

GENESIS 40:1-41:57

JOSEPH'S RISE FROM PRISON TO POWER

We have been looking at the book of Genesis for several months and last time we began to focus our attention on Joseph. As Genesis Chapter 39 ends, Joseph is not exactly where he dreamed that he would be growing up as a young boy in his father Jacob's household near Hebron. I can almost guarantee that he never even imagined that he would be sitting in an Egyptian prison. So, here we have this young, God-fearing, hard-working, intelligent man, probably in his mid-20s at this point – and he's sitting in a prison cell! He's been betrayed by his own brothers who sold him into slavery. He's been falsely accused by Potiphar's wife of something he didn't do. And this is where he ends up. We're never told in the text exactly how long Joseph is in this prison but he's been there long enough to have worked his way up to a certain level of trust by the prison warden, referred to as "the captain of the guard." It is safe to say that Joseph has been here in this prison for a while.

I made this point before, but I need to make it again. The problem with teaching a familiar story, like the story of Joseph, is that we have a tendency to view the events from the end looking back because we know how it all ends. But Joseph doesn't know that. As far as he knows he may never get out of this place. So, put yourself in Joseph's place. What can he do about his current situation? Nothing, other than pray and continue to trust the God he serves. All he can do is be the best Joseph he can be right where he is. Right? With that, let's pick it up the narrative in Chapter 40...

READ Genesis 40:1-3

"Sometime after this" – so, even more time goes by with Joseph stuck in this prison. Two new characters are introduced. Joseph has never met these men before. They are royal officials and each of them made the Pharaoh angry about who-knows-what? We are never told what they did. The result is that they end up here in prison where they cross paths with Joseph.

READ Genesis 40:4

These two officials are placed under Joseph's care. And that's where this story really begins.

READ Genesis 40:5-8

Up to this point Joseph had never in his life interpreted any dreams. You might say, "Well, what about the dreams he had back in Chapter 37?" Even his own dreams years before he never actually said, "this is what my dream means..." He only told what he dreamed to his family. They, in turn, conjectured that Joseph's dreams meant that they would one day bow down to Joseph. But Joseph himself never said that. He didn't know what his dreams meant. Joseph tells these two men here in prison what he believes and it is pretty good theology: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" Joseph realizes that only with God's help can he tell these men the meaning of their dreams. Joseph is NOT a person who is full of himself and who claims to have any special ability. He is merely a humble servant of God. So, with that, the cupbearer tells Joseph his dream...

READ Genesis 40:9-14

Joseph says, "Mr. Cupbearer, you are going to get your job back. When you do, please remember me." Then Joseph tells his story...

READ Genesis 40:15

Everything Joseph tells the cupbearer is true. He IS a Hebrew (the Egyptian's word for a Jew). He IS an innocent man. Yes, I know, everyone in prison says they are innocent, but Joseph really is! He doesn't deserve to be in this terrible place. Joseph uses the term "pit" to describe the prison they are in. It is not a very nice place. Joseph tells the cupbearer to put in a good word for him once he gets released.

I do NOT see this as a lack of faith on Joseph's part as some have suggested. Joseph is a godly man who has probably been praying every day that God would somehow get him out of this prison. He thinks that perhaps

this man, the cupbearer, is God's answer to his prayer. Again, Joseph doesn't know what's going to happen.

Well, the royal baker has been sitting nearby listening to this conversation between the cupbearer and Joseph. At this point he jumps in...

READ Genesis 40:16-18

Well, so far, so good.

READ Genesis 40:19

Yikes! Notice there is no response from the baker. He is stunned. I imagine the color probably drained from his face when he heard Joseph's words!

READ Genesis 40:20-22

Three days later the interpretations came true exactly as Joseph had said.

So, let me ask you a question. How could Joseph possibly know what was going to happen to these two men? How? God had to reveal it to him. Well, does Joseph finally get out of prison? Did the cupbearer remember him? NO!

READ Genesis 40:23

Joseph remains in prison a while longer.

I want to pause at this point and say something based on my own observation through the years. It is disappointing situations like this one in Joseph's life where a lot of believers lose their faith. I've seen it happen multiple times. God doesn't answer their prayer the way they thought He would or should. OR God doesn't answer their prayer in the timeframe they thought that He would or should. Their wrong conclusion is that God doesn't care. "He's forgotten me. He doesn't love me." A crisis of faith follows for a season. Perhaps that has happened to you. Joseph doesn't

know what is going to happen to him anymore than you or I do. Genesis Chapter 41 hasn't come yet in Joseph's life. He's still stuck in Chapter 40.

For Joseph the answer to his question "How much longer?" is TWO LONG YEARS! That's how Genesis Chapter 41 begins. For two more years Joseph remains locked away down in "the pit." And then what? Something he never would have predicted. God works in mysterious ways... Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the civilized world, has a dream. And not just one dream, but two dreams.

