

Joseph at Potiphar's house

Background information:

Joseph is a 17-year-old boy. He was born in Haran and emigrated when he was about 6 years old to Canaan, the land his father came from. To do this, he and the family he was born into had to walk some 800 kilometers. When they arrived in Canaan, his mother died giving birth to his little brother Benjamin.

Joseph also has 11 older half-brothers and a half-sister.

But his brothers dislike him because they see that father Jacob loves Joseph very much. Joseph is the only one given a beautiful coat by father, a showpiece garment it says in the Bible. Joseph wears this coat a lot.

The brothers also find it irritating that Joseph tells them that he dreams that everyone bows before him. So they mockingly call him "the master dreamer."

One day, as the brothers are grazing the flock, they see Joseph approaching in the distance. He stands out because of his colorful coat. They plot a plan to kill him. But that goes too far for Ruben, the eldest. 'Let's throw him into a well,' he says. He thinks: then I'll get him out later to take him to father.

When Joseph arrives at his brothers' house, they grab him. They take off his coat and they throw him into a well. When Joseph is in the well, Ruben goes away from the others for a moment.

The other brothers see a caravan approaching, they are Ishmaelites bringing merchandise to Egypt. They pull Joseph out of the well and sell him to the traders. They take Joseph and sell him to Potiphar in Egypt.

We read from the Bible (ERV): Genesis 39:1-23

GENESIS 39

Joseph Is Sold to Potiphar in Egypt

1The traders who bought Joseph took him down to Egypt. They sold him to the captain of Pharaoh's guard, Potiphar. 2The Lord helped Joseph become a successful man. Joseph lived in the house of his master, Potiphar the Egyptian.

3Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord helped Joseph be successful in everything he did. 4So Potiphar was very happy with Joseph. He allowed Joseph to work for him and to help him rule the house. Joseph was the ruler over everything Potiphar owned. 5After Joseph was made the ruler over the house, the Lord blessed the house and everything that Potiphar owned. The Lord also blessed everything that grew in Potiphar's fields. The Lord did this because of Joseph. 6So Potiphar allowed Joseph to take responsibility for everything in the house. Potiphar didn't have to worry about anything except deciding what to eat.

Joseph Refuses Potiphar's Wife

Joseph was a very handsome, good-looking man. 7After some time, the wife of Joseph's master began to pay special attention to him. One day she said to him, "Sleep with me." 8But Joseph refused. He said, "My master trusts me with everything in his house. He has given me responsibility for everything here. 9My master has made me almost equal to him in his house. I cannot sleep with his wife! That is wrong! It is a sin against God."

10The woman talked with Joseph every day, but he refused to sleep with her. 11One day Joseph went into the house to do his work. He was the only man in the house at the time.

12His master's wife grabbed his coat and said to him, "Come to bed with me." But Joseph ran out of the house so fast that he left his coat in her hand.

13The woman saw that Joseph had left his coat in her hand and had run out of the house.

14She called to the men outside and said, "Look! This Hebrew slave was brought here to make fun of us. He came in and tried to attack me, but I screamed. 15My scream scared him and he ran away, but he left his coat with me." 16Then she kept his coat until her husband, Joseph's master, came home. 17She told her husband the same story. She said, "This Hebrew slave you brought here tried to attack me! 18But when he came near me, I screamed. He ran away, but he left his coat."

19Joseph's master listened to what his wife said, and he became very angry. 20So Potiphar put Joseph into the prison where the king's enemies were held, and that is where Joseph remained.

Joseph in Prison

21The Lord was with Joseph and continued to show his kindness to him, so the commander of the prison guards began to like Joseph. 22The commander of the guards put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. Joseph was their leader, but he still did the same work they did.

23The commander of the guards trusted Joseph with everything that was in the prison. This happened because the Lord was with Joseph. The Lord helped Joseph be successful in everything he did.

Bible Study:

Joseph is bought by Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh. He is given household duties.

Poor Joseph, he has to work hard in a distant land where he doesn't know the language, culture and customs. But God is with him, and everything he tackles succeeds. Joseph has a good and positive attitude. He gets from Potiphar all the more tasks and responsibilities. And God blesses Potiphar's house because of Joseph.

