

Text: Genesis 41:1-42:38

Title: Prisoner to Prince

Truth: God does things that seem very unlikely to us.

Date/Location: June 18, 2023 at FBC (previously May 7, 2006)

Introduction

We continue the saga of Joseph, which is really the story of God's marvelous works to the children of Israel.

I. Joseph Delivered from Prison and Promoted, Genesis 41

- A. Not only did Pharaoh's servants have dreams, but also Pharaoh had dreams—two dreams that the Egyptian wise men could not interpret. When it seemed that no one would be able to figure them out, the butler remembered Joseph, the dream interpreter, and told Pharaoh that he might be able to interpret the dreams.
- B. So, Joseph cleaned up and went before Pharaoh. He was clean shaven, as was the Egyptian custom. He plainly stated that his insight into dream-interpretation was not from himself, but from God. Both dreams had to do with seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. God showed through the dream what His sovereign will was for the nation and surrounding territories.
- C. Joseph counseled Pharaoh to do some work ahead of time. He should open an agriculture department and take a 20% tax off the years of plenty so that there would be enough in the years of famine. He should appoint a wise man over the business.
- D. In verses 37-38, Pharaoh thought the advice was great, and said there was no one better to put in charge of the matter than Joseph, who had the spirit of God. They probably did not know much about the true God, nor His triune constitution, nor the Holy Spirit. Perhaps they thought that it was the "spirit of the gods" in Joseph. But they knew this much: Joseph had some kind of connection with God! So, Joseph immediately ascended to the office of second-in-command to Pharaoh over the entire nation of Egypt. What a promotion!

- E. By this time, Joseph was 30 years of age. He had a couple of children during the first seven years during of plenty, when he was implementing his plan to save grain for the coming famine. These two children would later be “adopted” by his father Jacob so that they are numbered among the tribes of Israel. Joseph is “replaced” as it were, by his two sons, so he received a double portion. Levi is out of the inheritance because of the priesthood, so there remains 12 tribes.
- F. Joseph gets an Egyptian name, an Egyptian wife, has two children, at 30 years of age. This is about 1884 B.C. The sons are “Forgetful” and “Fruitful,” which correspond to the big circumstances in Joseph’s life. The selection of a wife makes us wonder if she was a godly person; perhaps he taught her prior to their marriage or after about the true God.
- G. The years of plenty followed by years of famine do indeed come, and not only does Joseph help the Egyptians, but also those of surrounding nations who suffered from the famine. This sets the stage for a reunion of sorts between Joseph and his brothers and father in the next chapters, and for the whole “nation of Israel” to be preserved and moved to Egypt during the latter part of the famine. This in turn sets the stage for the book of Exodus, some hundreds of years later, when Israel was in bondage in Egypt.
- H. Lesson: God used Joseph through great difficulty. God does that sort of thing. He can use *you* too in and through heavy trials. Do not give up! Keep living godly in Christ Jesus and let God do the elevating.
- I. Another lesson: SAVE! Around 60% of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck. This means they do not have enough finances for a future expense until their paycheck comes the next Friday. If a larger item breaks (which it will) or you need to replace something (which you will), do you have the money to do so—today? In years of plenty, Joseph set aside 20% of the agricultural production of the nation. He implemented that in the form of a tax—“forced savings.” But you too can save 10-15% or even 20% of your income. Along with giving to the Lord’s work in the church, this requires you to go with less—presently—than other families

without that philosophy. But the point is that you will have more later to use, enjoy, give help to others, etc. Most of us are in the top 10% of the world's richest people. According to some data, almost all of us are in the top 1% of wage earners. We can save!

Journey #1: Benjamin Left Home, Simeon Held, Genesis 42

- A. The famine becomes so severe in the land of Canaan that Jacob (Israel) scolded his sons for just sitting around and doing nothing. Instead, he told them they should go to Egypt to buy food for themselves so they could live. So, he sends 10 of his sons to Egypt, holding back his youngest Benjamin in case something bad were to happen along the way.
- B. When the 10 brothers arrive in Egypt, they meet Joseph but do not know who he is. In 42:6 where the brothers bow down to Joseph, we have a clear fulfillment of the first dream that Joseph told his brothers back in 37:5-8. They had ridiculed him then, 20 years earlier. Now they were eating crow.
- C. Joseph tested his brothers by accusing them of being spies. They claimed they were honest men! They describe their family structure to try to demonstrate that they are not spies. They mention Benjamin, the youngest, who is still at home. Interestingly, they said, "and one is no more," referring to Joseph. They must have really come to the point that they now believed their second-to-youngest brother was dead. It had been over 20 years since they sold him into slavery (note 45:6). They did not realize they were talking to him!
- D. Now Joseph tells them that they must prove what they said to him by sending one brother back to Jacob and fetching Benjamin. Joseph changes his mind several days later and says all the brothers can return except one will be held in custody.
- E. The 10 brothers now demonstrate a very guilty conscience about Joseph (42:21-22). They think that this trial has come upon them because they did not listen to Joseph when he pleaded with them not to be sold into slavery. Here's a principle: sin tends to do that to us. What I mean is this: not that sin inevitably leads to some

“bad luck,” but that past sin calls up a guilty conscience. So, sin less, and you will avoid that problem more!

- F. Amid their conversation, Joseph was listening (in Hebrew) and became overwhelmed with emotion that his brothers were showing some guilt about what they did to him.
- G. The brother who is kept in custody is Simeon. Joseph sent each man away with a load of grain, and secretly returned their money. What grace! But when one of the brothers saw the money in his sack after they had journeyed on for a while, they all became very worried. Later, they found that they all had their money returned. Not only had their brother been left behind, but now they face the possible accusation of stealing the grain!
- H. All this puts Jacob into a sad situation. His Joseph was killed years back. Now Simeon is gone, as far as he is concerned. And the brothers are asking to take Benjamin to prove that they are truthful. Jacob cannot take it—if something would happen to Benjamin, he would go right to the grave in sorrow. Reuben offers his own sons as collateral. But these were Jacob’s grandsons. Reuben seems to have some strange thinking. The chapter ends with us wondering if they will ever go back to get more grain and fetch Simeon from prison there.

Conclusion

Hopefully we will not suffer the depth of trials that Joseph did. On the other hand, in humility we would never imagine or expect such height of earthly glory to come to ourselves as did to Joseph. After all, we are not in the Abrahamic line with the destiny of the nation of God’s people and coming Messiah resting on our life or actions. But we *do* have an impact on our families and church. We may not save a nation from starvation, but we can take steps to see to it that our families are properly cared for and spiritually well.

We are also blessed to be part of the church community—many as direct members and others as collateral beneficiaries of the community. We *are* blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. In that way, God has prospered Christians beyond measure in the things that *truly* matter.

See my notes on Genesis 39:1-40:23 for a bit on the Christian theology of dreams.

If you were in a situation like Joseph, in prison or in the government, how could you implement the Christian spiritual disciplines? You might not be able to do Bible reading for example, if you do not have a Bible or are in the middle of the workday, but you could pray, worship, evangelize, serve, use time wisely, fast, be in silence and solitude when appropriate, and persevere in the disciplines of faith.

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