



Lesson 2 September 12th, 2020

Obedient Love

Study Scripture – Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40 50-52

Background Scripture – Genesis 41:14-57

Key Verse:

“Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.”

Genesis 41:39-40

INTRODUCTION

The unpleasant things that happen to us in life which makes our circumstances difficult often makes it appear to contradict God’s promises of blessings to us and His faithfulness to His people. To counter this very serious threat, it behooves the people of God to be well acquainted with the certainty of God’s faithfulness. All of His other attributes guarantee His promises.

Christians know the outlines of world history. Christians are certain of the outcome of all the events that will happen. Christians know that God will one day establish His rule, prove that the righteous were correct in their belief in Him and that the Lord Jesus Christ will heal every hurt. The Gentile world will one day look to Him and accept His rule.

But we should be honest with ourselves. We feel that most of the time evil is triumphant. We are therefore made humble and reliance on God. We have to live with that humility and reliance because we know and are absolutely certain of the facts concerning the end of all things.

We have therefore to learn to think of ourselves as spiritual warriors who operate from our battle station in this time of struggle. As one writer advises:

“Difficult choices must be made. Righteous decisions must be arrived at. You are expected to maintain your place in the spiritual battle lines with honesty and courage. How is the battle going on for you as we await the end of all things?”

God therefore turns us to the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. The circumstances of Joseph’s life recorded in Genesis chapters 39 to 41 have been labeled ‘from the outhouse to the penthouse’, ‘from prisoner to prime-minister’ and other imaginative titles by some people and with very good reasons. Literally that was his journey and while the dramatic change of circumstances sounds like something from a Hollywood script, the unmistakable hand of God is easily seen in all the vicissitudes of that young man’s life. Starting with the unequalled love of his father Jacob, every milestone in Joseph’s life, fair or foul, turned out to be another plank in the long- term plan of the sovereign, covenant-keeping God for the nation He was building and the immediate preservation of His people and even the Egyptians and others.

The story of Joseph filled with drama and emotion as it is and with the happy ending as far as he is concerned, admittedly gives any reader a good feeling. However, beyond our natural reaction to the story there are telling lessons to be learned by every believer. Joseph consistently showed a voluntary willingness to serve others, whether in Potiphar's house, in prison or the Egyptian state. He without hesitation gave God the credit for any recognition that came his way and resisted the temptation providence provided to serve his own interest. But as we study remember there is something that we call the "providence" or government of God. In this area one writer points out for our benefit:

"the multitude of minor seemingly insignificant events, but all evidently necessary to contribute to the accomplishment of the will of God... from the beginning of Joseph's life, the providence of God is manifested.

From the jealousy that his brothers expressed, from his sale as a slave into Egypt, from his faithfulness under temptation, for his sympathy with the sadness of the men who had the dreams and could not interpret them, for his endurance of the harsh treatment in the prison, his loyalty to God, then the dreams of Pharaoh himself: the memory of past mercies, all of these things were threads that linked the pit of Canaan with the power that Joseph is now going to exercise in the land of Egypt.

Not one of these little links so seemingly insignificant is unnecessary. Each is essential and form part of all the things that work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose. So a multitude of small events but they contribute to the overall plan of God".

So therefore let us look at our life in the light of the little seemingly insignificant things that happen to us and in the light of the little things that happened to Joseph. This is very important for the little tiny things as well as those that we consider the big things that happen to us are part of the overall program that God uses to be with each one of us individually.

Remember though that God does not deal with each individual in a similar way and the little things for each one of us are different. But all the little things in our lives contribute to the ultimate and overall plan and program of God that He has in His mind for each of us.

This therefore is linked to the truth that we must trust in God and not in man. The prophet Isaiah tells us: "***Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils***". And also in the Psalms "***Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding: in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight***".

In all this you might say that life seems to be treating Joseph unfairly and he must have wondered what possible good could come out of all this injustice that have happened to him. But note that he was increasingly becoming a man of faith.

So should you.

Joseph's story challenges our views on the place and purpose of suffering in the life of the believer and do we believe that

"... all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Rom.8:28).

Note that for Christians the 'good' is not easily discerned at times, particularly in times of difficulty and more so when the difficulties arise from our obedience to God and here Joseph is a shining example. A considered and deliberate decision to do what was right landed him in the dungeon and might have even cost him his life. But we see no sign of bitterness or resentment



from him and even in that horrible situation he continued to show concern for others and to honor God (Gen.40:8).

