

Genesis 37-40 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

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The story of Joseph is one of the most dramatic and moving in the entire Bible.

And a good part of it is simple narrative so for the next couple weeks we'll just be reading the text without much comment.

This story just cries out to be made into a movie!

I believe one of the networks did a few years ago but they just didn't do justice to the story we find here.

CHAPTER 37

1. Joseph Is Sold Into Slavery (Ch. 37)

a. 37:1-4 • Joseph, Jacob's favorite

¹Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. ²This is the history of Jacob.

The closing verses of ch. 35 recount the death of Isaac at Mamre, or what later became known as Hebron.

This is where Jacob had settled down and v. 1 tells us that Jacob had come to take the place of his father Isaac now in the plan and promise of God to Abraham.

V. 2 is the recurring phrase in Genesis which marks the end of one phase or story in Genesis and begins another.

In this case, this seals the story of Jacob and turns to the story of his second youngest son, Joseph.

Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.

Joseph was the first son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel.

His father had a total of 4 sons by his two concubines Zilpah and Bilhah.

When it came time to take the flocks of Jacob out to pasture, Joseph found himself sent off with these 4 brothers and not the sons of Leah.

Because Leah was Jacob's first wife and the antagonism between Leah and Joseph's mother Rachel had been so intense, it's likely Leah's sons despised Joseph and harassed him without let up.

So Joseph went with the sons of Zilpah and Bilhah because they were less brutal with him.

But Joseph witnessed some rather inappropriate behavior in his brothers with whom he'd gone and told Dad about it.

Jacob then confronted them and they knew Joseph had ratted them out.

While the testimony and behavior of Joseph is pretty much a moral and ethical stand out in the Bible, here, in his teen years, we can see some immaturity and lack of wisdom.

Finking on his brothers here was probably not a good idea.

A couple of Proverbs speak of the wisdom of not recounting the errors of others.

Proverbs 10:12 • Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins.
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Proverbs 17:9 • He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.

Ratting out his brothers turns out not to be Joseph's only act of youthful foolishness.

³Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age.

Also he made him a tunic of *many* colors. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

Jacob favored Joseph and it was obvious to the entire household.

As he got older, Jacob made it more obvious that he intended to make Joseph the premier son and to pass the birthright on to him.

We've already seen the intense animosity that can arise in a family in a contest over the birthright from the story of Jacob and Esau.

Imagine when you add a total of 12 brothers!

As Jacob aged and knew that his end was coming, he made his intentions increasingly clear that Joseph would receive the firstborn privilege even though he was #11 of the 12 sons.
One of the ways Jacob showed his favoritism of Joseph was by giving him, what the text refers to as “a tunic of many colors.”

This translation is a hold-over from earlier interpretations which attempted to translate the archaic & at that time unknown words used here.

We *now* know the garment referred to was one which extended to the wrists and ankles.

This was the garment worn by rulers and those exempt from *manual labor*.

Regular laborers wore short sleeved garments with a hem at the knees so they could have greater freedom of movement.

The longer garment meant the person was of higher rank.

Canaanite & Egyptian fashion of that time shows these long sleeved and hemmed garments as having a band of ornate color right at the end of the sleeve and at the hem.

Jacob’s gift of this special garment to Joseph was a way of telling the entire family that Joseph was being set up as the next patriarch, the ruler of the household.

You can just imagine what kind of a response the rest of the brothers would now show him.

Any pretense at civility toward Joseph was no banished and they openly showed their disdain for him.

b. 37:5-11 • Joseph’s Dreams of Greatness

5Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. 6So he said to them, “Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: 7There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.” 8And his brothers said to him, “Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Here’s another evidence of Joseph’s youthful lack of wisdom.

As the unfolding story will reveal, this dream was *prophetic*.

But that doesn’t mean Joseph needed to share it with his brothers.

He ought to have realized this would only serve to inflame their already brewing hatred toward him!

Just because God speaks to YOU, doesn’t automatically mean it’s something you have to share with others – it may be just for you.

As we look at the Bible, we see that consistently when God wants his people to speak His message to others, He tells them to.

Joseph received no such command and ought to have kept this revelation to himself.

9Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, “Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.” 10So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” 11And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind*.

Joseph hadn’t learned from his earlier error and repeated it when he had another dream that was similar to the first.

