

STUDY GUIDE

USF BCM
LEAVING A LEGACY
JOSEPH'S TRIALS
GENESIS 39:21–40:23
02/19/2017



MAIN POINT

Through the trials he endures, Joseph becomes an example for us of patience and faith in God.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Divide the group into two teams and ask each person to think of the strangest dream he or she remembers having over the past week. Have each team pick one dream that seems the most bizarre or unique to share with the group. Each team must then come up with an “interpretation” of the opposing team’s dream. Once both teams have shared their interpretations, take a vote on whose you think is best.

How seriously do we take our dreams today? How is this similar to or different from the way they were typically viewed in the Old Testament?

What do we know about the way God often chooses to speak to us now, as distinct from the way He typically spoke in the Old Testament? Is it possible that God could still speak through dreams today?

Although there are accounts in the New Testament of God speaking to His believers through dreams, this occurs in the Old Testament much more frequently. Certainly God can and may choose to speak through dreams today, but most often, He speaks through His Word and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Both grant us wisdom, counsel and understanding.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 39:21–23 .

Despite the unjust accusations and punishment Joseph received earlier in his life for resisting moral temptation (with the seductions of Potiphar’s wife), he was again placed in a position in which the Lord remained with him, extending His kindness to Joseph (v. 21). Garnering the confidence of those around Joseph, God caused everything he did to prosper, even in the seeming hopelessness of prison.

What qualities of Joseph’s attitude and character may have led the prison warden to trust him with the same authority Potiphar did?

How might Joseph's moral testing earlier in Genesis 39 have refined his character in a way that attracted the warden's confidence and recognition? How might he have differed from other prisoners in the warden's view?

Read Genesis 39:2 and 39:23. These verses tell us that the Lord was with Joseph. Why do you think the passage repeats this truth within the same chapter? What does it say about our need to be reminded of God's promise never to forsake us?

Potiphar placed all he owned under Joseph's authority, without concerning himself with the matters (39:5-6). Joseph's attitude—his humble submission and refusal to grow resentful toward his unjust circumstances—earned the respect and trust of his superiors, beginning with the prison warden. Joseph's hardships and trials were not yet over, but God remained with him in everything he did.

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 40:1-8.

With Potiphar, Joseph was a "personal attendant" to the one he was under (39:4). With the cupbearer and baker, he was a "personal attendant" to those under him (40:4). What humility might Joseph have needed to make this shift? Could the first role have prepared him for the second?

Assuming these men understood Joseph's circumstances, what might they have expected of his attitude? Do you think Joseph met those expectations? If not, how might Joseph's unique attitude have affected those of his fellow prisoners?

Before Joseph interpreted the dreams, he acknowledged that true interpretations belong to God (v. 8). To what or whom might he have been tempted to give glory instead? What incentives did he have for doing so?

Despite Joseph's obedience to faithfully serve within his circumstances, he was surely very eager to be relieved from prison. As a result, Joseph could have had many incentives to take credit for the interpretation of the men's dreams—not only out of pride, but in hopes that he would be recognized as wise and powerful in his own might, perhaps being allowed to go free as a result. Even so, Joseph continued to give God all the glory as being the One who alone holds our futures.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 40:9-23.

In verse 16, the baker asked Joseph to interpret his dream after hearing the positive interpretation Joseph gave the cupbearer. Do we ever seek God's Word or answers, only expecting or searching for what we want to hear?

If Joseph had not shared the full, unfortunate truth of the baker's dream, or had tried to make the harsh reality sound better than it was, what could have been the consequences? What consequences could we also face for choosing not to speak the full truth to others, even when it is difficult?

What may have caused the cupbearer to forget about Joseph? What might have been his focus or priorities instead?

What kind of impact do you think Joseph left in the mind of the warden? The other prisoners? The cupbearer himself?

Through Joseph's ability to accurately relay God's interpretations of the men's dreams, God proves that He is with Joseph and speaking to Him clearly. Joseph remained steadfast in this physical test by obeying the Lord, speaking His truth and giving Him the glory. In this, Joseph's character was further refined as God established his legacy, even when it appeared Joseph had been forgotten—by God, his family, the cupbearer or the many others around him.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

At the start of this week's passage, we read that the Lord "extended kindness" to Joseph while in prison (v. 21). What generally comes to mind when we think of God's kindness?

Do we consider trials or suffering as isolated from God's kindness? Could they ever be an extension of it in ways we cannot see or understand?

Joseph's opportunity to minister began when he noticed the men looking distraught and expressed concern (v. 40:6-7). What ministry opportunities might you miss by failing to notice and act when someone near you looks the same? How could you become more aware of these opportunities?

Who in your life has asked you to remember them? Have you shown them the kindness of doing so?

PRAY

Thank God for His promises to never forsake us, but faithfully extend His loving kindness. Pray for such confidence in those promises that you remain steadfast, submissive and trusting—even in rejections, setbacks or persecution. Finally, pray that in the midst of those trials, He will grant you success for His glory and make you a vessel of truth to those around you.

COMMENTARY

GENESIS 39:21 – 40:23

39:21-23. The Lord, who is present in Sheol (Ps. 139:8), was also with Joseph in prison. God, who is rich in "faithful love", demonstrated His love by granting Joseph favor in the eyes of the prison warden. For the third time in his life, Joseph was given authority over his peers—in this case, all the prisoners who were in the prison. Mirroring Potiphar's level of confidence in Joseph, the warden did not "see anything in his hand" (bother with anything under Joseph's authority) because the Lord caused everything Joseph did to be successful.

40:1-8. As a good attendant, Joseph probably was perceptive of the moods of the men, observing that they were terribly distraught. Their internalized anger at failing to understand the dreams leads to their gloomy countenance. Moreover, unlike Pharaoh's dreams, the officials saw themselves as participants in their dreams, which probably added to the angst they felt.

They explained their disappointment at having no one who could interpret their dreams. In Pharaoh's court such dreams received the consideration of professional counselors, but they are cut off from the expertise that they had probably often witnessed. In ancient thinking, dreams were the prime vehicle of divine revelations. Joseph acknowledges this but departs from the common viewpoint that professional magicians were required to interpret the officials' dreams. God, who gave the revelation, could provide the interpretation to whomever he chose. Dreams were not the privilege of humans but the domain of God. That Joseph requested to hear the dreams implied that he could interpret them, if God

so chose to reveal their meaning to him. The recurring observation that the Lord was with Joseph by the narrator in the previous chapter has conditioned the reader to assume that Joseph, too, knew that God was favoring him in everything he attempted. Why not also in the matter of their dreams?

40:9-15. After confidently interpreting the cupbearer's dreams, Joseph pleads with the cupbearer, once he has been restored to the court, to assist him in his predicament. The final entreaty places the responsibility in the hands of the cupbearer; he can spring Joseph from prison by making the most of his elevated position. Joseph is not satisfied, however, with the cupbearer reciprocating out of indebtedness. He bolsters his appeal by insisting on his innocence. His imprisonment was a grave miscarriage of justice to begin with; the cupbearer's endeavor then would not only be fitting but also justified.

40:16-23. Encouraged by the good outcome of his companion's dream, the baker hastened to impart his tale to Joseph, and Joseph interpreted the dream that told the baker's grim fate. The concluding verses detail the outcome, showing that the dreams came to pass just as Joseph had said to them. The birthday celebration of Pharaoh gave the three-day period in the two dreams significance at first undetected by the reader and perhaps by Joseph.