Christians should carefully note that *the LORD was with Joseph* (39:2) when he prospered in Potiphar's house and that *the LORD was with Joseph* (39:21) when he was thrown in the dungeon. Clearly our external circumstances are not necessarily an indication of the presence of God in our lives but for believers it often is.

The readers of Genesis chapters 37 to 50 could well be excused should they conclude that Joseph is the hero of these closing chapters of the book. However Joseph's own testimony throughout the section clearly indicates who in his mind was in charge of circumstances and whose purpose ultimately was served by his experiences. He stated:

There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9).

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer. (Gen. 41:15-16).

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Gen. 50:20).

The challenges that faced this favored son of Israel since his introduction as a seventeen-year-old lad in chapter 37 continue in our Study Text. One day he is the appropriately garbed, *de-facto*, designated heir apparent of the clan, next he is the victim of a family murder plot, only to be spared by the 'fortuitous' appearance of Midianite traders heading to Egypt. Yes he was rescued but only to end-up in an Egyptian slave market from where he lands in the well-connected house of the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. Soon he is managing the entire affairs of his master and importantly we read and not the only time, *The Lord was with Joseph*, (Gen. 39:2, 21).

Let us never forget however that though Joseph is the hero in this drama for this story surrounds him, we are really looking at the layout of the story of the **Promise** of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the Promise of God that guarantees the success of Joseph. God put in the heart and mind of Joseph that certain people will bow down to him and Joseph therefore knew and held onto this knowledge that despite his difficulties and the turmoil that he underwent there would be a happy ending for nothing terminal could happen to him before his brothers and everybody bowed down to him.

The **Promises** of God to you personally cannot ever be forgotten by you. You have to hold onto them for they are your guarantee of success and eternal life. Once God promises you something it will come. That knowledge of the promise of God to you should sustain you for you know that the Holy Spirit of God will always be with you and guarantee that the Word of God will never return to Him void.

The unwanted, unrelenting and rebuffed advances of his master's wife eventually lands the now mature and handsome Joseph in jail, where very soon he is again put in charge and is running the whole prison. This sets the stage for the ensuing drama in our Text and again dreams are the catalyst for the unfolding events.

At this point of our Text Joseph's now established ability to interpret dreams is about to catapult him to the office of Prime Minister of Egypt. However, it was a very torturous route from favorite son in his father house to his present position; a sequence of events set off by his



own dreams some twelve or so years earlier. He had two dreams which his father and brothers rightly interpreted to mean that they would one day bow to and serve him.

Note that dreams are in the para-normal realm and are usually presented as supernatural events in Scripture, (Daniel). They feature prominently in the life of Joseph always in pairs and underline God's role in the unfolding drama of God creating a nation from Jacob's children and fulfilling His covenant with Abraham.

Joseph because of necessity adopted various practices of Egyptian culture as his own while being most resistant to changing his "one God" worldview, known as monotheism. Joseph looked, acted, and spoke like an Egyptian most of the time. But he did not lose his sense of dependence on God in a pagan culture. Whether in prison or in power, Joseph remained God's man, obedient, faithful and willing to give God the credit.

Notably, in all of his shifting situations Joseph used his considerable, God-given abilities to serve others, rather than be overcome with self-pity and bitterness at the thought of what 'might have been'.

In today's Lesson Joseph's fortune takes a dramatic turn for the better as he finds great favor with the ruler of Egypt for services rendered. However, his instantaneous elevation to the second highest office in the land is so improbable as to stamp the indelible hand of God on that young man's life.

Joseph did not see the sudden turn of fortune as an opportunity to enjoy life for a while in light of his recent suffering but rather immediately went to work to secure the welfare of others. Let us look at his example as a model for our response to God's blessings in our lives.

THE TEXT

Verses 1-24. Dreams dominate chapter 40 and the section of chapter 41 prior to the Study Text and set the stage for another totally unexpected turn of events in Joseph's life. Two full years elapsed either since Joseph was first imprisoned or since he had accurately interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's chief baker and chief cup-bearer. It was after he was elevated to warden that his concern for others led these two officials of Pharaoh who had run afoul of the king, to share an unsettling dream each had the same night. The divinely inspired interpretations Joseph provided for each man's dream came true: one man was put to death, and the other man was restored to his position. Joseph requested of the latter that after regaining his position, he would mention Joseph to the Pharaoh. The man, however made no mention of Joseph for two years (40:1-41:1).