But this time, not only did he see signs speaking of his brothers bowing down to him but also his father and his wives.

Jacob *rebuked* Joseph for this serious breach of domestic etiquette, but also filed it away as something to keep in mind.

Jacob had had his own prophetic dreams and knew that God does indeed reveal Himself in special ways to His chosen instruments.

This second dream of Joseph’s is prophetic in more than just what it foretells about Jacob’s family showing deference to Joseph as the ruler of Egypt.

This dream forms the basis for John’s vision of the sun, moon and stars representing the nation of Israel in Revelation 12.

c. 37: 12-36 • The Brother Plot To Get Rid of Joseph

12Then his brothers went to feed their father’s flock in Shechem. 13And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers feeding *the flock* in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” So he said to him, “Here I am.” 14Then he said to him, “Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me.” So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.

You remember Shechem; that's the place where Simeon and Levi had murdered all the Canaanite men while they recovered from being circumcised because they thought they were forging a covenant with Jacob's clan.

Shechem was a monument to Simeon and Levi's treachery and brutality and to the rest of the brothers' greed. It ought to have been a reminder to Jacob of what lengths his own sons would go to in their wicked plans. Because of Joseph's earlier reports about his brothers' shenanigans, Jacob now sent him on the mission of checking up on them. This was nothing less than salt in the wound of the brother's animosity toward Joseph.

15 Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?" **16** So he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding *their flocks*." **17** And the man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

When Joseph arrived in the region of Shechem, his brothers were nowhere to be found. One of the locals found him searching the area and asked him if he could be of assistance. He told Joseph that Jacob's flocks had been taken to pasture in Dothan, just a short distance to the north.

18 Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. **19** Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! **20** Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"

Some of the brothers were gathered together when they looked up and saw Joseph striding across the field toward them. His distinctive garment identified him and when he was still at a distance and out of earshot they hatched a plot to *off* him. Just then, Reuben, the firstborn and the one the other brothers looked to as their leader walked up, saw their furtive intentions and asked what they were up to. They told him.

21 But Reuben heard *it*, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." **22** And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit which *is* in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

Reuben quickly persuaded them not to kill Joseph but to merely confine him in one of the many dry wells that dotted the landscape. He appealed to their desire to put Joseph out of the way but without actually killing him. As we read on in the story, we can make a pretty safe assumption that it was treacherous Simeon who made the original suggestions to kill Joseph. The other brothers thought this harsh but went along with it until Reuben intervened and suggested a plot a little less hard on their conscience. Reuben's real plan was to sneak back and rescue Joseph, bringing him home and winning his father's favor because of the rescue. Reuben's previous failure in lying with one of his father's concubines had cost him dearly and he probably thought this act would restore the lost favor of father.

23 So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of *many* colors that was on him. **24** Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; *there was no water in it*. **25** And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry *them* down to Egypt. **26** So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit *is there* if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?"

Judah rightly analyzed the sitch: What difference was there in killing Joseph outright or just leaving him to die of exposure and thirst in the pit? Either way they'd have *murdered* him and this would be something they'd have to live with for the rest of their lives. Why not make a profit out of it and sell him to this band of Ishmaelites from Midian that was passing by?

27 Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh." And his brothers listened. **28** Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the*

brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

What perverse thinking is this on Judah's part?

"Let's not kill him – let's sell him!"

He doesn't say, "Brohs! What are we thinking! Joseph may be a creep and we may be right to be jealous of him – but kill him? Sell him into slavery? If we do either, don't we totally justify our father's passing over us to make him the heir and firstborn?"

If they loved their father, would they not realize the loss of Jacob would destroy him?

But they grab him, rip off his distinctive tunic, throw him into a pit and then sit down to eat a meal.

A bit later we'll read that while he was in the pit and they ate, he cried to them, pleading that they rescue him.

But no – he has to listen to them debate his fate.

He listens while Judah suggests that instead of just leaving him in the pit to die of exposure, they can make 20 shekels off him by selling him!

29 Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. 30 And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?"

After Reuben's earlier intervention, he'd left the scene and not found out what Judah had proposed.

When he returned to the pit to rescue Joseph, he found him gone and told it to the others. That's when they filled him in.

31 So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood.

32 Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, "We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?" 33 And he recognized it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces." 34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. 35 And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

From this point on, Jacob seems to be a broken man.

This loss and the grief it brought became a crushing weight from which he never recovered.

