

Joseph Passes His Greatest Test

Joseph's victory over Potiphar's wife

Text: Genesis 39:1-12

Introduction:

1. Context: Judah's moral impurity is documented in Gen. 38, preceding the account of Joseph's purity in Gen. 39. It appears the Holy Spirit orders the narrative this way to show the contrast between Judah and Joseph.
2. Joseph was 30 years old when he was elevated to ruler of Egypt by Pharaoh (Gen. 41:46). It was two years prior to that point that he had helped the butler and baker interpret their dreams in prison (41:1). Assuming Joseph had already been in prison for approx. 1-2 years, this would make him around 26 or 27 at the time of this temptation.
3. Concerning Joseph's life, Griffith Thomas writes, "Each scene in the record of Joseph's life reveals some distinctive trait of character elicited by means of a crisis."
4. This chapter records what would arguably be the greatest test of Joseph's life, a temptation that would test the very depth of his walk with God and the moral fabric of his inner life. Judah, under much less difficult conditions, succumbed quickly to moral seduction (Gen. 38). In this lesson we want to look at how Joseph came out the other side of this temptation victorious, winning the battle with the strange woman (Prov. 7:26).
5. We will study the account under **3 headings**.

I. **JOSEPH'S TESTIMONY IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE (VS. 1-6)**

We note several truths about this:

A. **God's Providence in Joseph's Life (Vs. 1)**

1. Like every other aspect of Joseph's life, we again see God's hand of Providence directing him in Egypt. Out of all the people who could have purchased Joseph, he was purchased by Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's high-ranking officials.
2. Potiphar was captain of Pharaoh's personal bodyguard. He also oversaw a special prison for political prisoners where Joseph would later be incarcerated (40:3).

B. **God's Presence in Joseph's Life (Vs. 2-3)**

1. The reality of God's presence (Vs. 2a)
 - a. What a comfort this must have been for Joseph to be consciously aware of God's presence with him in the midst of this very difficult trial. In coming to Egypt, Joseph had lost so much but he had not lost the presence of God!

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- b. We are reminded of the truth of God's promise to us as His children in Hebrews 13:5 "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."
 - c. The truth of God's personal presence is a great comfort in the believer's life, especially in times of trial. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) and He indwells the believer.
2. The results of God's presence (Vs. 2b)
 - a. God's hand was upon Joseph as he went about his duties as Potiphar's slave. God caused him to prosper.
 - b. It is noted that Joseph laboured "in the house of his master the Egyptian". According to the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown commentary, "slaves who had been war captives were generally sent to labour in the field and subjected to hard treatment under the "stick" of taskmasters. But those who were bought for money were employed in domestic purposes."
 3. The recognition of God's presence (Vs. 3)

Joseph's life was a good testimony to his heathen master Potiphar and he recognized:

 - a. The presence of God in Joseph's life.
 - b. The prosperity from God in Joseph's life.
 - c. Note: What kind of testimony are you where you work?
Remember, wherever God has you, you are there first and foremost to be a light by your life and your lips.

C. God's Promotion in Joseph's Life (Vs. 4-6)

1. The responsibilities of Joseph's promotion (Vs. 4, 6)
 - a. The sense is given that over time as Joseph proved himself, Potiphar entrusted more and more responsibility to Joseph to the point where Potiphar only took note of what food he was served. Everything else he left in Joseph's capable hands, knowing he could be trusted and that it would prosper under his management.
 - b. We can see how God was using this time to prepare Joseph for his major life's work. In Potiphar's house, he learnt the Egyptian language and customs. Being a part of a household closely connected to the Pharaoh probably meant he learned much about Pharaoh and how Egypt was governed. But Joseph would need further refining before he would be ready for such an undertaking.
2. The blessings from Joseph's promotion (Vs. 5)
 - a. The statement of God's blessing (Vs. 5a). God blessed Potiphar because of Joseph. How the majority have little idea how much they owe blessings to the minority. The presence of God's

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people in a business and a nation often brings blessing. To Potiphar's credit, he recognised it!

- b. The scope of God's blessing (Vs. 5b). To highlight the magnitude of God's blessing upon Potiphar because of Joseph the Bible notes that "the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field."