So not only did Joseph know that he was unjustly imprisoned, his first source of pain, now his second source of pain came because he was used by others to benefit themselves. Then on top of that he would experience a third source of pain. He would suffer pain because he **was** a forgotten man who despite the fact that he had befriended his fellow prisoners and offered them hope from the God of hope yet all was forgotten. Therefore the God who never forgets acted.

Do you think you are forgotten? Talk to God about that serious problem. What does God have to do to you to bring you back to reality? At this time God gave Pharaoh a couple of very incomprehensible and disquieting dreams, (1-7) that were peculiarly Egyptian in scenery and seemingly related to both plant and animal agriculture. He saw seven fat cows come up from



the Nile River only to be devoured by seven scrawny cows that emerged from the river shortly after. We know from Egyptian sources that the cattle immersed themselves in the water along the Nile for several reasons: (1) to keep cool; (2) to keep the insects off; and (3) to eat the lush growth of marsh grass. He awakened and soon after falling back to sleep the dream was repeated but this time: seven lush ears of corn came up and were eaten by seven withered ears of corn. Again Pharaoh awakened as an unhappy man.

The sight of cows grazing in the lush Nile valley was common and so was that of grain withered by a well-known and dreaded east wind. *'The east wind'*, a desert wind was notorious for its blighting of the agricultural produce of the land, is called the "Sirroco" (Aramaic) in Palestine, where it blows from the southeast. It is called the "Khamsin" in Egypt and it comes more from the south, southeast. It is referred to in Ezekiel 17:10 and Hosea 13:15.

But as familiar as the scenes might have been to the Pharaoh, there was a foreboding element to both dreams, for in each case a scrawny, blighted life form devoured a healthy, robust species but remained just as meagre and gaunt as before. Note that plant and animal life in Egypt was almost totally dependent on the flooding of the Nile as this not only provided water for irrigation and other purposes but deposited rich nutrients all over the valley and flood plain. This enriched the soil on which plant and animal life depended. Consequently the deity that controlled the Nile was very important to the Egyptians.

The *'wise-men and magicians'* of Egypt were immediately summoned to the court, but none was able to interpret the dreams. These men would have been the intellectuals, the wisest and best educated men of Pharaoh's kingdom who were schooled in astrology, experts in ritual books of priest-craft and magic and the art of interpreting dreams (Ex. 7:11). For all their abilities and *'expertise'* they were as baffled as Pharaoh regarding the meaning of the dreams. We should here look at Egyptian culture. God had given Pharaoh an Egyptian type of dream using Egyptian things. One writer tells us how therefore God acted so that the people would come around to understand Him: ***"Egyptians had a belief, widespread in antiquity, that "puts us in real and direct contact with the other world where not only the dead but also the gods dwell. Dreams therefore are a gift from the gods"***. (Vergote, *Joseph en Egypte*).

Joseph took advantage of this *'teachable moment'* and told them of his relationship with ***Yahweh***, the one and only living God in this land of hundreds of man-made gods. And then he asked them ***"Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams"***.

Joseph's attitude was consistent with the Old Testament rejection of occult practices and its reliance on prophecy as a means of discovering God's will (see Deuteronomy 18: 10-22). Dreams are a sequence of sensations, images, thoughts, etc. passing through a sleeping person's mind. Some dreams, because of their clarity, are the seeds for poetic and musical invention, scientific solutions, and spiritual perceptions. Some dreams are just the revelation of our true nature, because in dreams there are no moral or ethical restrictions, and images are fitted with sinful actions and selfish hopes and goals. (See Mark 7:20-23). (We are like computers: "Garbage in, Garbage out"). Some dreams of spiritual content because God uses it to speak to the godly, so just Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph; and the ungodly such as King Abimelech (see Genesis 20:3-7)

In this story God wanted to use Joseph as his instrument to interpret the dreams of others. At this time Joseph didn't know that his spiritual ability to interpret these dreams would eventually be used of God to bring him into the presence of Pharaoh, who in turn would be



the instrument of God to fulfill the dreams God had given to Joseph when he was 17 years old in Hebron, Israel”.

Conveniently, Pharaoh’s opportunistic chief butler choose this time to tell Pharaoh of a remarkable Hebrew slave who had correctly interpreted the dreams of himself and that of the chief baker when they ‘did time’ in the chief of the bodyguard’s prison. Joseph was immediately summoned and after a much-needed bath, shave and change of clothes, he was ushered into Pharaoh’s presence. This was not just “cleaning up,” on Joseph’s part, it was a cultural concession. To the Hebrews, a beard was a mark of dignity (2 Samuel 10:4-5; Ezra 9:3), but for the Egyptian it was an offensive thing. Pharaoh related his distressing dreams to Joseph concluding with a slap at his *wise men* that no one had the interpretation, (vs. 9–24).

