

February 10, 2019

Genesis 39 – Tempted

Introduction

Mistreated. Falsely accused. Fired from a nice job. Upon reading those words, you might imagine we were describing a story from last week's headlines in some national news outlet. In reality, though, these words describe the life of Joseph depicted for us in today's lesson. Let's discover what we can learn from Joseph.

Successful (Gen. 39:3-6a). As Genesis 39 begins, we read that Joseph arrives in Egypt. This was not a trip of his choosing. Having been mistreated and sold by his brothers, he now arrives at his new home. Once in Egypt, we see that Joseph is sold yet again (Gen. 39:1)! His station in life seems to continue to spiral downward. On this occasion, he is sold to a man named Potiphar. Who was Potiphar? The Bible states that he was an "officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guards" (Gen. 39:1). So, Potiphar works for one of the most powerful men alive in that day, the leader of Egypt. He buys Joseph and takes him home.

In the midst of everything he has experienced, next, the Bible makes a powerful statement. The first part of verse two explains that "The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man" (Gen. 39:2). What a powerful reminder for believers today: God is with us. More than that, however, we read that "his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made everything he did successful" (Gen. 39:3). Based on what he saw, Potiphar "put (Joseph) in charge of his household and placed all that he owned under his authority" (Gen. 39:4). Joseph had gained Potiphar's trust and this resulted in Joseph's high standing in Potiphar's house.

Tempted (Gen. 39:6b-12). Through verse six of this chapter, things seem to be going well for Joseph. He has found favor in his master's eyes; he has been appointed an overseer in Potiphar's house; and, God was blessing Potiphar in many ways due to Joseph's presence. In verse seven, though, the story takes an interesting turn. The Bible states that Potiphar's wife "looked longingly at Joseph" and invited him to sleep with her (Gen. 39:7). A few verses later, we see that she was persistent in her request. The text explains that "she spoke to Joseph day after day" (Gen. 39:10). How did Joseph handle the temptation to sleep with his boss's wife?

Joseph's response to the continued offers to commit immorality is instructive for believers today as they battle temptation. Three features stand out. First, Joseph's refusal to sleep with Potiphar's wife is based on his position in the house. He recognizes that he is under authority (Gen. 39:8). Apparently, he does not want to disrespect his master, Potiphar. Second, Joseph does not want to sin against God (Gen. 39:9). Third, when the situation changed, Joseph got out of the house (Gen. 39:12). When faced with temptation today, believers can learn much from Joseph's actions.

Favored (Gen. 39:19-21). Even though he had refused her many advances, Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of trying to sleep with her. Based on those false accusations, Potiphar had him thrown into prison (Gen. 39:20). Even in prison, though, the text notes that "the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him" (Gen. 39:21). Part of what that kindness entailed is described in the next phrase: "He (the LORD) granted him (Joseph) favor with the prison

warden” (Gen. 39:21). God’s hand was on Joseph. In both places where he found himself, that fact was noticed by others.

Conclusion

Today’s study shows that Joseph’s life takes many different turns. From one point of view, it seems like he continues to be pushed further and further away from where he should be. The reality, though, is this: he keeps getting closer and closer to where God wants him to be. That is the real storyline.