Thus, Jacob's *favoritism* of Joseph ended up costing him his son.

36 Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.

When the Ishmaelites arrived in Egypt, they set up shop and began trading.

One of their prizes was Joseph who was quickly sold to Potiphar, the chief commander of Pharaoh's personal bodyguard.

CHAPTER 38

2. Sidelight: Peril In Canaan (Chapter 38)

a. 38:1-11 • Judah's Detour Into Canaan

Dropped smack dab into the middle of Joseph's story is an interesting little tale about Judah that seems totally out of place.

Why – compare the last v. of ch. 37 and the first v. of ch. 39.

All of ch. 38 seems like an *interruption*.

It isn't – it's a story which explains *why* Jacob's family needs to be taken OUT OF Canaan for a time.

You see, now that the story has passed from *individual men* to whom God comes and renews the special promise of blessing, to the 12 sons of Jacob – there's a danger the kind of commitment Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have shown will be diluted by the influences of godless Canaan.

The culture of Canaan has grown progressively more corrupt and begins to affect the choices of Jacob's children.

Ch. 38 is crucial, coming as it does in the middle of Joseph's story, because it shows *why* God sent Joseph to Egypt.

1 It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. 2 And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and went in to her. 3 So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. 4 She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his

name Onan. ⁵And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him.

Why Judah chose to leave the family at this time isn't stated.

Maybe the whole affair with Joseph had served to put some caution in his soul regarding the brothers.

You see, now that Joseph was out of the way, the question of the rights of the firstborn became center stage again – who would Jacob now favor?

Reuben was out because of his incest with Jacob's concubine.

The next two brothers, Simeon & Levi, were out because of their treachery at Shechem.

That meant Judah was next in line. He may have split to avoid another plot.

Whatever his motivation for leaving, he went to and took a wife from among the local Canaanites.

We know what marrying a Canaanite means for the family of Abraham – it's taboo!

Judah's wife bore him 3 sons – Er, Onan, and Shelah.

⁶Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. ⁷But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him.

As was the custom of the time, Judah arranged a wife for his eldest son.

Her name was Tamar, another Canaanite lass.

But Er was a wicked man and for reasons that are simply explained as the Lord's judgment, he died.

Commentators love to suggest a reason for Er's judgment here but since the text remains silent, it's best for us to do the same.

The important thing is to realize that Judah's own son has been so corrupted by the evil of his surrounding, that it demanded swift judgement on God's part.

This is an important lesson for us Christian parents as it relates to the raising of our children.

It's crucial we realize that the world in which we live is going to imprint itself on our children.

The moral environment is going to influence them if we do not step in and teach them to be wise and discerning in interacting with the environment.

Judah left the household of faith and journeyed in the moral wasteland of MTV, I mean Canaan.

His own moral compromise allowed him not grounds for being able to raise his children in a godly manner.

And it was his family who suffered!

As was the custom of the day, if a man died before producing children, especially the firstborn to whom the birthright would flow, then it was his next oldest brother's duty to go to his widow and be a surrogate, fathering a child on his behalf and in his name.

This is called "levirate marriage" and is later codified into the Law of Moses in Deu. 25

This was done so the dead brother's name would be carried on and so that his widow would have children who could support her.

⁸And Judah said to Onan, [Er's next eldest brother] "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother." ⁹But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. ¹⁰And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also.

The sibling rivalry and hatred that had marked Jacob's house is duplicated in Judah's.

Onan despised his brother Er and wanted the firstborn rights for himself and his descendants.

He wasn't about to be part of a scheme in which his despised dead brother prospered and took from him the prize he wanted.

So he circumvented his duty – and for this, he too, like his elder brother, was severely judged by God.

They're dropping like flies!

And that's what we're to glean from this – the wages of sin are death!

With Onan now gone, there is one last son who must fulfill the role of being a surrogate for Er and that is Shelah,

Judah's 3rd son. But Shelah was too young to marry.

¹¹Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown." For he said, "Lest he also die like his brothers." And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

Judah had NO intention of allowing Shelah to approach Tamar.

He saw her as a black widow and thought that by putting her back into her own father's household, she'd quickly find a lover from among her fellow Canaanites and the arrangement with his family would be severed.

12Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. **13**And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." **14**So she took off her widow's garments, covered *herself* with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which was on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife. **15**When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, because she had covered her face.