As much as Joseph desired to be out of prison, there is no indication that the thought even crossed his mind to strike a deal to get himself out; his freedom in exchange for the interpretation to Pharaoh’s dreams. There was no mention of his dire circumstances or the injustices he had suffered. Rather he declined the ability to interpret dreams and sought to give God the glory. Joseph made it clear that the ability to interpret dreams was not his, but that God would give Pharaoh an *answer of peace*. Joseph’s attitude was consistent with the Old Testament’s rejection of occult practices and its reliance on prophecy as a means of discovering God’s will (Deut. 18:10-22).

This statement (vs.16) was an assertion to Pharaoh’s face, that Joseph’s God was superior to and sovereign over Pharaoh who was considered a god and the “gods” of Egypt. Pharaoh and his entire court especially the wise men must have cringed at Joseph’s words, but Pharaoh was desperate for an interpretation. The immediate events seem to be what set the stage for the political windfall to Joseph that we read about in our Study Text. A longer view however shows that his soon to be Prime ministership will be the fulfillment of two dreams he had received and told to his father and brothers, a number of years earlier (Gen.37).

Verse 25. *The dream of Pharaoh is one...* Joseph’s first statement on the interpretation immediately sheds light on what had totally stumped the *wise men of Egypt*. He told Pharaoh that while the dreams were different in some details, both dreams were one; meaning they conveyed the same message.

Joseph’s first words revealed the heart of this faithful servant of the Lord: “*It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace*” (41:16). God, not Joseph, would set Pharaoh’s anxious mind at ease (Daniel 2:45).

God hath shewed Pharaoh... Pharaoh could now add sovereignty to whatever knowledge he had of God’s attributes. Joseph’s God not only knew the future but also controlled the future, much unlike the impotent deities of Egypt.

Verses 26-27. Joseph skillfully and confidently interpreted the two dreams. His interpretation closely followed the two dreams in many particulars, a fact which could hardly have been unnoticed by Pharaoh and which added credibility to the interpretation. The two dreams, while different in some details, were one in their meaning.

The number *seven* in both dreams represents a number of *years*. Joseph’s reassurance that *the dream is one* clarifies that the *good kine* (cows; Isaiah 11:7) and the *good ears* represent the same seven years.



Similarly, *the seven ugly cows* and *the seven blighted ears* represent a new set of *seven years*. These seven years will be defined by *famine*. The interpretation was short, plain, sound and made sense to all.

One writer comments aptly: **“The calm and unpretending, yet confident manner of the interpreter, who, speaking of a dispensation extending over fourteen years, displayed the consciousness of a man gifted with higher prophetic foresight than that of mere natural sagacity, formed a most striking contrast to the bewildered and helpless magi...”**

Pharaoh could not help but be impressed especially after the perplexity of his wise men.

Verse 28. *What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh...*

At this point Joseph reiterated that God was showing Pharaoh what was about to happen.

Again he emphasized that he himself was not the source of the interpretation (Genesis 40:8; 41:25).

The significance of insisting on honoring *God* is partially found in ancient beliefs about the way gods ruled. Most people took for granted that multiple gods existed and governed the world.

These gods were often associated with a group of people in a specific locale. Whenever a person moved to another area, nation or people group, it was believed that he or she had left that deity's jurisdiction and come under the reign of another (1 Kings 20:28; 2 Kings 17:26).

Joseph, however, held to a very different view of God, one consistent with what the Bible teaches (Genesis 1; Psalm 47:7; 97:9; etc.). This knowledge about God's character and dominion left Joseph with no doubt that God

- (1) Had sent the dreams,
- (2) Provided the interpretation, and
- (3) Would follow through on what the dreams revealed.

Joseph's God was not a fictitious Egyptian deity; the Lord would show Himself able to carry out His will in any country, not just among the people who knew Him.

Verses 29–31. ... *there come seven years of great plenty... after them seven years of famine ...*

For the first time, Joseph revealed specifically what the healthy cows and the healthy grain represented

(vs. 26). Seven years of great abundance in Egypt will be immediately followed by seven years of bitter famine. The severity of the famine would be such that the bounty of the years of plenty would be totally forgotten.