II. JOSEPH'S TEMPTATION IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE (Vs. 6B-7, 10-12)

We can observe six truths concerning Joseph's temptation which will help us understand how temptation tends to operate in our lives:

A. The Temptress in the Temptation (Vs. 6b-7)

1. She lusted after Joseph (Vs. 6b-7a)
 - a. It is noted that Joseph was a "goodly person and well favoured". The same description is used of Joseph's mother Rachel (Gen. 29:17). Evidently, he inherited his mother's stunning looks, albeit in a masculine version.
 - b. In the process of time, Potiphar's wife started to notice Joseph as he rose through the ranks in the household. Note the time reference – "And it came to pass after these things". This temptation came to Joseph during a time of **success**. There are temptations that come both in times of **sorrow** and in times of **success**.
 - c. Joseph had faced the pit of pain at the hands of his brothers. Now he faced an even more dangerous pit, the pit of pleasure. Proverbs 23:27 "For a whore *is* a deep ditch; and a strange woman *is* a narrow pit."
2. She sought to lure Joseph (Vs. 7b)

B. The Seductiveness of the Temptation (Vs. 7)

1. It appealed to a powerful, natural God-given drive. The one flesh union between a man and a woman was created by God and is not sinful so long as it is entered only within the confines of biblical marriage (Gen. 1:31) "Impurity is the using of a perfectly proper, holy function in a way not intended." (S.D. Gordan) Temptation simply tries to get us to fulfil an appetite, which in itself is not sinful, in an ungodly and unlawful way.
2. It appealed to the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes (1 John. 2:16). Temptation looks attractive and appealing. Satan is very good at making sin look glossy and glamorous!
 - a. Archaeological discoveries¹ reveal that the Egyptian women were devoted to external appearance, physical beauty and sex appeal. The women, at least high society women, were devoted

¹ Information from David Cloud's course, Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms, PowerPoint set 10, Egypt.

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to cosmetics. Archaeologists have discovered mirrors, perfume and lotion bottles, and cosmetic containers. They have discovered containers and applicators for kohl, an ancient eye cosmetic used to highlight their eyes with black to make them more alluring and attractive (used in a similar fashion to modern eye shadow and mascara). The Bible referred to it as “painting the eyes” (Ez. 23:40) and it was the practice of the harlots of that time.

- b. There was jewellery for the neck, arms, hands, ankles, feet and ears.
 - c. There were revealing, tight clothing styles. A large number of the statues and paintings cannot be reproduced in a Christian publication because of the immodesty.
3. It appealed to the pride of life (1 John 2:16). To be propositioned by a woman of such high standing would be flattering to Joseph’s ego since his good looks and poise as an individual were the cause of his mistress’ infatuation with him (Vs. 6).
 4. An astute writer warns, “It is too little observed, and especially by young men who have most need to observe it, that in such temptations it is not only the sensual that needs to be guarded against, but also two much deeper lying tendencies – the craving for loving recognition, and the desire to respond to the feminine love for admiration and devotion...a large proportion of misery is due to a kind of uncontrolled and mistaken chivalry.” (Marcus Dods)

C. The Forwardness of the Temptation (Vs. 7)

1. Mrs Potiphar was bold and unashamed in her approach to Joseph. This is not a quality of a woman of character or even a natural trait of womankind.
2. Immorality was rife and culturally acceptable in Egypt.
 - a. Egyptian paintings portray a nation of adulterers (Berg). Keil and others have pointed out that Egyptian women were noted for their lascivious and unfaithful ways.
 - b. We get a hint at the sort of sensual sins which were prevalent in Egypt from God’s instructions to Israel in Lev. 18 – “**After the doings of the land of Egypt**, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do...” (Vs. 3) The catalogue of sexual sins includes incest (Vs. 6-18), adultery (Vs. 20), sodomy (Vs. 22) and bestiality (Vs. 23).
3. We are also living in a day when there is no shame in this area. We are bombarded with an in your face, bold invitation to immorality. Men are pressured to be playboys and women are pressured to lower themselves to the level of a skank on the street. In fact, the sordid sins of the flesh are now being aggressively promoted to children!

