

In Captain Potiphar's House

Extra: What are your thoughts about the statement "All sin is against God"?

Level 5 lesson 25

Key Verse:
"Against You, and You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight."
 Psalm 51:4

Read: Genesis 39
Further Reading: Psalm 33:10-22

JOSEPH PROSPERS

Potiphar, the captain of the guard, was a fortunate man to have a slave of Joseph's quality. We read, "The Lord was with Joseph, and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master." It is encouraging to see that, "Joseph found favour in [Potiphar's] eyes, and served him, and [Potiphar] put him in charge over his household, and all that he owned." Joseph's prosperity was due to the Lord's blessing, and Potiphar shared in that prosperity for Joseph's sake. Although Potiphar obviously treated him well, we can imagine that Joseph must have been frequently homesick and lonely in his new home. Yet his faith and hope remained steadfast in God.

JOSEPH PESTERED

Most men would have been excited by such quick promotion; but Joseph was soon to be tested in a way which would display his real character. Potiphar was not alone in his admiration for Joseph; his wife, a deceitful woman, had become infatuated with him and tried to tempt Joseph to have sex with her 'behind Potiphar's back.' Again and again she pestered him, trying to entice him.

At the very least, to give in to her would have been the gravest injustice, and a gross disloyalty to his kind master, but most importantly, Joseph knew that it would be a sin against God. So he refused, saying, "How can I do such a wicked thing, and sin against God?" But one day, when no-one else was at the house, Potiphar's wife made one final attempt to seduce Joseph. She grabbed onto his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" Joseph instantly recognised the danger, and keeping his integrity he quickly fled from the evil temptation!

If you always look at evil in that light, that it is sin against God, then when you are tempted to do anything wrong, you will find that it provides great motivation and strength to refrain, and even flee, from evil conduct.

Look at the words in our Key Verse (which King David spoke after he was exposed as having committed this very sin with Bathsheba) they teach very clearly that all sin is against God. Remember this, before you have to confess your sin and shame as David did!

JOSEPH THE PRISONER

However, Joseph suffered for his righteous and honourable behaviour. After Potiphar's wife failed with her final attempt to seduce Joseph, she became bitter and falsely accused him of trying to rape her! She even used his cloak as 'so-called' evidence! What an unenviable position for Potiphar to be in: on the one hand, was his belief in and loving respect for his wife, and on the other hand, was his admiration and respect for Joseph. But it seems his wife's lie was so convincing that he now believed his most trusted man had gone and betrayed him. It's no wonder Potiphar burned with anger and threw Joseph in Pharaoh's own prison!

Normally, a servant would have been executed for such a crime against his master, whereas Joseph was only imprisoned. So Potiphar either may have had some doubts about his wife's story (and thus his anger was with her for the politically embarrassing situation and he was compelled to make an example of Joseph) or else Joseph's years of faithful service had earned him a stay of execution. It seems the latter is the best explanation as to why he only threw Joseph in prison. Of course, we must never forget that behind all these circumstances, God was working toward Joseph's advancement and the fulfilment of the dreams he'd had years previously.

So Joseph the innocent one was sentenced to prison, surrounded by all sorts of evil and wicked people. This is similar to the time when our innocent Lord Jesus was sentenced and then crucified between two wicked criminals. However, even there in prison God was with Joseph. His good character and behaviour soon gained him the favour of the prison warden and again he was given a trusted position of authority. It is quite possible that the jailer soon came to believe that Joseph was an innocent man too, and so for now, Joseph had almost everything but his liberty there.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How did Potiphar show favour to Joseph?	.....
2. How was Joseph's character and love for God tested?	.....
3. What enabled Joseph to resist the temptation?	.....
4. Why do you think Joseph was only thrown in prison?	.....
5. How does Joseph's prison sentence remind us of our Lord Jesus?	.....

My Name is Age

The Butler and the Baker

Key Verse:
“Now there lived in that city a man, poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man.”

Ecclesiastes 9:15

Extra: Think about selfishness and how to get rid of it.

Level 5 lesson 26

Read Genesis 40

Further Reading: Daniel 2

SERVANTS DISCREDITED

Some time later, after Joseph had been imprisoned, two rather interesting prisoners were thrown into jail with him. These two were former employees of the Egyptian King, Pharaoh. One was his chief butler or cup-bearer, and the other was his chief baker. We are not told how they had offended Pharaoh, but for whatever reason, they were both put in prison. In the sovereign will of God, “The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph,” and both men came under his supervision. Joseph probably had no idea that the imprisonment of these two men would have anything to do with his own future, but we will see later on that in the goodness of God it did.

