under Potiphar's eye would have required a great deal of trust.

The temptation to distrust God grows when the circumstance in which we find ourselves through obedience is contrary to our dreams or even contrary to God's past dealings with us. God asks of us in times like these that we would remember His words about Himself and that we would let His words shape our view of Him, rather than letting our circumstances shape our view of Him. It is in the difficulties of the circumstances that God delights to make Himself known to His people. He delights to prove to His people that He has not forgotten His words. Yet, at the same time God delights to give His people opportunities to choose to remember His words. We must not think that the promise of crowns and of rivers of pleasures is made void because at present we must endure "the cross." Many promises have seemed to be forgotten by God and yet have been exactly fulfilled in their season.²



II. THE BLESSING OF GOD THROUGH HIS PRESENCE

Genesis 39:3

Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.

God chooses this time to lovingly bestow abundant blessings on Joseph and his labors. In the darkness of the day and the distress of the duty, God timed His blessings to be a balm to Joseph's soul.

The Lord's Presence is Continual: He is Always with His Child

The Lord's presence is with Joseph in a time of human desertion. Rejected by his brothers and discarded by the Midianites, Joseph recognizes that God is still tending to him and has not forgotten him. Though Joseph is laboring at lowly tasks in Potiphar's house, he is gripped with the assurance that God is present with him.

The Lord's presence is with Joseph at a time when Joseph needs assurance that his lot is not accidental or detrimental. The Lord attaches Himself to Joseph deliberately. Five times "the LORD" appears in verses 2, 3, and 5. Previously, we have seen Him only providentially working behind the scenes. Now, He seems to appear on the stage with Joseph. When He does so, Joseph's character fades to the background.

His Presence is Not Limited to Geographical Boundaries

It was sometimes said among the Hebrews that Jehovah's presence was confined to the land of Canaan, to the streams and hills and groves of the country of their birth, while He left other territories to be ruled by other gods, so that when any of His people crossed the border they were beyond His reach and care. This was a popular notion which the writers of Genesis nowhere countenance. They say that the Lord was with Jacob in Syria (Gen. 30:27) and with Joseph in Egypt, and that in these lands the same God directed the minds of such men as Laban (Gen. 31:24) and Pharaoh (Gen. 41:28).³

His Presence is Not Confined to Where His People Might Imagine He Should Be

Often in times of distress and disappointment, the people of God conclude that He has deserted them; that somehow their circumstances and God's presence are not compatible. Yet the exact opposite is true. When God arranges circumstances through our obedience, He pledges His presence *wherever* the obedience leads.⁴

While it is true that the Lord was with Joseph, it might just as well be said that *Joseph was with the Lord*. It is not being aware of Jehovah's presence that brings victory but in letting His presence determine one's outlook and actions. Joseph practices this internally, but he evidences his faith in God outwardly. Without a verbal testimony, Potiphar could not know to Whom to attribute Joseph's success and his own prospering.⁵





2 Chronicles 15:2

The Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake him, He will forsake you.

Joseph's work is not emphasized, though it seems clear that Joseph is a faithful and diligent steward. Prosperity is not always a sign of God's special favor, yet prosperity undoubtedly comes from God. It is a fruit of God's love to His own people when He sees that prosperity is better for them than adversity. Joseph, rightly believing that he is still in Jehovah's care, determines to accept the situation and adjust himself to his environment. Therefore, he willingly does everything that is required of him to the best of his ability; so that he soon secures the confidence of his master, who finds it to be in his best interest to entrust everything in his establishment to Joseph's care.⁶

III. THE BLESSING OF GOD THROUGH PROSPERITY

Genesis 39:2a

The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man....

The Lord blessed Potiphar for taking care of Joseph as he had blessed Laban for taking care of Jacob (cf. Genesis 30:27). The righteousness and success of Joseph were so obvious that "his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (Gen. 39:3). It was only a daily round of common tasks that he had to fulfill. But the presence of a man with an uncommon spirit lifts every situation from the realm of the common. The Lord's presence makes the difference in the man himself.⁷

Genesis 39:4-5

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. ⁵It 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.

