

**“BEGINNINGS: Joseph Down”**  
**Genesis 37 and 39 selected verses**

**Genesis 37**

2 This is the account of Jacob’s family line. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers... and he brought their father a bad report about them.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.” 8 His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

9 Then he had another dream... “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” 10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?”

12 Now his brothers had gone to graze their father’s flocks near Shechem, 13 and Israel said to Joseph, “As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.” “Very well,” he replied. 14 So he said to him, “Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.”

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— 24 and they took him and threw him into a cistern.

28 When the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

**Genesis 39**

1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

2 The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

7 After a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!” 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

17 Then she told him (her husband Potiphar) this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” 19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. 20 Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.

**Introduction**

By the time Joseph was about 17, he knew that his “blended family” was quite dysfunctional. Imagine this 17 year-old dealing with his father’s three “wives” as Joseph’s mother Rachel had died before he was 10; then 10 step brothers who resented him, the realities of family members “sleeping around,” and the all the confusion that comes with it. Add to it being the one of 12 favored by father, the

one of two prized by the favorite wife (Rachel was Jacob's true love and Joseph the golden child). Joseph had a growing self-assurance but apparently had little tact at that age. No wonder his ten older brothers came to despise him.

### **I. Let's Get Rid of Him (37:2-28)**

Genesis 37 begins by saying: "Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers... and he brought their father a bad report about them." How and why Joseph brought this bad report to Jacob we don't know. But I think it wasn't very smart.

For Israel (Jacob) already "loved Joseph more than any of his other sons; and he made an ornate robe for him." All of his sons were given an outer cloak designed for work: one fairly grab color, short sleeves, the length just beyond their knees. Joseph receives this long-sleeved coat, extending shoulder to feet, certainly not for work. After all, Jacob had Joseph in management, not labor. "When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him."

Then Joseph told his brothers, "Listen to this dream I had." Joseph is really digging it in. "We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly *my* bundle of wheat rose and stood upright, while *your* bundles gathered around mine and bowed down to it." His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Older brothers rarely enjoy the arrogance and self-superiority of the younger. In a famous parable of Jesus, the older brother will not celebrate the return of his younger, prodigal, wasteful brother.

In the family, at work, at school (in church!), have you ever been favored like a Joseph by your parents or teachers, or boss? Or were you disfavored like these brothers? Either way, how did it or does it feel? What affect did it or does it have? Favoritism tends to put a person on the proverbial "high horse." Those in second, third or fourth class want to knock him off!

Every time I fly, the announcement is "We welcome our platinum and gold members to board first" along with first class travelers. Only after those with elite status could I make my way to seat 26D. Actually, I prefer to get on the plane last, if only the airlines knew. Joseph had elite status as an adolescent. And he knew it. And his 10 older brothers resented it.

It says that Jacob wanted yet another report. So he sent Joseph to check on the flock and the brothers. "When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his special robe. They took him and threw him into an open cistern." They thought they should just kill him. But "when the Midianite merchants came by" they figured they could make some money by selling him as a slave. "His brothers

pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver (a common laborer's wages for two years – say \$30,000), sold to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.”

Finally, we're rid of him! And that's the end of the Joseph story.

## **II. Things Looking Up? (39:1-20)**

Genesis 38 goes on with the immoral character of Judah and the wickedness of Shua and their sons Er and Onan, and the deceiving daughter-in-law Tamar. Perhaps like Ishmael and Esau before, Joseph would drop out of the biblical account. But he doesn't. The sequel hoped for is produced! The story continues.

Chapter 39 returns to him. “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, bought him from the Ishmaelites... The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered... When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did... Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.”

Callously betrayed, deserted, and sold to be a slave, it now looks like Joseph would end up a winner through all of it. Things were looking up. Joseph knew that the Lord had plans for his life. God was determined to fulfill his covenant and his blessings.

The lesson here is how you and I can also come through difficult times and have the Lord change it around in his providence and grace. Faith and life in Jesus brings to each of us the pride of success and the ease of comfort. Right? High position and the wealth that comes with it. Being a Christian is a bed of roses. Right?

Not so fast! “After a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, ‘Come to bed with me...’ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. Then she told her husband Potiphar this story: ‘That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me (actually she grabbed it) and he ran out of the house.’ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.”

Ever been falsely accused? This happens to God's people again and again throughout history. Accused of blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was convicted and executed. In ancient Rome the church was accused of cannibalism: “Unless you eat my body and drink my blood.” The spread of Islam by the sword in the 7<sup>th</sup> century has reappeared in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Convert or die. The Shiite and Sunni division began in 660 AD and continues with ferocious battle today.

Recently at the office, someone sneezed. A co-worker said, “God bless you!” He was accused and warned about contributing unwanted hate speech in the work place.

Yeah, Potiphar “burned with anger.” But was his anger about Joseph or mostly at his wife? “That Hebrew slave *YOU* brought us came to me to make sport of me.” That put Potiphar on the defensive. He was put in a difficult position. If he and others thought this was true, Joseph would have been put to death on the spot. But now he had to choose between his seductive wife and the most trusted, capable overseer of his everything he had. Notice how Joseph is identified again by his coat, his cloak. It seems that Potiphar had to save face. Joseph was thrown into jail. And that was that! The Joseph story comes to an end... until next week!

### **Conclusion**

Joseph languished two more years in prison before he was remembered to Pharaoh. The wheels of God’s providence seemed to have stopped. But as we will hear, other wheels were working together, wheels that Joseph couldn’t see, each wheel turning another in the Lord’s redemptive plan. Those wheels seemed to move slowly, but they never stopped.

The wheels of God’s providence in our lives can seem to have stopped sometimes, especially when we feel hopeless, when we experience loss again and again, when we feel imprisoned. They don’t. Let us pray together with and for one another.