SIGNIFICANT DREAMS

To the Egyptians, dreams or “visions of the night” were taken very seriously. Indeed, they were so superstitious about dreams that a special group of men devoted their whole time to interpreting them. Well, one night the two new prisoners each had a dream. Unfortunately for them, they were unable to get an interpreter and so they were worried and sad.

In the morning Joseph visited them in their cell and noticed the very worried looks on their faces. He asked them “Why do you look so sad today?” They told him, “We both had dreams and there is no-one to interpret them.” Joseph replied, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.” Joseph was sure God would show him the significance of the dreams.

Encouraged, the chief butler told Joseph his dream. It was about a grapevine which had three branches. These budded and blossomed and produced ripe grapes. The butler continued, “Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand and I took the grapes, squeezed them into the cup and passed it to Pharaoh.” Joseph immediately interpreted the dream. He said the three branches represented three days and that in three days he would once again be restored to his former occupation in the king’s service.

SAD DISCOURSES

Sensing an opportunity to perhaps be favourably mentioned to the King, Joseph told his own sad story to the butler. Pleading his innocence, he appealed to him, “When all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison!” The butler promised to do this.

Next, hoping that he too would receive good news like the butler, the baker told his dream to Joseph. In his dream he had seen three white baskets on his head. In the top basket were all sorts of baked foods for Pharaoh, but instead of Pharaoh enjoying these delicacies, the birds of the air came down and ate the lot.

As with the butler’s dream, Joseph interpreted it immediately. In a similar way to the butler’s dream, he said, the baskets spoke of three days. Sadly for the baker, that is where the similarity ended! Joseph had to tell him that a terrible fate awaited him; rather than being restored to his former position, in three days time his head would be cut off, he would be hanged on a tree and the birds would come and eat his flesh!

SAD DISAPPOINTMENT

Sure enough, after three days Joseph’s claim that God would reveal the true meaning of the dreams to him was completely vindicated. The chief butler was duly restored to his position of honour and the poor chief baker was hanged. In his delight, did the butler remember Joseph? No! Shame on him! It seems he chose to forget him. How ungrateful! Many people today, treat the Saviour with a similar ingratitude, rejecting and forgetting the One Who died on the Cross to save them. May none of you be guilty of such sin, but rather receive God’s forgiveness and great salvation by accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What particularly made the butler and baker sad?

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2. What indicates that Joseph was in touch with God?

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3. What are your thoughts on dreams?

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4. What do you think of the butler’s conduct? (see verse 23)

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5. How should we treat the One who died to save us?

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Joseph's Honoured Position

Key Verse:
"That at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, in Heaven, and on earth and under the earth."

Philippians 2:10

Extra: Explain Joseph's sensational rise to power.

Level 5 lesson 27

Read Genesis 41:1-44 Further Reading: Psalm 92

The butler may have initially forgotten Joseph, but God hadn't. Now the time was approaching for Joseph's youthful dreams to be fulfilled. We find God working through the circumstances of Joseph's life to bring this about. Then in a marvellous way, He caused the forgetful butler to finally remember Joseph.

WORRYING PROBLEMS

One night, God gave Pharaoh two dreams. In the first dream he saw seven fat cows come up out of the river Nile and begin feeding on the reeds by the river's bank. As he watched, seven other cows, very thin and scrawny, came up out of the river and stood by the seven fat ones; then suddenly, they turned and ate them up! Pharaoh awoke with a start, full of superstitious fears. You see, the cow was the sacred symbol of the goddess Isis (an idol), which only made the dream even more frightening and mysterious. Finally falling back to sleep, Pharaoh dreamed a similar dream, only this time he saw fat and thin heads of corn in place of the cows.

On awaking in the morning, Pharaoh worriedly called together his magicians and 'wise men.' He told them his dreams and demanded to know the meaning, but no-one was able to interpret them for Pharaoh. You would think that someone from amongst these so-called 'wise men' could have taken a decent guess at the interpretation of such relatively simple dreams, but no! Their dullness certainly belied their title as 'wise men!' At this point, the forgetful chief butler saw an opportunity to look good in front of the king. Although two years had passed, he suddenly remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him and his skill in interpreting dreams!

WISE PRONOUNCEMENTS

On hearing this, Pharaoh ordered Joseph brought to him out of the dungeon. After being cleaned up, Joseph stood before Pharaoh, the powerful ruler of Egypt.

"I hear," said Pharaoh, glancing at the weakly smiling butler, "that you" - returning his penetrating gaze to Joseph - "are able to interpret dreams when you hear them? Is this true?" Joseph replied clearly, humbly attributing his ability to God; "I cannot do it," he said, "But God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

Pharaoh then recounted his dreams to Joseph, who responded immediately with the interpretation. "Your two dreams are one," he said, "They both reveal what God is about to do. The seven fat cows and the seven good heads of corn represent seven years. Similarly the seven thin cows and the seven thin heads of corn also represent the seven years which will follow. The first seven years are to be years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt; the second seven years are to be years of terrible famine which will ravage the land. The twice telling of the dream is because the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon."