D. The Relentlessness of the Temptation (Vs. 10)

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1. She spoke to Joseph “**day by day**”. This temptation wasn’t just a once off, it came again and again and again over a period of time. How long this persisted for we are not told but some Hebrew commentators from the first and second centuries suggest this went on for a year according to oral tradition (Jim Berg sermon). Each morning when Joseph got up, he would be conscious that he would likely face the same temptation again that day.
2. It was persistent and relentless. This is the nature of temptation. Wholesome opportunity often only knocks on our life’s door once but temptation pounds it repeatedly.
3. Luke 4:13 “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him **for a season.**”
4. “For in that he himself hath **suffered being tempted**, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” (Heb. 2:18)

E. The Secretiveness of the Temptation (Vs. 11)

- a. Potiphar’s wife made her boldest move when no one was around. It is probable that Mrs Potiphar had calculated and planned this. She was determined to get Joseph. Proverbs warns, “...the adulteress will hunt for the precious life.” (Prov. 6:26)
- b. Sin of this nature thrives in an environment of secrecy and anonymity. Today the digital Potiphar’s wife (the digital strange woman) has found her way into the rooms of many Christian homes. It takes place so easily and privately but it is DESAMATING Christian men on an alarming scale and sadly today, even Christian women.

F. The Forcefulness of the Temptation (Vs. 12)

1. Potiphar’s wife now takes things to the next level. Up until now, words hadn’t worked with Joseph. Now she gets close to Joseph and physically grabs a hold of him, hoping to stir his passions and overcome any last resistance he might have to her advances. Matthew Poole labels her “the shameless hussy”.
2. The devil, sin and temptation are not half hearted in their attempts to bring a believer down! This was a powerful temptation and could only be defeated by spiritual power from God.

III. JOSEPH’S TRIUMPH IN POTIPHAR’S HOUSE (VS. 8-12)

The odds were stacked against Joseph but he came out victorious! What was the secret to his victory?

A. He Refused the Temptation (Vs. 8-10)

Joseph could have rationalized/excused this sin in multiple ways but he did not! There were any number of excuses he could have used. For example:

- He could have used his older brothers’ bad example as an excuse.

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- He could have used his trial as an excuse. E.g., “I deserve this after all I have been through”. If Joseph had been bitter, he would have fallen to this temptation!
 - He could have used Egyptian culture as an excuse. E.g., affairs like this are accepted in Egypt. Joseph did not get his morals from Egyptian popular culture but from his knowledge of the Holy Character of God Almighty.
 - He could have used the excuse that no one would ever find out. After all, here he was alone as a Hebrew in the capital of the most powerful nation on earth a long way from home and family. Who would ever know?
1. The Perspective (reasons) behind his refusal (Vs. 8-9)

Joseph’s reply to Mrs Potiphar’s advances gives us a window into Joseph’s heart, his inner thoughts and the godly convictions that kept him from yielding to this sin.

 - a. Joseph believed in personal honesty and integrity.
 - i. He was governed by a sense of responsibility despite the fact he wasn’t being watched. His actions were governed by higher motives than the fear of being caught.
 - ii. “We tend to do what’s inspected, not what’s expected.”
 - b. Joseph believed in the sanctity of the marriage bond.
 - i. Remember that Joseph didn’t have a copy of the 10 commandments or even the Book of Genesis!
 - ii. Joseph had the light of the creation account (orally taught) and the light of a conscience sharpened by his close walk with God.
 - c. Joseph feared God and saw sin from His perspective.
 - i. “great wickedness” = he recognized the magnitude of this sin. A sin of this nature is in the category of a ‘great’ sin in the eyes of God. See 1 Cor. 6:13-20; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3-8. Joseph did not allow his morality to be shaped by the culture of his day or the bad example of his siblings (e.g., Gen. 38).
 - ii. “sin against God” = he recognized that sin is ultimately against God. Joseph was gripped by the fear of God. Not a fear like that of a pagan deity, but a sense of awe, respect, and honour for the God He knew, loved and served. **This was the highest motivation for Joseph above all else.**
 - iii. “He who has learned to call the sin to which he is tempted, “This great wickedness,” has already won half the battle.” (J.R. Bailey)
 - iv. Illustration: Teenage girl invited by friends to a dance.
 2. The Persistence of his refusal (Vs. 10a)

