

Joseph and Esther

Lesson 5 (Joseph)

Genesis 40-41

Joseph and Pharaoh's Prisoners (Genesis 40)

Two of Pharaoh's officers had offended him (Genesis 40:1). They had **sinned** against the king of Egypt by not doing what he expected and required of them. They had displeased Egypt's ruler, and as a result they found themselves in the prison with Joseph!

The word "butler" (Genesis 40:1-2) should be translated "cupbearer." This important official served wine to the king, and often he would come before the presence of the king to perform this function. The cupbearer must be absolutely trustworthy and loyal to the king. A man in this position could possibly plot against the king and could even put poison in the king's cup. Often the king would require the cupbearer to swallow the drink before serving it, to make sure it had not been poisoned.

The royal baker was also a trusted official who was responsible for baking bread for Pharaoh.

Each of these men had a vivid and troubling dream while in prison. Following their dreams, Joseph came to the cupbearer and butler and behold, they were S_____ (40:6). They were dejected and disturbed and distressed! Genesis 40:7 literally says that their faces were **evil** (sad, unhappy). Joseph could read their faces and know exactly how they felt!

*How we feel very often shows on our faces! How we **feel** on the inside often influences how we **look** on the outside. What is the secret of having a cheery and happy face (Proverbs 15:13)? Should we concentrate on fixing the outside or the inside (compare Proverbs 25:20)? Cain's **inner** anger could be read all over his face (Genesis 4:5-6). Nehemiah, another cupbearer, had a concern for Jerusalem that the Persian king could see on his face (Nehemiah 2:1-*

3). *A healthy heart that is right with the Lord will naturally and normally produce a healthy countenance (see Psalm 42:11; 43:5)!*

Pharaoh's prisoners were so sad because they thought there was no one to **interpret** (give the meaning of) their dreams (Genesis 40:8). Joseph could not interpret the dreams, but he knew Someone who could: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" Yes, the Lord owns interpretations, and if we want them we must go to the One Who owns them! If God gave the dreams, then He could give the meaning of the dreams as well! The Lord's interpretation of these dreams through Joseph proved to be absolutely true (Genesis 40:20-22; 41:13).

There are many things in life that do not seem to make sense: sickness, death of loved ones, problems, trials, hardships, etc. Though we often do not understand, God does! God sees things very clearly, though our vision is often blurred or unclear. God can make sense out of that which seems senseless. God alone holds the key that will unlock the mysteries of life. God alone can give the true interpretation of life.

In Genesis 41:14 Joseph asked the chief cupbearer to "Think on me." "Think on me" means "Remember me." Let us compare this request with a similar request made by a criminal who died on a cross, as recorded in Luke 23:39-43:

<p style="text-align: center;">JOSEPH Genesis 41</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE THIEF ON THE CROSS Luke 23</p>
<p>Condemned to Prison</p>	<p>Condemned to Death</p>
<p>Joseph was completely INNOCENT (verse 15).</p>	<p>The Thief was completely GUILTY (verses 40-41).</p>
<p>His Request--"THINK ON ME (REMEMBER ME)" (verse 14)</p>	<p>His Request--"REMEMBER ME" (verse 42)</p>
<p>Joseph knew that the cupbearer would be alive and well, restored to his place in the kingdom, and thus in a position to help him (verse 13).</p>	<p>The thief believed that the Lord would be alive and well, restored to His place in the kingdom (as King), and thus in a position to help him (verse 42).</p>
<p>The cupbearer failed to remember Joseph until two years later (40:23; 41:1,9-13)</p>	<p>The Lord remembered the thief IMMEDIATELY (verse 43--"today").</p>

Joseph considered himself to be stolen property (Genesis 40:15). He knew that he belonged to his father and he belonged to the land of the Hebrews. He was stolen away from both! From the divine viewpoint, however, Joseph was right where he belonged! He belonged in Egypt and he belonged in prison. God was working out His perfect plan, not only for Joseph but for all the children of Israel. Later Joseph realized that **although men took him, God sent Him** (see Genesis 45:7)!

God can use wicked men to fulfill His perfect plan—Acts 2:23–24; Luke 22:22; Acts 3:14–15,18—and thus cause the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10)!

Pharaoh celebrated his birthday by lifting up the heads of his cupbearer and his baker (Genesis 40:20), but in very different ways (Genesis 40:21 and Genesis 40:22)! [Compare the way in which Herod celebrated his birthday as recorded in Matthew 14:6–12. The only two birthday celebrations mentioned in the Bible both involved the removal of someone's head!]

Joseph and Pharaoh's Dreams (Genesis 41:1–32)

Joseph wanted to be released from prison immediately (Genesis 40:14), but God wanted him to remain there two more years (Genesis 41:1).

*God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8), and God's time is not our time (Psalm 27:14). God's **delayed blessings** (delayed to us, but on time to God) are to be kept for just the right time. Delays occur but deliverance is sure. Don't push the panic button. "As sure as ever a believers carves for himself, he'll cut his own fingers."*

Pharaoh dreamed two dreams, awaking after each one (Genesis 41:1–7). What was the meaning of the dreams? What was the meaning of the details given in verse 21? Why did God cause Pharaoh to dream two dreams (verse 32)?

If God says something once, we ought to really listen because everything God says is important! If God says something twice (or even three times), how much more should we take heed and pay attention!! Compare Galatians 1:8–9; Philippians 4:4; John 21:15–17; Mark 9:44,46,48. Can you think of other examples?

