

## SESSION #17

As we continue our study of Joseph and his dreams, we now see...

### D. The Wise Ways of God

- as we have already noticed, the dream creates conflict and puts the dreamer in danger
  - first the brothers, then Potiphar's wife, then the famine in Egypt
  - but nothing can kill the dream because God gave the dream as part of his ongoing purposes for the family of promise
- ...in this session & the next we're focusing on God's work in Joseph's life; in Session 20 we'll look at God's larger purpose for Israel and the Promise
- yes, when living "between the brackets" the dream is often in danger
- but the **God** who is hidden behind the scenes here in Genesis is still actively working out the dream
- we see hints of this in the striking **parallels** between Joseph's situation at **Potiphar's** and in **prison**: we read these verses in the last session, but as we do so again note now the parallels between these 2 different situations:

Gen 39:2-6

The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. <sup>3</sup> And his master saw that the Lord *was* with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.

*Vs. 21 - 23*

But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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.

Let's review the parallels:

- **God's presence** with Joseph is noted particularly in both cases, as we saw earlier
- secondly, Joseph is **trustworthy** – he “found favor”
- he is given large **responsibility** – overseer of Potiphar's household; then manager of the entire prison
- his boss in each case **delegates** everything to him *carte blanche* – Potiphar “left all that he had in Joseph's hand”;
  - then, “the keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority”

- and God gives him **success**, at Potiphar's & in prison – vs. 3: “the Lord made all that he did to prosper”; and vs. 23: “whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.”
- the symmetry is not accidental; it illustrates a **major theme** of Joseph's story: God's sovereign and gracious control
- these experiences were all part of God's wise plan for Joseph and He used them to prepare Joseph for significant service
  - Ralph Emerson said, “*Bad times have a scientific value. These are occasions a good learner would not miss.*”
  - ...Joseph is a good learner; and God is a good teacher
- in **Potiphar's** employ he learned:
  - ...**humility** (he was a slave who was bought & sold; moreover, a *Hebrew* slave and the object of racial discrimination)
    - as a teenager telling his dreams to his family, Joseph showed naiveté (at best) or more likely downright pride (at worst); he was a young man of great promise but with a personal problem as a result of being so favored by his father
      - therefore, before his remarkable gifts of management & wisdom could be put to use in God's plan Joseph needed to learn humility – and for that lesson, God allows him to become a slave of Potiphar
  - ...secondly, he learned administration & **management** techniques
    - it seems that Joseph had some special gifting in this area, but these skills were greatly stretched & sharpened by the experience of managing the business & household affairs of this prominent Egyptian official
  - ...thirdly, he learned about Egyptian **agriculture**
    - as a Hebrew whose family were primarily livestock herders Joseph didn't know much about *grain* farming; but knowledge in this area would be crucial later for managing the surplus harvests and distribution of supplies during the famine years – how would he learn this? ...by managing Potiphar's agricultural holdings - 39:5 tells us that his supervision include “in the **field**”
  - ...and lastly, he learned **self-control** & discipline
    - through the persistent temptations of Potiphar's wife, Joseph learned to exercise terrific self-discipline
- in **prison** he learned even more:
  - ...more **management** skills, honing them in a different arena altogether
  - ...he learned about the political workings of the Egyptian **state** (his fellow prisoners were all political detainees who would have provided valuable on-site seminars in Egyptian political science for this foreigner, Joseph) – this information would be crucial to his ability later to manage the entire state machinery as Prime Minister
  - ...in prison, he learned what it meant to suffer **hardship**
    - Psa. 105:18 tells us that “*They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons*” – his prison experience was, at least initially, a very rough one indeed
    - when he became Vizier (or P.M.) over Egypt, in charge of national resources during the 7 years of famine, he knew how people felt when **destitute** because he had been there himself; it injected compassion into his leadership

...and, he learned **patience**

- he was 17 when his brothers sold him into slavery;
- he was 30 when he was suddenly elevated to the #2 position in the Egyptian state, and many of these 13 long years were spent in prison wondering perhaps if the dream had actually died

- Jeremiah Denton, a Vietcong POW (and later a US Senator), after being brought to his lowest point in a Vietnamese prison through weeks of torture, wrote this poem reflecting on Mary at the cross, but one which may have also described Joseph in his prison:

“Her face showed grief, but not despair  
Her head though bowed had faith to spare.  
And even now she could suppose  
His thorns would somehow yield a rose.  
Her life with Him was full of signs  
That **God writes straight with crooked lines.**  
Dark clouds can hide the rising sun  
And all *seem* lost when all be won.”

- today perhaps you may need the reminder that “God writes straight with crooked lines”
  - the “crooked lines”, the tough stuff of life
    - ‘between the brackets,’ may be ALL we can see, and we wonder whether the dream’s doxology will ever sound in our lives
  - Madeline L'Engle wisely wrote: “Those who believe they believe in God but without passion in the heart, without anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, and even at times without despair, believe only in the *idea* of God, and not in God himself.”