

Beneath Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat: Joseph in Potiphar's House (Genesis 39)

There are two important themes that run through Joseph's life that also appear in the specific events of chapter 39. The first is that Joseph's life is a picture of God's promise to Joseph's great grandfather Abraham, "*I will bless you... and you will be a blessing to all peoples on earth*" (Genesis 12:2 – 3). In the early part of this story we are also made aware of a special blessing on Joseph's life based on the dreams that God gave him as a teenager (37:5 – 11). Now after the brief interlude of the Judah and Tamar affair (Genesis 38) we see these family blessings beginning to bear fruit. At the beginning of chapter 39 we discover that, because God is with Joseph, he becomes prosperous and is put in charge of his Egyptian master's entire household. Therefore, Abraham's blessing also overflows onto Potiphar and all that he owns (39:2 – 6). And despite Potiphar's wife's false accusation that leads to Joseph's imprisonment, by the conclusion of this chapter we discover that the Lord continues to prosper Joseph, even blessing the prison warden because of him.

The second theme of the Joseph story that is also found in this chapter is that when others do evil against Joseph, God keeps using these 'misfortunes' to bring about his will. Already we can see that by selling Joseph into slavery his brothers have actually placed him on a trajectory that will lead straight to the fulfilment of God's plan for his life. The fact that God remained with Joseph even while he was being mistreated as a slave in Egypt would become a vital testimony to future generations of Jacob's descendents prior to the Exodus.

Finally, keep an eye on the various 'coats' that Joseph will wear throughout his life. Twice now clothing that someone has given to Joseph as an expression of his favoured status has been stripped away. But God's blessing remains on Joseph, even when symbols of human favour do not. In the same way, Christ's blessing remains on us even when our circumstances might suggest otherwise.

1. What does verse 39:1 tell us about Jacob's favourite son's new status in Egypt?
2. Read 39:2 – 6. How is God's blessing being manifest in Joseph's life?
3. Read 39:7 – 12. Compare the integrity of Joseph in this situation with the flippant immorality of his older brother Judah in the previous chapter (38:13 – 18). What were Joseph's reasons for not caving into temptation? (39:8 – 10)
4. Compare the incident involving Joseph's ornamented robe in Genesis 37:31 – 35 and Joseph's servant-cloak in 39:11 – 20. How do these garments represent Joseph's life thus far?
5. Compare the details of Joseph's life in Potiphar's house at the beginning of this chapter with the details of his imprisonment at the end (39:20 – 23). How might God be using these difficult circumstances in Joseph's life to prepare him for the future?
6. Reflect on what the story of Joseph has been teaching you about the highs and lows of living under God's blessing?