

Text: Genesis 39:1-40:23

Title: Joseph: Unjustly Imprisoned and Interpreter of Dreams

Truth: God's plan moved forward because of injustice, and despite it.

Date/Location: Sunday June 11, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

We continue studying the history of Joseph.

I. Chapter 39: Joseph Successful but Imprisoned

- A. In verses 1-6, we see that Joseph was raised to a position of prominence in Potiphar's house because of administrative and leadership skills which the Lord had given him. Note that the Lord's presence with Joseph is that which caused him to be successful. [Note that I said *note*: this is important for you to heed. You will never be *truly* successful unless the Lord is with you. The measure of success is not dollars and properties and fame. Real success is measured with eternal value, not temporal value.]
- B. Potiphar partook of God's blessing on account of Joseph as well (remember *collateral blessings*?) and assigned stewardship for all his goods to Joseph. He did not have to check up or audit Joseph's work because he knew Joseph was an honest and hard-working man. He completely trusted his steward.
- C. But Joseph had one liability—good looks. Potiphar's wife repeatedly tried to lure him into an illicit relationship, but he would not buckle to her seductions. He knew that to do so was sin not only against his master, himself, and the woman, but most importantly it would be sin against God. Joseph continued about his work, ignoring Potiphar's wife, but she cornered him one day and took his outer garment. When he fled from her to avoid sin, she then turned on him and lied about the whole situation to cover up her lust and unfaithfulness to her husband. Nice character, huh? She pinned blame not only on Joseph, but also on her husband for buying this Hebrew slave. Her internal prejudice came out as she tried to make Joseph look very bad.

This teaches us to avoid situations where we are in private spaces alone with someone of the opposite sex that is not our spouse. It is

dangerous—do not do it! Not only can it lead us into sin, it can be used against us as it was with Joseph. An open-door policy is appropriate, or at least a window in the door! The apostle Paul authoritatively teaches us: “Flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18). “Flee youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22). We are enjoined to flee harmful, destructive lusts and the love of money (1 Timothy 6:11).

- D. Upon hearing his wife’s story, Potiphar became angry with Joseph and had him thrown into prison. I must ask this question: did he truly believe his wife more than he trusted Joseph? The prison was evidently a bit of a white-collar incarceration center, still unpleasant.
- E. The Lord was still with Joseph, however, and so were his abilities. His skills were noted by the headmaster of the prison, who soon made Joseph an administrator over the prison.
- F. In both cases, whether in high office or in low estate, Joseph relied on God and was prospered because of his relationship to the Lord. May it be so for us.
- G. In His omniscience, God permitted a very grave injustice to fall upon Joseph so that His plan would move forward. God did not leave Joseph; God was with Him the entire time through the trials. Job’s friends could have learned something from this before accusing Job of wrongdoing because of his calamities.

II. Chapter 40: Joseph Left in Prison

- A. After some time in the prison, Pharaoh’s butler (or *cupbearer*, like Nehemiah) and baker were thrown into jail. Perhaps Pharaoh had a suspicion of treason or some other charge. After being put under Joseph’s care, each man had a dream.
- B. The butler’s dream had to do with a fruitful grapevine and providing the cup of wine to Pharaoh. Joseph, who was informed by God as to the interpretation of the dream, told the butler that within three days he would be out of prison and back to his place of prominence before the Pharaoh. Joseph simply asked that the butler not forget Joseph and bring his case before the Pharaoh.

Joseph was basically acting in the office of a prophet, like the dream-interpreting Daniel roughly 1,300 years later. (These events occurred sometime around 1894-1878 B.C. under Pharaoh Senusret II). Both men gave full credit to God for helping them understand the meaning of what the dream foretold (Gen. 40:8, Daniel 2:28).

- C. The baker had a dream about baskets on his head out of which the birds ate. Joseph interpreted this dream to mean that in the same three days, the baker would be hanged, and his body left for the scavenging birds. Perhaps the baker was culpable for whatever plot or crime Pharaoh had heard about—or perhaps not. The butler was innocent.
- D. I was interested to observe that the New Testament does not speak much of dreams or interpretations. Paul experienced a dream in Acts 16:9, but its interpretation was obvious, and no one needed to interpret it for him. Some dreams occurred in the birth narrative of Jesus (Matt. 1:20, 2:12-13, 2:19, 2:22). They were direct revelations without metaphors—no interpretation needed. Pilate’s wife had a troubling dream (Matt. 27:19) but the meaning was obvious as well.

There is no spiritual gift of “dream interpretation” suggested in the New Testament. Someone might say that it is subsumed under a gift of knowledge or prophecy, but there is no example that I can find. It is my understanding that like the other gifts of the spirit (tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, etc.) God is not pleased today to use dreams nor to have some specially gifted people interpret them. This is because the Word of God is complete and all that is necessary for a life of godliness in this age.

What about your dreams, then? If your dreams raise “to do” items for you that are in concert with Scripture, this simply means your brain is thinking about those things and perhaps your conscience is talking to you. What you need to do might be obvious. If you are left confused, your pastor would be happy to discuss with you these matters to see if what you are thinking lines up with the Bible.

Dreamers were often associated with false religion and idolatry, not true godliness (Deut. 13:1-5).

E. The sad note of the story from Joseph's perspective was that the butler forgot Joseph—for two long years! This lengthened his stay in prison significantly.

Conclusion

God's blessing was evidence of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. The injustices that befell Joseph were not evidence of God abandoning the covenant but rather preparing further steps of its fulfillment.

When we think of the terrible moral conditions of the world, remember that these are not accidental. God is working through and with them to bring about his intended culmination of world events.

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