Pharaoh and his court regarded the Nile as the cause of want or plenty in Egypt, but Joseph would have them know that God controlled the vital flooding of the river. The king and his court should realize that the dreams not only warned before-hand of the coming periods of plenty and want but they showed that all these circumstances, however fortuitous they may appear were under the direction of an overruling Providence.

... it shall be very grievous ... describes something too oppressive or “heavy” to bear. *I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.* (Numbers 11:14). The phrases are piled up, repeating in stark language that the good years will be forgotten as the *famine* would end up being a nationally devastating event.

Verse 32. ... *the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice ...* once again repetition serves to emphasize. God gave the dream in two different forms to show the absolute certainty and imminent arrival of what would be an enormous public crisis. This time the emphasis is by *the dream* having come *unto Pharaoh* in two forms.



... *the thing is established by God* ... God was firmly committed to the years of plenty and of famine that the dreams predicted (Isaiah 46:11). As Joseph spoke to Pharaoh, he might have remembered his own *doubled* dreams that his family would bow to him (Genesis 37:5–10). Though Joseph did not know when, he could be confident that God would bring these things *to pass* (42:6).

... *God will shortly bring it to pass*... the twofold format also suggested urgency in heeding the dreams: God would soon fulfill what He had revealed. We do not know exactly how long after these dreams the seven years of plenty began. But the implication of the twice-dreamed dream was clear: Pharaoh had no time to waste in preparing for what lay ahead for his people. Once more Joseph emphasized God's work in granting Pharaoh the dreams and giving Joseph their interpretation (vs.28). Instead of taking credit for his own wisdom and insight, thus promoting his own interests, Joseph continued to point to God's work through him. God may have seemed absent to Joseph, especially when a fellow prisoner forgot him for two years (Genesis 41:1). But God's continued favor in giving Joseph interpretations undoubtedly reassured the man that the Lord was present with him, even in (or especially in) prison. The Lord had not forgotten His faithful servant. At the beginning of Joseph's time both in Potiphar's house and in prison, we are reminded that the Lord was "with Joseph" (39:2, 23). Whether Joseph was aware of it yet or not, God never left his side.

This point would have been the ideal moment for Joseph to make a plea for his release from prison. But as much as Joseph desired to be released from his captivity, he never brought up the subject. His first concern was not with his own comfort, but with God's glory.

The phrase "feast or famine" describes situations of extremes with no middle-ground result. Farmers may use the phrase to describe a year's rainfall when early spring drenching makes fields too wet to plant, but then summer drought keeps the harvest from growing and maturing. Those who work on commission may experience feast or famine times on a regular basis!

The *feast or famine* aspects of Pharaoh's dreams were to be fulfilled literally. But a spiritual aspect is also present: Pharaoh's wise men were in a *famine* state when it came to interpreting their leader's dreams. However, Pharaoh was blessed that God had given Joseph a *feast* of discernment with which to interpret the dreams.

That fact leads to a natural question: How does the Christian move from spiritual famine to spiritual feast? It all begins with knowing God's will—not as He has revealed it in dreams, but as He has revealed it in Scripture (Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 2:15; etc.). Where does your feast/famine meter read in that regard?

Verses 33-36. Just knowing what the dreams meant was of vital importance; however, that knowledge was worthless without a plan to use the information appropriately. Thus Joseph took the initiative in making the suggestion we see here. Joseph further suggested a plan for the appointed man to put into action, (vs.34–36).

Note that while the famine God had determined was sure to occur, the response to God's revelation should not lead to resigned in-action. The purpose of the revelation was to spark a particular response and Joseph suggested just such a plan.

Here Joseph moved smoothly from the role of interpreter to that of astute advisor. He was not only able to interpret dreams, but he was also able to quickly analyze the situation and



determine the best course of action, in order to mitigate the effects of the coming famine. He proposed a decisive plan of action to Pharaoh along with his interpretation.

... *man discreet and wise* ... he advised; in light of the certainty and enormity of the coming events, Pharaoh should appoint a suitably qualified (*wise and discreet*) administrator and give him the authority to oversee emergency measures throughout the land of Egypt. Specifically, the administrator should appoint managers covering all the land and a fifth of the produce should be gathered under royal and official direction in the seven years of plenty and stored in the cities of the surrounding areas for safe-keeping and later distribution. All the grain gathered would be completely at the disposal of Pharaoh.

The exaction of a fifth, on top of the heavy taxes despot usually levy on their people was likely an extraordinary measure, but was fully warranted by the coming emergency and the absolute power of Pharaoh would enable him to enforce this for the public good. The 'gathering up of all the food' may imply that, in addition to the fifth, large purchases of corn were made by the government out of the surplus of the years of bounty.