Time has passed, Shelah is old enough to fulfill his duty on Er's behalf but no word has been sent to Tamar.

When she's told about Judah's trip to Timnah, she puts off her widow's garb which she's been wearing for years, and takes a seat at a place she knows Judah has to pass.

Question: Why had Tamar maintained her identity as a widow of Judah's firstborn?

Why didn't she give it up and go back to her lifestyle as a Canaanite?

As we look at the entire story and see how Tamar is taken into the family of Judah and how she ends up being in the line of promise and the Messiah, we see that while Judah's side-journey in Canaan leads to *corruption* in the family of faith, it also leads to salvation for some who are lost!

Tamar learned the story of the family of Jacob.

She heard of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

A faith in God was kindled in her and she determined that she would be a part of the promise.

So, she maintained her identity as a member of Judah's family though he was hoping she'd forget it and go back to her *Canaanitism*.

She knew what Judah had to be thinking about allowing Shelah to join her, so she concocted this plan to lay claim, not to Shelah, but to Judah himself.

16Then he turned to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. So she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"

Judah doesn't know it's Tamar as he propositions her and she consents if the right price can be fixed.

17And he said, "I will send a young goat from the flock." So she said, "Will you give me a pledge till you send it?" **18**Then he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" So she said, "Your signet and cord, and your staff that is in your hand." Then he gave *them* to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. **19**So she arose and went away, and laid aside her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood.

Tamar is one clever woman!

She did this, knowing that if she had sex she'd get pregnant!

Judah said that he'd give her a kid from the flock. And she said, "Sure, but till it comes I'll hold you signet and staff as collateral."

Judah gave her a kid alright – but not from the flock!

As soon as the deed was done, Tamar returned home and reassumed her identity as the widow of Er.

20And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive *his* pledge from the woman's hand, but he did not find her. **21**Then he asked the men of that place, saying, "Where is the harlot who was openly by the roadside?" And they said, "There was no harlot in this *place*."

When Judah sent his friend to pay the harlot he'd just been with, it turned out no one knew what he was talking about.

22So he returned to Judah and said, "I cannot find her. Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot in this *place*." **23**Then Judah said, "Let her take *them* for herself, lest we be shamed; for I sent this young goat and you have not found her."

Judah was perplexed – what good were his signet and staff to a prostitute.

Now – he could make an inquiry about the whole thing but since it was a rather embarrassing thing he quickly decided to just let the thing drop.

24And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry." So Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!"

This was really what Judah had been hoping for all along! He wanted to find some way to get rid of Tamar and this seemed the perfect excuse.

She was pregnant, and it certainly wasn't by Shelah, so she must have gone after some illicit lover.

His sense of anger and self-righteousness at judging her is about to blow up in his own face.

25When she was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, “By the man to whom these belong, I *am* with child.” And she said, “Please determine whose these *are*—the signet and cord, and staff.” **26**So Judah acknowledged *them* and said, “She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son.” And he never knew her again.

Judah was busted! He was more in err than she because he had not fulfilled his promise or duty to give her Shelah.

And if it was wrong for her to play the harlot, it was not less wrong for him to use one!

27Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins *were* in her womb. **28**And so it was, when she was giving birth, that *the one* put out *his* hand; and the midwife took a scarlet *thread* and bound it on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.” **29**Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, “How did you break through? *This* breach *be* upon you!” Therefore his name was called Perez. [Breach / Breakthrough] **30**Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.

This chapter is not intended to present to us the moral superiority of Jacob’s family!

It aims to show us the danger the culture of Canaan is to that family.

In v. 26, Judah says of Tamar – “She has been more righteous than I.”

If Tamar’s actions can in any way be referred to as righteous, and then made more righteous than Judah’s, then things are indeed headed south for the family of faith and promise.

This chapter also warns us about the importance of Christian parents exercising discretion in what influences they allow in their home and how they groom their children in learning how to interact with the contemporary culture.

Ch. 38 also stands as a solid proof for the *inspiration* of scripture.

This chapter certainly doesn’t cast Judah in a very positive light.

In fact, Genesis has drawn a portrait of it’s heroes in an appallingly honest light! It paints them *warts and all*.

If this was a book penned by mere mortals with no divine inspiration, wouldn’t the writers have sought to whitewash the story a bit?