READ Genesis 41:1-8

This is a very similar situation to what we studied in Daniel where another most powerful man in the civilized world, King Nebuchadnezzar, had a dream that needed interpreting and Daniel was called. Here in this story, God gives Pharaoh these two dreams and all the magicians and smart guys of Egypt – the ones who supposedly had all the answers – they cannot tell Pharaoh what his dreams mean. Why can't they? Joseph gave us the answer earlier – "Do not interpretations belong to God?" The Lord God is the one who gives us the dreams and He's the only one who can interpret them. That's why all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men couldn't tell Pharaoh what his dream meant. They weren't connected to God. They only possessed human thinking.

READ Genesis 41:9-13

Suddenly the cupbearer remembers something that happened to him two years before. "I don't recall the guy's name but a young Hebrew was there, a servant of the captain of the guard, and he told me and the chief baker the interpretation of our dreams and they happened exactly like he said they would."

READ Genesis 41:14

Joseph is thirty years of age when he stands before Pharaoh here in Chapter 41. We learn this later in this same chapter, in v 36. So, do the math. Joseph was 17 when he was sold as a slave and brought to Egypt.

That means that he has now been in Egypt for 13 years. Most of that was working for Potiphar, but a lot of it was spent in prison, "the pit," as Joseph called it.

READ Genesis 41:15-16

Notice Joseph's response to Pharaoh's words. He gives glory where the glory belongs and it is NOT to himself. Then Pharaoh tells Joseph his dreams, which we read earlier – he's standing by the Nile, seven fat, good-looking cows came up out of the river. Seven thin, ugly cows came up after and they eat the seven fat cows. But then Pharaoh adds one little detail that we didn't read earlier. It's found in v 21.

READ Genesis 41:21

I'll talk about what this means in a minute.

Pharaoh tells Joseph about the second dream he had with the ears of corn. Seven good-looking ears of corn sprout up out of one stalk. Then seven withered ears blighted by the wind sprout up after them.

READ Genesis 41:24-25

Joseph now tells Pharaoh the meaning of his dreams...

READ Genesis 41:26-32

Joseph goes on to suggest to Pharaoh what needs to be done in light of this information. In modern terminology we would call these "Action Points." Pharaoh can do what he wants, but this is Joseph's suggestion.

READ Genesis 41:33-36

This is a good plan and Pharaoh recognizes that it is.

READ Genesis 41:37-38

"Where can we find such a man who can oversee this massive project? Hmmm!"

What we are about to read is God at work, so don't miss this.

READ Genesis 41:39

"I think I just found the right man for the job. It's you, Joseph!"

READ Genesis 41:40-41

"Joseph, as of right now I'm setting you up as the number two man in all of Egypt."

READ Genesis 41:42-44

This is what we might call "a major promotion." What this is, it's the sovereign hand of God. From prison to power in less than a day. That's God!

READ Genesis 41:45

Pharaoh goes on to give Joseph a new name which is about a foot long and hard to pronounce. All the commentaries I read on this passage each gave a different interpretation of his Egyptian name. I liked the explanation in Nelson's Commentary the best. It says that Joseph's new name means, "The God Speaks and Lives." He then it makes this observation: "Wherever Joseph went in Egypt, his name would point to the reality of his God." I like that.

Pharaoh also gives Joseph a wife who is the daughter of a pagan priest. We know nothing about this woman personally other than that her name is Asenath. So, even though we know virtually nothing about her, we DO know about Joseph her husband and his godly character. We know that Joseph worshipped the one true and living God. There is little doubt that at some point Joseph tells her about his great big God. Whether she ever came to faith in God, we don't know. I like to believe that she did, but we can't be sure. The Bible never says.

Do Joseph's predictions about seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine come true? Well, as you read the rest of Chapter 41 you find out that Joseph's predictions DID, in fact, happen exactly as he said they would.

READ Genesis 41:46-57

Everything happens exactly as God had revealed to Joseph. As you can see this is a pretty wide-spread famine. This will become important as we go into the next few chapters.

So, what can we take away from Chapters 40 and 41?

- Joseph's confidence was not in himself, but in his great big God.
- Even though Joseph was wronged again (when the cupbearer forgot about him in prison), there is no evidence that he ever developed feelings of bitterness or resentment. He maintained a godly character.
- Joseph never allowed his negative circumstances to cause his faith in God to waiver. No crisis of faith.
- Joseph was quick to give God the glory rather than accept any praise for himself.
- God is at work always. He frequently works in mysterious and unpredictable ways. Sometimes God works through humble prisoners; sometimes through powerful rulers.
- God's purposes WILL be accomplished in His perfect time.
- Remember that God's work in your life is not just about you.