Verse 37. Joseph could not have foreseen his elevation so the advice he offered was without any personal interest or consideration. Thus he was either immediately inspired by God, or his intellect and managerial experience allowed him to grasp the situation and offer a solution.

Either way the prudence and sound sense of his counsel was evident to Pharaoh and his courtiers.

... *all his servants*... likely refers to various officials in Pharaoh's government, including the magicians and wise men who were unable to interpret Pharaoh's dream (Genesis 41:8). Their unanimous approval may indicate God's having blessed not only Joseph with understanding but also the bestowal of wisdom on the Egyptians gathered.

Verse 38. Joseph's interpretation of the dreams gave a certain amount of relief to the court, not the least to the magicians who stood to face serious loss had an acceptable interpretation not been found. But even greater comfort came from Joseph's plan of action and his obvious ability to head the program. Before despair could set-in Joseph laid out a plan that would mitigate the disastrous consequences of the coming famine.

... *Can we find such a one as this* Pharaoh posed a rhetorical question; was there a man like Joseph to be found? The '*magicians and wise-men*' unashamedly shook their heads. Pharaoh confessed and his court assented that the Spirit of God was with Joseph. That being the case there would be none as "...*discreet and wise*..." as Joseph, to quote Pharaoh. Even the magicians had to admit that Joseph was the man for the job. Although the Pharaoh was the supreme ruler it would be customary for him to seek the counsel of his advisors and so they concurred with Pharaoh's decision.

... *a man in whom the Spirit of God is?*... while Pharaoh's statement gives testimony to his conviction that Joseph had divine enablement, it would certainly be a stretch to imagine that anyone at this time would have had a good understanding of the Holy Spirit. At this point his conception of Joseph's religion was rudimentary at best.

Pharaoh's words here do not necessarily reflect faith in God (compare acknowledgement of "the spirit of the holy gods" in Daniel 4:18; 5:11–14). There is no indication that he renounced other gods or came to believe in the one true God. He simply acknowledged that a deity (or deities, since the Hebrew can be translated plural) who sent the dream also sent the interpretation to the man of His choosing. In the same way, Pharaoh would likely expect that if



an Egyptian god sent a dream, then that same deity would be the one who gave or withheld interpretation (compare Daniel 2:11; 4:8–9).

In any case, the phrasing acknowledged divine favor on Joseph. Though Joseph was a foreigner, a slave, and a prisoner in Egypt, Pharaoh did not mention any of this. Of greatest significance to him was that Joseph showed himself to be the man Egypt needed.

Verses 39-40. The best that Joseph could have hoped for was to be released from prison but in the next moment he went from prisoner to prime minister. Pharaoh set him as governor over his house and the entire land of Egypt. All necessary authority for the position was vested in Joseph and confirmed with him receiving the official symbols for such an office (vs.41-44). All the people would pay the profoundest respect and obedience to all his orders and commands. Joseph was second only to Pharaoh in all the land of Egypt.

No one else had Joseph's divinely given insight. The *God* who had sent the dreams had also provided a particular man to interpret them. *Pharaoh* agreed with *Joseph* completely in that the dreams and their interpretation were not of human origin. Since the man Joseph obviously had been given a divine stamp of approval, Pharaoh followed suit. To Pharaoh, it seemed only right that someone with the insight and intelligence that Joseph clearly possessed should be the one to administer the plan he suggested. Joseph's responsibilities were very similar to what they had been in Potiphar's house (Genesis 39:4–6) and the prison (39:20–23). The key difference was that the only person in a higher position was Pharaoh himself (Psalm 105:16–22; Acts 7:10).

Hindsight tells us that God had been preparing Joseph for this position ever since he arrived in Egypt. What an amazing change of status for someone who, just twenty-four hours earlier, had been a forgotten prisoner! Joseph went from pit to power. Genesis 41:41–45 records the actions taken by Pharaoh to confirm Joseph's new position in Egypt. Joseph diligently carried out the task of amassing grain in preparation for the coming famine (41:48–49).

There has been much speculation about when Joseph could have arisen as second in command over all of Egypt. Many assume that it had to be during the Hyksos period known as "the Shepherd Kings," who were apparently Semitic, not Egyptian. They ruled from 1730 to 1570 B.C. However, it is interesting that in verse one, the term for "river," which obviously refers to the Nile, is found in a form that only occurs during the 18th Dynasty or 1546–1085 B.C. From Egyptian documents we also learn that throughout the history of Egypt, there were Semites in places of responsibility in many other Egyptian dynasties than the two mentioned above.

