

WHEN GOD IS WITH US

GENESIS 39

As we come to this chapter, we are tempted to think that we are picking up where chapter 37 left off. That was the chapter where Joseph was sold into Egypt and now this chapter opens with him coming into Egypt as a slave. But the author has been quite specific to insert the events of chapter 38 between these two Joseph narratives. He does this for a reason. We are meant to see a contrast between chapters 38-39.

Genesis 38	Genesis 39
Tells the story of Judah's temptation by Tamar	Tells the story of Joseph's temptation by Potiphar's wife
Judah's test came from a Canaanite	Joseph's test comes from an Egyptian
Judah left his seal and cord	Joseph left his garment
Judah failed his temptation	Joseph passed his test

The contrast that we see between these two chapters is foundational to the purpose God has in bringing Jacob and his family down into Egypt. The brothers of Joseph are in danger of losing their inheritance in the Lord as they integrate into the Canaanite society in which they live. God is going to place them into a land that will keep them at arm's length and that will force them to be set apart from the pagan culture of the day.

This chapter opens amidst what looks to have been tragedy. Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, had been taken and sold into slavery in Egypt. One could hardly imagine a lower standing in society than that of a slave. Yet by the end of this chapter, Joseph will have been brought even lower. He will be a slave in prison.

You've heard of Murphy's Law. It says that anything that can go wrong will go wrong. I'm rather fond of Petrov's Law; it says that Murphy was an optimist. But this is not a story of things going wrong. That is too narrow a view of this passage. The bigger picture will be how God took things that went wrong and used those circumstances to work something magnificently good.

The story of Joseph is an example of the truth that *God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose* (Romans 8:28). Joseph was such a man. How do I know? Because of what is repeated throughout this chapter as a continuing refrain:

- *The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man (39:2).*
- *Now his master saw that **the LORD was with him** and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand (39:3).*
- *But **the LORD was with Joseph** and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer (39:21).*
- *The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because **the LORD was with him**; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper. (Genesis 39:23).*

The story of Joseph is more than a story about Joseph. It is the story of God and what He does when He is with a man or a woman.

WHEN GOD IS WITH US, BAD THINGS CAN STILL HAPPEN

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. (Genesis 39:1).

Joseph had thus far been obedient to his father and to the Lord. The Genesis account give no hint that he had been filled with pride at the dreams he had been given and his reporting of them was the reporting of the revelation of God.

In spite of Joseph's faithfulness, we see him taken, thrown into a pit, and then sold into slavery. Neither was it a slavery from which he could ever hope to escape, for he was taken to a strange land where a different language was spoken and where there would be no ordinary means of redemption.

We ought to consider what life in Egypt was like during that day. Egypt was the most advanced kingdom in the world. The pyramids were already a thousand years old when Joseph came to Egypt. The land of the Nile was the breadbasket of the ancient world. It was also the center of culture and learning for the ancient world.

Furthermore, Joseph was not placed into a backwoods section of Egypt. He was brought into the house of Potiphar. Potiphar was the captain of the bodyguard. That would have placed him in the capital city.

Think about what this would mean to Joseph. He was faced with the most advanced

science of the day who held to views that sharply contrasted his belief in the God of his fathers. He faced a “modern” educational system, a highly advanced philosophical system and a high culture, all of which were directly opposed to his faith in Yahweh.

We live in a world that is somewhat similar today. We live in a world that prides itself in its scientific achievements and, to be sure, we have accomplished some wonderful scientific breakthroughs. We have a modern educational system that has set itself up to be deliberately void of any mention of the God of the universe.

I do not say these things to make you lose heart or to shake your head and to bemoan the condition of the world. The world has ALWAYS been that way. I say these things so that you will realize that God can work through you in today’s world just as He worked through Joseph in Egypt.

WHEN GOD IS WITH US, OTHERS WILL EVENTUALLY NOTICE

2 And the LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.
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. 4 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.
(Genesis 39:2-4).

Notice that we do not have to wait until the last verse of this chapter to see that God was with Joseph. It is mentioned here in verse 2. God was with Joseph. As a result of this divine presence, Joseph enjoyed success in the house of Potiphar. It became readily apparent to this pagan slave owner that Joseph enjoyed success in each of his duties.

If God is with you, then people will eventually begin to notice that something is different. When they ask you what it is, you be sure to tell them about the One whose presence makes a difference.

WHEN GOD IS WITH US, WE CAN BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS

5 And it 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.

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. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. (Genesis 39:5-6).

We have already seen that God was with Joseph and that God was prospering Joseph, but now we see that something else was added to the equation. Potiphar's house also began to prosper. Verse 5 says that both his house and his field and everything he owned was blessed by the Lord.

