



## Lesson 24

### Joseph in Prison

In Lesson 22 we saw how his brothers came to hate Joseph, Jacob's favourite son. They kidnapped him and sold him into slavery. We saw how difficult this must have been for Joseph. It would have been easy for him to think that God had deserted him.

#### Potiphar's Wife

Joseph was bought by an Egyptian officer called Potiphar; he was 'the captain of the guard' for Pharaoh, king of Egypt and so a very important man. After telling us this, the Bible immediately says:

"The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

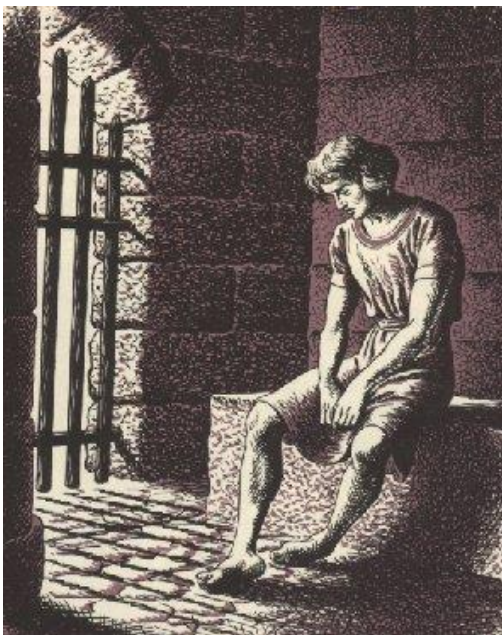
His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

So Joseph found favour in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had.

From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field."  
Genesis 39:2-5

Notice the important points made in this passage.

- God did not desert Joseph but looked after him; however He did not take away his slavery. Many years after this, the Apostle Paul was in prison waiting to see if he would be executed. He wrote that he had learned to be content in whatever state he found himself. Later he wrote that there was '*great gain in godliness with contentment*'. We need to recognise this in our own lives, God does not take away the problems of this life but He will help us to cope with them and we should try to be content with whatever life He gives us.
- Joseph's faith did not fail. He told his master about the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Potiphar understood that it was Joseph's God who brought prosperity to the household. Perhaps this happened because Joseph was an honest and trustworthy slave when others had been dishonest servants of their master.
- Potiphar trusted Joseph and put him in charge of all that he had. So God blessed him. This was what God had said to Joseph's great-grandfather, Abraham.



"I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."  
Genesis 12:3

Then disaster struck! Joseph was a handsome young man and Potiphar's wife wanted to have sex with him. When he refused, she accused him of trying to rape her. Potiphar was very angry with Joseph and threw him into prison. Initially he had a very hard time. We read in Psalm 105:18 that '*his feet were hurt with fetters (shackles); his neck was put in a collar of iron*'.

Once again Joseph's faith was being tested. He had been abducted and sold into slavery. Now he has been falsely accused of a serious crime and thrown into prison. He must have wondered why God was treating him in this way.

It is very hard to suffer humbly when we are punished unjustly for something we have not done. Our natural reaction is to protest our innocence and do whatever we can to get justice.





Many years after Joseph, the Lord Jesus Christ suffered a horrible death on the cross although he was innocent of all the charges made against him. The Apostle Peter learned a great lesson from this and shared it with us in a letter he wrote in the New Testament.

“For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” 1 Peter 2:20-23

Why did God allow Joseph to be treated in this way? We need to remember that he had been a great talebearer. He had spied on his brothers and reported any misdeeds back to his father. Now he has met a worse talebearer than himself – Potiphar’s wife. She has told lies about him and he is suffering unjustly because of it. No doubt he thought back to his own behaviour and realized how wrong and hurtful it had been.

### The Butler and the Baker

In spite of all this, Joseph’s faith did not fail. God was with him and showed him mercy. Just like Potiphar, the keeper of the prison realized that Joseph was a remarkable man and entrusted him with helping to run the prison. We read that *‘the keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph’s charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed’*. Just as when he was a slave in Potiphar’s house, Joseph tells his master about the Lord, his God and through his behaviour and God’s blessing the prison keeper comes to know something about the Lord.

But we are told something else!

“...and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined.” Genesis 40:3

We have seen at the beginning of this lesson that it was Potiphar who was *‘the captain of the guard’*! Imagine how he would feel, he had lost the best servant he had ever had, an honest man who had looked after all his affairs and made him prosperous, now he saw this same man looking after the prison over which he had charge and making it run really well.

Pharaoh was angry with two of his palace servants, his butler (the man who looked after all he drank) and his baker. Whilst in prison they each had a dream which Joseph interpreted for them. He told the butler that within three days he would be freed from prison and restored to his job, however he told the baker that within three days, he would be taken and executed – and it happened just as Joseph said.

Sadly the ungrateful butler forgot about Joseph and another two years passed. Once again Joseph is being tested by God. He had asked the butler to see if Pharaoh would release him but there is no mention of him asking God in prayer. He has to learn to wait until it is the time chosen by God for his release and we shall see this in the next lesson.

### SUMMARY

In this lesson we have learned:

- Joseph was a very gifted man who was a trustworthy servant whatever he was asked to do.
- He had to learn the lesson not to be a talebearer – God taught him this through a worse ‘tell-tale’ than himself – Potiphar’s wife.
- Even when he was in terrible trouble, Joseph’s faith never failed and he told people about the Lord, his God.
- Sometimes we too need to learn humility and accept unjust treatment as did the Lord Jesus Christ.