Verse 50. Though this is a normal relational progression (marriage, then children), this note also shows the depth of Joseph's trust in God. *Joseph* was preparing for the *famine* that he firmly believed was coming. Yet he was so confident that God had provided for those lean *years* that he was not hesitant about introducing new mouths to Egypt. This may foreshadow his care for other nations and especially his estranged family (Genesis 45:10–11).

Which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him... On was a city in Egypt, located just northeast of modern Cairo. It was the location of a temple devoted to the worship of the Egyptian sun god Ra (the Greeks later called the city Heliopolis, meaning "city of the sun"). The name *Potipherah* (not to be confused with Potiphar) means "he whom Ra has given." Joseph's marriage to *Asenath the daughter of a pagan priest* raises eyebrows. After all, her family was devoted to idolatry and pagan wives had a way of introducing compromise into a



husband's devotion to the Lord (see 1 Kings 11:1–6). Yet there is no suggestion here or elsewhere that Asenath ever influenced Joseph toward idolatry. Even in marriage to an Egyptian bride, Joseph relied on the one true God only.

Verse 51. Manasseh sounds like the Hebrew word meaning “forget” (Isaiah 44:21). God caused Joseph to forget the hard times that had characterized his life for the previous thirteen years (see Joseph's age in Genesis 37:2 with that recorded in 41:46). Joseph could now see God's providential hand in his circumstances.

He was not ready for the crucial role God had for him when he arrived in Egypt.

Subsequent experiences prepared him for the role.

... *all my father's house* ... he had come to grips with the events in Canaan and the treachery of his brothers; he was at peace. Joseph no longer held any grudges or ill will toward his brothers since he could begin to see those circumstances in a new light (45:4–8).

At the same time, it is clear that Joseph had not forgotten God, nor had God forgotten him. Though the name of his firstborn emphasizes forgetting, the name would also remind Joseph of what had been “forgotten” and ensure that it was not *really* lost to his memory.

Verse 52. *Ephraim* from a Hebrew word meaning “twice fruitful” (Genesis 17:6). It probably reflects the fact that God had given Joseph two sons. The name likely praised God for the blessing that Joseph was experiencing in Egypt.

Furthermore, the name celebrated the abundance of a land about to be hit by famine. This suggests once again that Joseph confidently trusted in God's provision during the lean times. Just as God has brought Joseph through *affliction* before, Joseph came to anticipate that God would bring him, his family, and all Egypt through a great famine.

The name Ephraim also seems to foreshadow the story of Jacob's family in Egypt for generations to come (Genesis 47:27; Exodus 1:8–11; 3:7–10). God would not forget Jacob (Israel), just as God had not forgotten Joseph.

Joseph himself was given a new Egyptian name (Genesis 41:45) and by implication, an Egyptian identity (Daniel 1:1–16). But he gave both of his sons Hebrew names (Genesis 41:51–52). Doing so acknowledged the presence and provision of the God of his (Hebrew) family in his life. It also emphasized that Joseph still thought about the family of his youth, apparently fondly enough to choose names in his native tongue.

Joseph it is clear had a good understanding of His God and in the dramatic shifts and reversals in his life, could as the Apostles Paul, say; “*Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*” (Philippians 4:11).

Joseph's afflictions are a vital part of his story of triumph. What about yours? When tragedy strikes, the natural tendency is to cry out “why, why me?” There's nothing wrong with that—for a time. But to get out of a holding pattern of despair, the *why?* must eventually be replaced with *what's next?* In what regard is God calling you to do just that right now?

CONCLUSION

The God whom Joseph served and honored is the God we serve and honor today. No matter the circumstance, He does not change (Malachi 3:6). He remains in control. Whether we find ourselves in a pit or a palace, He is there.



The story of Joseph is a gripping drama that certainly grabs our attention, but we should not fail to see the dominant hand of the sovereign God steering events to His design and see His faithfulness to the 'Fathers'. God is faithful to all his promises, to all his people and use all situations of our lives to shape and mature us into the people He has called us to be.

Joseph's experiences bear valuable lessons for Christians, not the least of which is the place and purpose of suffering in the lives of believers; the blessings of serving others and a patient focus on God. His life can be characterized as one in which there was a keen awareness of God and that consideration governed his behavior.