That is an amazing statement. To the best of our knowledge, Potiphar continued to be a pagan idol-worshiper, yet God was blessing him in some very visible ways.

Here is the principle. God not only blesses His people, but He also blesses those who are connected to His people.

1. This is seen in marriage: *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband (7:14).*

Being a Christian who is married to an unbeliever is rough. But it need not make that Christian defiled. Quite to the contrary, the very opposite ought to be true. The unbelieving partner is sanctified by this union to a believer.

Does this mean that you can be saved by being married to a Christian? No. But it does mean that God has set apart the family of a Christian for some special blessings.

At the same time, I need to give a disclaimer. Christians are specifically prohibited from marrying non-Christians. The Bible speaks against entering into such a union in no uncertain terms. But there are instances in which a Christian can nonetheless be in such a union. For example, it often happens that one partner in a marriage comes to Christ while the other does not. In such a case, the Christian is not called to try to get out of the marriage. Why not? Because the unbelieving partner is in for some special blessings.

2. It is illustrated in the relationship of Jacob with his uncle Laban. After Jacob had worked for Laban for 14 years, Laban bore witness, saying, "*The Lord has blessed me on your account*" (Genesis 30:25).

Laban recognized that there was a supernatural presence that was bringing him prosperity. He attributed it to the blessing of the Lord.

3. It is seen when God offered to reprieve the destruction of the wicked city of Sodom if there were only ten righteous people in the city. The presence of ten of God's people within the city would have saved it from destruction (Genesis 18:32).
4. It is manifested in the effect upon Children: *For otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy (7:14).*

A child is not saved just because he has a Christian parent. But he is set apart for some special blessings by having such a Christian parent. He is set apart for prayer. He is set apart to witness a Christian life up close. He is set apart to hear the message of the gospel.

WHEN GOD IS WITH US, TEMPTATIONS LOSE THEIR LUSTER

7 And it came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. 9 There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?"

10 And it came about as she spoke to Joseph day after day, that he did not listen to her to lie beside her, or be with her. (Genesis 39:7-10).

Back in verse 1, Potiphar was described as an *officer* of Pharaoh. The Hebrew word סָרִיס is often used to refer to a eunuch (See 2 Kings 9:32; 20:18; Esther 2:3; Isaiah 56:3-4). It was customary in the ancient world to require leading officers in the king's court to be castrated. This was to insure devotion to duties and to minimize the possibility that one might try to take over the government and establish his own dynasty. If this was the case with Potiphar, then it would have meant one of two things:

- He consented to this operation after he was married in order to acquire his office.
- His wife married him for political reasons rather than for normal marriage relations.

Though this does not justify the sin that was contemplated, it makes the temptation understandable.

Joseph was a young man. He was away from home with no one to report in on him and

he was being offered sexual gratification. Yet he refused and he refused consistently.

1. Joseph did not succumb to the temptation of Potiphar's wife because he realized that such a sin would be a breach of faith against that which had been entrusted to him. He points out that Potiphar had put all of his possessions into his hands and he felt a duty to keep that trust.

There is something about trust that tends to beget the desire to affirm that trust. When someone turns to you and says, "I am trusting you with my very life," your natural tendency is going to be a desire to live up to that trust. Of course, whether you actually follow through on such a trust depends upon how trustworthy you are, but the desire to be trusted is resident in most of us.

Did you ever stop to think about how God has entrusted us? We normally speak of our trusting the Lord and that is certainly the basis for our relationship with Him. But the Bible also speaks of how God has entrusted us with the message of the Gospel.

- 1 Thessalonians 2:4 says that *we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.*
- In 1 Timothy 1:11, Paul speaks of how he has been entrusted with *the glorious gospel of the blessed God* (See also Titus 1:3).
- Timothy is warned to guard that which had been entrusted to him (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14)

We have been given a trust. It is the message of the gospel. We have been given that message, not merely to bury it in our hearts, but also to spread it out to the world. How do I know that? Because Jesus told a story of a master who entrusted a great treasure to his servants. The story is found in Matthew 25:14-30. The master is about to go on a journey, but before he leaves, he entrusts various amounts of talents to his servants. Even a single talent was a great deal of wealth. Each of the faithful servants took their talents out and utilized them. One servant did not. He took his and he buried it in the ground. The message was not proclaimed. The gospel was not preached. The seeds of the kingdom bore no fruit.

2. Joseph did not succumb to the temptation of Potiphar's wife because he realized it would involve a sin against God: *How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?* (39:9).