If this was simply a story about men, instead of about God, we’d see the men in a much more kindly light!

The Bible tells the truth about even its heroes because through it all it’s not about the perfection of men but the grace and mercy of God.

CHAPTER 39

3. Joseph The Slave (Chapter 39 & 40)

a. 39:1-18 • In Potiphar’s House

Since we covered all of this chapter Sunday, I will only read the text tonight with minimal comment.

1Now 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. **2**The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. **3**And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. **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. **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. **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.

Potiphar was the commander of what we would call the Secret Service.

This was Pharaoh’s private body guard – so Potiphar was a high official in the Egyptians Court, and Egypt was at this time the premier power in the ancient world.

History also tells us that a group of foreigners called the *Hyksos* had managed to take control of Egypt at this time.

The Hyksos were a *Semitic* people, form the same stock as the family of Abraham.

So there was a lot of trade and interchange between Mesopotamia and Egypt at this time.

It was common for Ishmaelites living in the region of Midian to travel to and trade in Egypt.

This also helps explain how a young Semitic lad like Joseph could rise to the place of Prime Minister of

Egypt.

Later, when the ethnic Egyptians managed to oust the foreign Hyksos from the royal court, there would be a terrible backlash against all Semitic peoples who had migrated into Egypt.

This is the basis for why the Jews ended up becoming *slaves* in Egypt.

But back to young Joseph.

Rather than being resentful about his circumstances, he entrusted himself into the Lord's keeping and sought only one thing, to be faithful with where ever he was.

And God blessed him by giving him remarkable success at everything he did so that he was promoted to the position of chief steward over Potiphar's entire estate.

Joseph was the golden boy and it wasn't long till Mrs Potiphar decided she wanted some of that!

7And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." **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. **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?" **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. **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, **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. **13**And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, **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. **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." **16**So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. **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; **18**so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

There are some great lessons here for us but since we covered them in depth on Sunday, I'll leave it to you to get a tape of CD if you weren't here.

b. 38:19-40:23 • In Prison

19So 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. **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.

It's clear from the way this is worded that Potiphar wasn't angry with Joseph so much as he was angry at being put in this situation where, to save face with his wife, he had to remove the super successful Joseph from his role as chief steward!

That Potiphar knows Joseph is innocent of the charge of attempted rape is made clear by his placing him in the Club Fed of the day, the king's prison, rather than just executing him out of hand.

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

Once again, Joseph only sought to be faithful with where he was.

He might not understand why the pursuit of holiness and a life pleasing to God would result in worse and worse conditions, but he knew God stood above his understanding and would make all things clear in His time.

In the meantime, there was only one choice to be made – to be resentful or faithful.

The answer to that one was obvious to Joseph.

It wasn't long until once again Joseph's skill as an administrator was being grown and blessed.

CHAPTER 40

1It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. **2**And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler

and the chief baker. ³So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph was confined. ⁴And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

Potiphar's duty as the head of the Egyptian Secret Service was to sniff out plots against the throne.

When a conspiracy that involved the palace staff was discovered, Potiphar narrowed it down to two men; it was either the chief of the bakers or the overseer of the butlers.

This word "butler" is an archaic word which ought to be translated as the head *vintner*, or the *keeper of the wine*.

The chief baker oversaw the kitchens and the preparation of the royal food and table.

The butler oversaw the royal vineyards and wine-making process.

Each man, as the head of his department would also serve as the taster, to make sure the food and wine weren't poisoned.

Any plot to assassinate the king via poison could only be successful if the food tasters were in on it – and poisoning was a very common form of assassination in the ancient world.

This is where we get another clue to the fact that the Hyksos were in possession of the throne of Egypt.

The ethnic Egyptians were continually trying to steal the throne from them.

While Potiphar's investigation of the plot progressed, both men would be confined to the special prison which was assigned to such esteemed prisoners and there they came under Joseph's duties to attend to.

⁵Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night *and* each man's dream with its own interpretation. ⁶And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad. ⁷So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look so sad today?" ⁸And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it." So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please."

Joseph didn't know what the dreams meant, but he knew who did – God.

Since he knew God, he asked them to tell their dreams and then maybe the Lord would tell him their meaning.

Joseph felt an affinity for those who had dreams which were clearly portents of something more – his youthful dreams of greatness were still crystal clear in his soul.