Joseph spent two years in prison while in the prime of his life. During this time he matured, dealt with his disappointments and moved, not into despair, but into hope in God alone. When he emerged in our text, we do not see a cynical, angry man as one might expect, but rather a godly, mature man who is able to handle the heavy responsibilities thrust upon him. Psalm 105:19 says of this time that *"the word of the Lord tested him."* Those two silent years in the dungeon after his disappointment with the cupbearer were a time of learning to hope in God. Clearly there is a lesson here that disappointments are essential to spiritual growth, because they demand faith and resting all hope upon God.

There is absolutely no evidence of any act of vengeance by Joseph on those that mistreated him. He did not repay Potiphar and his wife for what they had done to him and he did not throw them down from their positions. He did not repay the cupbearer for his forgetfulness and ingratitude. He did not even treat his brothers severely when they came face-to-face with him. As second-in-command in Egypt he had the power to wreak vengeance on others that had done wrong to him. Instead he saw the hand of God working all through his life.

This is indeed remarkable for many times those people that reach positions of power take vengeance on others that they think have done them wrong. May we never do that when God elevates us for we should follow the example of Joseph.

Joseph had radical faith in his God. Even though God might have seemed far away during the thirteen years of slavery, God continued to give Joseph evidence that He had not forgotten the imprisoned man. How does your life witness to the same truth?

As we look at the example of Joseph's behaviour it gives rise to many who look at parallels between the life of Joseph and that of Christ. An examination of this will help us appreciate our Saviour more. One writer lists several of these parallels.

First, it is noted that Joseph was the man in whom the father's affection found its delight. Jacob loved Joseph more than all of the other children and we know that the Lord Jesus Christ was the beloved son of His Father who made it clear at His baptism the Father was well pleased. Second, we also know that Joseph had a commission from his father Jacob filled with danger to go out to find his brethren. The Lord Jesus was sent out in the fullness of time to redeem those that were under the law.

Third, Joseph was rejected by his brethren. The Lord Jesus Christ came to His own and His own received Him not. He was rejected by His brethren.

Fourth Joseph was exposed to the humiliation of slavery and ultimately to jail in Egypt. The Lord Jesus Christ was exposed to humiliation.

Fifth, Joseph suffered on the way to blessing the children of Israel. The difference now is however that the Lord Jesus Christ's humiliation was the humiliation of the suffering of death



by which His blood was shed for our redemption. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered vicariously for He did no sin being sinless. And so Joseph does not suffer in the way that Jesus did.

Sixth, Joseph was exalted out of prison. The Lord Jesus on the third day was resurrected and became the exalted Lord at the right hand of the Father, able to save to the utmost those that came to God by Him.

Seventh, Joseph obtained a Gentile bride. We remember that the church today is primarily a Gentile bride but we should note that the Church of Jesus Christ came out of the Jewish people who were there on the day of Pentecost. First of all the church was Jewish in its character and has always had Jewish people in it down the centuries. So there is only a partial resemblance to what happened with Joseph. The full picture is with Christ.

Eight, the brothers of Joseph were reconciled to him through the work of Joseph. In the case of Israel the nation is now living apart in rejection scattered to the four corners of the earth. But the Scriptures tell us that eventually the nation Israel will be reconciled to their brother and Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Scriptures tell us that Jesus will pour out upon them the spirit of grace and supplication so the grace of God would be efficacious grace for the nation of Israel when they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced according to Zechariah the prophet. Ninth, Joseph was touched by the actions of his brethren and went away by himself and wept. The Lord Jesus Christ will be touched by the repentance of the nation Israel and He will pay special attention to them in the millennium.

Tenth, Joseph became a benefactor in his work in a political and material way. He became a Saviour to those in all the land of Egypt as well as for his brethren.

The Lord Jesus Christ of course is a Saviour and He saved man from the guilt of sin and gave them assurance of eternal life. Of course we know that the Lord Jesus Christ is greater than Joseph, is more competent and has the control of the Kingdom of greater spiritual dimension, has greater administrative capacity and greater justice in His hands. So we are invited to come to Him for that great Salvation.

Remember however the great Love Joseph had for his father. He learned the Lessons of morality and righteousness from his father and he obeyed his father.

Jesus demonstrates what the fullness of Love and obedience to the Father in Heaven is. The Father in Heaven has told us He was well pleased with His Beloved Son. He invited His Son to come and sit at His right hand until He made His Son's enemies His footstool. Psalm 110:1. Obedient Love is our motto.

