

Joseph is Falsely Accused and Sent to Prison

Genesis 39:13-23

Genesis 39:13-23 - *“And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside,¹⁴ that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, “See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.¹⁵ And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside.”*

¹⁶ So she kept his garment with her until his master came home.¹⁷ Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, “The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me;¹⁸ so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside.”

¹⁹ So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, “Your servant did to me after this manner,” that his anger was aroused.²⁰ Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison.²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.²² And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing.²³ The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph’s authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.”

Background Notes

Just when it looked like things were going well for Joseph, circumstances changed abruptly. Joseph was falsely charged, not just with sexual harassment, but with rape! Potiphar’s wife failed in her attempts to seduce Joseph, so in her anger and frustration she turned against him.

When Potiphar heard the story, his anger was aroused. With whom was Potiphar angry? With Joseph? Perhaps. But maybe he was angry with his wife! Chances are this was not the first time Potiphar’s wife had been unfaithful to her husband, and there’s a good indication here that Potiphar didn’t believe her story. Where do we see that indication? A slave raping the wife of a high-ranking Egyptian official would certainly have received the death penalty, so if Potiphar had believed his wife’s story, he would have had Joseph killed instantly! But Potiphar didn’t have Joseph executed – he put him in prison instead.

Joseph was put into the prison where “the king’s prisoners” were confined (v20). This prison and the prisoners confined there would have been a “cut above” some of the regular Egyptian prisons. But don’t get the idea that it was a “country club prison,” or that Joseph didn’t suffer.

About Joseph's experience, Psalm 105:16-18 says: *"He sent a man before them— Joseph—who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters; he was laid in irons."* Joseph was shackled, and he was in a dungeon: *"For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon"* (Genesis 40:15).

We don't know how long Joseph was in this miserable situation, but apparently it wasn't long before Joseph's positive attitude was noticed, and he was unshackled and actually put in charge of the other prisoners! But it was more than Joseph's positive attitude that brought about this change. *"But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison"* (v21). And, *"The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper"* (v23).

God was working behind the scenes on Joseph's behalf, in spite of the unfortunate and unfair circumstances that put him into prison.

Doctrinal Points

1. God's plan for the believer's life may include false accusation.

Joseph was put in prison on a false accusation. He was totally innocent. He had been the perfect servant. He had not yielded to temptation in the slightest. Yet he was falsely accused, and his coat, the very evidence that proved that he had run away, was used against him. How could God have allowed this awful injustice happen?

We know the rest of the story - that prison was part of God's plan to bring Joseph to power over Egypt! Can you imagine, however, how Joseph felt at this point? If you were Joseph, would you have blamed God? Would we have remembered that God's plan for the believer's life might include false accusation?

Sometimes Christians are accused of wrongdoing, but it is *not* a false accusation. Christians are not perfect. Sometimes they do wrong, and this hurts the testimony of Christ. Wrongdoing is certainly not God's will for our lives!

However, sometimes our sovereign God allows a believer to be falsely accused, as Joseph was. If this happens to you, don't blame God. Look to God for strength to endure and to rise above the situation, as Joseph did.

And difficult though this may be, thank Him for the opportunity to be tested! There is a great reward for being faithful in these situations. 1 Peter 2:19-20: *"For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God."*

A Christian man I know is out of a job because he was falsely accused. Not a shred of evidence, but yet he was fired on the basis of the false accusation of one person. We discussed the story of Joseph together, and I was able to show him that even this unjust situation can be part of God's plan for his life.

God's plans for the believer may include false accusation, but it is hard to take when you are going through it! However, we can look to the experience of our Lord as the perfect example. As the perfect Servant, He was falsely accused, but He recognized that it was all part of God's plan. Our attitude and reaction should be the same as our Lord's attitude and reaction!

Listen again to the words of 1 Peter 2:19-23: *"For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth," who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."*

Joseph is a picture of our Lord here, isn't he? He was falsely accused! He suffered innocently, without complaint. We read of our Lord in Isaiah 53:7, *"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."* Joseph is a beautiful picture of our Lord.

Our first teaching point should help us to follow our Lord's example. God's plan for the believer's life may include false accusation.

2. God's plan for the believer's life will include preparation for the future.

Why would God allow Joseph to be falsely accused, thrown into prison, and suffer unjustly? We know this was part of God's plan, but why? There are many reasons. These unjust situations were tests of Joseph's faith, tests of his character, learning humility and patience, and certainly preparation for the future.

Joseph was being groomed and prepared to be prime minister of Egypt. Remember that Joseph was a Hebrew shepherd from Canaan! He needed training in the affairs of Egypt, and knowledge of the inner politics of Egypt. Before he became prime minister of Egypt, he had to learn the ways of Egyptian culture and society. He had already learned much by managing Potiphar's estate, and now he would learn much more in the royal prison.

You can imagine how much Joseph learned about Egyptian culture and the workings of the government of Egypt just by listening to and talking with "the king's prisoners" in Pharaoh's prison. Many of these prisoners were likely former high-ranking officials. In addition, Joseph was becoming more sensitive to the injustices of Egyptian society, something that is essential for a good leader (then and today). And then think of the time that Joseph spent alone with God while he was in prison! This was all part of God's preparation for the future. Joseph's experiences, even in prison, were all part of the preparation for his future.

God's plan for the believer's life will include preparation for the future. This principle is seen in the lives of so many biblical characters. Moses - David - Paul - and many more! As we read of their lives, we see how the events of their early years were all preparation for the future.

This is true in our lives as well. Whatever you are going through right now, pleasant or unpleasant, that experience is training and preparation for God's future plans for your life. That is the way God has designed it. And this goes for all of us – and at all ages, too, by the way! God's plan for the believer's life will include preparation for the future.

Practical Applications

1. Don't jump to the conclusion that God is disciplining a Christian who is suffering.

Sadly, when a Christian suffers in various ways, or becomes very ill, or dies unexpectedly, some Christians will automatically conclude that the Christian has committed a serious sin and is being disciplined by God. **That is a terrible mistake!** Job's friends made this mistake when Job was suffering because he was being tested, and God had to rebuke them.

I'm sure if the Joseph story were happening today, some Christians would be bound to say, "Joseph **must** have done **something** wrong! Otherwise, why would he be suffering? Why would he be thrown into prison?" But these people would be 100% wrong in their speculations and conclusions. Joseph was **not** being disciplined for wrongdoing! He was being tested. He was **not** being disciplined for wrongdoing.

Yes, it's true that God can use suffering to discipline wayward Christians - but don't jump to the conclusion that God is disciplining every Christian who is suffering!

2. Let's be extremely careful, because of false accusations.

We've seen that false accusations can be part of God's plan for our lives, but that doesn't mean that we should try to get ourselves "falsely accused." In fact, we should be extremely careful because of the possibility that unbelievers will accuse us falsely.

The enemy is always looking for opportunities to bring a false accusation against a believer. Those of us who are employees - be very careful about using company time or property for personal use - even though that may be acceptable practice where you work. Why? Because somewhere along the line, you may be accused of stealing company time or company property! Christians must be extra-careful not to do anything that would give opportunity for accusations.

Billy Graham had a strict policy that he would never ride alone in a vehicle with a woman who was not his wife - simply because of the possibility of false accusation! He knew that even a *false* accusation could be very detrimental to his service for the Lord, and could even ruin his ministry.

His policy is a good example of this principle: let's be careful to guard against false accusations!