

# GENESIS 39:1-23

## FROM THE PALACE TO THE PRISON

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Most everyone likes a “rags to riches story.” During the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. An author by the name of Horatio Alger wrote over 100 books. According to conservative estimates, 30 million copies of his books were sold. What was it that made these books sell? Though Alger was compared to Charles Dickens, he was nowhere near the writer that Dickens was. Alger’s characters were all the same as were the plots of all his books. So what was it that made him such a successful writer? The answer is that all his stories were about the American Dream. They were all rags to riches stories. They inspired people. Alger believed that no matter the station into which you were born, with hard work and determination, you could improve that station and be successful. This is what makes Joseph’s story so attractive, but there is a great difference between the success of Joseph and those of Alger’s novels. The characters of Alger’s novels made their way by sheer hard work and determination. Joseph, as we will see had a divine hand working in his favor. And as Christians, we need to take note of that.

Today we take back up with the narrative of Joseph and his story. Whereas we all like a “rags to riches story”, the story of Joseph takes several twists, turns, ups and downs. His life is a roller coaster of sorts. When we read or see things in the context of just a few pages as opposed to several years, we tend to see it in a sort of vacuum or a microcosm. Things are happening on paper rather quickly, whereas in real life events are spaced out over several years. We get to see several years of Joseph’s life in just a few chapters.

The closer you are to an event the more focused you are on that event. Things tend to seem bigger than they are from a more distant

perspective. Truth is absolute - trouble is relative to us. Nobody's problems are as big as ours.

Well today we get to see that God is in control of everything even when it doesn't seem like He is. Today we will take in a good portion of Joseph's early life. When you see what is happening from the outside it is hard to believe that God is showing him favor, but in actuality he is always in God's hands. Joseph has to know this because we never see or hear him complain. So let's look at Joseph as he goes from the palace to the prison.

**Gen 39:1** *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.*

**Gen 39:2** *The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.*

**Gen 39:3** *And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand.*

**Gen 39:4** *So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.*

**Gen 39:5** *So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field.*

**Gen 39:6** *Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.*

If we were writing our own life script, I'm sure none of us would write it this way. Joseph was put in a dry well or a cistern and then sold to Arab traders as they journeyed to Egypt to sell their goods. Joseph became one of the items they had for sale.

Once he is in the Egyptian slave markets he is bought by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. Potiphar means, "devoted to the Sun." This was the local deity of the Nile Delta placing Potiphar not far from the place the Israelites would eventually inhabit. Potiphar noticed that Joseph was good at doing whatever he was asked to do. Apparently he was good at administrative duties. He was so good that Potiphar put him over everything in his house. Potiphar took his hands off the household responsibilities showing that he totally trusted Joseph with all his wealth and finances, even his family.

Verse 2 says that **the Lord was with Joseph**. That is a blanket statement. How many of us would have said that had we been looking on at the life of Joseph? And how many of us would have believed that had we been in Joseph's shoes?

**How could the Lord be with Joseph when he was sold into slavery? Slavery is such an evil thing. How could God have been with Joseph in the midst of such an evil thing? How could God have even allowed him to be put there?**

These are legitimate questions. Being able to read about Joseph in just a few pages helps us because we can quickly get to the end of the story. Therefore we can see the ending. **However, when it comes to our lives or the lives of those around us we can't see the end of the story.** So the horrid situations in which we find ourselves, or those circumstances in which others find themselves seem to overwhelm us and/or them. **But would we be overwhelmed if we counted on God already knowing the end of the matter?** I think not.

*Isa 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'*

Another interesting thing we see is that Potiphar acknowledged that God was with Joseph. This means that at some point, Joseph had ascribed his

success to his God. **Joseph ministered to Potiphar! His faith wasn't just a private thing! His faith was public!** Joseph was surely gifted, and that in itself was a source of blessing, but there was and is another hand behind the curtain.

**As Christians we need to take every opportunity to point others to Jesus!** All of our successes should be credited to Him. Even if you feel you aren't equipped to answer the questions of the skeptic, you are certainly equipped to give God the praise for all you have and all things in which you are gifted. That is evangelism at its most basic point. Potiphar saw that if God blessed Joseph, then it was advantageous for him to also bless Joseph.

What emerges from this is a Christian approach to success. Though Joseph sought God first in all he did, he also worked hard to further the interests of his master. In other words, he worked hard and was diligent in seeking his master's success. Joseph could have played dumb as many of the other slaves most likely did. He was at a distinct disadvantage. He didn't know the language, the customs, their science or medicine. He was a shepherd and that was all he knew. This tells us that he studied and learned all he could in order to better himself. It tells us that he was "practical" as well as spiritual. **This allowed him to be favored by God and man!**

In this modern day and age I believe we tend to be more carnal than even some of the pagans in times past. Even though they were pagans they still attributed success and failure to spiritual manifestations. We tend to think only in the natural realm. **So much is possible in this day and time that even Christians leave God out of the equation and attribute success or failure to natural phenomena only.**

**There is no such thing as a self-made man.** God is working quietly behind the scenes putting people in the right place at the right time. Though Joseph and his skills were a blessing, God was blessing Potiphar over and above what Joseph was able to do. We need to think more

along these lines. **We need to assess our successes and failures more carefully and thank God for our success as well as thank Him for our chastening.** The Bible says that God chastens those whom He loves.