WONDERFUL PROMOTION

Having interpreted the dreams, Joseph continued, "Let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man to be in charge of the land." Then he urged Pharaoh to appoint officers to store up one fifth part of the corn produced in the first seven years, for use during the seven years of famine to follow. This was so that the country wouldn't be ruined by the famine.

Naturally, the plan made good sense to Pharaoh and he at once selected Joseph as the man for the work to be done, "a man in whom the Spirit of God is." "God has shown you all this," Pharaoh said to Joseph, "There is none as wise or discerning as you. See I have set you over all the land of Egypt!" Then taking his ring off, he put it on Joseph's finger and ordered that he be dressed in the finest clothes. He put a gold chain around his neck, gave him a special chariot to ride in and ordered the people to bow when coming into his presence. Amazing! Joseph had been suddenly lifted from the dungeon to the second-highest position of authority in all of Egypt, right under Pharaoh himself! God had truly honoured Joseph!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did Pharaoh dream?	.....
2. What did the butler tell Pharaoh?	.....
3. How was Joseph able to interpret dreams?	.....
4. What do you think of Joseph's advice?	.....
5. How was Joseph honoured?	.....

“Go to Joseph!”

Read Genesis 41:45-47

Further Reading: John 6:25-40

Key Verse:

“I am the Bread of Life, he who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.”

John 6:35

Extra: From this study, what good advice could you tell your friends? Try to do this.

Level 5 lesson 28

PREPARATION

Following his interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream and promotion to Prime Minister of Egypt, Joseph certainly had plenty of work in front of him! He was just thirty years of age when this happened, so with the energy of a young man he got busy right away. He went throughout the land of Egypt, organising the collection and storage of the bumper crops. No doubt in time, new barns and warehouses needed to be built in order to cope with the extraordinary fertility of the earth during these first seven years. We read that the grain was produced plentifully, “like the sand of the sea.” In fact we read this amazing statement, “There was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure!” These were certainly good years!

So Joseph stored up huge quantities of corn and other grain in every city, to ensure an ample supply for the coming days of famine. Wouldn’t it be a good thing if people were wise enough to adopt this principle in regard to spiritual things! Think well ahead. Prepare! Provide now for your future eternity! It would have been too late for the Egyptians to gather in the days of famine, so it will be too late for you to prepare in eternity. “Now is the accepted time,” the Scriptures tell us, “now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2)! Proverbs 27:1 warns, “Don’t boast about tomorrow for you don’t know what a day may bring forth!”

BLESSING

Busy as Joseph was, we see from verses 45 and 50 that he found time to get married and become a father. The priest’s daughter Asenath became his wife and she bore two sons to him. He named the elder Manasseh (which means ‘forgetting’) in view of all the unjust and bitter experiences of his earlier life, and he called the younger, Ephraim (which means ‘double fruitfulness’), in grateful recognition of his present blessings.

All too soon the years of plenty were over and the famine began. Food became scarce everywhere, and before long the people had used up all their private stores. Hungry, they went to Pharaoh and demanded food. He responded to the pleas of his countrymen by stating, “Go to Joseph and do what he tells you!” There is a simple, but important lesson here for us. Notice they couldn’t get supplies direct from Pharaoh; he merely pointed them to Joseph. They must apply to Joseph or perish. He was the one to whom they were to look.

PROVISION

This is a picture of the position today. People everywhere need the “Bread of Life;” they will perish without it. God has an abundant supply for them, but He says, “Go to Jesus!” We dare not ignore Jesus – He is the Saviour. It is through His work on Calvary’s Cross that the “Bread of Life” is available for us today. We must speak with Him. This is very important to understand, “For there is no other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” So “Go to Jesus,” confess your sins, believe in Him, ask Him to save you, and you will not be turned away or disappointed.

Back to our story: Joseph opened up the storehouses, and sold grain to the hungry Egyptians. Now we see a lovely contrast! Joseph sold, but Jesus gives for free! “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). People could buy from Joseph; but Jesus doesn’t sell His blessings. He has paid the terrible price demanded by sin, with His own death on the Cross, and now He offers salvation without money and without effort by us. Have you ever thankfully accepted the free gift of salvation, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and all the other blessings He offers you?

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did Joseph do during the first seven years?	.....
2. Write out a verse of Scripture to show when we should prepare for eternity.	.....
3. What did Pharaoh say when the people cried to him for food?	.....
4. What are some of the blessings that the Lord bestows on those who come to Him?
5. Name an important difference between Joseph and Jesus.

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