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- a. Joseph did not meet the repeated attempts of temptation with a passive, half-hearted refusal. Fierce temptation must be met with fierce resistance! No doublemindedness!
 - b. Joseph was like Daniel who "...**purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself...**" (Dan. 1:8)
3. The Precaution of his refusal (Vs. 10b)
- a. Joseph took steps to try and avoid being with Mrs Potiphar – "or to be with her". As a slave, he could not always avoid her but he did so as much as was possible.
 - b. What wisdom! Instead of hanging around destructive sources of temptation, try and avoid them! If you know certain sections of the mall are going to be a source of destructive temptation then stay away from them! If your phone is becoming a source of temptation then work out a system to avoid those temptations!
 - c. Proverbs 4:14-15 "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil *men*. **Avoid it**, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."
 - d. Rather than avoiding the strange woman, the foolish young man of Proverbs 7 "passed through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart." (See Vs. 7-10).
4. The Power behind his refusal (Vs. 2, 3, 21). God's hand was upon Joseph and Joseph was clearly a man who walked with God. Joseph drew on the power of God to resist this temptation.

B. He Ran from the Temptation (Vs. 11-12)

"When Joseph was faced with her "crowning attempt" he did the best and only possible thing he could do, he fled and got him out. Flight is the only safety from certain forms of temptation. Some temptations we resist by meeting them, but we can only resist others by flight. Safety is found in putting distance between us and our foe, and there is not only nothing ignoble in such flight, but on the contrary, it is the highest and truest form of virtue." (Griffith Thomas)

1. The sacrifice in his retreat – "he left his garment in her hand" "He lost his coat but he didn't lose his character". It was better for Joseph to suffer in prison than to lose his purity! We need to get our priorities right! There are some things worth losing to keep your purity!
2. The speed of his retreat – "and fled, and got him out."
 - a. Joseph lived out the truth of 2 Tim. 2:22 "**Flee also youthful lusts**: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." This was not passive response to temptation.

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- b. Joseph took the way of escape God provided. 1 Cor. 10:13
“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation **also make a way to escape**, that ye may be able to bear it.”
- c. “It is dangerous to drive restive horses near the edge of a precipice; it is dangerous to bring gunpowder near the fire; it is dangerous to come near an adder’s fang; and it is equally so with these fallen natures of ours to approach temptation. Therefore, ‘avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away’ (Prov. 4:15)” (William M. Taylor).
- d. One of the best weapons against temptation is to **GET OUT!**

When temptation comes your way, get out! When the band begins to play, then get out! When at work the party starts, grab your Bible and depart, God will bless you for opting out but get out! When immodesty you see, turn your head in victory, trust the Lord for purity and get out! When at school the swearing starts and dirty stories assail your heart, end the chat and go out back, just get out! When she comes with wily tongue, saying let’s go and have some fun, say a prayer, turn and run and get out! When he says his love for you means to wait, he will not do, tell him no and turn and go and get out!

A useful tool a smartphone may be but unguarded it feeds iniquity, choose the right and make it tight, please get out! Television your life will ruin with its promotion of perversion, make your home a holy haven and get it out! The internet can be a tool, but it is also a porn-filled pool, hence the need to be accountable, so get sin out!

Joseph’s life to us doth speak, inspiring us sin to defeat; from temptation we must flee, this is how God gives victory. So, learn this lesson tried and true, it will work for you to, learn to run and to retreat and get out, get out, get out!

Conclusion:

1. Christ can redeem and rescue you from a sinful, immoral lifestyle. *“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”* (1 Cor. 6:9-11)
2. Christ can cleanse you as a Christian if you, like David have fallen morally. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9; Psalm 51)
3. Challenge to young people: Resolve before the Lord that with his help you will keep yourself pure for the spouse of God’s choosing.
4. Challenge to married couples: Guard your marriage!
5. Challenge to parents: Be aware of what your young people are facing and help eliminate safe spaces for sin and temptation in their lives.