

Genesis 39 and 40

Aim of lesson

To show how Joseph still trusted in God, even when he was in prison.

Background study

The historical background to life in Egypt.

Suggested outline of lesson

Consider the sudden change in Joseph's circumstances. He had been uprooted from the position of favourite son of a rich family, and now found himself deprived of everything that he had enjoyed - love, freedom, home, family and comfort. Explain what it meant to be a slave, owned by foreigners whose way of life and beliefs were vastly different from his own. His arrival in Egypt must have been an awesome experience. The noise, pagan temples, mass slavery, civilization and culture contrasted sharply with the rural scene he had left behind. There was no one here to speak his language or share his loneliness. But Joseph did not feel alone. He trusted that wherever he was, God was near.

In Potiphar's house

Explain that knowing that God was with him had two effects upon Joseph. Not only did he gain strength and courage from this knowledge, but also his faith made him behave with integrity at all times. Potiphar was so impressed by this that he placed complete trust in him, and gave him responsibility over the other slaves.

Show how Potiphar's wife was similarly impressed with this admirable young man, but she misjudged his character. In her vanity, she assumed that he would not be able to resist her advances. In addition to this, she had authority over him; as a slave, his duty was to obey. Show how this situation presented Joseph with a dilemma. He had either to offend her or to offend God. Though he must have been embarrassed and distressed by the repeated attentions of his master's wife, which he knew to be wrong, he was prepared to risk the consequences of her spiteful anger, rather than betray Potiphar's trust in him and sin against God.

In prison

Help the children to appreciate how unfairly Joseph was treated when Potiphar believed the lies about him. No one came to his defence; and, being a slave, he had no right to appeal against his sentence. He had to bear the hurt of having people think ill of him, when in fact his behaviour had been blameless. Slavery had been a hardship, but imprisonment was a sore test of his endurance. However, he drew strength from the knowledge that God knew the truth, and he continued to behave well. Soon he was again put in a position of trust, in charge of the other prisoners.

The butler and the baker

God was still working out his purpose in Joseph, and it was no coincidence that he encountered the butler and the baker. For the second time, dreams featured in his life and when God gave him the ability to interpret the men's dreams, he must have been reminded of his own dreams. Perhaps the fulfilment of the dreams reassured Joseph of God's continuing influence and sustained him through a further two years of frustration, wondering whether the butler would ever think of him again.

Worksheets

The solution to the number puzzle is 'Potiphar was very pleased with Joseph and put him in charge of many things. Potiphar's wife wanted to go out with Joseph and when he refused she lied about him and had him sent to prison.'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, please help us to see clearly what you want us to do when we are tempted to do wrong. Thank you for the life story of Joseph, which is such a wonderful example to us. Amen.

Memory verse

"The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble" (Psalm 37:39).

Relevance to the children's lives

When we are faced with a really big temptation, as Joseph was, how do we decide what to do? Remember that God sees us and knows the truth even when other people wrongly believe ill of us. If we remember that God is watching over us, how should we feel about our troubles?