⁹Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "Behold, in my dream a vine was before me, ¹⁰and in the vine were three branches; it was as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. ¹¹Then Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." ¹²And Joseph said to him, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days. ¹³Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler.

As the chief vintner explained what he'd seen in his dream, Joseph gained the interpretation and immediately gave it – he would be exonerated of all charges and restored to his post.

Then Joseph said -

¹⁴But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. ¹⁵For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon."

Joseph humbly and simply appealed to the official to remember him and mention his case to Pharaoh.

A terrible injustice had been done and Joseph knew Pharaoh could easily set him free.

Joseph was not agitating here to get out of his circumstances, only to better them, if the Lord allowed it.

Paul gives this same counsel to slaves in 1 Cor. when he tells them to serve the Lord as slaves, but if they have the opportunity to secure their freedom, to do so. [1 Cor. 7:20-24]

¹⁶When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also was in my dream, and there were three white baskets on my head. ¹⁷In the uppermost basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head." ¹⁸So Joseph answered and said, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three baskets *are* three days. ¹⁹Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you."

The baker was uncovered as the one involved in the plot against Pharaoh and in three days would be executed.

20Now it came to pass on the third day, *which was Pharaoh's birthday*, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. **21**Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. **22**But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

23Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

That is, Joseph was forgotten until the precise right moment – as the next chapter reveals.

CONCLUSION

I want to repeat something we took a look at Sunday.

While from Joseph's perspective, his commitment to the Lord only seemed to serve to push him into ever more dark and desperate circumstances, from our advantage of hindsight, we can see that God was actually positioning him exactly where he needed to be in order to rise to a place of exaltation and where he could be instrumental in saving hundreds of thousands of lives.

Having faith in God means that no matter what our present circumstances, God is in control and will work all things together for good.

God is not just interested in getting us to the goal or the end; He knows that it's the journey which will shape us into the people we need to be when we get to the end.

Year ago, I went on backpacking trip that had several miles of cross country hiking in it – no trail.

On the map, it looked doable – in reality it was this much shy of impassible.

On the hike in, when we were on a trail, going *down* Dusey Basin took us just about all day and when we finished we were exhausted!

Then, during the cross-country part of the trip, we hiked and climbed through brush and terrain so difficult, we only made 3 miles one entire day or 8 hours!

There were times that day the 3 of us despaired of making it out – but there was nothing else to do but keep going and eventually we did make it back to a trail.

That 3 miles of impassible terrain, which we passed had so toughened us and so changed out perspective on hiking that when we went UP Dusey Basin, we made the entire trail in 3½ hours! It took us 6 to hike down it, but only 3½ to go up!

We felt like we were flying! I remember all 3 of us chuckling as we passed people on the trail who were huffing and puffing.

Learning to water ski can be a real challenge, and that's getting up on two skis.

Then you go to one. And once you've slalomed, skiing on two skis is a piece of cake!

When learning to snow ski, you start on 140's and then as you get better you progress to 180's or 190's or even 200's.

If you put on a pair of 140's, you feel like you could do all kinds of freestyle tricks it's so easy.

In Jeremiah 12:5 God asks the prophet -“If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?”

God had big plans for Jeremiah – he would stand before kings and speak a hard word of warning and judgment.

But Jeremiah was complaining to God about some petty officials who were opposing him.

God challenges Jeremiah – “You're upset because these nobodies won't listen? You want to quit because they little guys reject you? Jeremiah, if this is your reaction when confronted with such simply opposition, what are you going to do when the highest ruler in the land threatens you? AND YET YOU SAY YOU WANT TO BE MY MESSENGER!?!?”

Joseph had begun learning his skills as an administrator and overseer the moment his father gave him that special tunic with the long sleeves and ankle length hem.

But when he'd learned all he could from overseeing Jacob's household, God had to take him from elementary school to high school and placed him in Potiphar's house.

When he'd learned all he could about administration at that level, God graduated him to the college of the king's prison.

His graduation was about to come – but Joseph's years in the school of hard knocks was all for a good and divine purpose.

Joseph's story is ours; for just as he was destined for the throne of Egypt, so you and I are destined in Christ for an even great throne – to rule and reign with Him for a thousand years!

This life is our school – and like Joseph, we ought to be concerned with only one thing – not the circumstances, but the lessons – being faithful!