The **magicians** (professional interpreters, those who possessed special knowledge, especially occult knowledge) and wise men could not interpret the dream (Genesis 41:8), but Joseph could (Genesis 41:25 and following). What did Joseph have that they did not have? Intelligence? Special training? Education? Inborn ability? Luck? What made the difference? Compare Daniel 2:2-12,23-30. Can God make the same difference in your life?

Joseph was careful to give the Lord full credit for what He alone could do. In Genesis 41:15 Pharaoh said in effect, "You can interpret it." Joseph corrected him, "It is NOT in me, God shall give Pharaoh an answer...(Genesis 41:16). Joseph knew that although he could not do it, His God could! Throughout the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph mentioned God and gave Him full credit:

Verse 16: GOD _____

Verse 25: GOD _____

Verse 28: GOD _____

Verse 32: GOD _____

When the heart is full of God, the tongue will be obliged to speak of Him! Pharaoh's words about Joseph in verses 38–39, therefore, do not surprise us!

Joseph in the Palace — His High Exaltation (Genesis 41:33–44)

God's purpose was to set Joseph up as a ruler throughout Egypt (Genesis 45:8) so that the nation Israel could be saved and preserved through the seven-year famine (Genesis 45:7). How did the Lord do this? He first sent Joseph **into a pit** and later **into a prison**, for this was the way that led **into the palace!** God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform!

*When do you suppose Joseph first understood God's purpose in sending him to Egypt? We may find ourselves in a pit of distress (Genesis 42:21) or in a prison of disgrace (Genesis 40:15). Yet we can be sure that God has a **purpose** in it all, though it be hidden from our eyes. How then shall we walk? (2 Corinthians 5:7--"By F _____ not by S _____").*

Joseph suggested a plan for survival during the coming food emergency and he encouraged Pharaoh to find an able leader to take charge (Genesis 41:33–36). Pharaoh approved of Joseph's plan, and he knew just the man for the job (Genesis 41:37–40)! No other man was so marked by God's Presence. See Genesis 41:38 and compare Genesis 39:3 (Potiphar) and Genesis 39:23 (the keeper of the prison).

Do people see God's Spirit at work in you (Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 5:9) or do they see the ugly manifestation of the sinful flesh (Galatians 5:19–21)?

Joseph, who for thirteen years (compare Genesis 37:2 with 41:46) endured the life of a lowly slave and prisoner, was suddenly exalted to a high position over all the land of Egypt! How high was Joseph exalted (consider Genesis 41:40–44; 42:6,30,33; 44:18; 45:8–9,13,26)?

According to Genesis 41:41–43, who exalted Joseph to such a position? _____ According to Genesis 45:8, who really was responsible for exalting Joseph? _____ It is interesting that the same Joseph who was once stripped of his coat of many colors (Genesis 37:23), and forced to leave his garment in the hand of a wicked Egyptian woman (Genesis 39:12), is now clothed in the finest Egyptian linen (Genesis 41:42)!

Under what conditions does God exalt a man? How does a man reach the top and attain first place? See Ezekiel 21:26; Matthew 23:11–12; Luke 1:52; 14:11; 18:14; James 4:10; Mark 9:34–35; 10:31. Surely with God, the way up is the way down, and the way down is the way up. Satan tried to go up and was brought down (Isaiah 14:12–15). The Lord Jesus went down and was exalted high (Philippians 2:5–11). "H_____ yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may _____ you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

Joseph's Wise Administration (Genesis 41:45–57)

Just as God gave Joseph wisdom in **interpretation** (Genesis 41:16,25,28,39), so He gave Joseph wisdom in **administration**. Did Joseph have any experience in governmental leadership and administration? _____ How many years of experience did he have as a slave and a prisoner (37:2; 41:46)? _____

The Lord might direct you into some new job, responsibility or activity which you have never done before. You will be able to handle it in the strength of God, as you trust Him. See Philipians 4:13,19; Proverbs 3:5-6; 2 Corinthians 9:8.

Was Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream exactly fulfilled (see Genesis 41:47-49, 53-57)? _____

How can a correct knowledge and understanding of God's Word help you prepare for the future? Joseph knew that a terrible seven-year period of famine would come upon Egypt and the surrounding countries. Does the Lord tell us of a terrible seven-year period that will yet come upon this earth? See Daniel 9:27 and Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6,14.

Joseph was hated and rejected by his brothers (Genesis 37:20) and later was exalted (Genesis 41:40) and given a Gentile bride (Genesis 41:45). This was a picture of what happened to the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus was rejected by His brethren (John 1:10-12); He was exalted (Philippians 2:9-11); He received a bride (Ephesians 5:31-32). The Church is the bride of Christ, made up mostly of Gentile believers.

Notice the names of Joseph's sons (see Genesis 41:51-52)—Manasseh (forgetting—Joseph was able to forget his toil and trouble which he had to go through) and Ephraim (fruitful—Joseph was fruitful in the land of Egypt). God delivered Joseph "out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt" (Acts 7:10). Joseph was beginning to understand that God had a purpose in sending him to Egypt, and that great hardship would be followed by great blessing.

What is God's purpose in saving you and in allowing you to go through life's trials and problems and difficulties? See Rom 8:28-29; Gal 4:19; 1 John 3:2. God wants to make you more like His Son.

Did Joseph give the Egyptians free food (Genesis 41:56-57; see also 47:13-26)? _____

Problems arise when a government gives free "handouts" to people who refuse to work. See 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 and Ephesians 4:28.