*Gen 39:7 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."*

*Gen 39:8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand."*

*Gen 39:9 There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"*

The last portion of verse 6 stated that Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. Yes, it is a curse some of us have to bear, but look at how he handled it.

Potiphar's wife lusted after Joseph. She approached him and offered herself to him. He retorted with the responsibility that he had been given. And why had he been given that responsibility? One reason was that he could be trusted. He stated that only one thing had been kept from him and that was Potiphar's wife.

**It is easy to think that it would be easy to get along in this world if we had access to all but one thing. The forbidden fruit often looks the sweetest. Some times it isn't possible to serve/ please both God AND man.**

Adam and Eve had access to all but one thing and that was what got them in trouble. Who was it that brought that forbidden thing to the forefront of their lives? It was Satan. You can bet that it is Satan working here through the wife of Potiphar to bring down this man of God. **Joseph won the first battle but will he win the war?**

We should also see that for Joseph, **to be with Potiphar's wife was not just a sin against Potiphar, it was really a sin against God.** Now you can see the spiritual perspective with which Joseph looks at his life.

There may have been some men that would have resisted because they were friends with Potiphar, but sinning against God would never have crossed their minds. They don't see the real danger.

**Gen 39:10** *So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.*

**Gen 39:11** *But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside,*

**Gen 39:12** *that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.*

**Gen 39:13** *And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside,*

**Gen 39:14** *that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.*

**Gen 39:15** *And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside."*

**Gen 39:16** *So she kept his garment with her until his master came home.*

**Gen 39:17** *Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me;*

**Gen 39:18** *so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."*

Verse 10 says **she spoke to him day by day**. This must have been hard on Joseph. Every day she tempted him. Then one day they were in the house together, alone. She grabbed him and he fled leaving his coat in her hands. She then cried rape and there were no witnesses.

It isn't prudent for people to be in such situations. I believe it was Billy Graham that said **you avoid these traps by keeping your hands off the women, the money and the glory.**

At any rate, Joseph has now been accused of attempted rape and now we will see what happens when his master comes home. At the very least we can see that **things aren't always what they seem.**

*Gen 39:19 So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused.*

*Gen 39:20 Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison.*

*Gen 39:21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

*Gen 39:22 And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing.*

*Gen 39:23 The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.*

So Potiphar throws Joseph into prison when he is told what supposedly happened.

**Joseph now has the opportunity to throw himself a pity party.** We don't read of that however.

What we do read is that it wasn't long before Joseph was running the jail! Once again we see that the Lord was with Joseph and everything that could have been entrusted to Joseph was in fact entrusted to him.

**[Psa 105:17](#) He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant:**

**[Psa 105:18](#) *Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron:*  
**[Psa 105:19](#) *Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD*  
*tried him.*****

**The gift of the gifted will make room for itself.** Eventually there will be an environment where the gift of the gifted will be able to thrive. If God has his hand on you no one can hold you back. His will, will be accomplished.

**But how would we have seen Joseph's circumstances? Would we have flown off the handle and given up on God? Would we have gotten mad at God and curled up in a ball? Would we have automatically thought Joseph to be guilty? Would we have abandoned him though he was someone with whom we had gone to church?**

**What if we had been in Joseph's shoes?** First of all men, would we have been able to fend off the temptations of Potiphar's wife? Fending her off once is one thing, but how would we do if as she did with Joseph, she continued day after day? **Would we have continued to have faith in a God that allowed us to be sold into slavery and then apparently pull the rug out from under us just when it appeared that things had turned around for us?**

Once again, since we see these things on paper in a few pages and since it is happening to someone else they don't seem quite as bad. However, when they are happening to us they seem to be the end of the world.

Well, I'm here today to tell you that **the same God that was with Joseph through thick and thin is with you if you are His child.** And He will deliver you if you are walking in His will and don't give up on what He has called you to do.

**So why do good, even when it doesn't seem to be expedient?**



**Mat 5:10** *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**Mat 5:11** *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*

**Mat 5:12** *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

(Blessed literally means, "happy." No quid pro quo.)

**Remember, we have been made free because a righteous man was unjustly accused, convicted and executed, just as a lamb goes to the slaughter.**

And if you are sitting in a dry well and don't know what to expect next, then I suggest that you cry out to God and let Him know that whatever comes your way, you are committed to doing knowing that in just a few pages you will come out of it one way or the other. And if you are obedient to His will you will have been successful and you will hear **"Well done my good and faithful servant."**