Before long, Joseph is put in charge of all the household. Potiphar leaves everything to Joseph.

Joseph learns the language and develops all kinds of leadership skills.

He has made a fine career and reached the highest level of achievement as a slave.

Then in the Bible story comes a transitional phrase: "Joseph is handsome and good-looking."

It is an introduction to what is to come.

Potiphar's wife sees Joseph growing in his role as janitor. And she sees that he is handsome.

I imagine that in her position she gets everything she wants. She snaps her fingers and immediately people start running for her.

And now her eye has fallen on Joseph. 'Sleep with me,' she says. But Joseph has integrity. He says, 'no, I can't do that because Potiphar has given everything he has into my hand so that I take good care of it. Everything except you, because you are his wife.' Here there is an echo of Genesis 3 where Eve says to the serpent (the devil), 'we may eat of the fruit of all the trees except the tree in the middle of the garden.'

Joseph adds: 'what you ask I cannot do because then I would be doing something that God finds terrible.'

Is that a phrase that you, you and I utter to people who ask if we want to make a choice that we know God doesn't like?

Do we take God into consideration anyway when making decisions?

Or are we more like Potiphar's wife: what my eye falls on/what my desire is for, that's what I want to have?

Potiphar's wife will not take Joseph's no for an answer. And she certainly has no use for Joseph's God. Day in and day out, she tries to tempt Joseph.

But Joseph remains steadfast. He keeps saying no.

One day, when Joseph is alone in the house, she grabs Joseph by his robe. In our time, we would say Me Too, transgressive behavior, sexual harassment, harassment and assault. Joseph yanks away and runs outside. His robe remains behind.

The woman knows she cannot have Joseph and her lust turns to hate.

She begins to cry out, other servants come running, and she says Joseph wanted to seduce her. As proof, she shows his robe.

She also says this in the evening to her husband, who becomes furious.

Joseph is not allowed to respond to the accusations. He is expelled from the house without trial and thrown into prison.

Again I think: poor Joseph. How is it that you do the right thing and evil happens to you.

Again, he has no influence at all and others decide his life.

Yet Joseph maintains a good attitude. Even in prison he puts his best foot forward.

Perhaps because here too God is with him. As many as four times we read this phrase in this Bible passage. And also here in prison God blesses the work of his hands.

Even from the jailer he receives all the more tasks and responsibilities. The jailer no longer has to think about anything himself.

Even though Joseph had a good job with Potiphar, that was not where God wanted him to be. For a time, yes, to learn all kinds of skills. But God has a much bigger plan for Joseph. For that, he has to end up with Pharaoh.

And because Potiphar is a courtier of the king, Joseph ended up in prison in the ward that belonged to the royal palace.

Since Joseph has no idea what his life will look like going forward, he does what is best at the time: perform his duties as best he can and live close to God.

How Joseph, in many ways, is such an example for us.

Prayer: Lord, Joseph is going through a lot in his life. There are many people around him who do not treat him well. Yet You are with him, blessing the work of his hands. Lord, You are still the same God: will You take care of people who are victims of others. Will You help them and give them love? So that these people may also experience that You are with them. Amen.

Questions:

1A. Potiphar's wife lusts after Joseph. She wants him and does everything possible to tempt him. We too can be tempted to make wrong choices by all kinds of ways today. In what different ways can this happen?

B. How do you deal with temptation? Can you stand firm like Joseph?

2A. How do you deal with lust/lust/when your eye is caught on something?

B. Can you resist it? How can you keep it from getting so big that all you want is that one thing and it takes hold of you completely?

3. Eve said: we may eat of all the trees except that one; and she ate of it anyway.

Joseph said, everything is given into my hand except the woman, and he did not respond to her temptations.

Are you more like Eve or Joseph?

4. Why would God be so against adultery (cheating/unfaithful)? (It is even 1 of the ten commandments)

5. Doing the right thing and still being punished, what would that have been like for Joseph?

6. How could Joseph (first with Potiphar and later in prison) still keep such a good attitude?

This Bible Study was written by Carla Heuvelman and can be found on www.febelijbelstudies.nl