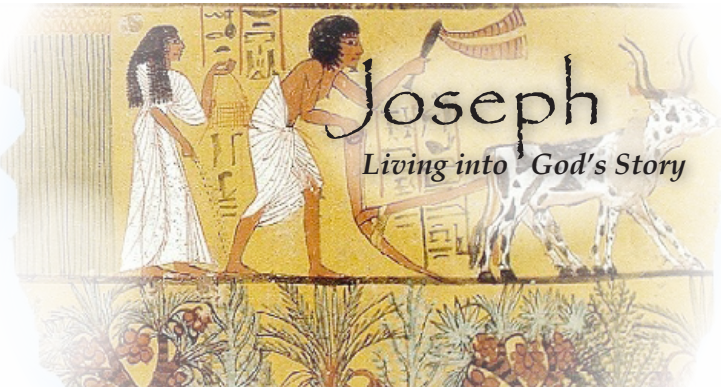


Weekly
Discussion
Guide

February 21,
2010

Genesis 39:
Trouble in a
Foreign Land



Where we start . . .

Complete these sentences:

When I am in the center of God's will then life will . . .

When I am out of God's will then life will . . .

What is our basic operating assumption about what life is to be like when we are living in His will?

What we read . . .

We come to what is one of the most well-known accounts of Joseph's life. Read Genesis 39.

How do you think Joseph handled things once he got "moved" to Egypt? Overall, how is he doing?

How would you describe the situations that Joseph continues to be put in? How would you describe what's going on in his life?

Was Joseph "in the will of God" in the events described in Genesis 39? Why or why not?

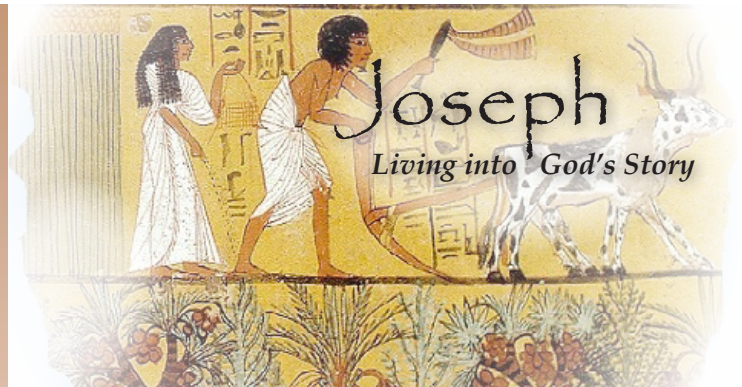
Why this matters . . .

How do you make sense of a situation where someone is seemingly exactly where God wants them and she or he still finds herself or himself facing hardship that seems unjust, unfair, and unwarranted?

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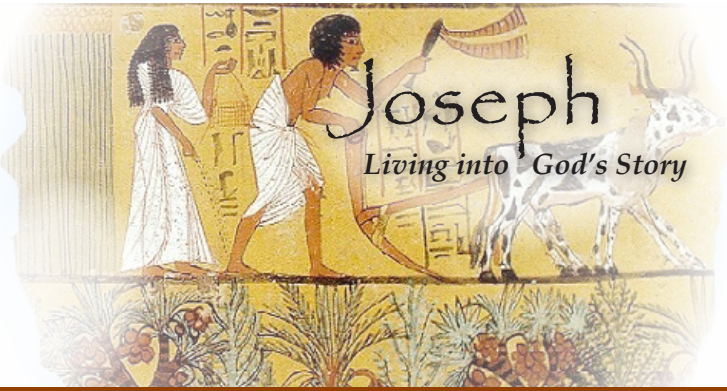
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What are we focusing on?

We come to a very familiar section of Joseph's life. As we work through this portion, keep in mind that we are not simply being given "principles for living"--we are watching people live out their lives in the midst of the story that God is weaving. It's not as much about "making life work" as it is about getting a glimpse of "living into God's story."

Most of us live with the thought that the more fully we are given over to living in the center of God's will, the "better" life with go for us. But that seems to be almost antithetical to what we see in Joseph. There is nothing to indicate that he did anything but the right thing (in Genesis 39). It is clear that God's hand is upon him during this time, and yet he still ends up in a dungeon! And that's the part of the story we get to explore this week.

What will we be discussing?

Hopefully the initial "sentence completions" will open the door to some honest discussion about how we really do think about living "in the will of God." Although we might intellectually assent to the idea that being in the center of His will *might not* result in life going better for us, most of us end up living with the thought that being in the center of His will *will result* in life going better for us.

There are a few details that might help enrich our understanding of the situation in which Joseph found himself. Specifically:

39:1: Potiphar is identified as an Egyptian. This seems strange given that Joseph was in Egypt. But history tells us that there was an alien dynasty influencing the land. Thus, the identification is necessary.

39:1: Potiphar is identified as the "captain of the bodyguard." Although this is apparently a reference to a highly placed

guardian of the Pharaoh, the Jewish historian Josephus suggests that the term actually identified Potiphar as the Pharaoh's "chief executioner."

39:20: Joseph's punishment appears to be somewhat light, given the charges. According to historians, an attempt at adultery in that place at that time would have been punished with, minimally, 1000 blows; rape would have been even more severely treated. Some suggest that Potiphar may have been reluctant to fully believe his wife in the charges she had made.

39:20: The jail in which Joseph was put was the for the "king's prisoners"--those who had committed crimes against the state. From 40:15 we know that it was not a "nice" prison--there it is described as a dungeon.

Although this passage is often used to explore and discuss how to resist temptation (and, in fact, Joseph does that), the heart of the passage is wrapped up in what is unfolding in the story and not simply how to face down sin.

Recall where Joseph's life began, and compare it to where things end up at the close of chapter 39. Perhaps we could think of it this way . . .

Joseph, favored son of his father, but hated by his brothers . . .

It could be worse . . . and then . . .

Hated by his brothers, but not around them much . . .

It could be worse . . . and then . . .

Checking up on his brothers, but not having to work with them . . .

It could be worse . . . and then . . .

Fell upon his brothers, and left for dead . . .

It could be worse . . . and then . . .

Sold into slavery by his brothers, and taken to foreign land . . .

It could be worse . . . and then . . .

Sold as a slave to the chief executioner of Egypt, but needs being met . . .

It could be worse . . . and then . . .

Trusted as a slave by his master, and getting the attention of his wife . . .

It could be worse . . . and then . . .

Falsely accused by his master's wife, and sent to the dungeon . . .

What is important to note is that in this chapter we are told, four times, that God is with Joseph! What does this mean? When God is with someone, minimally it must mean that he is under God's care, he is under His protection, he is surrounded by God's keeping power, and he is in some way and to some degree where God wants him to be.

But do you think Joseph's first thought would have been: "Gosh! Look at all the crud that is happening to me. I must be in the will of God!"

Where does this leave us? Well, we are in the middle of the story that God is writing about what *He* is up to . . . and how Joseph is being written into *that* story. But having God "with him" (or having God with us, being in His will) does not mean our lives will move from bad to better (as we might measure it). We have yet to see (in Genesis) how all this will play out, but right here we need to be clear: God can still be fully "with us" in the midst of the most troubling of situations. Can you trust Him there?