We are living in a day and an age when society denies such sin "between two

consenting adults.” Such an outlook forgets that all sin is ultimately against God.

Following his adultery with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of Uriah, David prays, “*Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight*” (Psalm 51:4). David knew the truth that is echoed here in the words of Joseph; that sin is ultimately against God.

WHEN GOD IS WITH US, THE ACCUSER LOOKS TO ATTACK

11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. 12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me!” And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled outside, 14 she called to the men of her household, and said to them, “See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. 15 And it came about when he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled, and went outside.” 16 So she left his garment beside her until his master came home.

17 Then she spoke to him with these words, “The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; 18 and it happened as I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled outside.”

19 Now it came about when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, “This is what your slave did to me,” that his anger burned. (Genesis 39:11-19).

The actions of Potiphar’s wife speak volumes to the selfishness of the sort of affair she sought. She isn’t interested in Joseph’s well-being. She is only interested in self-satisfaction. Her pride has been hurt and her reaction is to get even.

It is more of a side note, but did you notice the central role that Joseph’s garment played in this scenario? It wasn’t the first time. The last time we saw Joseph when he was back in Canaan, the issue had also been an article of clothing.

In Canaan	In Egypt
The coat of many colors had been taken by his brothers	His servant’s garment is taken by Potiphar’s wife

His brothers used the coat to deceive Jacob	Potiphar's wife used the garment to deceive her husband
The result of the deception was that Joseph was sold as a slave to Egypt	The result of the deception was that Joseph was sent to the king's prison

Before the story is finished, there will be more on this theme of clothing. We will ultimately see Joseph's prison garments removed and replaced by those suitable to the court of Pharaoh.

There is a similar vision in the prophets that present the image of an accusation made on the basis of clothing. We could call it the vision of the worst-dressed sinner.

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. ² And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?"

³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. ⁴ And he spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes." (Zechariah 3:1-4).

The vision of Zechariah is of a high priest, the person who represents the people before the Lord. He is being accused by Satan himself. Furthermore, it is a just accusation. The accusation is supported by the fact that the high priest is wearing filthy garments. That isn't what he is supposed to be wearing. He is supposed to be wearing clean, white linen.

You see, the difference between Joseph and us is that Satan does not have to falsely accuse us. There is plenty of which we can be truly accused. But the Lord says, "It is okay; I took those dirty robes and paid the penalty for them. I wore them in your place and I have given you my own pure robes of righteousness."

WHEN GOD IS WITH US, EVEN OUR ADVERSITIES BECOME BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE

So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. (Genesis 39:20).

There is no trial. Potiphar does not cross-examine Joseph or even ask him what happened. The law of Egypt did not demand such action. A slave was considered mere property and had no rights.

Joseph goes from being a slave to being even lower than a slave. He goes into the jail; into the place where the king's prisoners were confined. This would have been the maximum security prison. This was the place where you were put if the Pharaoh of all of Egypt were displeased with you.

God had promised through Joseph's dreams that he would someday rule over his brothers. Instead, he finds himself in prison in Egypt. Psalm 105:18 tells us: *They afflicted his feet with fetters, He himself was laid in irons.* The situation seems absolutely impossible.

Is that bad? Yes, it was, but even this adversity would eventually become a blessing. If Joseph had never been put into prison, then he would have ended his days as a slave in Potiphar's household instead of rising to become the number two man in all of Egypt.

May 11, 1996 was a bad day for one man. He stopped by a vending machine, put in his dollar, and got nothing for his trouble. He made it late to the gate, only to find that he had missed his flight. He went up to one of the clerks to complain and only then learned that his troubles had saved his life. Valuejet Flight 592 had crashed in the Everglades. There were no survivors. What had looked to be adversity had saved this man's life.

WHEN GOD IS WITH US, WE WILL PROSPER IN HIS WORK

21 But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. 22 And the chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it.

23 The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper. (Genesis 39:21-23).

Even when he is in prison, Joseph continues to prosper as the Lord is with him. Notice that this is more than mere moralism. This is not merely a case of saying that "good character and leadership traits will always get you to the top." The reason for Joseph's prosperity is directly related to the work of God.

- The Lord was with Joseph.

- The Lord extended kindness to Joseph.
- The Lord gave Joseph favor in the sight of the chief jailer.

This is not a story about Joseph. It is a story about the Lord and about His workings in the lives of men.

We have been looking at Joseph as a man whose life manifested the presence of God. We noted in verse 23 that *God was with him*. How wonderful would it be if the same thing could be said about us! It can. Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah foretold the birth of one who would be Immanuel -- “God with us.”