Joseph is promoted from an ordinary servant to Potiphar's personal assistant. Gradually, the realization dawned on Potiphar that he had in his possession a man who might not only help him to become prosperous, but that this man might even be more skilled than Potiphar.

Genesis 39:6

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.

Joseph is promoted to steward of all Potiphar's house. Joseph serves man well, because he is conscious of God's presence and adjusts himself and his behavior accordingly. Potiphar basically put everything he owned under Joseph's hand. The word "left" here means "to abandon." The expression "except the food which he ate" has been explained by two possibilities. One is the possibility of caste or culture. We learn later that it is an abomination for the Egyptians to eat with Hebrews (Gen. 43:32).



A second explanation involves religious practices. Egyptians, like the later Corinthians, often involved idolatrous practices in the preparation of their foods. Because of Joseph’s testimony for Jehovah, Potiphar may have exempted Joseph from this responsibility.⁸

CONCLUSION

Thinking back to last week’s picture of the eight, winged virtues depicted on the rotunda ceiling, let’s look at the **Faith virtue** and compare it to the **Just virtue** listed in our theme verse, Philippians 4:8. It was Joseph’s faith in God that made him righteous or just in God’s eyes. It was his faith that made him do all that he did in a just or right manner. It was his faith that governed what he thought. God says what we think about is important.



Before we can think just thoughts, we must be just or righteous. But Romans 3:10 says, “There is none righteous, not even one.” Since God is perfectly holy, He cannot allow sin in His holy heaven. **Our only hope of getting there is through God’s Son Jesus.** 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that “[God] made [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” When Jesus died, he took our sin and its punishment, so that we could have His righteousness. **But the choice is ours.**

Romans 10:9-10 says, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” If you believe that Jesus died for you and have come to Him as Lord, confessing your sin, you are covered in the righteousness of Jesus. When God looks at you, He does not see your sin, He sees Jesus’ righteousness. He welcomes you as a part of His heavenly family.

As God’s child, you can put away wrong, sinful thinking and think just, righteous thoughts. Because of your faith in Jesus, He gives you the power to do what is right and good, just as He did for Joseph, and He will give you peace in the process. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, “We are destroying speculations (imagination) and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” Isaiah 26:3 says, “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (NKJV).

“The teaching of Christ does not simply lead to salvation, but it provides a framework.... Our thinking [must be] shaped by the Spirit through the Word of God, and that instruction has direct bearing on how we think about every facet of life. In other words, Christians should see every aspect of life, economics, politics, education, personal relationships from a Christian point of view. Such a perspective is called a Christian worldview.”⁹



Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren,
whatever is **true**,
whatever is **honorable**,
whatever is **right**,
whatever is **pure**,
whatever is **lovely**,
whatever is of
good repute,
if there is any
excellence
and if anything is
worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.

Have you been made righteous through Jesus? If you are God's child, are you striving to view every facet of your life through the Word of God? Can others tell you are a follower of Jesus? Determine to work in a way that reflects well on your God. Attribute your success in employment to Him. Accept additional positions of responsibility as a greater opportunity to bring greater credit to God.



Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.
2. George Lawson, *Life of Joseph*, Banner of Truth, 1972, p. 27.
3. James Strahan, *Hebrew Ideals in Genesis*, Kregel, 1915, p. 284.
4. *Ibid*, pp. 284-85.
5. Thomas Kirk, *Life of Joseph*, Andrew Eliot Publisher, 1900, p. 85.
6. William Taylor, *Joseph: Prime Minister*, Palala Press, 2016, p. 44.
7. Strahan, pp. 285-286.
8. *Ibid*, p. 286.
9. Steve Viars, February 24, 1996, Philippians 4:8, [https://www.faithlafayette.org/resources/lessons/philippians 48 thinking things that are just](https://www.faithlafayette.org/resources/lessons/philippians%2048%20thinking%20things%20that%20are%20just)

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WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

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First Session

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STAFF

12:00 P.M. Wednesdays
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